



CGfE 'Signpost' Resource Paper No 2 July 2009

Evangelisation in New Housing Areas

From the 'Churches Coordinating Group for Evangelisation' (CGfE) of Churches Together in England

Introduction

The challenge of evangelisation in new housing areas is not new, but the current context raises a lot of issues that makes the challenge fresh. Here you will find consideration of the issues, stories from 'Pioneer Ministers', links to a dedicated website, and resources to help the wider church share the good news of Jesus Christ in new housing areas (NHA's).

Opportunity, Challenge and Issues

- Government call for 3 million new homes: where, how, and Christian response of protest or welcome
- Credit crunch and implications for Christian projects already underway when no new building going up
- Questions of best 'model' re evangelisation e.g. church planting vis-à-vis fresh expressions networks
- Perennial question 'to build or not to build' a church, especially in larger new housing developments
- Challenge of churches to work together in partnership when seeking to share the good news of Jesus Christ
- Evangelisation where there is no community and 'how to create community' as an expression of 'good news'
- Planning processes and partnerships long and complicated, while the finance needed for building can be daunting
- Churches often have too few people resources to pioneer and maintain a new Christian 'presence'
- Once started, maintaining and growing the work to make it sustainable and effective in further evangelisation.

Listening to some Pioneer Ministers

GfE is a Coordinating Group of Churches Together in England, and has a close working relationship with another Coordinating Group which brings together the denominational and agency representatives who specialise in the concern for new housing areas. That group shares the concern for evangelisation and invited Pioneer Ministers living and working in new housing areas to tell their story. This is what some of them had to say.



Elvetham Heath. David Price is the minister of an ecumenical church at Elvetham Heath near Fleet in Hampshire. This is an Anglican, Baptist, Methodist and URC partnership. 24 people in December 2000 gathered to think and pray about a new church plant on land which had been designated on a 'use it or lose it' basis. David quoted George Lings' suggestion that they consider themselves to be 'in the departure lounge without the comfort of arrival'. Two key questions were considered:

- would this be a Fresh Expression or more conventional church and
- Would it be more described as 'network' or 'neighbourhood'?



David stressed the importance of a shared vision to guide the emerging congregation through all the options and stages of development, and the value of starting early eg buying one of the first houses. After that it was an emphasis on the basics eg Bible, evangelism, practical service, pastoral care. What has emerged naturally is a village square and church in the heart of the new community. Though daunted by the burden of repayment, the congregation has grown and is excited about the future, feeling 'on the right track'. More information is on: <http://www.churchontheheath.org.uk/>.

Dickens Heath Village. Tim Aho from USA has been with the Fellowship of Churches of Christ in England for 15 years. He planted the church at Dickens Heath Village near Solihull with four couples. 'We were blessed by the other churches' he said and particularly encouraged by the Heart of England Baptist Association. The vision was for people not a church building, which felt right at the time, but in retrospect more could have been achieved with their own space. A congregation has developed which meets in a school and 'networks' based around the home. On their website you will see this under 'Home Zones'. Early involvement and network with developers, planners, Council, agencies was all important and the church was seen as a group building community. The annual Picnic on the Green, Christmas Fete, Community Survey and good links with the school have all been significant factors in the growth as you can see on their website: <http://www.dhvc.moonfruit.com/#>

Grange Park, Northampton. Charlie Nobbs had been a nearby Anglican Curate when building began on fields near the M1 back in 2000. Now 1580 homes are occupied and he is the minister of the church which began with

gazebos in the playground. Building a good partnership with a new school was key, as was moving on to the estate in early days with his own family. The surprising main way in which the church was able to build community was with young mums and the opportunity to serve refreshments at the Weighing Clinic. In addition to Neighbourhood Watch, Litter Picking, Firework displays and other community events, it is the young mum's network that has been really significant. 'Not many babies born on Grange Park in the last 4 to 5 years, have not spent Thursday mornings in the Vicarage' he says. This initial contact has led on to 'Talking Point', 'Kids Zone' and 'Stepping Stones'. A very helpful resource has been the 'Journeys' DVD from NZ with faith journey stories, at fortnightly wine and pudding evenings. <http://www.grangeparkchurch.com/>



Locking Castle, Weston Super Mare. Mark Elvin is a URC Minister and says community development at Locking Castle was inspired by a local vet. She led the way with a new practice on the estate. The vision for a church was inspired by a previous local minister and a new congregation began to meet in a portacabin. Now they have a church building and an ecumenical congregation, though questions have surfaced about the design, as most people drive past to work without knowing it is a church. This is partly because the many midweek activities are in the hall out of sight round the back. A large notice board and posters help say it is a church, and outreach initiatives and Alpha groups help people see what goes on. <http://www.lockingcastlechurch.org>.

Signpost to background Resources

Website: Church in New Housing Areas

The key resource for evangelisation in new housing areas is provided by Churches Coordinating Group for New Housing Areas of Churches Together in England. Their website 'Church in New Housing Areas' looks at three key areas: the Planning Process, Creating Community, and Church Planting at: www.cinha.net.

Ten Top Tips for mission in new housing areas.

Bob Purser is the Churches Officer for New Communities in Northamptonshire and has produced a handy guide for churches wanting to consider mission in new housing areas. Written for local church groups from experience from an area where it has been tried. See <http://www.cinha.net/article.php?id=119&num=5>



Building Utopia? This is a book by Laurie Green and Christopher R Baker. SPCK 2008

Few books have been written to look at issues of the church in new housing areas, and little research has been done so far. Christopher Baker is one and reflects on that with the Bishop Laurie Green who has been at the forefront of the Church of England considering estates over the past few decades. Subtitle is 'Seeking the authentic Church in new communities', this book explores the issues from various social as well as ecclesial perspectives.

Church of Scotland considerations of 'New Charge Development'

On 28th May 2008 the Church of Scotland hosted a Day Conference 'Being Church in areas of New Development'. Although not on the web, the CofS website does have a paper and link to a paper you can download about church planting at: <http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/ministry/downloads/ministryncdnewapproaches.rtf>

'Faith' in new developments

Cambridgeshire Horizons commissioned a report on faith provision in the context of new housing developments. This is a local consideration of some national issues about the benefits of faith communities involved in new housing. An executive summary is at: http://www.cambridgeshirehorizons.co.uk/our_challenge/community/faith_facilities.aspx

More formal congregational partnership guideline papers

Churches Together in England has hosted various meetings which bring together the denominational representatives to consider how the churches can work together with their different practices, legal and theological backgrounds. They have produced guidelines which can help others at the point of considering more formal arrangements and save some of the 'reinventing of the wheel', especially in establishing single congregation partnerships. See all the resource papers on: http://www.cte.org.uk/Groups/43932/Churches_Together_in/Local_Ecumenism/Ecumenical_Notes/Ecumenical_Notes.aspx

List of resources available

The site map on 'Church in New Housing Areas' lists resources, agencies, stories at: <http://www.cinha.net/sitemap.php>

This Resource Paper is one of a growing series on different topics for local church leaders, being produced and posted on www.churches-together.net

These papers collate contributions from our immediate and wider network, and are presented in good faith for accuracy and representation. They cannot be considered formal statements or endorsements on behalf of all churches in England, and CGfE / CTE cannot be held responsible for material and opinions which have been quoted.

The Churches Coordinating Group for Evangelisation (CGfE), is a network of national evangelism officers of the major denominations and home mission agencies. Our aim is to help the churches in England work together in sharing the good news of Jesus Christ.

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