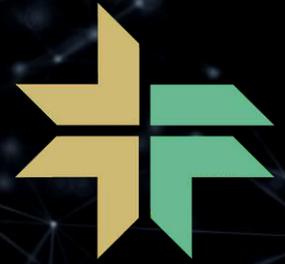


FCC CONNECTION

The official newsletter of
The Fellowship of Churches of Christ



GREETINGS FROM ESSEX IN ILFORD



Hello FCC family this is Max and Vickee and the children here at **Gracevine Community Church** formerly called Cranley Road Christian Church. It has been a delight to be in God's mission and an amazing journey for the last three years since we moved from Kent to be part of what God is doing in Ilford.

The first two years were quite challenging with the kids settling in the right school, bereavements, and ill health. We thank the Lord for his continued grace, strength, and wisdom. During this period, our focus had been to connect with leaders, to understand and develop a missional context for our community. We have been having support from the Trustees at Cranley Road Christian Church in various ways to ensure we are doing well.

God also made it possible for us to connect with a lovely couple by the name of Bob and Mary Baine who were

IN THIS ISSUE

Greetings from Essex in Ilford

Dates for Your Diary

Mission After George Floyd

Church Building / Trustees Training

Leading God's People in the Great Unravelling



once living in Redbridge but had just moved to Newcastle by then. They are running the Welcome Network that bridge the gap between churches and the community. They were of tremendous support in connecting us with other leaders and organisations in Redbridge, that are of great benefit for the work we are doing in Ilford. Bob and Mary were so faithful and committed in visiting us on a regular basis for several months between 2017 and 2018 with a planned strategy of mentoring. We are now connected with several church leaders, becoming part of Love Redbridge, the Street Pastors and the Redbridge Food Bank.

In February 2019 we launched the Gracevine Food Bank which was opened once a week for one and half hours, working in partnership with the Redbridge Food Bank. Over the year to February 2020 we fulfilled 56 vouchers, provided food for 68 adults and 44 children, and distributing a total of 1,203.99kg of food. We had six volunteers who have been supporting the work of the food bank. Unfortunately, the Food Bank had to close due to COVID-19 and all distribution was centralised by the Redbridge Food Bank. We are trusting God to start again as soon as we possible can.

It's always the desire of my wife Vickee to support children in their education, during the Easter period of 2019 and the lockdown this year she offered free tuition in Mathematics and a free online Mathematics and English tuition during the first lockdown. This has created open door to support other children online till date.

We have been busier in the mission of God during this lockdown than the first two years we have been in Ilford. Few of the work we have engaged in during this period are:

- Helping with shopping for the vulnerable
- Supporting a friend who is battling with cancer
- Checking on our neighbours by phone especially the elderly

- God has created the opportunity for us to run online prayer meetings on Monday's evening, Life Study on Saturdays and a Sunday Home Church Online. This all started during the first lockdown and we are grateful for all God is doing on this side.

Our vision is to build a community of God's people who will reach, restore, rebuild, and replenish their communities by reaching one man, empower that one man who will go on to empower others. We want to see a united body of believers who will work together in the fulfilment of the great commission. Please pray with us as we continue to press on in the mission God in Ilford.

Prayer Points

- Pray for us as a family for strength, wisdom, and courage to keep pressing on. Particularly for my daughter who is taking her A level exams next year (all being well), making decision for her future in choosing the right University. For open doors to in reaching our community as a family.
- Our prayer is for God to bring in the right people who will connect with the vision and work together with us in his mission.
- That God will help us to create the right fields where the seed will be sown. The field is where we can gather people, create possible projects that will give us the opportunity to reach the community of Ilford. There are two projects we are praying about; A Morning Café and A Life Skills Centre alongside the Food bank. These are plans for post COVID session and for the next three to five years.
- Pray for the Ilford community that God will be enthroned and the heart of our neighbours will yield to the love of God. That the salvation of God will come to the Muslims, the Buddhists, Sikhs, Hindus, and non-Christians that surrounds our community.
- Pray for the Unity of the body of Christ that we will come together for the purpose of the great commission.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Prayer Day

We are holding a time of prayer for mission, our churches and our leaders. The event will be on Zoom on **Saturday 16th January 2021** from 10.30am to 12 noon. We are limited to 100 participants and so the event will be by invitation only. However, if you want to be invited please contact Lynda Robinson lynda.robinson@fcc-cio.com and she will send you a Zoom link to the event. This is a great opportunity to meet people from other congregations.

Delegates Conference – Connect

Once a year we hold a delegate's conference which we call **CONNECT**. Because of the Covid crisis, we will be holding the event in two parts on two different days. The first occasion will be a Zoom event on Saturday 13th February 2021 at which we will vote people into key positions. We expect this event to last about 90 minutes.

The second part will be held as a live event once the vaccine is sufficiently available to make that possible. We can't select a date at the moment, but we hope it will be before the end of April. We are going to monitor the progress of the vaccine distribution and announce the date once we are sure that meeting will be safe.

At this second event we will welcome in new churches to the Fellowship, have a time of worship and conduct some additional business. Please ensure that your congregation sends the names of your delegates to Lynda Robinson lynda.robinson@fcc-cio.com so that we can send your Zoom link together with the necessary paper work online.

MISSION AFTER GEORGE FLOYD

One of our ministers, **Harvey Kwiyani**, who also teaches at Liverpool Hope University, has written an excellent booklet on the difficult task of mission in the context of racial, cultural and ethnic tensions. It's a difficult read, partly because some of the issues he raises are painful and partly because it's a fairly academic piece. However, if you have the time to dig into it you will find it both challenging and helpful. We have to deal at some level with the questions Harvey raises.

The booklet itself has gone viral! Many people have downloaded the material and you can do so for yourself using the following [link](#):

<https://churchmissionsociety.org/resources/mission-after-george-floyd-on-white-supremacy-colonialism-and-world-christianity-harvey-kwiyani-anvil-vol-36-issue-3/>



CHURCH BUILDING / TRUSTEES TRAINING

Those of you that carry the responsibility of looking after church buildings might be interested in a free training event that seeks to equip trustees with advice on how to ensure that all your various legal requirements are up to date. The event is organised by **Stone King LLP**. See details below.

Virtual Charity Training Land and Buildings: Charity Trustee Duties (and Opportunities) Wednesday 13 January

We have developed our new programme of Virtual Charity Training webinars to provide a comprehensive overview of topical issues for the charity and social enterprise sector. From supporting your employees during times of change to ensuring you are Brexit-ready, this 5-part programme is aimed at trustees and members of senior management teams. You can view the full programme [here](#).

In the third of our topical charity training webinars we will focus on how to approach the rules that apply to charities and their land and buildings. With an opportunity to ask questions throughout, this promises to be an interactive engaging session. If you would like to submit your questions prior to the webinar please include on your registration form (link below) or contact events@stoneking.co.uk.

Timings: 10:00am to 11:00am

Cost: This training is free of charge.

BOOK NOW

Speakers



Hugh Pearce

Partner in Commercial Property
Team and Head of Faith
Organisation Team



Kathryn Williams

Senior Associate in Commercial
Property Team

LEADING GOD'S PEOPLE IN THE GREAT UNRAVELLING



[Click the picture to read more.](#)

ForMission College participates in something called the **Journal of Missional Practice**. Some months ago, we highlighted a webinar together with **Lord Glasman** and an organisation called **Together for the Common Good**. We had an amazing response to the webinar and what follows is a follow up “pastoral letter” in the light of that event which highlights some of the issues that arose following the webinar.

Background and Purpose:

This “letter” arose out of a recognition that many clergy are confronting a nexus of crises that are disrupting their sense of vocation. Its intention is to foster conversation by offering a description of the situation and, on that basis, invite some clergy to reflect with us. What follows is the letter.

Discerning Vocation: Leading God's People in the Great Unravelling

Dear Friends in God's Ministry:

Grace and peace to you in the name of Jesus Christ. These are challenging days as we sort through our roles as leaders among God's people (pastors, priests, clergy, and others) in the midst of a pandemic that is no longer a passing moment. This is a space of death and trauma for so many of those among whom we live and lead. Our time is one of

crisis and grief. We genuinely find ourselves in a liminal space. But that is only part of the story. At the same time, this is a moment of immense opportunity in which the Spirit is inviting us to re-imagine our vocation. To describe this invitation, we must first describe the liminal space - the crises that have come upon us.

A Multifaceted Crisis

This crisis operates at multiple levels:

First: Our training has formed us to care for our congregations. Yet, in this ninth month of Covid many of us have become distanced from our congregations. The places we gathered to do Word and sacrament are, in some cases, even closed. Many of us are working hard at various kinds of engagement online but it isn't what we ever imagined. Many leaders say they "just want to get back to pastoring". This expresses a desire to fulfil their vocation. But a church life that has been the norm may not be coming back. Increasing numbers are asking aloud about the need for a physical form of church and, in that process, the roles that leaders have filled. In this sense of loss lies a crisis of leadership identity.

Second: It is a financial crisis that has been developing over several decades, but the pandemic has accelerated it into a full-blown watershed moment. Many congregations are no longer generating enough to support full-time clergy. The existential challenge here is the economic viability of local leaders. This crisis confronts existing church leaders with questions about the economic future of their role. This reality presents leaders with anxiety producing choices they never imagined when entering training colleges, taking on ordination and responding to God's call.

Third: It is a crisis of place, of dislocation from a rootedness in the local. The professionalising of clergy has carried with it a career-orientated tendency which, overall, meant a detachment from place. This professionalization has produced dislocated, often isolated leaders without a deep and enduring connection to their place, and who may also be estranged

from the people living in that place. The anxiety, isolation and fear of this Covid time is around the exposure of the thinness and frailty of the root systems of leaders (and often of congregations too). At the exact time when leaders need to be in a place of being with and receiving from the other, this leaves them fragile and exposed. This exposure of a 'crisis of place' could, until recently, be sloughed off with arguments about a digital culture replacing concrete relationality. Yet, while the pandemic has accelerated our connectivity online, it has also relocated us where we live, with stark reminders of the importance of the physical neighbourhood, not least for the poor, infirm and disenfranchised.

Fourth, these three realities have combined to lay bare a theological crisis of role and vocation. This crisis is a story long in the making. The vocation of many priests and clergy has become enclosed, in an inwardly-focused imagination whose orientation is about attending to a congregation.

In modern Protestantism, congregations became branch plants of denominational identities (as happened in "network" churches). Clergy became professionalized managers, communicators and spiritual guardians of denominational identity. Theological colleges served as certifiers of the leaders performing these key functions. The interface between denomination, college and congregation birthed a clergy industry supplying leaders to congregations. This world is unravelling.

The challenges for the Catholic Church are somewhat different. Its size, distinctive international structure and the diversity of its expression produce a more complex picture. However, it has not escaped the professionalisation trend, with some clergy

focusing inwardly on congregation while falling out of relationship with local people. In addition, declining numbers of priests are severely straining the clerical-centric model, raising critical challenges around modes of survival. Alongside this, growing examples of ministries and vocations among the non-ordained - that do not fit the clerical mould - are a sign of the Spirit working in ways the Church has yet to fully embrace.

Accepted, professionalised, roles have been built into our assumptions about church leadership, framing our convictions about the place where God is at work. These roles are now under enormous strain. Questions about the vocation of leaders in these crises are not answered with pragmatic models or tactical skills like innovative or adaptive leadership. They are about the vocation of the whole people of God, and in this unprecedented unravelling, about how God is calling congregation and parish. These are profoundly theological questions about the vocation of leaders, where the Spirit is located, the place of belonging, about Christian communities and their rootedness in the local. They raise further questions about how and with whom we discern the movement of God, about how we are listening to the other, not as strategy, but as part of a reciprocal relationship with the neighbour (the other) in order that we can receive as well as give.

These questions are, at their heart, about God's agency, about Incarnate life in place and community, about God's call to the church to participate in the reweaving of creation and civic life. These are theological questions that must be addressed before all tactical methods. The gift of our moment is that the curtain is being pulled back on how vocation has been understood and how Christian leaders can join in writing a different chapter.

Re-imagining the Vocation of Leaders

Writing a new chapter requires us to discern another way of practising our vocation. The vocation of forming God's people as signs of the kingdom is severely inhibited within the paradigm of clergy professionalisation. God is reweaving the torn threads of creation, the frayed ecologies of our communities. In this movement, the whole people of God is being called to join in with what God is doing in their communities.

Underneath all the unravelling of the failed story, there is within the memory of the church a better story, a gift that can redeem our troubled situation. There is a new chapter to be written which involves a joint congregational and leadership vocation of joining with God in the transformation of communities and creation. God is calling forth a doxological reweaving of all things. Our "yes" to vocation is to the forming of a people who are joining with God in Christ in their neighbourhoods. The Spirit is calling us to this new place: 'God is in this place, and we knew it not.' (Genesis 28:16).

Responding to this call

Increasing numbers of Christian leaders sense this call. We are observing that they are:

1. Neither wanting nor willing to "go back to normal" or to manage a brand.
2. Wanting to form a people orientated toward God's agency in their communities.
3. Not sure how to go about this.
4. Ready to join with others in discerning the shape of this re-orientation.

In this work together there are some pointers about what is involved:

1. Tradition is important. The riches in the treasury of our Christian past can help us in this re-rooting. We're not severing our traditions but re-entering their richness from the standpoint of our liminal place.
2. Eucharistic community directs us.
3. The gift of the place where we live, and the people of that place, is central in discerning what God is doing and saying.
4. It can't be rushed. This vocation is not amenable to technique.
5. It is not an individual undertaking but requires a community of co-leaders.
6. The Christian story is for the public square. We are to dwell in, listen with and speak to the world beyond the walls of the church. It calls for a public theology of relationship in which the Gospel is engaged in the circumstances of our societies where the story of a hyper individualistic culture makes less and less sense.

An invitation

If this letter resonates with you, we would be delighted if you would join us, as part of a small group of specially invited clergy, for a zoom conversation on these themes. From this, we hope to discern our next steps.

Alan J Roxburgh, Martin Robinson, Lord Maurice Glasman, Jenny Sinclair, the Rt Revd Andrew Rumsey, Mark Lau Branson, Alison Gelder and Fr William Taylor.

*This comes out of an ongoing conversation between **Together for the Common Good**, **The Common Good Foundation** and **Journal of Missional Practice** and is framed by a generous and generative partnership between us.*



THE PLAGUE AND THE PARISH: AN INVITATION TO THE CHURCHES.