

Sharing Our Story...

Llanelwy Community Church



Llanelwy Community Church in St Asaph is a small church, but with a big heart for mission and collaboration. When John Thompson arrived as minister to the church, there was already a thriving toddler group and annual advent event which folk from the church were running at the Cathedral. However, as John explains, “people outside the regular congregation were not really engaging in the spiritual life of the church, and we were lacking the framework to develop a long-term spiritual relationships with those outside or on the fringes of church life.

So often we’re desperate for people to know Jesus, but they don’t seem to trust us or come to events that we put on. I had recently done a piece of work for another church looking at the stepping stones of mission. In his book ‘The Forgotten Ways’, Alan Hirsch writes that when missionaries go to visit a new people-group, they have a certain number of barriers to sharing their faith, such as language, cultural practices considered normal and the inherited religion in a country. It is hence recognised that barriers need to be consciously crossed. The more barriers, the longer the typical average journey to faith may be. Trust needs to be built at each stage.

Christianity is no longer the inherited religion of the country, holding little sway over government and education. Culture and the media are generally not positive towards Christianity. Hence, we are expecting people to move between a greater number of zones or cross more boundaries than before. There is a new openness, but whilst God can of course still appear to people in a Damascus road experience, God can also move gradually in someone’s heart if we can provide a realistic path for them to come to faith. It’s like having stepping stones to cross a river.

For people at a toddler group, what is the next realistic step for them on a journey into faith? Our church hasn’t had a lot of success in attracting people from a toddler group to go to other events – even Messy Church. When I was training for ministry, I was introduced to an idea called Breakfast in Bethlehem. A family drop-in with craft stations, biscuit decorating, activities and games, a pool table and a free bacon sandwich and free tea/coffee. A printed A5 handout is given to all containing Bible verses and reflective information about each station. People are free to read it or ignore it as they wish. There’s Christian background music. People from the church help or are available to mingle and chat. A leaflet introducing the church is also handed out. I’ve then taken this successful event to two other churches and both times it has been a huge success there too. Why? First, you can escape - it’s a drop-in. Second, it’s seasonal - people do Christian things at Christmas and Easter, and that’s considered to be ok. Thirdly, there’s something for dad and the teenagers who will then agree to come too - there’s something for the whole family. Fourth – prayer. We prayed. Lots. We had over 60 people – praise God! Not bad for a church where the congregation is between 15 and 30.

We then ran an event on Easter Saturday – we had more than 90 at that (following lots more prayer over lent), and then a summer event to start raising money for a third world water collaboration project. Prayer had opened opportunities at schools for us to publicise that event which was quite effective too. We had more than 60 at that – which is great for a non-seasonal event and I did a short talk halfway through the 2-hour time slot to present the clean water project. Folk listened. So, Family Fun days seem to be a good stepping stone. We’re beginning to recognise regular faces. We’re beginning to build relationships. What’s next for those who are willing to try the next hop? Family Fun Days -> Messy Church -> Café Church -> Alpha in an ideal world? We’re starting off by making sure that the final step is in place by launching Alpha this Autumn so that we’re ready for the future and can run it periodically. We’ll continue to pray and see how God leads. Exciting times.

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