

A new Children and Families Centre at Christ Church

An Exciting New Opportunity

A valuable piece of work comes to an end.

For about 10 years Christ Church has been the host of a wonderful charity project serving the needs of seriously paraplegic adults with learning difficulties. The work they have done has been exemplary and the staff have been wonderfully motivated. We have been proud to give them a home in the lower hall. We have also appreciated the £14,000 that they paid for annual services charge.

Now the charity has been bought by a large company. They are facing difficult times financially and are consolidating their three locations in Sheffield into one. So, they have left Christ Church this May. And consequently, Christ Church will lose that annual income, which has helped our budget so well.

A new opportunity emerges, not a loss.

But all is not lost. We do not want to rush out and find the next client that can rent our premises. We are secure enough, and active enough, and forward-thinking enough to think more positively about what it might mean to have available to us a lovely suite of rooms. What can we do with them that would be of direct support to the church in its Christian mission and its practical service to the town? Any church suddenly presented with a well-equipped and decorated suite of activity spaces, storage spaces, with two toilets, a large kitchen, and two level entry-exit doors into a beautiful garden, would immediately say "Wow, what can we do with it?"

A new families and children centre.

We achieved a major re-development 8 years ago, and benefitted from that. Sometimes we have more activities than we can easily accommodate. And with costs for heating rising, we want to be careful about heating the large church for small group work.

And having spent a lot of effort supporting the older congregation and the adult members of our community, we have now benefitted from the dedicated work of our Junior Church and Toddler

leaders so that we have a growing Junior Church. Now there are toddlers in church and young teens. We have been through our thinking for the "Child-Friendly Church award", and believe we will soon be recognised with this national award. On Sundays the toddlers need a creche and the early teens might prefer something in the week. There are lots of possibilities for work with our young people and their parents and we should spend the next years focussing more on them than we have done to date.

Beyond our own young people, and their development in life and faith, there is no doubt that there are many children and young teens in the town who might have other needs or interests. We'll sketch out some of our ideas on the next pages.

None of this is yet agreed. We wish to have an open conversation about these proposals and the use of what was known as 'the lecture room'. We want to hear from a variety of people, especially the church leaders and members. We want to hear all ideas for the use of this space. The Church Meeting will want to be comfortable with whatever ideas emerge from these discussions.

The economics

We have no doubt that we could soon generate enough use of the suite with church and non-church activities to go a long way to recoup the income we have lost from this room. You could think of the suite of rooms as having three sessions a day available, across seven days of the week, 21 sessions in all. If we could let 21 sessions at £30 a session for 52 weeks, it would generate over £32,000; over double what we get now. We'd never do that, of course. And we would not charge for our own work in the same way. But it is perfectly feasible to think of it as not being a loss, but rather an investment.

It would have a much more positive impact on our church life, its future, and our work in the town.

What sort of activities?

For the church we see the following activities being possible:

- Junior Church with teaching resources and supplies. (Already exists) Perhaps with a new name. We have suggested "Sunday Club".
- Sunday creche for morning service.

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- Munchday Church one weekday teatime, with activities, religious input and a cooked meal for children and their parents to share. (See below)
- Group activities for church children, such as when they collaborate to create TV inputs for the Sunday worship, environmental activities. (Already happens)

We will think of others!

For non-church activities the possibilities include:

- After School Club at least two afternoons a week from 3.00-6.00 pm with space for 11–16-year-olds.
- Rhythm and Rhyme for toddlers (already exists).
- Music teaching club.
- Parenting skills courses (being requested by Sheffield Youth Service)
- Baby group for very early socialising and play.

Munchday Church

Our early teens in Junior Church are finding it increasingly less desirable to come on Sunday, for a variety of reasons with which all churches and families will be familiar. We want to develop an idea



we have seen work very well at another URC church. One day of the week, after school, the church is open for young people of all ages to come, preferably with one or more parent, (but not necessarily). We will provide some activities to choose among, space to talk and play, and have a fun time. There will be a faith element with input and discussion and singing and other forms of telling the story of Jesus. This will be followed by a simple meal such as baked potato with beans, or cheese, or tuna, or pizza for example, or even more wholesome, which the church leaders, and other members and the parents and the children can all join in. This will be for many of them “Sunday

School on Monday”. For the adults it might be “Church on Monday”

After School Club

I’ve already had a discussion with a member who is interested to offer a support service to young teenagers from the secondary school, starting two afternoons a week, from 3.00 to 6.00 pm.

The priority will be to provide a safe space to relax, meet and talk with peers, coffee and tea and soft



drinks, snacks, space to do homework, perhaps with support, and extra laptops, and a simple meal of beans on toast or pasta. There is already music in the room, and we might have a TV and even a PlayStation. We have a full-size table tennis table.

There would be no charge for this, and we would manage the numbers and staffing ratios.

We would be able to access basic foods from the Fairtrade Rescue Service, which is also servicing the Stocksbridge Food Bank, run mainly by volunteers from Christ Church.

The church already offers a reading service in school through church volunteers, and has already provided a number of laptops for those in school without them at home, and this could be extended into homework support. We intend to consult carefully though our excellent contacts with the school to ascertain their views on what would be best.

The expectation is that as well as peer-to-peer interaction, there will be space for discussion with the young people. This will be a non-religious venture, but the possibilities for open and sensitive conversations one-to-one or in groups is significant.

We hope that there could be shared cooking and eating, and other activities. We will seek occasional resources for activities from other places.

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What needs to be done to bring this about?

Church Approval

This paper will go to the Leadership Team meeting on 25th July, for detailed consideration. We are also circulating it among the membership of the church and it will be discussed at Church Meeting on 16th July to consider the common view on what are at present only initial proposals. Nothing is yet decided.

Consultation

We need to consult with the following to seek their views and ideas, and potential for assistance:

- Junior Church Members
- Junior Church Parents and Grandparents and Carers
- Stocksbridge High School staff
- URC Yorkshire Youth Work Team
- URC Sheffield Team Ministry
- Methodist Circuit Youth Work Team
- Stocksbridge Town Council
- Sheffield City Council
- Stocksbridge Family Centre
- Potential volunteer leaders
- Stocksbridge youth activities leaders
- Steel Valley Beacon Arts
- and others.

We will invite the young people to suggest a catchy name for the After School Club and offer a prize for the chosen name.

Volunteer Teams

As I have begun to speak with people about this possibility I have been struck by their enthusiasm, and proposals for parts of this work. For the Junior Church activities, we already have a team of volunteers with an excellent leader. The leader has said she is keen to share in these discussions. We need to discuss this with them all and seek to strengthen the Junior Church team and ensure that an early evening could be covered, if on a rota.

For the After School Club, we know that we will need a minimum of three responsible adults each evening, preferably four. We think we can identify 2 or 3 at the moment. More will be needed if we need a rota.

Safeguarding is well implemented at Christ Church and this activity will fall within existing processes.

Other Activities

We propose, once it is agreed, to start discussing with potential user groups how they might use the new parents and children suite.



The space would be available every evening also for adult groups if we wanted to facilitate them, and earn their service charges. We would love to start a children's choir. Beacon Arts might want to have a children's drama group. A music teacher might want to start a children's band. There might even be toddler yoga. There is a garden to spill out into and relax there too. There could be a children's art group. Each group would have to pay a modest contribution to wards the cost of providing the space.

We envisage the existing Busy Little Hands continuing its excellent service in the main hall.

Parents and Children Support Worker

While we can do so much with volunteers from church and others from the town and community groups, it would be a significant advance if we could recruit a paid Parents and Children Support Worker. This worker could be significant part time or more. The worker would join the church as part of its wider ministry team of lay and ordained people. The focus of the work would be on developing and supporting activities, providing training and backup, rather than running all the activities.

I have already had initial discussions with the URC Yorkshire Synod about the possibility of some funding for this, and they are very keen to discuss the possibilities with us, both at their Education and Youth Team, (to whom this paper is going on 22nd June for discussion and comment) and at their Synod Mission discussions. They would like to discuss the support they could give to this. I have stressed that

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it cannot compromise the support we expect them to continue to give us for the Social Café. They are enthused by the idea of developing further the



concept of team ministry of lay and ordained people to improve long-term resilience for the churches.

What improvements do we need to the suite?

In fact, the suite of rooms is in overall very good condition. The following improvements are proposed. Costings will be worked out in July.

- Large extractor fan in small window in kitchen to right of oven.
- Replace the two apex window frames with new frames. with large air inlet vents in the frames. Each frame to have a lower third on a hanging opening light with opening restriction for ventilation. Both windows to have the frosted glass replaced with clear.
- Electrical sockets in the study space.
- New carpet in the study space.
- Service the rolling room divider.
- 6 display boards for activity use and notices.
- 2 white boards for notices and reminders.
- Fix electric fan heater under kitchen counter.
- Install condensing clothes drier to go with existing washing machine.
- Remove treatment bed from male toilet and if possible, insert a shower cubicle. Replace toilet seat. Retain traditional doors.
- Install brighter lights in toilets and corridors. Increase levels of emergency lighting.
- Decorate the suite with light emulsion and bold paper on the wall of the kitchen hatch.
- Four two-seat sofas near the hatch.
- TV screen. (with PlayStation or similar).

- Charging sockets
- Printer for wi-fi printing for homework.
- Spare laptops for homework use only.
- 3 blue and 4 red folding tables to match the existing red and blue chairs and trolley for a variety of uses in the main space.
- Toaster and microwave, pots and pans, and minor crockery. (some is available)
- Minor woodwork and other repairs.
- Relocate drama resources from wardrobes in corridor to spare Good Days cupboards and remove cupboards from fire corridor.
- Three recycling bins in kitchen.
- Major sort out and tidy of the various cupboards. Re-purpose old deep cupboard in kitchen for activities store.

Funds for the renovations and equipment.

In my conversations with the URC Yorkshire Synod, it is clear that they would be pleased to receive a request for funding to support these activities and renovations and equipping of the suite. The degree to which they would require our financial support or other grant support is not yet discussed.

A Strategic Moment

I shared with the Clerk to the Yorkshire Synod my hopes for this scheme, who was very enthusiastic about the project and really wants to see it progressed from their angle. We agreed that it is a strategic opportunity for the church to face the future and reach out to younger people. I have every confidence that this is feasible and will be an exciting development. We are sending this paper to the URC Education and Youth Committee on June 22nd, to hear their views and we hope to have their feedback in time for the Church Meeting.

I commend this proposal to the Leadership Team and all the church members and friends. Feedback of any sort on the ideas would be most welcome. Please email me at ianlucraft@btinternet.com. We look to the Church Meeting to give us a steer on the way forward, with these, and other ideas about the space available.

Rev Ian Lucraft : June 2023