

Sharing Our Story...

Haggate Baptist Church, Burnley



“Haggate Baptist Church announce our new Mission Partner – the Hare and Hounds Haggate! Don't worry, we're not 'unequally yoked with unbelievers' or gone 'worldly', but we are working together to put on events to benefit the whole community, and have FUN.

Why? Well, we both want to benefit the community, bring folks together, put on events that might not otherwise happen, or that will be so much better when we work together, and in doing so be better known, increasing presence and good reputation. Of course, for the pub, the longer term outcome is better profits; for the church, an opportunity to share the love of God and help people come to know him. We're both up front about what's in it for us, but it's a win-win partnership.

Last year we had a word that God was challenging us to 'step out of the boat' but weren't sure what that was going to look like in reality. At a vision day this seemed to resonate: 'when we stepped out it would be to join Jesus where he already was, outside of our familiar boat.' Well this could be part of what he had in mind.....

There's always been a connection at Haggate between the church and the pubs but with a new landlady at the Hare & Hounds who is keen to put on community events, and to partner with the community. We'd be fools not to take the opportunity.

It began on Bonfire Night. The church has traditionally put on a big bonfire and a fireworks display in the burial ground, followed by food and fun at the church building (formally the primary school). We were planning for this year. However, before our publicity had gone out, we saw an advert for a firework event the same night at the Hare and Hounds. We realised the new landlady did not know about the tradition of church bonfire night; it wasn't a deliberate rivalry. After a quick planning committee meeting, we agreed it would be silly for both institutions to hold events a few hundred yards apart, so Brian (the minister) and one of the elders went on behalf of the church to see if we could work together.

The outcome was a joint venture in which we would move the bonfire (providing the wood we already had in store) to the pub, combine fireworks, ours and theirs, to make a much better display than either could do separately. They would serve their usual drinks and a supper, and the church would use the back bar (nearest the display as it happens) to serve tea, coffee hot chocolate etc (which are not normally on offer at the pub) and give out flyers about our other community services such as toddlers, Fantastic Fridays, Messy Church, Thinking Thursdays, and publicity for the groups that use the church like Slimming World. Win-Win for both pub and church, but especially for the community.

Who knows what we will do next, but if it helps the community come together, and benefits us both, why not? I look back at memories of mining villages in the North East, where my parents and grandparents grew up (and I spent every school holiday), and I understand why at that time Chapel and Pub had nothing whatsoever to do with each other (and no-one frequented both!!). But then I read the gospels and see Jesus and the disciples wherever people gathered, (the wedding at Cana was definitely a better do because Jesus was there) and I give thanks that these days, without forsaking moderation, we can work together with what is, after all, another community centre in the village.”

How does your church relate to and connect with other community groups and community locations? How could you work together to the mutual benefit of church and community?

Epilogue! The Bonfire was a HUGE success. We reckon over 1000 people came. Combining our fireworks with those of the pub, people described it as the best display they'd seen for years, including the official council one. We gave out almost 100 flyers about the various things that happen at church. Next time we will have flyers for the groups that use the premises too, as it's a community event, and a whole table of flyers shows how much we are at the heart of the Haggate Community. We served free tea coffee and hot chocolate topped with whipped cream and in the end we received over £800 in donations, far exceeding our costs and the balance has been set aside for community use, (not church funds), hopefully to fund or help fund something that would not otherwise be possible in the community.