Facing the Challenge: Hebden Bridge Methodist Church

Report March 2015

Introduction

Hebden Bridge Methodist church has developed from the joining in the 1970s of 3 Methodist Churches within Hebden Bridge. The premises reflect the rebuilding of the Sunday School hall and Church at that time. The Church has recently celebrated 40 years of the new Church building.

More recently, the Church has absorbed members from other Methodist Churches in the Calder Valley that have closed: Luddenden & Midgley, Old Town and (very recently) Mytholmroyd. New people have also moved into the area and joined the Church.

The congregation has become a mixture of “incomers” and local folk and the mix has created a friendly welcoming Church. The congregation demographic tends to be predominantly over 50s with many between 70 and 80 years old. The Church lacks young families and young people although it has managed to maintain a Sunday School (called Trailblazers). The congregation averaged about 20 people each week in 2014.

What do we hope to explore and implement in the next 12-18 months?

- **The role of Christians in society:**
  The Church is a Fair Trade Church, and supports organisations such as Christian Aid, the Blenheim Project (Bradford), the New Ebenezer Centre Food Drop-in and the Morning Glory Clinic in Kenya. There are also many people within the congregation who actively support other charities.

  There may be interest in developing the promotion and support of Christian charities and becoming more actively involved in campaigns around social justice.

- **Support and expand our Fellowship groups:**
  The Church has two fellowship groups: the Mytholmroyd Monday Evening Group (meets in homes for bible study and discussion) and the Teatime Fellowship (meets at Church for a faith supper followed by bible study or discussion). Many of the congregation attend the Hebden Bridge Churches Together ecumenical Lent Groups.
It might be possible to either expand these groups or begin a day-time fellowship group.

- **Develop our Hospitality:**
  One of the strengths of the Church is its welcoming and hospitable nature. For example, for many years, the Church hosts a monthly Luncheon Club for anyone to have a meal. During this time the Church is usually open for prayer and reflection.

- **Review and explore our form of worship:**
  Many of the congregation are interested in exploring newer forms of worship. The Church has a Worship Group that goes out to other Churches in the Circuit to take an all-age service. Last year the Church hosted a “Churches Together” open air Pentecost Praise service and some members are planning a new “Soul Space” evening.

  The challenge is to develop, explore, experiment with worship while recognising that some members value a traditional form of worship (and seating).

- **Connecting to the community through the Internet:**
  We are interested in running and maintaining our own website which could include recordings of the weekly service as well as being a means of improving our visibility and connecting to the local community.

Where do we feel our gifts are?

- **Welcoming:**
  Our strengths include a warm welcome to new members and visitors to the Church and, importantly for an area like Hebden Bridge, our acceptance of individuality.

- **Ecumenical perspective Examples:**
  We are committed to working with and through Christians Together in Hebden Bridge. For example the Annual Covenant Service has been shared with the local Anglican congregation for many years, as has the annual joint services with the local Baptist congregation. We support the various Easter and Christmas activities arranged by Christians Together. Newer ecumenical initiatives include the open air Pentecost Praise service and Soul Space.

  As a congregation we feel we are strengthened through our joint worship and witness to God’s work.

- **An Awareness that we need to move on:**
  We know we have to move on and not look clinging to past traditions. We are just not sure how or where the Lord wants us to go.
What might we offer to the Circuit?

- **HB Worship Group**
  The HB Worship Group has been taking all age worship to Churches around the circuit for nearly 10 years. The Group uses the advantages of having 4 people leading worship to incorporate drama, humour, changes of pace and audience participation.

  The Group taps into the talents and experience of ordinary members of the congregation by encouraging them to take part in worship during the service in some way.

  This may be a model that other Churches would be interested in exploring and we would be happy to share our experiences.

- **Premises for retreats, meetings, and events:**
  Our premises has level access and has meeting rooms as well as a large hall and the Church.

  We are currently reviewing our needs and considering how to make it more attractive and incorporate multi-purpose spaces.

- **Ecumenical perspective**
  We are commitment to working with and through Christians Together in Hebden Bridge.

  As a congregation we feel we are strengthened through our joint worship and witness to God’s work with and through Christians Together in Hebden Bridge as well as neighbouring Churches in the Circuit.

What could the Circuit offer us?

We are actively seeking to understand how God wants us to develop our mission to our community in the Upper Calder Valley. We are also aware of the need to develop the ministry of the Church amongst its congregation (members and adherents).

We are struggling to do this on our own with so many of our active members either being elderly, suffering ill-health or having demanding work/home lives.

We would value support, such as a lay worker, for mission and ministry.

Maureen Readle, Senior Steward. Hebden Bridge Methodist Church