

# FCC CONNECTION

The official newsletter of  
The Fellowship of Churches of Christ

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## HAPPY NEW YEAR!

In this time of Covid and lockdown, "Happy New Year!" might seem hard words to hear and to believe. What will the year ahead hold for us? Certainly, the next few months up until Easter will be challenging for every congregation.

The rules, at least in England, enable us to meet for worship under social distancing rules. But each congregation will need to ask whether that is the wisest action to take.

Whatever our decision as local congregations this is the time to begin to plan for what might come next. In all probability, there will not be a return to church as normal for some time and maybe not ever.

Over the next few editions of **FCC Connection**, we will be focussing on what the future might be. We will be talking about church planting, about re-connecting with our communities and about imagining what leadership will look like over the coming period.

## PRAYER CONFERENCE POSTPONED

In the previous edition of Connections we announced a Prayer Conference to be held on line on Saturday 16th January. The combination of Covid and our capacity means that we have had to postpone this event. **It is not cancelled and we hope to be able to hold the event before Easter this year.** However, we do need more time than we currently have to organise this event well. So please forgive us for this postponement - we will send you more details in the weeks to come.

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# multiply 2021

— TOGETHER —

## CHURCH PLANTING CONFERENCE

We are excited to announce we are now taking bookings to this year's church planting conference on **Thursday 24 June — multiply X 2021: TOGETHER.**

To reach our nation with the Gospel, we need every kind of church and Christian community, from every stream, to multiply — reaching different people, in different contexts and places, in different ways.

We believe we must do it **together** — the theme of our conference this year. The idea is not that we necessarily plant churches together, but by finding creative ways to envision, encourage and support each other, together we plant churches. Covid-19 may have dislocated us and physically distanced us but churches have responded more creatively than ever. We want to build on that creativity and learning in this conference.

Find out more [here](#).

It's our hope and prayer that this conference will provide an opportunity for many people from across the Church who long to see God's Kingdom multiplied, to meet, affirm, share, learn, and discern together how God is calling His church to emerge post-lockdown.

Take advantage of our 20% off early bird discount - book by 14 February using the EB20 code.



# WHAT THE FUTURE MIGHT HOLD...

The following letter, sent out to congregations in Canada and the USA, raises some questions about **what the future might hold**.

*Dear Friends,*

*We're at the beginning of the end of the pandemic. As hopeful as that ending is, CV19 has raised difficult questions about our world and our churches. We're confronting the results of a long period in which individualism, the market and globalization have produced a malaise of loneliness, winners-losers, and the erosion of social trust.*

*The challenges before our congregations are far more than getting back to a "normal".*

*Many of our churches have fallen out of relationship with our communities and neighbours. Many of us are turned in on ourselves, shaped by a conviction that we have little to receive from the other. The One who declares "I make all things new" is calling our churches to their ancient roles as good neighbours who become the glue of social thriving in the name of Christ. It is a call to move beyond transactional engagements to dwell with and be for our neighbourhoods.*

*God is at work in our threadbare times calling congregations to re-imagine who they are called to be and what they are called to do. We are being called to participate with the Spirit in reweaving the torn threads of our common life. Too often we have forgotten this counter-cultural imagination. There remains a memory of another time when the church lay at the heart of shaping civic and social life.*

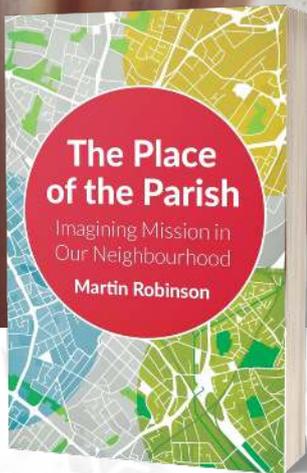
*The good news is that the Spirit is ahead of us and Jesus is inviting us to join in the remaking of our shattered social, political and economic life. This is disciple-making at this time. It is about how a congregation discerns what God is doing in their neighbourhood and joins with God there. Our vocation is to humbly be present in our neighbourhoods (Luke 10:1-12). This is not about a new program or strategy for survival or growth, but as the response to this call to dwell in and receive from our neighbours.*

*If we respond to this invitation we must begin with a commitment to the place where we live. And in our place together, we must begin to wrestle with questions like: Who are we being called to partner with in our communities? What do we need to learn from our neighbours? Where might the Spirit be inviting us to contribute and participate? How do our daily rhythms support and nurture relationships of mutuality? How are we learning to share stories about God at work among our neighbours and in our neighbourhoods? How are we being shaped by God's story in our daily lives? As we begin to work with these questions, we step into our vocation as God's people. We begin to participate in reweaving the fragile chords of relationship in our communities. We become followers of Jesus who bear witness to the One who is making all things new.*

*This is a far greater ask and call than returning to "normal". This is the work that God is calling us to.*

# JOURNEY INTO THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

Martin Robinson



The following is a reflection on neighbourhood taken from a book by Martin Robinson with the title *The Place of the Parish: Imagining Mission in Our Neighbourhood*.

## **Journey into the Neighbourhood**

“Some years ago, I met a brother from the Taizé community, and, during a wonderful conversation over lunch, he shared with me that many young people arrived at Taizé each summer, sometimes for a number of years in succession. He recounted that frequently some of these young people would express wonder and amazement that they met the same monks each year. ‘You are still here!’ they would exclaim. The reason for that wonder is that often this was the only point of stability in their lives. Their parents had divorced, sometimes more than once. Their friends had let them down, education and employment had failed to meet the emotional needs of their lives and so they had tended to wander and to drift. The spiritual gift of stability, or remaining, of faithful presence, was precious for them. That’s not a programme so much as a vocation, a way of life.

One of the key learning points of all those involved in networks such as New Parish have discovered is that faithful presence begins by listening to the neighbourhood. That is also the way in which a conversation with a neighbourhood begins, one that moves us beyond the despairing cry of ‘Why don’t you come to our church anymore?’

This was a journey that the congregation of which I am a part began some 20 years ago. The journey began with an intention to plant a congregation on the south side of Birmingham, England. The congregation began with a small group meeting in someone’s home and, after finding a number of different meeting places, finally arrived at a rented room in a community centre located in Bournville – Rowheath Pavilion.

The Pavilion had rooms for hire and the church plant rented the main hall on a Sunday for worship. After a few years the charitable trust in question ran out of funds and the church plant was invited to take on the lease on a long-term basis. To the partial surprise of the church, taking on the lease did not result in the immediate growth of the church. For one thing, it took a huge amount of effort to operate and maintain the centre and, for another, the community was not much interested in the fact that a church was located in a building that had largely lost its intimate connection with the community. Not only was this not necessarily good news for the community, it was just not news at all.

After much prayer and thought the church decided to begin a listening exercise, one part of which was to conduct a survey in the neighbourhood, partly to discover what people thought of the church and partly to understand what people living nearby thought were the needs in the area. The findings made for some sobering reflection. First of all, despite the best efforts of the church to date, very few people in the

neighbourhood had ever heard of the church, and a surprising number had no idea what happened in the building; a small number were not even aware that the building was even functioning, believing it to be either redundant or closed.

The needs expressed by the community were even more surprising, at least in part. The top need was to see a children's playground in operation. No-one in the church had ever had that thought. The second was the need for a place to have a coffee with space to talk with their friends and a third was perhaps more obvious: youth in the neighbourhood needed some resource as there was little for them to do.

After a good deal of soul searching the church agreed to lead the community in fund raising for a children's play area located next to the building. At the same time, they renovated a room that had been largely unused and launched a café, located within a few metres of the playground. This had an immediate impact in the community. A conversation had begun, small at first but growing. Over time, this little-used facility began to attract significant numbers of people to a wide range of activities, some operated directly by the church but many by community groups or commercial enterprises. After a few years the building was opening from 9.00 a.m. to 11.00 p.m., seven days a week. Today, around 15 years after the opening of the children's playground, some 2,500 people use the building each week for activities ranging from sports groups through to dance classes, language classes, children's programmes, spending time in the café and of course church services. The main hall is frequently used as a venue for weddings, parties and other family celebrations. A farmers' market and outdoor festivals take advantage of the grounds, together with a Street Food Friday event that runs through the summer months.

Soundings taken by the church suggest that the centre is now much better known in the neighbourhood. The church is can even echo the words of Acts 2, that they enjoy the favour of the people. A conversation of sorts is in place and within that larger conversation are many individual conversations about life, faith and the personal needs of those who visit the various amenities.

The church had undoubtedly grown in numbers through this period but for the most part it has grown because Christians who have moved into the area have chosen to make this their home. Some have come to faith through the various conversations and relationships that have been established through the activities of the centre but the idea that the 'favour of the people' has translated into huge numbers of people coming to faith is certainly not true.

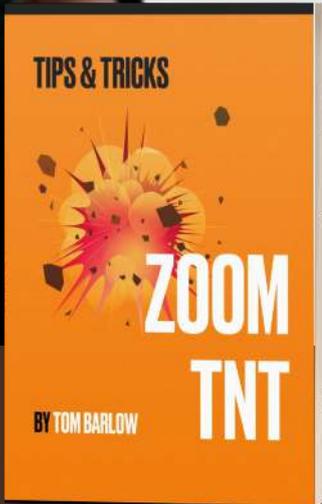
So what was the church expecting to happen as a result of establishing a conversation with the community? To a certain extent there was a hope that out of the many relationships formed through that conversation it would result in people coming to faith in Christ, simply because the gospel is good news. But it is also true that this was an open journey that sought to discover what God was up to in the community. That journey is based on the conviction that God is the primary agent of mission. If the attempt to have a conversation with the community is merely an evangelistic technique, then we are implicitly claiming that we are the agent of mission, not God.

Even once a church 'enjoys the favour of the people', this is not a recipe for a community-wide orientation towards that church. It simply creates an open space that was not present previously. Potentially and hopefully, it is a creative and fertile space, but it is not a programme. Christians are called to live in that space. To use Newbigin's phrase, the congregation is the hermeneutic of the Gospel. That means we attempt to live the gospel in such a way that it can be heard, seen and experienced, however imperfectly.

It is also clear that this is costly. We may begin with the joy of the incarnation but in doing so, we cannot avoid the pain of the cross. We have indicated that joining God in the neighbourhood is not a quick fix, it's not a methodology that's all about church; instead, it requires a very long-term commitment, and it requires those who are willing to walk the way of the cross."

# ZOOM TNT: TIPS AND TRICKS TO UNLOCK YOUR ZOOM EXPERIENCE

**Tom Barlow**



We are delighted to bring this useful, new, and timely book to your attention. As well as serving as a leader in the FCC Frankley Grace Community Church in Birmingham, Tom is an Associate Certified Coach and a leadership trainer, specialising in cross-cultural competency in the not-for-profit sector. He has lived cross-culturally for more than three decades; cultural intelligence is his hobby and his passion. He loves building bridges between people and helping others engage with new ideas and concepts. He also recently launched CoachingCultures.org to offer training and coaching in cultural intelligence, in addition to expanding his coaching network.

**[Tom@CoachingCultures.org](mailto:Tom@CoachingCultures.org) | [www.CoachingCultures.org](http://www.CoachingCultures.org)**

*“The Covid-19 pandemic. No matter what you think of the phenomenon, you have lived at least some effects of such a global event. If nothing else, you have seen or heard harrowing stories from other parts of the planet caused by the virus. For most of us, the effects have been far-reaching and long-lasting. Some believe we may never fully go back to the “old normal”. Such an event is bringing about new thinking in many areas. Businesses are re-assessing their need for office space. Employees are investigating how much of their roles they can accomplish from home. Online commerce has grown exponentially, putting in jeopardy the very existence of many high street shops. In-person training events and conferences have come to a standstill. For those who train, the change can feel overwhelming. Paralysing. Devastating.*

*Thankfully, online training can be effective - and even more focused and engaging. This brief book can be the first step toward that, as you unlock ways to use one platform, Zoom, much more powerfully.*

*As you work through each Tip or Trick, you will likely discover more ways to use it well. Feel free to share them, so we all use the tools available to us right now to develop and grow.”*

**[Available via Amazon.](#)**