

Neither Young Nor Old

Beginning a New Church

v. 0.2

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Foreword to Version 0.2

The NYNO project is a work in progress. This document is intended to share our thoughts on what we have done to date, so that others may take those thoughts and build on them in their own context. Inevitably, there are unanswered questions in what follows: our story is not yet finished. There is more to come from us, we hope, and also from yourselves. The more people who embark on this journey and who share their adventures, the more we can all learn from one another. That being so, it seems sensible to get this document into the hands of other people at this stage to encourage conversation and to help us reflect on our own progress.

We pray that God would bless you and his church, wherever you are.

Matthew Edwards, Aberdeen, April 2015

1. Introduction

The Purpose of This Document

This document has been written to help people have the confidence to faithfully create new churches in which old and young worship together. If you have heard about the NYNO project and have wondered if you could help a new church community develop and be part of its ongoing life, we hope that reading this document will help you understand what is involved and approach the task one step at a time, with down-to-earth realism, and yet with faithful confidence and expectation.

The rest of this introduction will describe the history of the NYNO project and its central ideas. We feel that it is important to remember these things as they provide the context in which our ideas and actions make sense. It may well be that things look differently for you in your situation. Being aware of our context may leave you better equipped to translate our words and actions into your own situation. If you are already familiar with all of this, of course feel free to

move on to the second chapter.

To finish our introduction, here is one final note. This booklet will not give you everything that you might need to start a NYNO-style church. If you are not already convinced of the importance of mission, of the value of Christians meeting the world in new and unfamiliar places, then much of what follows may not feel persuasive. NYNO assumes the importance and value of these things. It builds from what we hope is an orthodox position, influenced by the Reformed and Anglican traditions, attempting to provide worship that is approachable and meaningful to a broad range of those who are Christian, as well as a faithful witness to those who are not.

NYNO – From the Beginning

The idea for NYNO was originated in the parish church of Stockethill, Aberdeen. Perhaps Stockethill's most distinctive feature is that it has no building of its own. In turn this has led to a vigorous self-understanding of the church as community and a significantly high participation of its members in small groups. Sunday worship takes place in

three different places, each 'congregation' having a distinctive form.

Of these three 'congregations', the largest has met weekly in a community centre and has naturally been seen as the centre of the church, more contemporary in its music and more diverse in its age range, receiving more of the leadership's attention. The other two have met monthly in the communal lounge area of local sheltered accommodation complexes. For around five years before the beginning of the NYNO project, Matthew Edwards, one of the project workers for NYNO, took his turn leading the services in one of these sheltered accommodation congregations. It was apparent from an early stage that this was a welcoming Christian community that enjoyed meeting together. For Matthew, it felt as though there was the potential for something more. A first attempt to find out what this might be, involved moving an already existing small group into a new location in the sheltered accommodation in order that it would supplement the continuing monthly services. The existing small group that was transferred was joined by residents and meets most Thursday nights, for tea, Scripture reading and discussion.

This Thursday group continues to this day, at times quite full, at other times dwindling. A few members have moved on, a number have died. New members have joined as well, sometimes committed Christians who have moved into the complex, but also people have joined the group and found a home who had not been regular churchgoers.

At the same time, the monthly Sunday service in the sheltered accommodation continued as it was: a friendly, enjoyable and joyful experience. Matthew became convinced, however, that those who led the service were a significant limiting factor for how the community could develop. Those who led the service treated their leadership as an act of Christian service given willingly but sporadically before one returned to the 'main place of worship'. This was a good thing to do, but for a church to develop it requires leadership that identifies with and commits to the people who are led.

This was the immediate context in which NYNO was conceived. Here was a community that seemed ready to flourish, ripe with potential, and yet continuing as it always

had. NYNO was created to find ways by which such a community could take responsibility for its own spiritual life, could overcome the barriers that separate them from younger people and so become a spiritual home for a diversely aged Christian community: a church.

First Class Church

A good place to start when thinking about NYNO is to use the terminology of first or second class church. What was happening in the monthly service in the sheltered accommodation could be described, although worthwhile and important in many ways, as ‘second class church’.

The reason we say this is that the group who met for their religious service had no expectation or aspiration that they should exist as a Christian community beyond their monthly, half-hour service. Similarly, those who led the service, although committed and dedicated to the task, had a primary commitment to a Christian community elsewhere. Whilst this group of people viewed their own gathering in this way, there was little potential for them to identify with one another as a Christian community, as a church. Without this,

the group would not be expected to challenge or encourage one another in faith, to plan and pray together, to seek that their common life together might be a witness to the world around them.

It is not clear that those who attended this service, or those who led, would even have considered this gathering a church. If we were to call it such, perhaps it should be termed a 'second class church'. This is not so much a value judgement imposed from without as it was the opinion of those involved, even if the term was not one used by them. It is worth spending some more time listing and exploring the problems touched on here.

For starters, the congregation met only monthly and this inevitably limited the depth to which, and speed in which, community could be developed.

Next, the overall church leadership of Stockethill largely left the running of the services in sheltered accommodation to those who prepared the services. Their attention as a leadership team (Matthew was a member of this team) was largely taken up with the development of the largest

congregation that met weekly in a community centre and the small groups of the people who attended this meeting.

Neither the group meeting in sheltered accommodation nor the leadership team felt there was an issue, but from NYNO's perspective it was unlikely that any innovation or significant development of the Christian community in sheltered accommodation would occur without leadership that believed in the potential of that group and that was committed to providing it.

The monthly meeting itself then was heavily dependent on the minister figure. Others set out the chairs and prepared the tea and coffee, but the formal worship was very much dependent on the visiting minister figure. Apart from singing, the congregation was outwardly passive. At the same time, this minister figure changed each month on a rota and this undermined further the relationship between congregation and leader. There was the outward form of the traditional Westminster Directory worship, but the 'minister' (the person taking the role of the minister was not always ordained) could not be said to have a pastor's relationship with the flock as he or she was present only every other, or

every three, months.

Against this background, NYNO developed an alternative principle: there was a need for all involved to view this congregation with more expectation, faith and hope. For those leading such a service, it should no longer be an act of service performed according to a rota before one returned to one's spiritual home. This congregation itself would need to become a spiritual home for any leadership. If the leadership wanted to see the fellowship of the church develop, then the leadership would have to show through their own behaviour that something different was possible and worthwhile.

A further, and important, sense in which this was a second class church, and understand implicitly so to be by all involved, was that the congregation largely consisted of older people and was empty of the young. On the one hand, it would be true to say that some people had opted for this more traditional form of worship in contrast to the more contemporary and informal worship in the community centre. On the other hand, it only took a passing conversation on the subject with any of the participants to

realise that there was a real love of children here and that living as an older person with older people, while comforting in one sense, lacked a life-giving diversity. In different circumstances, a parish church that drew together all into fellowship might have provided this. However, when society has already been fractured and when many of the congregation, and their neighbours, are frail and have mobility problems, there is an opportunity for a church located in sheltered accommodation to offer a glimpse of the kingdom of God by providing a more diversely aged community.

The question arose then, would it be possible to create such a community, and indeed help existing ‘second class churches’, to develop into *first* class forms of church? Further questions naturally follow. What would such communities look like? What would the leadership look like? How would they worship? Where would the younger people come from?

So then, without knowing how to achieve any of this, these ideas began to coalesce into a whole. This is what NYNO stands for now: there is a need to develop churches in places

that are most accessible to its weakest older members, which yet are spiritual homes for a diversely aged range of people.

2. What NYNO Offers to the Church

NYNO has the aim of developing churches in places that are most accessible to its weakest older members, which yet are spiritual homes for a diversely aged range of people. Our principle way of doing this is to work as part of a particular congregation, experimenting together, recording our thoughts and progress, and then to share and discuss our findings with others doing similar work in different places.

The NYNO project then offers several things to the world. Firstly, we offer an idea: we stand for a principle that old and young should experience church life together. We advocate this idea independently of any evidence of its practicality; we advocate it because we think it is true. The clearest expression of this idea can be found in our project description (Appendix A).

Secondly, we advocate a view of church and mission that is experimental. This is discussed further in Chapter 3. In summary, the work of projects like NYNO needs greater supervision and encouragement by the wider church and

understanding such projects as ‘experimental’ may be a helpful contribution to this.

Thirdly, we advocate an adaptable process for experimental church planting where professional ordained leadership is unavailable or only partially so. The advice given in Chapter 3 is based on the practical use of this process. The process itself takes inspiration from the practice of Action Research (for more detailed reading, see Swinton and Mowatt, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2006)).

Fourthly, we offer ourselves and our own solutions and practices developed for the congregation in which we work and worship. Two related liturgies are provided in Appendix B. These structure and guide a meal of worship in which old and young can participate together. Appendix C provides four introductory sermons that explore a reading of 1 Corinthians 10-12 and explain the basis for our advocacy of liturgical meals. Chapter 4 explains more concisely the reasoning behind the form of church we have developed.

3. A NYNO Form of Church

NYNO bases its work in a congregation that meets in a local sheltered housing complex. In that context we have developed a small set of resources that are available to be used by others. While we are glad to share what we do, we are very aware of the importance for the development of a church that it understands its own identity. A church, however – and NYNO wants all congregations that identify with the NYNO banner to be taken seriously by all as churches – is about more than simply the use of a set of resources. A NYNO church can be so much more than that: we can be God’s community in a certain place, growing in knowledge of God, ourselves and the world around us. When we are a community like this, actively and prayerfully exploring God’s will for us we will find ourselves involved in mission: the structure, actions and community of a church can be a witness to the world. NYNO churches seek to be places of reconciliation between young and old, but that reconciliation has a significance beyond the group’s own boundaries. When others see our commitment to

reconciliation, see young and committed to one another and worshipping together, that reconciliation can be a witness to God's love for us in Christ.

So, it will be possible to pick up our sermons, to use our liturgies and recipes and be good to go! We would recommend something more though. We recommend seeking to build church in as full a sense as possible. Such a church will be involved in a prayerful exploration of God, itself and the world. This will be about so much more than the organisation of a monthly meeting. It will be involved in following in the footsteps of Christ, an ongoing conversation with itself and the world.

To this end, we would encourage you to engage with the following chapter on 'Advice for New NYNO style congregations' as well as our chapter on 'experimental church'. Here can be found summations of some of the thought behind the development of the NYNO project. To benefit most from NYNO, a new church would not aspire simply to follow an existing pattern of church life, but would rather begin their own prayerful process by which they

would hope to learn God's will for them in their own unique situation, and so be equipped to offer their own gifts to others.

The Limitations We Face

The NYNO project was conceived and developed within a set of limitations. As a new form of church, created at a time when the rest of the Church of Scotland is experiencing ongoing decline, it was important from the outset that any new positive pattern of church life should be sustainable and reproducible without the costs associated with a conventional parish. If NYNO was to create something that could be used in other sheltered accommodation complexes, for instance, then it would realistically have to be something that did not rely extensively on paid ministry. A NYNO church model would necessarily then have to draw to the fore the participation of lay members. In addition though, as we explored this and the theology of the body of Christ, it became apparent that this was something we would do not only out of necessity but actually also from a positive conviction that there was something to be gained from a

community led by lay people.

The Place of Older People in The Church

Our thoughts were along the following lines. If it was the case that older people were, in some cases, at risk in the Church of being ignored particularly in the pursuit of a youthful church, then a new model of a church that worked against this would have to offer resources to work against this. We observed that even in conventional forms of pastoral care put into place for the benefit of older people, older people were at risk of being seen as objects of care rather than, firstly and most importantly, as participating community members. In addition, the expected way in which services are offered in such places as care homes, with a visiting minister who largely speaks for the majority of the meeting, is in danger of seeing older people merely as passive recipients of the church's work, rather than active members. In contrast, NYNO has sought to develop a form of worship where the participation of the laity is the primary building block of the service. Of course, older people face limitations in how they contribute to the life of a church

community, but a strong theology drawn from 1 Corinthians 12 will not consider their active contributions to be any less significant. It is also the case that in the particular church culture from which the majority of the older people in our congregation have come from, vocal public contribution is an intimidating prospect. For all of these reasons the use of liturgy seemed a positive way forward.

Going Forward with Liturgy

In the setting of English non-conformity and the Scottish Reformed Church, there remains in some circles suspicion of liturgy. The Westminster Directory offered the apparently immediate power of the minister in contrast to the stultifying words, words and more words of the prayer book. It is unusual then, even today, for a church plant to look to structure worship with liturgy instead of something more powerful, emotional and 'relevant' to our contemporary culture. However, NYNO turned to liturgy in the recognition that there were simply not enough ministers to take charge of conventional parishes, let alone small church plants and that there were even fewer ministers who are being used by

God to build a church through the Spirit empowered force of their proclamation. (While this might appear a judgemental statement, it is intended as a self-evident statement of fact deriving from the numerical and financial state of the wider church. No reference is intended to any particular minister or congregation.) It would seem an important question to answer, then, whether a form of worship could be found that would enable lay people to worship unrestricted by the absence of the ordained. Liturgy enables a congregation to worship God with a confidence that they would usually invest in a minister. The words they use will be authorised by the wider Church, words that have been used by Christians for most of the Church's life. The repetition of these words, the Church's interpretation of Scripture, can be essential in our spiritual formation. They can give us a grammar with which to interpret and speak to the world. A liturgy allows the congregation to speak the Gospel to one another, to read the Scriptures and pray with one another without needing a leader with professional training or the time to construct a sermon. Public speaking can be immensely important for a church, but a church must not

cease to exist or function if no public speakers are available. NYNO has also observed the importance of leaders identifying and making their spiritual home with the people they lead. Simply having an ordained minister, or non-ordained preacher, available to lead a service is unlikely to be helpful in encouraging a congregation to gain a sense of its own identity or to grow. Such a leadership, and a form of worship dependent on it, will create a passive congregation.

NYNO anticipates, unsurprisingly, that most worship in sheltered accommodation will not have the luxury of an ordained minister or trained preacher, committed to having that congregation as his or her spiritual home. To that end we have invested time in developing our liturgies so that the people of God can be enabled to continue to worship together. These liturgies can be found in the appendices below.

Worshipping With A Meal

The decision to place a meal at the heart of our worship came naturally as we investigated the theology of participation, communion and the body of Christ in 1

Corinthians. A community with Christ at the head, whose members minister by the Spirit in his name to one another should be able to recognise that there is deep spiritual significance simply in meeting in the name of Christ around his table. It was apparent to us from this investigation, and also from an awareness of the exclusion of older people from the heart of society, that we needed a form of worship that embraced every-age. Indeed many parts of worship that we take for granted, including the sermon as conventionally practised, exclude the youngest members of the church and to that extent lessen the significance of a meeting in which all are valued.

The Eucharist and its Presidency

NYNO would prefer to celebrate communion at each of its meetings. Here, the heart of the Church, Christ, is proclaimed as we meet around his table, a community constituted by him, his life, death and resurrection for us. The significance of our community and meal together would be illuminated by the light of communion. In practice, however, we respect the Church's preservation of presidency to the ordained

(presidency refers to role of the person who blesses the bread and wine during communion) and are limited in our celebration of the eucharist to the times when a minister is present. At the same time, the reality of Christ expressed in communion still informs our communal meals and is reflected in our prayers: we meet around a table remembering that soon we will meet again around his table. We recognise as well that our liturgy gives the eucharistic prayer to the people, preserving the words of institution for the minister and that this will not be acceptable in some denominations. We welcome the adaptation of our work, and recommend that changes be clearly marked and published online so that others can benefit from your work.

Worship for Every-Age

The question of all-age worship is certainly one that is far from easy to answer. Children's and youth work can often seem a technical speciality for the gifted and trained. Equally, our experience is that many adults find all-age worship difficult to enjoy. If NYNO is to offer any hope in this area, once again it can not be by advocating creative

presentations that capture the attention and imagination of young and old together. Such an approach may be wonderful when the human resources are available to create it or present it, but the church must still be able to function without it. We looked then at what was at the heart of Christian worship and what could be enjoyed by young and old together. Again, we turned to the idea of the meal. Young and old are able to enjoy each other's company around the meal table.

Education

It was when we considered the Reformation understanding of preaching as the offering of the promises of God to the congregation, to which the congregation can respond with faith, that we realised both that current practises have strayed far from this notion and that in principle a liturgy could function in the same way as a sermon.

With regard to current practices, we would suggest that most church services can be understood as a form of education. As we teach and preach, we are aiming to impart knowledge and understanding with the assumption that the individuals

and community that appropriates that knowledge will be better able to live and serve. Because education is the aim it makes sense for adults and children to be addressed separately, both because of their different capacities to reason and understand and because of the different contexts in which they live. Both receive knowledge at church, each to a level that is suitable. This is, of course, important. But it is not as important, we would argue, as the proclamation of the Gospel: the offering of God's promises of salvation to which we may respond with faith. This 'proclamation of the Gospel' has an educative element to it but it should primarily be understood as a spiritual act, that is an act understood in a particular relation to God. In it, God's acts of salvation for the congregation and the whole world are set before the congregation and they are invited to respond with faith. We are not attempting to 'know the Bible', except in so far as the Bible describes God's acts of salvation for the world. We accept that to some this might seem like splitting hairs, but our thoughts are that it is very easy to spend out time in church talking and thinking about God rather than being addressed by God and offering the God ordained appropriate

means of response: faith.

However, this emphasis on 'proclamation' brings with it a problem in our current situation: who will proclaim for us? NYNO has recognised that the relatively small churches, of which we aim to facilitate the creation, cannot support a full-time minister. Further, we have also recognised that dependence on visiting ministers can undermine community participation and development. Given all of this, we have turned to the use of liturgy in order that a congregation should be able to meet and hear the promises of God. In our liturgy, the people speak these promises to themselves and to each other using words prepared beforehand.

Education is still, of course important. We advocate, however, that in a NYNO congregation it should always play a secondary role and where educational resources are available, it should be performed either outside or at the edges of our central meeting. If education is made central, it is much harder to keep young and old together. If education is made secondary, we can make meeting together as the central communal expression of our faith in Christ and

recognise and bless one another as fellow children of God, no matter our age.

As a practical note, it can be noticed that our liturgies specify that a sermon can be given before the beginning of the meal. In this way, children can play or receive age appropriate tuition for the period of the sermon, and all can come together as the meal starts.

Praying in Silence, Participation in Public

Our practice of praying in public has changed over time. Originally, before NYNO formally started, we used the ‘chaplaincy’ model of conducting a service in which the minister figure led the prayers. We have already expressed what we feel to be the limitations of this form of worship. To recapitulate: when the minister leads all of the worship the congregation can begin to think of themselves as passive recipients of a spiritual good. When this happens, spiritual community can be assumed to be an additional and non-essential aspect of church. It is possible that this is exacerbated in our case, where the congregation consists of older people who have become accustomed to their role and

contributions being peripheral to the life of their churches.

With respect to prayers, there are different ways of addressing this problem. An obvious solution is to invite members of the congregation to contribute to different parts of the service and, in this case, to lead the prayers. This is a sensible way forward in that it encourages a wider public participation and yet acknowledges the diverse giftings of the congregation: for whatever reason not all have the confidence or aptitude to take a public role.

In our own situation we felt that increasing the number of public contributors while keeping the same model of service was not the best way forward. We thought this for a number of reasons. Firstly, even if we encouraged some people to lead prayers and succeeded in getting them to do this, the majority of people would still not be doing so. We would still have in place a model of worship in which community could be seen as peripheral to church. We would still have a congregation who because of their age and living situation have become less than central to the life of a church centred on a parish building. What we hoped for instead was to find

ways to emphasize the importance of each member and the value of his or her contributions, whatever they were. Inevitably, when a service is led or conducted this leading role will be especially esteemed, to the detriment of the valuation of the contributions of everyone else.

Secondly, in our particular situation we felt that it was difficult to be seen to be 'raising' people into church leadership. The problem lies in part in the way Church of Scotland ministers, and no-doubt those of other denominations, are viewed in society generally and perhaps especially amongst the older generations. It would be difficult for any individual to be seen to taking on that role in such a small church that largely existed within a relatively small housing complex. All manner of attractive and unpleasant power dynamics would be possible if a resident were to take a role as a church leader for a church that largely consisted of residents. For this very reason many would not dream of taking on such a role. Of course, leading prayers or even taking a public role in worship does not entail church leadership, but it may be felt to imply it to some degree in the context of the use of a led service model

and where few people are willing to contribute publicly.

Lastly, we recognized that we might be unsuccessful in finding people who would want to contribute to the service. We simply might not have such people. Our congregation might be too frail or too intimidated, for reasons discussed above. It had to be possible to find a form of worship that could be embraced and enjoyed even when no public speakers were available.

For these reasons, we turned to a form of silent prayer in which the prayers of all the saints are recognised to be significant and there is no necessity for anyone to be understood to be praying on behalf of the whole congregation. Everyone can and must pray, everyone is called to do so. This is reflected in how prayer is conducted in the liturgy.

Our current liturgies (see the appendices) are largely composed of prayers and statements of faith and the congregation says these prayers and statements together, to God and to each other. When we come to intercession, we recognise that we are responding directly to the differing

situations of our lives and our words need to reflect this. Simply put, this section of the service begins and closes with set prayers that remind us of the reason why we can and should pray. In between these prayers we pray together in silence for topics that are named by a leader. The topics themselves are contributed by the congregation, everyone having the opportunity to write down a matter for prayer on distributed pieces of paper. These are then collected by a leader who collates the topics and invites prayer for each with a simple 'Let us pray for ...'. After period of silence, the responsive prayer is offered, 'Lord in your mercy,' to which the congregation responds 'Hear our prayer'.

There are undoubtedly limitations to this approach. Its advantage is that it is simple and requires relatively little preparation and so can be used by anyone. At the same time, this simplicity and silence means that we are not teaching people to pray in any particular way. Well structured and thoughtfully composed prayers teach us to pray according to what God has revealed of himself, with faith, hope and love. It is possible that a selection of collects could be used to accompany these prayers, but there will always remain a

balancing act: the richer and more varied we make our liturgy, the more demanding it is to prepare the service. Perhaps the way forward is to keep a simple basic form of liturgy, but to allow individuals to enrich it as they have the time, energy and inclination to do so.

Music

Music is a very important area in the life of contemporary churches. At the same time, it is a highly divisive topic. For a church looking to bring young and old together, what music should we enjoy together?

This is also a further area where human resources is an obviously limiting factor. A church must be able to function without the presence of a technically gifted musician. The fact that music has become so central to church life and that the prospect of living without it seems to many so implausible, may be an indicator of the impoverishment of our ecclesiology.

For NYNO, this is an area we would like to develop further but have not yet had the opportunity. We would argue that at the heart of church music should be participation, rather

than presentation. Church should firstly be a place where people come to sing, rather than to listen. There is a parallel here with role of the modern sermon and the passive congregation as discussed earlier.

The Church could undoubtedly benefit from new music that places the emphasis on corporate singing, is simple and approachable, but which breaks connections with contemporary music and church hymn singing, each of which is seen as anathema by differing factions in the church. Sadly, NYNO is not in a position to provide this, although we would love to have discussions with anyone who is. As always, if a solution to an idea is not immediately forthcoming, the way forward is discussion and prayer. Perhaps the question has to be asked more clearly and widely before a solution can be found.

In practice, NYNO has reduced the amount of singing enjoyed in its meal liturgy. This has the effect that though we still sing hymns, their individual importance and the value of their words are emphasised. Further, the dulling effect of familiarity and overuse can be reduced when fewer words

are used. We have used a guitarist and a keyboard player when available, but most often use a wireless speaker system, driven by phone with downloaded hymn tunes.

4. An 'Experimental' Church

Here at NYNO, we suggest that it can be helpful to think of the life of a church (a new church plant or an existing church) as an 'experimental' work. By using this term we are making an analogy to science. But, we hasten to add, this is *only* an analogy and all analogies have limits. So, please do not be put off by something that might sound intimidating. What we actually mean by this is relatively simple and quite important.

So, what do we mean by 'experimental'? In very brief and broad outline, the term is useful in at least two ways: firstly, in the educational relationship between a church plant and the wider church; and, secondly, in the manner in which our church communities handle the adaptation that is necessarily at the heart of a missional life. In what follows these two issues will be addressed in turn in more detail.

'Experimental' Church Work in the Context of the Wider Church

The Goal of 'Experimental' Church Life

What everyone wants to see in the Church is faithful communities growing through mission. We would all like to see this, but few of us do. This just seems an empirical fact given the ongoing shrinkage of the Church in the Western world in the twenty-first century. We use the term 'faithful' because numerical growth is not everything. Filling an arena is not an end in itself. Christ must be at the centre of our lives as individuals and as a community, and this is more important than simply gathering lots of Christians together. It doesn't really prove much, at least with regard to the questions NYNO is interested in, if a church grows through attracting people who are already Christians. We use the term 'mission' because we want to insist that our new communities develop from an engagement with the world outside of our existing church communities. As a community and as individuals, in faithful dependence and faltering obedience to Christ we want to live in relationship to the world. The two of course go together, our relationship to

Christ and the world: being faithful to Christ demands engagement with the world, although it does not necessarily mean full church meetings. In summary, we hope for our churches to be faithful communities, growing, engaged in mission. The problem would seem to be, though, that none of us really know how to do this.

No-one Has the Answer

When we say, ‘we don’t know how to do this’, this is no exaggeration! If there was an answer, we would all be using it. Part of the issue is that the Church as a whole has not come to terms with its new position in society after the end of Christendom. Whether we are dealing with the Church’s relationship to other faiths, what we have to say with regard to society’s attitudes towards money, sexuality or celebrity, as a Church we struggle to convince one another and arrive at a common mind, let alone speak with a provocative and faithful clarity to the world. The issue is that the Church feels as though her anchors have been lost and she has been cast adrift. We feel as though our faith necessitates that we should have some answers – even if that answer is a practice of prayerful silence in the face of the world! - but we don’t.

In the face of diminishing numbers, we have lost our confidence. There is lots we could say. Many doctrines we could rehearse but too often, to our consternation and the test of faith, they seem empty and powerless, dry, dusty, dead.

The Difference ‘Experimental’ Churches Could Make to the Wider Church

In this context, in our context, we think ‘experimental’ church is important. Here is why.

An experiment is a step into the unknown. We face a problem and we conceive of a hypothesis, a possible solution. Will it work? We don’t know, we need to test it. The hypothesis might be, ‘Could a Church prosper, meeting in the context of a library?’, or ‘Is it possible to create a diversely aged church that is particularly accessible to older people?’ (that one might sound familiar to you), or ‘Is it possible to make our musical worship feel fresh and joyful without feeling as though our attention is constantly drawn to performers on a stage?’ The point about the hypothesis is that it sounds like a faithful solution to a problem, but we don’t know whether or how it would work. Hopefully our

ideas will be informed by the needs of the people in front of us, the state of the wider church, the priorities of Scripture and doctrine and the wise counsel of those who went before us in Church history. Hopefully they will be great ideas, inspirational and exciting. Testing these ideas might involve a new direction for an existing church, or might involve the creation of a whole new church shaped in an important sense to address this pressing issue. The grand hope would be, whatever our hypothesis that we wish to test, that we will learn from our experiment and so be able to pass on our gained experience, information, wisdom, practices, on to others.

We said above that we wanted our churches to be ‘faithful communities growing through mission’. In this world, where the church feels cast adrift we need to learn from each other’s successes and failures. This is particularly true for church planting which is an especially challenging task, often working without the supportive established structures of an institution. The principle applies, though, to all churches that want to try something new. Lessons can be learned from success and failure, if we’re humble and

honest enough to listen to others and to tell our story.

The Problem of Success

'Success' and 'Failure'

Our churches need and want 'success'. We need more people and we need more money. Phrased like this, most of us would express doubt that this is the success that we should be striving for, and yet it is the 'success' that practically speaking we are tempted to spend most of our time and energy chasing.

The Church in the Western World is dwindling. Its institutions face a crisis of a lack of money and a lack of people. We are all looking for a solution to this problem and church planting appears to offer a way forward. If our existing churches with their existing way of life appear, quite practically, to be facing an unavoidable crisis, church planting appears to offer new churches and new church practices that engage in a fresh and faithful manner with the world around us and inspire our existing churches.

We cannot avoid the pressure that our existing churches face, but we need to be cautious about how we let this

pressure push us forward into church planting and how it shapes the way we support and evaluate our church plants.

The logic of the language of ‘success’ says – even though few would openly use the actual words – that our existing churches are ‘failing’. We would then be looking to church plants to provide ‘success’, to make up in the long term the deficit in people and finance that the existing church is experiencing.

Seeking success in this manner is certainly tempting, and may even be unavoidable given the circumstances of the church. Nevertheless, we would suggest that doing this is counterproductive and ultimately is not faithful to our calling to be the Church of Christ, that which Christ himself will build.

Seeking ‘Success’ is Counterproductive

Firstly and quite practically, the desire for ‘success’ actually gets in the way of our achieving the preservation of our institutions. If we rightly want to see new churches and new forms of church being developed, what is required is freedom to experiment. The freedom that is required is not a

freedom to try out any thing that takes our fancy, but is instead a freedom to follow the priorities of the Gospel, even if that leads us into apparently unpopular places. The problem we face, however, is that if we are driven by success and failure we will stifle our life-giving freedom to experiment. In order to experiment with freedom, we need to be prepared to fail and we need to give others permission to fail. The demand for success will not allow this, however. If we only try new things that we know will succeed, we will learn next to nothing because we will only choose to do things that we already know will succeed. In practice, this means that we will only take predictable, unsurprising paths. Unfortunately, and speaking very generally, making predictable choices cannot be the way forward for the Church. We do not know what the answers are to the widespread problems that the Church is facing and so there is a need to find new and surprising solutions.

If there is a need to experiment, this means there will inevitably be 'failures'. But, who wants to be a 'failure'? What encouragement is there to be given to experimenting churches who try new things if the whole enterprise of

experimentation comes with the likely result of being branded a 'failure'?

If we truly want people to read the Gospel's afresh and, in prayerful obedience to the guidance of the Spirit, do something unexpected and yet true to Christ's words and actions, then we need to value those who experiment, and their endeavours, independently of whether things do or do not lead to the conversion of towns and cities *en masse*, independently of whether it attracts finance. If we want people to have the freedom to be faithful, we need to value and support them, their ideas and actions, independently of 'success'. We can only expect people to have that freedom when the pressure of success is taken off them.

Seeking 'Success' is not Faithful

'Success' is a problem in another, and perhaps a more fundamental, sense.

We all want our churches to be successful. How could we not? It pains us to see Christ ignored by the world, and it pains us to see ourselves ignored by the world. It is easy to assume that success is a large wealthy church and that that is

what we are aiming for.

Of course, in practice, for many of us we would count survival of our churches as 'success'. We face competing demands of loyalty to existing churches, that provide stability and tuition to the next generation and faithful witness to parishes over generations, and the desire to reach out in new ways and to new people.

What does God want us to do? There is no single answer. We must all assess our own situation. NYNO would urge us all, however, not to be driven solely by pragmatic assumptions about the value of survival or success. We must all recognise the difference between the coming of God's kingdom, the growth of God's Church, and the needs of an institution in the form it currently exists.

The matter perhaps comes down to definitions of Church. If we know what the Church is then certain practices are ruled out, and others are mandated. Without a clear definition of Church we will be left vulnerable to treating our churches in a manner that is convenient or pragmatic, rather than in a way that is faithful to the one on whom our existence

depends.

Put simply, it seems to us that a helpful way of considering our churches is to consider them as called into existence by their Lord and Saviour. If the Church is to be faithful to the one who calls her into being, then she must be missional as he was and is. The Church only exists because she is called into existence. Christ is the Word who brings light out of the dark, and he calls us into being. More than that, he calls us to be a particular being, to be his body. What then are we to do? Our life together then, as his body, is to be shaped by his life of self-sacrificing love, given in the hope of the resurrection. We are to seek ways of being faithful to his calling, trusting that he will provide the material necessities of life. Any form of church life except that which seeks to conform to this calling is a pointless exercise, flirting with non-existence and atheism because the Church only really exists because it has a spiritual nature. Anything else is not worthy to be pursued. So, our calling is firstly to be the Body of Christ. Grounded in this fact we will be better placed to make decisions about the preservation of the form of any particular institution

(whether national church, local parish or small church plant). In contrast, we are not to make success or survival our primary aim. If it is appropriate to build or maintain our institutions it must only be because of the prior calling to be faithful to Christ.

Faithful Experimentation

While we seek ‘success’ first, we will be tempted into pragmatism, doing ‘what works’ or trying to follow the models of apparently large and ‘successful’ churches. Let me give an awkward example. A successful church might have a number of talented musicians who produce a rock concert like experience for a large number of people. This looks like success. Smaller churches will try to emulate their performances, perhaps without the same slick professionalism. Other churches with no musicians will feel hopeless, unable even to begin to emulate such success. A better way forward for the small church is to experiment, to try something completely different, to question these established norms that seem to doom our meetings to ‘unattractive failure’; believing that God is with us and that must count for more than the presence of a skilled guitarist

and large amplifier. To do this, we would seek to base our existence as a community afresh in the life of the Holy Spirit. We would pick up inspired Scripture and try to read it afresh as it points us to Christ. We would start a conversation amongst God's people, trusting that God has given us the people we need for this place and that these people are endowed by the Spirit with gifts for the equipping of his church (and that these gifts might not be the conventional tools of 'success' that we hope for). We would try to be students of the Church's history, listening patiently to those who went before us, trusting that they were no more fallen and no less indwelt by God's Spirit than ourselves. And finally, we would seek to do this in supportive conversation with other churches doing the same thing. We would not know what might result for all of this, but we suspect that at the least it might be a community that knows it has a purpose and that values its own members and that those would be an improvement on feeling hopelessly small, uncool and under-skilled.

All of this is to say that we need churches – and projects that are not yet churches but want to be – that are willing to try

something different. But it is hard for these new churches and new initiatives because they may not be able to offer the prospect of immediate ‘success’. They will feel self-conscious, under pressure to produce results, and possibly undervalued if they perceive themselves to be evaluated according to ‘success’. What might an alternative be?

The purpose of viewing our churches and initiatives as ‘experimental’ is that everyone might recognise the need to try new things and the challenge and risk involved in that. To view a new church plant as ‘experimental’ would be to expect that church plant to try new things and that this is a worthwhile thing in and of itself. Such a project should not be evaluated according to success, but rather promise and faithfulness. The question might not simply be ‘are they successful?’ but rather, ‘are they learning something that can be shared with the rest of us?’. Those lessons might be small things, questions of pastoral wisdom, advice on organising events, or bigger notions to do with society’s response to a certain presentation of the Gospel. The lessons might come from apparent success or failure. Both should be valued. Individuals and teams embarking on experimental projects

need to feel valued by the wider church not because they have all the answers, but because they are learning faithfully. They need to be supported and nurtured on this basis. Not every project or idea can or should be encouraged but experimental churches need to be judged primarily on their faithfulness to Christ's calling. If we all viewed each other in this way, listening and learning to the surprising lessons taught us by our communal life of mission in the Spirit, we would all be involved in helping the Church equip herself to witness faithfully to the world in our new and disconcerting age.

Choosing a Hypothesis

An experimental church or project needs to develop its own hypothesis. By 'Hypothesis' we are referring to the idea, the new thing, that is to be explored, tested, the new missionary direction that a church is to take. At the outset we will likely not know whether or how it will work. We should believe that it is a good idea, a faithful idea, but we will likely not know at the outset how to put it into practice. In the case of NYNO, the primary thing we want to find out is to what extent, and how, it is possible to create diversely aged-church

that is accessible for older people. We are exploring this in the context of a sheltered accommodation complex. Other contexts could also be explored. Within our one issue there are many further questions (and we will talk about that further below), but broadly speaking we are able to identify the area we want to explore. If we are unable to do this at the beginning it will be difficult later on to evaluate and communicate what we have learnt, so it is worth working hard at being able to summarise and communicate the experimental element of your project.

Where Do Ideas Come from?

Where did the idea for NYNO come from, and where might other ideas come from?

Some of the explanation for where the ideas of NYNO came from can be deduced from the section ‘NYNO – From the Beginning’ above. For yourself, a significant factor may well be the issues the you have to face daily. It may be possible to conceive and develop a project involving an issue that you have nothing to do with presently, but we should be cautious: launching into the unknown, must not be an

excuse to walk away from our present relationships and challenges.

More generally, ideas could come from any number of places, and more particularly, an infinite number of individual people and their live circumstances. Each of us is of course unique, each of us has a unique life-history, and so each of us has the potential to produce unique ideas. Of course, we are all perfectly capable of producing some terrible ideas too. If you are looking for ideas, or wondering how to assess the value of an idea you have had, we would suggest spending time turning on a number of 'lights', to illuminate what you have and help you see what you have not yet spotted. We have mentioned these before but they bear repeating. An experimental church will actively seek to base its life and experimentation in the context of the Holy Spirit. This means we will be a praying community; a community open to hearing God's word, to being challenged to see the world afresh through Christ's eyes; this means we must be a Scripture reading community, patiently listening to the narrative of God's dealings with us in Christ recorded there; we will be a community that listens to one another,

that recognises that all can contribute, that all are needed; and we will be respectful, humble students of history, of the lives of those who went before us who suffered and struggled with their own age but were no more fallen and no less indwelt by God's Spirit than ourselves. Lastly, an experimental project needs to be in conversation with other churches. Are they doing something similar? Have they done it already? Do they have someone who might join us. Do we have someone who feels called to join them in their endeavours? Together we can affirm one another as we head off into the unknown, offering our love, support and prayers and active interest whatever it is we set out to learn.

The Body of Christ and an 'Experiment'

All of this scientific language has its limits. Ultimately, it should not be allowed to displace the theological language of ecclesiology and mission when describing our work. We must not forget that we are members of the body of Christ, leading a community that is seeking to be faithful. If the language of experiment is going to remain helpful, we need to ensure that our hypothesis – our learning goal, our question to be answered – is one that is appropriate to our

location and the people over whom we have influence. We must be convinced that the testing of our hypothesis is demanded of us by Christ in our situation. Our question must be one that makes sense in the context of our understanding of ecclesiology and mission. This is not an arbitrary pursuit of knowledge, but a prayerful pursuit of God's will for this community, in this place, in this time.

5. Advice for New NYNO-style Projects

It may have occurred to you, as you read the above, that innovative church projects are not always viewed positively as ‘experimental’ (on this terminology, see the chapter above). Inevitably, as churches struggle to maintain their existing ways of life, new projects that do not offer immediate success, or that do not conform to cherished forms of church, can be seen as threats or as a potential drain on financial and human resources. It is all the more important that the leaders of new projects have a strong sense of their project’s own worth. If we view our projects as experiments and recognise the value in that, and describe ourselves in that manner to others, we will be better able to gain the support of others in a fashion that will not leave us feeling unrealistically pressurised to achieve the result of a large, wealthy and diversely populated church.

Having a clear identity as an ‘experiment’, allows us to focus on the questions that remain unanswered and that lie behind the genesis of our project. Leading a church

community will always be a challenge, involving unexpected twists and turns. We may feel under pressure to develop mega-churches in a matter of years and may feel insignificant because we do not have a plethora of paid staff or large buildings. What we do have, though, is important: the ability to learn something about what it means to be faithful to Christ in our situation, and to share that with others.

Experimenting Together

We have spent quite a bit of time discussing the way that an innovative church project can and should be viewed as ‘experimental’, and therefore be valued and nurtured by the surrounding church community as a potential place from which we can all learn, and all be better equipped to live faithfully today.

There is, however, another important sense in which NYNO has viewed itself as experimental. This involves the manner in which we lead a community through change towards a place where our question can be answered.

Leading an Experimental NYNO Church

We have not as yet discussed the fine detail of how to go about building a NYNO church community. The following sections will give advice, not so much about what to do as about how to go about thinking in the right way so as to make the right decisions for your community.

When approaching a new NYNO-style project, there are two situations you might find yourself facing: the development of a so-called brown-field site, or a green-field site. While the two are different, they are perhaps not quite as different as they may at first seem.

Brown-field and Green-field Projects

By ‘Brown-field’ site, we refer to the development of an existing congregation in a sheltered accommodation complex, being run according to a chaplaincy model. The terminology could be understood to imply that such services are somehow derelict. That certainly is not intended, even while NYNO exists to explore whether something understood by us to be better can be created. In practice, of course, it is easier to work with an existing congregation when you

already have a relationship with that congregation. The NYNO model relies on conversation and consensus. If you are new to a congregation, relationships need to be built within the context of the existing practices before any innovation can sensibly be introduced.

By green-field site, we are referring to the creation of a new congregation. A green-field site offers certain advantages. A team can gather together the Christians in a place and begin with a form of worship that is expected to prove accessible to a diverse age-range later. In contrast, in a brown-field situation the congregation has to be transitioned with particular care. Even when your leadership is encouraged by a congregation, people may not appreciate all that is involved in the NYNO model of church. People may have unexpected attachments to aspects of the old service and its running, and may not see the point of the development you are proposing or have much confidence in its realistic success!

In practice, the differences between green-field and brown-field work are probably much smaller than you might

expect. Once the participation of the congregation comes to be essential to the experimental process, as we advocate, the practical differences of whether the congregation already exists or needs to be created becomes less important for its regular running. Of course, beginning a new group has its own set of intimidating challenges and they should not be downplayed. But even so, once you have a group of people in the room the way forward is very similar.

Don't Rush

Perhaps the first thing to say is, 'Don't rush'. Spend time talking to people you trust, from whom you can take hard questions without feeling crushed. If a NYNO-style congregation is going to develop, you will have to explain yourself and the project to a lot of people in the congregation and outside of the congregation. Some people will legitimately have questions, and they need to be listened to and considered. Sometimes others will take a less than legitimate sceptical attitude, and patience and grace will be needed. In both cases you will not have helped yourself if you have not already done some hard thinking. It is impossible to think through every question beforehand, but

it is certainly possible to anticipate and think through a good number of them!

Write

No doubt this is not everybody's thing, but if you can write, do so. Writing can help you to do a number of things.

Firstly, it helps you understand and deal with your own ideas. Crafting a paragraph is an exercise in getting to grips with what is in your head. It helps you to see issues and questions ahead of time, and stops you going round in circles with issues that you are unsure about. If there is an unanswered problem that bothers you, write it down, acknowledge that you do not know how to solve it, and look for the conversation or reading that might help you to feel happier about it.

Secondly, writing helps you to work with other people. When ideas only exist in your head, it is hard for other people to help you. Putting your ideas on paper means that they can be studied, discussed, improved and worked on together.

Thirdly, writing helps your project to make steady progress. It is too easy for friends working on a project together to

have the same conversation three times over as many weeks, when the time could have been spent on something new. Write and record ideas and decisions and plans, and then the next discussion can move onto something new.

Lastly, writing helps you to learn, but also helps others to learn. An 'experimental' church needs to be recording what it is doing, writing and reflecting as it goes. Doing this helps your project to understand what has occurred for you to get to this place, but also helps others who want to learn from your project do the same.

Form a Team

It would probably be too much to say that a NYNO-style church could not be developed around the leadership of one person, but in more than one way doing this work as a team is beneficial.

The first thing to say about this is to point out one of the defining contrasts of NYNO. The traditional form of service in a sheltered accommodation, that we ourselves used, was centred around the minister of the Word. The minister led, preached and prayed. The people sang and gave their money.

In contrast, NYNO has sought a model of church where community is of primary importance and participation in that community is seen as the most basic and most important act of a member. Encouraging people to understand and embrace this form of church may not be easy. The older forms of church life and worship are deeply embedded in the psyche. Even when an individual stands up to advocate change and to encourage the ideas advocated by NYNO, it is possible for that individual to be perceived as a minister figure and so to undermine the very change being encouraged. Of course, this is not the end of the world and change takes time and persistence. Even so, a better approach is to have a leadership team. A team can model in leadership the shared participation that we hope the whole congregation will enjoy.

Team leadership in church planting and development is advantageous because it can be so much more fun and enjoyable than working on your own. Together, you can meet and plan, sharing ideas and stresses and strains. On your own, advocating change is hard. Every proposal, every new idea, has to be defended by you. Everything that goes

wrong, or that does not meet people's expectations or your own, will be your responsibility. Simply having people to share your emotions about the decisions that have to be made and their consequences can be hugely important. NYNO advocates that change has to take place as the result of an ongoing conversation amongst the congregation. This perhaps sounds fine in practice, but what if people engage negatively in the conversation? The way forward is to genuinely listen to what is being said. But this is doubly hard if you are a sole leader. Perhaps some people have the emotional and personal resources to navigate safely through such choppy waters. We expect that most do not. Having that congregational conversation, knowing that you are part of a team can make all the difference. It is not about drowning out others' voices, but rather about the difference having a team makes in giving you the confidence to genuinely let others have their say and trust that God will provide a way forward. So, don't rush. Take time to form a team, to get to know each other and to arrive at a common mind. And then go forward, one step at a time, together.

Everyone Has a Part to Play

NYNO was begun with the assumption that it is unacceptable to treat older people as peripheral to the life of a church. In contrast, any NYNO congregation will actively seek the opinions and contributions of all its members as decisions are made in the life of the church (See Appendix C, Sermon 1 for a practical attempt to begin such a conversation). We say ‘all’ because we are not interested in creating a church for older people. This would be a self-defeating project, isolating older people from wider society even as we attempt to address some of their needs. Therefore we are looking to a create, and see others create, forms of church that are accessible to everyone, from toddlers to octogenarians, and everything in between. By definition, this would appear to involve compromise for every generation. We are used to products being marketed to the preferences of particular demographics and generations. The church needs to be careful in allowing such an analysis to shape the form of our churches. The only people we should betray a preference for are the vulnerable and the poor. The way we express this is not to so much to serve such people as to see them as

essential participants in the community.

Begin with the Familiar

Whether you are seeking to work with an existing congregation or create a new congregation, it will likely be counterproductive to launch into something completely unfamiliar.

In a NYNO congregation everyone matters and can contribute to the life of the community. But people can only contribute when they understand what is going on around them and can apply their own life experience and thoughts to it. There is a need therefore to start with something familiar in order to build community and trust. This may mean a simple combination of hymns, prayer and a sermon, or a simple liturgical service, but the actual decisions as to what to provide should probably be made only after discussion with those who you expect to come. What are they used to? What have they found helpful spiritually in the past? How might their spiritual experiences be best shared with people yet to enter this community?

Plan Ahead

Planning ahead is important. You need to have some kind of idea of where and how you would like the congregation to grow. In NYNO's case we wanted the congregation to encourage more participation and to be multi-generational. This was a long term goal and so we set smaller and more immediately achievable goals as stepping stones. Before we could hope to have a multi-generational congregation we would need a form of worship that embraced and encouraged the participation of all ages. We developed our liturgical meals for this purpose.

Start a Conversation

While it is essential to have short and long term goals, these can only be reached with the participation of the congregation. And, if participation is genuinely to be participation, this means that we need to hold our goals lightly and patiently.

Your goals are important, because without them you will lack direction, but they need to be held lightly so that the congregation can influence them and potentially change

them. In addition, though, you need to hold your goals with patience. It takes time for people to appreciate a new idea, to understand its significance and implications. It takes patience then, when introducing an idea, to stick with it long enough for people to come to terms with it, even if they are initially cautious.

In NYNO we began our conversation with a sermon that explained the significance of everyone in Christ's eyes. We then introduced our 'Thought Forms', which are very simple pieces of paper that people are encouraged to use to jot down their thoughts about what is happening in a service, or about a topic of conversation that has been introduced as part of the worship. These 'thought forms' were especially useful because a public discussion will inevitably be too intimidating for some people. In our case, people were invited to describe their fondest memories of church. On future occasions the thought forms were particularly made available whenever something new was introduced. The leadership could then read and assess the congregation's responses before the next meeting and respond appropriately, either to individuals or to the group as a

whole. The response when it comes should generally be seen as the next part of a conversation, inviting further discussion, rather than a final answer from an authoritarian leadership.

One Step at a Time

As you form your long term and short term plans, and as you begin your conversation it is important to remember to take one step at a time. When we have exciting plans or feel pressure to produce results, we can feel tempted to introduce wholesale changes at once. It can be hard to resist this temptation.

In NYNO's history, in our second year we were feeling under pressure to see our congregation be more overtly missional and so we tried to shape our annual Christmas carol service into something that would attract parents and toddlers. We introduced craft to the event. At the time we advertised the event as an opportunity to bring emergency food supplies to the local food bank. We tied the two elements together by making our craft the decoration of our food boxes with Christmas scenes. The event was organised with the help of a

small subgroup of the congregation, but even so this was a lot to do and, more importantly, it was a lot to communicate to the rest of the congregation and to the world outside. In retrospect, introducing one new thing would have been simpler to organise and would have enabled the congregation to participate in its organisation more readily.

By only introducing one new thing at a time, you allow people to respond to that one thing, to concentrate on it and to discuss it. If you introduce two or three things, people can be easily overwhelmed and respond negatively or without comprehension to the whole innovation. It takes patience and creativity to do this, but it is rewarding in the long term as the congregation comes to a place where it understands and appreciates itself and its worship.

Not Introducing Change

If the above is followed a congregation will find itself embarked on a journey of perpetual change. Put in this way, it sounds horrendously difficult. In practice however, the congregation will be involved in its own exercise of listening to the Spirit of God and of conscientiously attempting to

order its life in a way that is faithful to the call of God to be a light on a hill. The congregation will be involved in a process in which change is the norm, because we must always be seeking to follow God's call in the present day, with the people before us. Life does not stand still. Faithfulness to the unchanging God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ will demand an unchanging attitude of love to the world around us. As the world changes, so will we adapt in order to express our love more appropriately to the situation of the day.

We have found it to be the case that it is unhelpful to use the language of change as it immediately raises anxiety in some people as 'their' church is deemed to require modification. This anxiety can be felt even when a consensual and conversational way forward for the congregation is being sought. Avoiding the word 'change' might seem a small thing but we would suggest it can be important. There are more helpful, positive and descriptive ways of describing what a NYNO congregation does.

Always Innovate for the Better

Whenever we introduce a new thing, we ask ourselves whether we believe it will improve things for the church and also whether it will be perceived to do so by the congregation. It is, again, an obvious point, but an important one and one that is easy to forget. If it is the case that some innovation – a new form of music or worship, a change in the seating for instance or to the liturgy – is viewed with scepticism we need to investigate why that is the case.

We can start with ourselves and review that innovation that we are making. We can ask ourselves the following questions. What is it for? Why does it make the church better? Is it obvious to people that it is an improvement and if not how can we communicate more clearly what the benefit is of the innovation.

We need to listen to the scepticism when it is aired. Have we really understood what has been perceived to be lost? Have we really communicated how things will be better?

Sometimes a relationship can develop where all innovations that we introduce are viewed as doubtful at best. In this case,

the problem is likely only partially to do with the current change we are introducing. The underlying problem can be that a distrust has developed that affects how everything we do is viewed. In this situation there is no simple answer: the relationship needs to be rebuilt. If the church is to progress together, we will need to seek consensus, continuing to reassure ourselves and others that what we are doing is better than what went before, and listening to the responses that people make.

Sometimes an individual innovation can make little sense on its own, but gains more significance when viewed in a wider context. For example, in NYNO we changed the seating plan for meetings from one in which the congregation faced the minister, to one where we sat in the round. For some, this seemed unhelpful because it was unfamiliar and because it was less clear who was in charge and less easy to watch and listen to that person. The actual purpose of the change was in fact to make the minister less important, and to emphasize the significance of every member. We could argue for this on principle or on the projected decrease in numbers of ministers in the Church of Scotland and the need for

congregations to survive without them, but what probably was most important in leading to the acceptance of the new seating layout was how, especially when experienced within the context of a communal meal, the social atmosphere of the meeting was given a distinct lift.

In practice then, we need to introduce only one change at a time in order to let people have their say. The full significance of many changes that we make, however, will only be fully appreciated when they are understood in conjunction with other changes that we have made and will make. This means we will have to be patient and work hard at our communication. However we may be tempted, it is not helpful to introduce everything all at once.

Optimism and Realism

Optimism

The NYNO project was begun with an optimism that had sprung from a fresh – for us – reading of Scripture. We felt that we had seen, as though for the first time, something of what it meant to be the Church and that we had before us a place and a people in which that understanding of Church

could be lived out as though we were a city on a hill. This meant that we started the project with a confidence that God could and would provide.

We knew that what we were proposing to do would not immediately appeal to many in the wider church. This was not because anyone would deny the importance of what we were trying - its basis in Scripture, its nature as a missionary action - but rather because we all find ourselves committed to our current congregations and it can be hard to embark on something new. There are lots of valid reasons for this. One the one hand, many Christians feel embattled and defensive in the face of increased secularism and gathering together in larger churches full of peers helps alleviate some of that stress, helps give confidence in mission. In contrast, NYNO appears to offer the prospect of commitment to a small congregation, full of older people: not immediately appealing. On the other hand, many existing congregations in the historic denominations are struggling to meet their financial commitments and require all the help they can draw on. Placing your attention on a new initiative may well be seen as a betrayal, leaving the burden of maintenance for

the existing congregation on an ever smaller number of members.

Despite all of this, or perhaps even because of it, we want to insist that the Church can exist in ways that are surprising to us and the world and are so because they are being faithful to God. And, if God is with us, who could be against us? We knew we were seeking to answer a question, the answer to which was not obvious. But we also knew that Christ was raised from the dead and therefore the Church must not simply live according to rules defined to meet the expectation of success. Christ would never have died for us had he followed those rules. What we are seeking is the fullness of life of the kingdom of God. The figure of Zacchaeus springs to mind. Here was a man who gave up his wealth and yet ... rejoiced. We know that NYNO offers a challenge to many of us, particularly to the younger generations, but we do not believe the Gospel calls us to selfless misery. There is joy to be had in a NYNO congregation. It seems to us, as it must have done to Zacchaeus, that though this way offers challenge, it also offers something better.

Realism

An optimism founded in the new reality of the Spirit of Christ, who died and rose again, is a necessary characteristic of the Church. Such an attitude will always receive accusations of naivety. All such criticisms cannot simply be dismissed. A criticism of our optimism that stemmed from a cynicism and lack of faith would have to be resisted. This would be a criticism that failed to recognize the reality of the kingdom of God as the constitutive basis of our Church. This is not, however, the only criticism possible. A criticism based on a failure to observe the reality of the world is also possible and it is here where we are most at risk of rightly being called naïve.

Starting a NYNO congregation presents lots of challenges. There are personal challenges for the individuals who try to start it, there are challenges for the church community as it forms itself, changes and continues while its members grow frail and die. NYNO pioneers need to know what they are getting into. To use the Zacchaeus example, they need to know how much money they have before the full significance of giving it up can be experienced. We need to

know that people may not flock to join us, that they may have many other claims on their time and energy. We need to know there is no set pattern of success that can easily be followed to achieve a ‘thriving’ congregation – that we ourselves will need to go into our situation in faith and with prayer, seeking answers for our own situation.

To return to the language of the kingdom, it is helpful to remember that the fullness of the kingdom will not be known until Christ returns. The challenge and task of the Church is to live in and according to the reality of the kingdom, to live in the Spirit, in a world that does not yet know the newness of the kingdom or the refreshing life of the Spirit. This is not achieved by closing our eyes and humming a hymn, but by knowing full well the challenges that are ahead and yet nonetheless believing that God looks with favour on the lowliness of his servant.

Vulnerability and Church

A young NYNO congregation can easily feel and be made to feel vulnerable, small and insignificant. Without the history of many a parish, without the reassuring ownership of a

building, without the seriousness of balancing a large budget or the established characters of a church leadership, it is always a challenge for the NYNO leadership not to be defensive. The section above on experimental church may be helpful in giving yourselves and others a realistic and supportive way of categorising a NYNO church.

It can be helpful as well to remember, although it certainly does not make anything easier, that being vulnerable is not entirely a bad thing. In Paul's analogy of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12), it is the more vulnerable members of the community that are to be treated with the most respect. It is the meek who will inherit the earth. Our smallness and vulnerability make us dependent on Christ, on our Father for our daily bread. If being 'unimpressive' makes us humble and makes us pray more, it may be to the long term health of any community that we are hoping to see develop.

Death and the Community

The NYNO project has been working for two years. Those of us involved in our NYNO congregation were involved there for a number of years preceding this. Simply being part of

the community over an extended period of time is important. It demonstrates a valuable commitment. There is no way of achieving this via a short-cut.

In doing this, however, in committing to this community over an extended period of time, death can become a haunting and draining presence. In our situation, and we suspect that this is the case across the UK, people are entering sheltered accommodation at an older age and more frail state. We have come to know a number of people over the last few years who have entered the complex where we worship, become part of the church, become friends with us, and then subsequently died.

The experience of this is hard. It both makes running a NYNO church all the more hard and all the more important. As difficult as it might be for us, it is more so for those who live in these complexes without the support of a diversely aged community.

This means that NYNO churches should aim to think well about death and to pray through it honestly and faithfully. We have no specific resources to offer at the moment regarding

this, but we recognise it is an important issue and would value the contributions of others. One small possible way forward might be for members of the community to learn how to contribute to the leading of funerals. Ordained ministers can spend the majority of their time doing this and it may be possible and appropriate for members of a NYNO community to help in this way, rather than to look for a leader from outside who did not know the deceased and does not know the family or church.

There is no solution to grief, but there is hope even in death. Our churches need to live by the light of the resurrection and to care for each other as we mourn.

A Check-list to Help You Get Started

- Find out what already exists.
 - Ministries in your local area.
 - What community exists and how it expresses itself in the area you hope to see a church grow.
- Write down how the church would be experienced if your ideas worked out.

- Share your ideas, with members of the congregation if it exists, with residents who might be involved, with others who might want to go on this journey with you.
- Talk to staff.
- Form a team.
- Make sure you have oversight.
- Pray. Listen.
- Be patient.
- Make the congregation your church.
- Take your first step with the congregation.
 - Always change for the better.
 - Allow the people to respond.
 - Show that you have listened.

Appendix A – NYNO Project

Description

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for all are one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28)

In Jesus Christ also there is **neither young nor old**.

Summary

The NYNO Project is an experimental church planting work of New Stockethill Church[†], Church of Scotland.

It aims to create fresh expressions of all-age church amongst older people, particularly, but not exclusively, those who live in sheltered housing accommodation.

What we do

The NYNO Project aims to see new all-age church communities come into being that are accessible to older people and that develop their own identity, teaching, spirituality, leadership, mission and care.

[†] Scottish Charity Number SCO30587

We hope to touch the lives of people from at least four categories.

- Older Christians living within or with access to meeting spaces in sheltered accommodation. We plan to facilitate their continued participation in the full life of a church.
- Younger Christians will be inspired and challenged to recognise the importance and joy of an experience of church that encompasses every age.
- Non-Christians of every age will be shown a glimpse of the kingdom of God and invited to participate in it through all-age communities that are committed to sharing lives with one another.
- The families of older Christians in particular may also find the NYNO congregations places of welcome, care and support for their relatives and for themselves.

We hope to discover ways in which older people can play their part in helping the Church address the needs of today.

We hope to find ways in which younger people can develop a

sense of their own Christian identity that embraces change, challenge, innovation and mission to their peers while not feeling compelled to accept a homogeneously youth-oriented church.

We hope to develop forms of worship that are faithful and accessible to young, old and those outside of the church.

In addition, the NYNO Project hopes to encourage others caring for older people in churches across Aberdeen through an annual conference of teaching and the sharing of experience.

Why we are doing it

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is good news for all people. The Church of Jesus Christ reflects the diversity of people and by God's grace finds strength in that diversity (1 Cor. 12:22). The Church is to follow its Lord and so to love especially those whom others might see as of less worth (Jam. 1:27).

At present, in Scotland, the NYNO Project believes the Lord is calling some of us within the Church to seek to create new local churches within which older people, in particular, no

matter their age or infirmity, are seen as an essential part of the fellowship of Christ.

Much of the church-going population in Scotland is elderly and ageing. The pragmatic assumption of a shrinking and ageing church is frequently that its future lies primarily in engagement with the young and the culture that surrounds them. A consequence of this can be that the significance of older people is minimised within and outside of the Church. Christ's vision for his Church, however, is not pragmatic but is instead one in which its weakest members are especially valued and in which the least valued of society are offered the kingdom (Matt. 5:3).

One common traditional approach of the church in its engagement with older people, particularly those in sheltered or supported accommodation, has been to care for them through visiting and, if possible, to provide opportunities for worship through a monthly short service. The limitations of this approach are at least two-fold.

- Firstly, it perpetuates the form of church that in many cases has already been rejected over the course of a

life by those outside of the church, and so has limited missional impact.

- Secondly, the services and visits tend to be implicitly understood by those conducting the services and those attending as a second-class form of church: older people are cared for in this approach, they are not included in the full life of the church.

There is a need, therefore, for new forms of church which offer to the world a powerful counter-cultural witness to the kingdom of God through a refusal to view older people as a secondary part of the Church. Instead, we wish to include them as essential members of the body of Christ, alongside others drawn from every age of life.

How we will do it

The new churches will be led, initially, by two part-time workers, employed by the project. These workers will be supervised by a management team, which will report to the Leadership Team of Stockethill, Church of Scotland.

From the start of a new congregation, we will create a local

steering group who will guide the development of their new church.

NYNO Management Team contact

For further information please contact,

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Appendix B – Two Simple Liturgies for for an Every-Age Church that Worships Through a Shared Meal

Liturgy 1: An Agape Meal

*These words will guide our worship. Except where indicated,
we will say and sing these words together.*

*[Before the meal begins, a reading from Scripture and sermon
may be given.]*

OPENING WORDS (ALL)

The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains:

The heavens declare the glory of God;

And we exhibit his likeness,

though we are marred by our misdeeds.

In the waters of baptism we are shown

that we have died with Christ

and are reborn by the Holy Spirit,

to live now in the hope and joy of the resurrection.

United with Christ our Saviour, the Son of God,

we form his body the Church,
and now approach our Father in heaven
as his children.

We offer ourselves,
to be transformed by his word,
to pray for his world
and to witness to all of the goodness
of our creator and redeemer.

Let us worship God.

[While the meal is served, we sing a hymn.]

HYMN

GRACE (ALL)

Our Father in heaven,
for your creatures you bring forth food
from the earth,
we thank you for the gift of your Son,
the bread of life come down from heaven.

Indwelt by the Holy Spirit,
may we demonstrate here
the unity and peace that

is ours for eternity in Christ.

Reform us in the image of your Son,
that we would welcome all to this table,
enjoying and sharing your good gifts
of food, drink and fellowship
as a sign for all of the banquet that is laid
in your coming kingdom.

Amen.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

[After each reading, the reader will say: 'This is the Word of the Lord'. Together, we respond: 'Thanks be to God.']

PROFESSION OF FAITH (THE NICENE CREED)

We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,

God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit
and the Virgin Mary
and became truly human.

For our sake he was crucified
under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.

On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven and is seated
at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the
living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit,

the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and
glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic
and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism
for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come.

PRAYERS (ALL)

Jesus Christ is raised from the dead, he sits at the right of the Father, always ready to intercede on our behalf.

Adopted into God's family, let us then approach the throne of our Father with confidence, so that we may receive help in our time of need.

[Matters for prayer are named and the community prays silently for each. At the conclusion of each period of prayer, one says, 'Lord, in your mercy'. In response, all say, 'Hear our

Prayer: *The concluding prayer is the Lord's Prayer:]*

Our Father in Heaven,
hallowed be your name,
 your kingdom come,
 your will be done,
 on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins
 as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation
 but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power,
 and the glory are yours now and forever.

Amen.

OFFERING (ALL)

[The offering is taken, after which all say:]

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, by whom we are created,
sustained and redeemed, you call us to direct our lives in the
paths of Christ. Use these gifts we ask in the service of your
kingdom. Amen.

HYMN

BENEDICTION (ALL)

Around this table, we have met

in the presence of the risen Christ.

In him we form one body.

May our community continue to be

a witness to all that he is

in his faithfulness, wisdom and salvation.

And may we leave here now at peace, in the

knowledge that no trouble, hardship,

persecution or famine shall separate us

from the love of Christ.

[Teas and coffees are refilled.]

This liturgy takes inspiration and uses prayers from *Book of Common*

Order, 3rd edn (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 2005); *Common*

Worship (London: Church House Publishing, 2000)

Liturgy 2: Communion with Agape Meal

These words will guide our worship. Except where indicated,

we will say and sing these words together.

*[Before the meal begins, a reading from Scripture and sermon
may be given.]*

OPENING WORDS (ALL)

The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains:

The heavens declare the glory of God;

And we exhibit his likeness,

though we are marred by our misdeeds.

In the waters of baptism we are shown

that we have died with Christ

and are reborn by the Holy Spirit,

to live now in the hope and joy of the resurrection.

United with Christ our Saviour, the Son of God,

we form his body the Church,

and now approach our Father in heaven

as his children.

We offer ourselves,

to be transformed by his word,

to pray for his world

and to witness to all of the goodness

of our creator and redeemer.

Let us worship God.

[While the meal is served, we sing a hymn.]

HYMN

GRACE (ALL)

Our Father in heaven,
for your creatures you bring forth food
 from the earth,
we thank you for the gift of your Son,
the bread of life come down from heaven.

Indwelt by the Holy Spirit,
 may we demonstrate here
 the unity and peace that
 is ours for eternity in Christ.

Reform us in the image of your Son,
 that we would welcome all to this table,
 enjoying and sharing your good gifts
 of food, drink and fellowship
 as a sign for all of the banquet that is laid
 in your coming kingdom.

Amen.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

[After each reading, the reader will say: 'This is the Word of the Lord'. Together, we respond: 'Thanks be to God.']

[The meal continues.]

THANKSGIVING

[The bread and wine for communion will be set out. The congregation divides into two groups, A and B, speaking to each other.]

A: Let us lift our hearts to the Lord:

B: We give you thanks, holy Father, heavenly king,
almighty and eternal God, for Jesus Christ your Son our
Lord.

A: To you be glory and praise for ever.

B: For he is your living Word: through him you have
created all things from the beginning, and formed us in
your own image.

A: To you be glory and praise for ever.

B: Through him you have freed us from the slavery of sin,
giving him to be born of a woman and to die upon the
cross;
you raised him from the dead and exalted him to your
right hand on high.

A: To you be glory and praise for ever.

B: Through him you have sent upon us your holy and life-
giving Spirit, and made us a people for your own
possession.

A: To you be glory and praise for ever.

B: Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the
company of heaven, we proclaim your great and
glorious name, for ever praising you and saying:

All: Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord,
Hosanna in the highest.

THE LORD'S PRAYER (ALL)

Let us pray.

Our Father in Heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours now and forever.

Amen.

WORDS OF INSTITUTION (MINISTER)

*Accept our praises, heavenly Father,
through your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ,
and as we follow his example and obey his command, grant
that by the power of your Holy Spirit these gifts of bread and*

wine may be to us his body and blood;

who, in the same night that he was betrayed, took bread and gave you thanks; he broke it and gave it to his disciples saying: Take eat; this is my body which is given for you do this in remembrance of me.

All: To you be glory and praise for ever.

In the same way, after supper he took the cup and gave you thanks; he gave it to them, saying:

Drink this, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

All: To you be glory and praise for ever.

Draw near with faith.

*Receive the body of our Lord Jesus Christ
which he gave for you.*

Eat and drink in remembrance

*that he died for you,
and feed on him in your hearts
by faith with thanksgiving.*

[We share in the Lord's Supper.]

PRAYERS (ALL)

Jesus Christ is raised from the dead, he sits at the right of the Father, while present to us by the Holy Spirit, ready to intercede on our behalf.

As God's children let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

[Matters for prayer are written down and collected. The leader invites the community to pray silently for each topic: 'Let us pray for ...']

At the conclusion of each period of prayer, the leader says.

'Lord, in your mercy'. In response, all say, 'Hear our Prayer.'

CONCLUDING PRAYER (ALL)

Merciful Father,
accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son
our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.

OFFERING (ALL)

[The offering is taken, after which all say:]

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, by whom we are created, sustained and redeemed, you call us to direct our lives in the paths of Christ. Use these gifts we ask in the service of your kingdom. Amen.

HYMN

BENEDICTION (ALL)

Around this table, we have met

in the presence of the risen Christ.

In him we form one body.

May our community continue to be

a witness to all that he is

in his faithfulness, wisdom and salvation.

And may we leave here now at peace, in the

knowledge that no trouble, hardship,

persecution or famine shall separate us

from the love of Christ.

[Teas and coffees are refilled.]

This liturgy takes inspiration and uses prayers from Book of Common Order, 3rd edn (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 2005); Common Worship (London: Church House Publishing, 2000)

Liturgy 3: Simple Liturgy for a Small Group Meal

OPENING PSALM (ALL)

NIV **Psalm 66:1-7**

¹ Shout with joy to God, all the earth! ² Sing the glory of his name; make his praise glorious! ³ Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds! So great is your power that your enemies cringe before you. ⁴ All the earth bows down to you; they sing praise to you, they sing praise to your name."

⁵ Come and see what God has done, how awesome his works in man's behalf! ⁶ He turned the sea into dry land, they passed through the waters on foot – come, let us rejoice in him. ⁷ He rules forever by his power, his eyes watch the nations – let not the rebellious rise up against him.

OPTIONAL HYMN

GRACE (ALL)

Our Father in heaven,

we thank you for the gift of your Son,
the bread of life come down from heaven.

Indwell us now by the presence of your
Holy Spirit, that we as your church
in this place might know and proclaim
the unity and peace that
is ours for eternity in Christ.

Form us in the image of your Son,
that we might be hospitable,
treating all as we would Him,
enjoying and sharing your good gifts
of food, drink and fellowship
as a sign for all of the banquet that is laid
in your coming kingdom.

Amen.

MEAL

SCRIPTURE READING

[Space is left for reflection and discussion.]

TEA AND COFFEE

INTERCESSIONS (ALL)

Jesus Christ is raised from the dead, he sits at the right of the Father, always ready to intercede on our behalf.

As God's children let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

[Matters for prayer are named and the community prays silently for each.]

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom, and the power and glory, forever.

Amen.

OPTIONAL HYMN

FINAL WORDS (ALL)

Our Father in heaven, whose Son Jesus Christ endured the condemnation of death on our behalf, though he knew no

sin, make us your children, one with Christ. Take away our sins, secure us in eternal life. Grant that at the resurrection of the dead we may hear your words of affirmation:

"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

(Matthew 3:17)

And may the same Christ,
who lives forever and is the source of our new life,
keep your hearts rejoicing
and grant you peace this day and always.

Amen.

Liturgy: Additional Prayers and Variations

EASTER ACCLAMATION (ALL)

Alleluia.

Christ is risen; he is risen indeed.

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

OPENING WORDS (ALL)

Grace, mercy and peace,
from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

be with us.

As God's children, the church,
let us hear God's word,
enjoy afresh our union with Christ
and so with each other,
and offer to our Father in heaven
ourselves in prayerful response:

let us worship God.

CONFESSION (ALL)

Most merciful God,
who so loved the world
that you did not withhold
even your only Son, Jesus Christ,
to save us from our sins,
be our advocate in heaven
and to bring us to eternal life,
we confess that in negligence, weakness
and at times in malice,
we have neither loved you
nor our neighbour as He did.

We are truly sorry and turn from our sins.

For the sake of Jesus Christ, who died for us,
forgive us all that is past
and grant that, indwelt by your Spirit,
we may serve you in newness of life
to the glory of your name.

Amen.

[The following prayer complements the above confession.]

FORGIVENESS (ALL)

May almighty God, who sent his Son into the world to save sinners, bring you his pardon and peace, now and for ever.

CONFESSION (ALL)

Most merciful God,
who so loved the world
that you did not withhold
even your only Son, Jesus Christ,
to save us from our sins,
be our advocate in heaven
and to bring us to eternal life,

we confess that in negligence, weakness
and at times in malice,
we have neither loved you
nor our neighbour as He did.

We are truly sorry and turn from our sins.

For the sake of Jesus Christ, who died for us,
forgive us all that is past
and grant that, indwelt by your Spirit,
we may serve you in newness of life

BENEDICTION (ALL)

As Christ burst forth from the tomb,
may new life burst forth from us
and show itself in acts of love and healing
to a hurting world.

And may the same Christ,
who lives forever and is the source of our new life, keep your
hearts rejoicing and grant you peace this day and always.
Amen.

Appendix C: Four Introductory Sermons

Sermon 1: Luke 15:1-7

What would the perfect church look like?

I invite us all to dream a little this morning.

Would it meet in St. Paul's London, or Kings College Chapel, Cambridge?

Would it have a fantastic choir? A minister who gave compelling sermons?

Would it be full of energy, loud music, or quiet and reflective?

Would it be full of children, or empty of them?

Would it be the church you grew up in, or in which you brought your children up?

Would be full of friendly people, or people who let who didn't bother you?

Another way of asking the question might be, when have you

been most happy in church? And, why was that so?

What kind of church would lift your spirits, would be a place where peace was restored?

@@@

I ask this question aware that to my knowledge it's not something about which most of us have been invited to give of their opinion. And that troubles me, because your opinions, your thoughts and preferences about church matter.

@@@

In our reading we heard Jesus' words concerning the lost sheep.

The Pharisees saw Jesus surrounded by disreputable tax collectors and sinners and they took offence. Who was this teacher who 'welcomes sinners and eats with them'?

Jesus tells the Pharisees a parable and invites them to consider themselves within it: 'Suppose one of you,' he begins, 'has a 100 sheep and loses one. Does he not leave the 99 in the open and go after the lost 1.' Consider yourselves,

Jesus says, in my place: the shepherd, one responsible for all the sheep. On finding the one lost sheep, would he not rejoice and celebrate because the one that was is now found.

If you consider yourselves a leader, Jesus says, then you must follow my example and care for each one under your care.

It all depends, you see, on whether the lost are under your care or not: there is something very important being said here about identity and belonging.

The Pharisees looked at the tax-collectors and 'sinners' and they had no compassion: they considered them traitors to the cause of Jewish nationalism, what they believed was God's cause. They did not identify with them, they were not brothers or sisters, not family, not kinsmen – or rather, they were kinsmen and that was the problem: their moral actions were seen to bring disgrace and shame on the whole family and so they were ostracised, considered as not one of us. They diluted the purity of God's people, they perhaps dissuaded God from blessing and liberating his people: they had to go.

But Jesus' attitude is quite different: the wayward, troublesome sheep still belongs to him, he remains the good shepherd.

We turned to this parable this morning for a reason. It speaks to something that should be at the very heart of any 'perfect' church. It reminds us that in the Kingdom of God, we gain our citizenship, our membership and significance, our identity because it is given us from the depths of the love of Jesus Christ. The waters of baptism do not merely wash the skin but declare to us that with Jesus we now have new life, and those waters operate with no record for our abilities, our competencies, our moral performance. All such things are secondary to this wonderful truth: God views us with love. We may have wandered, but we remain his sheep.

To return where we started, and to consider the question of the ideal church: we see that the question of God's love for us and our love for each other are deeply connected. If we matter to Christ then we must matter to one another. I am reminded of the words of Jesus:

Luke 7:47 But he who has been forgiven little loves little.

These words of course, can be reversed. He who has been forgiven much, loves much.

Or the parable of the unforgiving servant:

Matthew 18:33 'Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?'

A church therefore that knows the love of Christ, must therefore seek to be a place where such love is shown between its members. At the very least, I would suggest, that this means listening to one another.

In our self-appointed task of being a great church, of raising money, of tidying up, or organising music, it is so easy not to consider the person before you. A wonderful being created by God. Broken, as we all are, and yet loved by Christ and a recipient of the hope of eternal life, now called to serve Christ with all that he has given them.

@@@

Let me summarise in brief. I am concerned that our church are forever in danger of not respecting their members as those loved by Christ, and rarely really listening to their

voices, their thoughts and concerns. If the members are so treated will they not become dull, muted, quiet, finding that church does not engage them as a whole person but merely as a means to an end and will the church itself then fester as a community, ceasing to be a place that nurtures and affirms, unattractive to those outside.

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All of what I've said this morning has been said in all seriousness. Julie and I would like to find ways in which your thoughts, reflections, hopes and fears can contribute to our life together. That can take place entirely informally, as we talk to each other. But we also recognise that talking about faith can be difficult for many reasons. In your notice sheets, you should have what we've called a 'Thought Form'. This is simply a piece of paper which you can use to tell us things, if there isn't the opportunity to do so directly, or if you'd prefer to do so through writing.

We will include this form with the notice sheets each time we meet.

What could you use this for? You could say, I really liked that

hymn or tune. You could say, I enjoyed that sermon, but I didn't understand x, y or z. You could say, I'd like us to have a church outing. You could say, I miss my old church, the people and the building. It probably wouldn't be a good use of the form to write personal attacks.

These are just examples.

When you write something on one of these forms, be aware that it's for everyone and could be shared in our meetings. Of course, if you'd prefer it not to be, you can indicate that.

You'll see that there's the opportunity to write your name or to leave it anonymous.

To get us started, I'd like to invite you to jot a few things down in answer to the question I raised at the beginning: what would be the ideal church for you? What would church need to be like, so that when you went your spirits were lifted and you left at peace with God. If you are new to this service feel free to contribute. Your voice is valued. But equally, don't feel obligated. If you run out of time, don't worry, s lost sheep turn now to communion. The place where we celebrate that though we were lost, through Christ we are

brought back into the fold of his people. You can write things on one of these forms at any point, now or after the service.

Questions?

[*Play quiet music while people have time to think.*]

The good shepherd laid down his life for his sheep: and so we as lost sheep turn now to communion. The place where we celebrate that though we were lost, through Christ we are brought back into the fold of his people.

Sermon 2: 1 Corinthians 10:14-22

The Message (MSG)

15-18 I assume I'm addressing believers now who are mature. Draw your own conclusions: When we drink the cup of blessing, aren't we taking into ourselves the blood, the very life, of Christ? And isn't it the same with the loaf of bread we break and eat? Don't we take into ourselves the body, the very life, of Christ? Because there is one loaf, our many-ness becomes one-ness—Christ doesn't become fragmented in us. Rather, we become unified in him. We don't reduce Christ to what we are; he raises us to what he is. That's basically what happened even in old Israel—those who ate the sacrifices offered on God's altar entered into God's action at the altar.

The Church is formed around the eating of a meal. In a

conventional church service it is easy for us to forget this.

The life that we spend within the Church can seem to be taken up with a set of activities entirely separate from the humdrum realities of life. We preach or listen to sermons, we sing hymns, we gather in our own distinctive buildings, we have our own language and so talk about 'ecumenicalism', 'session clerks' and 'General Assemblies'. Of course, all these things are there for their reasons. My point is that it is easy to forget that the Son of God took on a human existence, was a child, grew, taught, and before he went to his death, sat at a table with his followers and friends and ate with them, telling them to continue to do this after he had gone. At the heart of the Christian faith is God involving himself in the simple necessities of life, eating with us, giving himself to be with us, and so giving us hope where and when we need it: at every hour, in every place.

The word that the church has traditionally used to recognise the special nature of our communion meal is that of 'sacrament'. John Calvin spoke of sacraments as signs of covenant, that is signs of God's promises and will for

humanity. Augustine spoke of the sacraments as ‘visible words’: a visible and tangible message from God to bolster our weak and vulnerable faith. The spiritual comes to us through the physical.

And so as we pick up bread, and take the cup, we are drawn by the Spirit of God into the presence of God. But even more than that, we experience our oneness with Christ. We participate in him.

To participate in Christ is to experience his benefits, to know afresh that by his broken body, spilt blood and resurrection he has freed us from the guilt of sin, from the fear of death, and freed us for love and communion with God, and love and community with each other.

In the language of our reading, as we eat communion do we not take into ourselves the body, the very life, of Christ? And, because there is one loaf, from which we all eat, does not our many-ness become one-ness?

And so, a meal, a humdrum ordinary meal, brings us into communion with the Son of God, who died for the sins of the world, and makes us one where before we were many.

The word for participation used in our passage is *koinonia*. It has various meanings, ranging from communion to fellowship, participation, sharing in, contribution or gift and also presence.

It is entirely fitting then, that we gather around a table, even when we cannot take communion. Christ is at the centre of this community, he is in our midst. We are a community because he is our saviour and lord.

The meal, then, so to speak, takes us back to that upper room where Christ sat with his disciples. It is, in God's hands, a means by which Christ becomes present to us now. But even more than that, the meal allows us to taste the future.

In the familiar words of 1 Cor. 11:26: as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

We eat in the knowledge that there is more to come, and our meal points us to that reality and proclaims it to the world.

The prayer, 'thy kingdom come' will one day be finally answered when Christ comes in glory and victory our meal will be transformed into the wedding feast of the lamb of

God.

Placing the meal at the heart of our meeting is appropriate, but it will not therefore be easy. Bringing us closer to one another is fine, until we discover our divisions. Calling each other brother and sister is also appropriate if we remember how they are wont to fight. It is right that we should seek oneness then, but we must not forget that we are one firstly because Christ has made us so. In him we know forgiveness; before him we must repent and confess. If we remember these things in our dealings with one another we will not be given a perfectly peaceful community but we may begin to learn what is required to bear with one another in our frailties.

In some mysterious way, when we participate in Christ's cup, and have communion with Him, we are joined together as brothers and sisters. We participate in the feast together. Participate with Christ, and communally, together. It is joint participation. Thus community and family become closely intertwined, because aiming at a common unity strives to overcome brokenness, divisiveness, and, ultimately gaining

wholeness with each of the members, with their environment, and with God.

Last week we filled in a number of our Thought Forms.

Thank you for the responses. A common theme throughout was - welcome, warmth and friendship. I thank God that that does sound like the koinonia we just mentioned. Thank you for your honesty too. Someone contributed the words “Love one another. Very difficult. Make an effort to smile and be pleasant to all, enemies included!!!” I am glad that we are aware that real-life fellowship with real people, will at times require forgiveness.

Let us all continue to make room for Christ and so continue to be guided to make room for one another, for friends, strangers and enemies alike. This is a gift of grace! It is something far more mysterious than we can really give words to. But it's a real outworking of our faith, of our participation in God. It's an expression of love and therefore it is a way of becoming more like Jesus.

Sermon 3: 1 Corinthians 11

You may have noticed we've included thought forms with

your noticesheets this morning, and we hope to always have these available when we meet. The purpose of these is to encourage a conversation amongst us all about our life and worship together. You can use to them to note down anything you feel is particular significant, that strikes you as we worship. Occasionally, if Julie or myself have introduced some innovation in the form of our service, as we did last time with the chair layout, then we're likely to invite you to comment on your responses to these things: is it helpful, thought-provoking, how.

I don't have a specific question for you to reflect on this morning, although you'd be more than welcome to reflect on the chair arrangement, but just wanted to explain again what the forms were for and to invite your contributions.

1 Corinthians 11:17 – 12:1

17 In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. 18 In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. 19 No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval. 20 When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, 21 for as you eat, each of you

goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk. 22 Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you for this? Certainly not! 23 For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." 25 In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." 26 For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. 27 Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. 28 A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. 29 For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgement on himself. 30 That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. 31 But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgement. 32 When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world. 33 So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for each other. 34 If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgement. And when I come I will give further directions.

The church is the body of Christ. That is, in the words of the apostle Paul, this is ‘a profound mystery’ (Eph. 5:32).

The force of that word, ‘mystery’, is of something long hidden, now made known. What has been hidden and is now revealed is, of course, the great work of God in Jesus Christ, in which humanity is redeemed from its slavery to the worship of any- and everything except God. In Jesus, humanity is invited to participate in new life, eternal life. We realise that we cannot escape our broken selves and see that that which we cannot achieve, God has done for us.

But again, what is the significance of this phrase, the body of Christ, and how does it relate to this mystery now made known?

Well, of course, the term draws us back to the Lord’s Supper, bread and wine set before us this morning and the passage that we read earlier that describes the supper’s institution.

Followers of Christ are invited to take the bread and wine, called Christ’s body and blood, and consume them. We may be inclined to shy away from the unpalatable aspects of this act: it was not without reason – even if it was mistaken – that

the early Christians were accused of cannibalism.

This act signals to us that a change in who we are has taken place. No matter who we were before, no matter what we have done, now we are identified with Jesus Christ. We lack the everyday language to describe this, and that perhaps is why we are left this sacrament, this physical act to perform, rather than mere words. But even so, by taking Christ's body into us, we are declaring – proclaiming – that we belong to him and he to us.

But more than this, as the context of the Last Supper implies – which is that of the the passover feast and the consumption of the slaughtered animal by which the Israelites escaped slavery in Egypt, and more importantly, Christ's crucifixion – as all this implies, we are consuming a body that has died.

We are finding ourselves identified with Christ and particularly with his death: “For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.”

And this death is for us: “This is my body, which is for you.”

In this supper we identify with and participate in the death of Christ, so that it becomes our death. So that what we were, is laid to rest in the grave, and what we are is now to be bound up with the life our Lord, the risen Christ. Paul's words about Baptism point us to the same thing: this from Rom. 6:4, "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."

And so there we have it. The promise of God of physical resurrection, of sharing in Christ's eternal life, is given to us in physical elements. A bodily promise - of flesh and blood - that indicates to us that our old bodies that we still carry around with us and in which we are contribute to the brokenness of the world, is laid to rest with Christ, and a new hope of bodily redemption, of resurrection is set before us. This promise is no mere aspiration: the Son of God did not taken on flesh, die and be resurrected merely to offer hope, but to achieve it. This promise is a commitment from God, sealed in the blood of the divine Son. We are to take it and eat it, to drink, with enthusiasm, awe and gratitude.

But there is more, one further aspect not yet explained that I want to conclude with.

In our reading, Paul expresses frustration at the manner in which some in the Corinthian church are conducting themselves at their celebration of the Supper.

The Supper is taking place within the context of a wider shared community meal: something I would be eager to try here incidentally. However, some bring their own choice food and wine and share and consume it among their friends. Others, likely poorer and not able to arrive earlier or to bring much food, come to the gathering and find themselves ostracised, humiliated and hungry. And then note what Paul says: “For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgement on himself.”

I don't have time to address the question of the judgement falling on that Church this morning, but the force of Paul's words remains enlightening. The Corinthians are excluding their fellow Christians, and Paul accuses them of eating and drinking the bread and wine without recognising the body of

the Lord. Body here refers to the community of the church.

There is a logical connection of course: we eat the bread and wine, given to us as the body and blood of Christ and we ourselves join the body of Christ: we become the Church, we become the body of Christ in which no human accolade or achievement or privilege can significance or value before one another: because all must die with Christ, because all are dependent on him to know eternal life now and at the resurrection.

And so the church is the body of Christ. It is so in a global sense: Christ creates within himself a new humanity. The scope of Christ's work is not to contribute to human life and culture, to be one aspect of many, but, universally to found once again who and what humanity is as God's creation, to direct and inspire us to live in humility and compassion now with the hope of the renewal of all things at his return.

But this term, the body of Christ, has significance on a local level as well, it has significance for us. Remember what Paul says about the rich and the poor, the privileged and the dispossessed. This applies to us. We often describe gatherings

like ours, this morning, as a service. We come, we listen (or speak), we sing and we depart. Our religious duty is performed, we return to life. But perhaps our language could be different. We are part of the body of Christ. In this place, we are the body of Christ. God's Spirit resides in us no less than in others. Have we not died in Christ, like all other Christians? Is our hope any different?

Therefore, without arrogance or rancour, we have justification to think more of ourselves as a group, as a church in this place. As we gather in this place around the table we are reminded again of all that Christ has done and all that that means for us: that we have died with him and that now we live in the Spirit, as his body, in the hope of everlasting life: and that as we do so we proclaim to the world that there is hope and meaning and peace. Amen.#

Sermon 4:

[TODO: Julie has notes for this?]

Sermon 5: Why a Meal?

A word of Prayer:

Our Father in heaven, who sent his Son Jesus Christ to take upon himself the sins of the world, to die, be raised to life and ascend to reign at your right hand, by the Holy Spirit speak to us now through the Scriptures and draw us to yourself and one another in peace, that our community, faltering though our efforts may be, might yet be a sign to the world of the restoration of all things at Christ's return. Amen.

Luke 5:27-32 7 After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. "Follow me," Jesus said to him, 28 and Levi got up, left everything and followed him. 29 Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. 30 But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" 31 Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. 32 I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

The Church appears to be in quite a predicament. There is no bottomless pit of money that the church can continue to

draw on. Perhaps worse, there is no endless supply of ministers. A large proportion of ministers are due to retire in the next ten years, and there aren't the young ministers to replace them. Many churches will find themselves unable to find a minister, and those that remain no doubt will be in high demand. Perhaps worse still, will there be congregations for ministers to go to? Each year the size of the church continues to shrink. It is possible to extrapolate into the future and predict a date when there will be no one left!

And no one knows what the answer is. Simply continuing, though, as we have been doing, would seem negligent. And there is no reason why we here cannot play our part in the prayerful search for something better.

Since before Easter we've been building our meetings around a common meal, and there are a handful of reasons why we think this might be a good idea. Let me run through them.

As I mentioned earlier, the church may well have to find a way of surviving with fewer ministers. The conventional

Church of Scotland service is highly dependent on the minister, to lead and speak. The congregation gives their money and sings, but otherwise can be entirely passive. On the other hand, in the idea of a meal, the emphasis lies on the community, on each one of us, as we sit across the table from each other. This means that we are one step closer to being able to organise our own worship, if there is no minister to hand.

Although the traditional service may be comforting and familiar to you, it separates you from the younger generations. The minister led service appeals to the adult intellect: it presents you with the truth, to which you can respond with faith. But, if this important aspect of our Christian lives becomes the central concept behind our gatherings, then our children are excluded. That is why, in years gone by, Sunday schools existed: because the services were intended for adults. On the other hand, if you make the meal the central idea that shapes our gathering, young and old can worship together.

If it is the case, that you can hardly imagine inviting

grandchildren or great-grandchildren to come to church with you, then surely something has to change.

In our reading Jesus sat down at table with tax collectors and sinners. What would he have done today? Perhaps he would have sat down with fat cat bankers and benefit scroungers. The Pharisees were appalled, as no doubt would we be. But this controversy is raised by the simple action of Jesus sitting down at a table with people.

The story is very rich. It is easy for us to assume that our place in the story is with the Pharisees, looking down on the despised, and that instead we are to be welcoming to all. Perhaps though we should consider ourselves with the tax collectors and sinners. Our sins may be more hidden, may be less obvious, but none of us has a right to the presence of Christ, and yet he welcomes us nonetheless. And so, when we come to this meal, particularly when we celebrate communion, we are reminded afresh of the forgiveness and gracious welcome of our saviour.

A meal is a place where we can receive grace, but where also we can give it. How difficult it has always been to welcome

someone new into a church, to help them to feel at home. How difficult it has been for the Church to share its worship with the wider world. But, with a meal, might it be different? The shared joy of good food is surely a better place to start than the offering of a hymn book and an invitation to stay for coffee.

Lastly, the meal acts as a symbol, pointing us to the future, to the Christian hope: the wedding feast of the lamb. The Church today is imperfect. It cannot grow through trying to demonstrate that it is nicer than the next group. All our attempts at community will be imperfect. We look forward then to the time when Christ will bring all things in order before the Father. In Scripture, that time is described as meal, a banquet, a feast. It points us to the hope that humanity's divisions will be reconciled under the lordship of Christ. In the words of Revelation 19:

“Hallelujah!

For the Lord our God

the Almighty reigns.

7 Let us rejoice and exult

and give him the glory,
for the marriage of the Lamb has come,
and his Bride has made herself ready;
8 it was granted her to clothe herself
with fine linen, bright and pure”—

for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

9 And the angel said[a] to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” And he said to me, “These are the true words of God.”

As we eat, we remind ourselves of God’s goodness in this world, and the world to come. Amen.

Appendix D: Hosting a NYNO Meal

Here's a little how-to when it comes to the practicalities of hosting a NYNO meeting centred around a meal.

Some Basic Principles

Keep Things Special and Simple

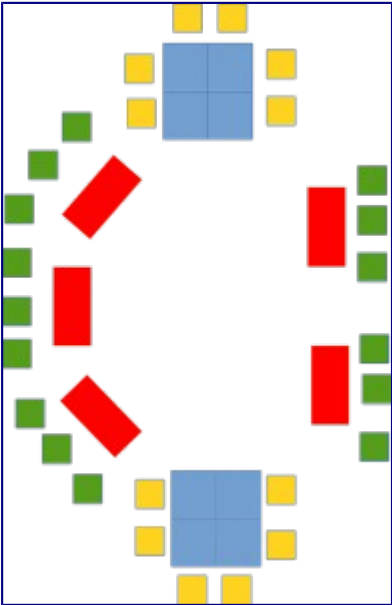
We want to keep our breakfast gatherings as special as possible but also as simple to prepare as possible. For us, it meant a couple of loaves of homemade bread with butter and jam, and tea and coffee. Of course, you can use your own recipes, but we've included some of the ones we've used below in case you find that helpful.

If there is a suitable oven in or close to the meeting area, doing some baking on the day creates some wonderful smells. Practically speaking we have found it sensible to do as much preparation as possible before we arrive, and then perhaps have one thing prepared, ready to pop in the oven during the hour before the meeting. Of course, if you had people who wanted to get together early and bake on the day that could be fun! Just so long as it doesn't become a chore

and people's service doesn't begin to displace our participation in worship as the most important thing.

Seating

We'll discuss liturgy in another place. But here it's enough to say that how we sit together matters. We always try to give the impression of everyone sat round one table. Practically we can't actually do this but we attempt to arrange what tables we have in something of a circle, with everyone seated around the outside. Here's a diagram to illustrate.



The blue squares are square

dining tables, the yellow squares dining chairs. We arrange four of these tables into one large table at each end of the room and place dining chairs around three sides of the large table so that people are facing inwards to the room.

The red tables are are low coffee tables around which we place comfy arm chairs (green squares).

It's more important to us that people should be aware of being sat round a table together than that they should be able to hear a speaker. Our meeting is more about emphasizing the participation of the people than the performance of the preacher.

Preparation

To set up with normally arrive an hour before the beginning of the meeting. This allows enough time to set out the seating, do any baking

Each table setting has a plate, cup and saucer, knife, and serviette, along with the liturgy.

For a breakfast of up to 30 people:

- One packet of butter, cut into cubes and served in

small dishes.

- One jar of jam, served in small dishes
- About 2 pints of milk for teas and coffees, in four little milk jugs.
- A couple of sugar bowls, but we find that very few people take sugar in their beverages.
- A packet of fresh, ground coffee which last us 2 meetings. We make two large cafetieres of coffee and four pots of tea.

We have clusters on the tables consisting of a plate of bread; milk jug, sugar bowl and teaspoons; butter and jam servings. They serve about 5-6 people. They should be in easy reach, and people are encouraged to serve one another. At the appropriate time, teapots and cafetieres are brought through from the kitchenette and again, we serve each other.

The Meal

The liturgy we've been using will be discussed elsewhere, in brief outline though the meal goes as follows. Before we eat, we say grace together. As we share breakfast, we enjoy fellowship with one another. At this point, we also offer

around little forms and give people space to write down any items for prayer. Our meal is drawn to a focus point by taking all the items for prayer to God before one another in silent prayer. We say the Lord's Prayer together and sing a final hymn. We bring our meeting to a close by speaking aloud the benediction to one another.

Time disappears during a meal! But we strive to keep the whole meeting to about 45 minutes. That way people stay longer because they want more breakfast, or to talk to one another and not because the service is dragging on ...

Afterwards, we have found that people are very keen to stay and enjoy further fellowship. We are always inundated with people willing to help with the clear-up, dish-washing and drying, and taking leftovers home!

Two Recipes

Irish soda bread

Here's a recipe for a simple soda bread. It's fine to make the day before and bring to the meal pre-sliced. It's a recipe by James Martin and can be found at bbc.co.uk/food .

Ingredients

- 170g/6oz self-raising wholemeal flour
- 170g/6oz plain flour
- ½ tsp salt
- ½ tsp bicarbonate of soda
- 290ml/½ pint buttermilk

Preparation method

1. Preheat the oven to 400F/200C/Gas 6.
2. Tip the flours, salt and bicarbonate of soda into a large mixing bowl and stir.
3. Make a well in the centre and pour in the buttermilk, mixing quickly with a large fork to form a soft dough. (Depending upon the absorbency of the flour, you may need to add a little milk if the dough seems too stiff but it should not be too wet or sticky.)
4. Turn onto a lightly floured surface and knead briefly.
5. Form into a round and flatten the dough slightly before placing on a lightly floured baking sheet.
6. Cut a cross on the top and bake for about 30 minutes or until the loaf sounds hollow when tapped. Cool on a wire rack.

We find that 3-4 loaves is plenty for around 25-30 people to have a couple of thick slices each.

Hot Cross Buns

Here's a recipe for Hot Cross Buns, that worked so well on Easter Day, we may have to do it again before long. It was based on the recipe [here](#).

It worked well to largely prepare this the night before, leaving the buns on trays in the fridge over night, covered in clingfilm. I took them out of the fridge for a gentle second rising first thing in the morning. They're ideal to bake just before a meeting because they only take 12 minutes and so have time to cool down before icing, and also because they reate an impressive aroma.

- 240 ml of whole milk
- 2 packages dry yeast (5 teaspoons)
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 1 large egg plus 1 egg yolk
- 1 cup (115g) currants
- Zests from 1 orange and 1 lemon or 1 lime

- 1/2 cup (110g) sugar
 - 4 cups flour, [fluffed to aerate before measuring](#) or 500 grams by weight
 - 1 teaspoon of ground ginger
 - 1 teaspoon cinnamon
 - 1 teaspoon table salt
 - 140 grams of cold butter, cut in small bits
 - Additional flour for kneading

 - 2 tablespoons of milk
 - 1 tablespoon of melted butter
 - 250g icing sugar
1. PROOF the YEAST In a small dish, heat milk in microwave about 1 minute to 105F – 115F. Gently stir in yeast and 1 teaspoon sugar. Set aside until foamy, about 5 minutes.
 2. SOAK the CURRANTS In a small bowl, whisk egg and yolk well. Stir in currants and zests. Set aside.
 3. MIX the DOUGH In large bowl, stir together 1/2 cup sugar, flour, spices and salt. With fingertips, blend butter into flour until a coarse meal forms (I've use

the food processor for this stage). Make well in center, pour in yeast and currant mixtures. Blend thoroughly with hands, then form into ball and transfer to lightly floured counter. (Don't worry, the dough will be sticky. If it starts off too sticky to knead on the counter, just knead it right in the bowl.) Knead 10 minutes, adding as little flour as possible, just enough to work dough without any stickiness when the kneading is done.

4. **FIRST RISE** Transfer dough to a clean, lightly oiled bowl, first rubbing the dough mass against the bowl to lightly coat all sides with oil. Cover, let rise in warm place until doubled, about 1 hour.
5. **FORM BUNS & SECOND RISE** With a fist, gently deflate dough. Cut into 30 pieces. I cut the dough into 6 and divide from there. Form buns and arrange on two or three baking non-stick baking trays. If you're preparing the night before, cover gently with cling film and place in fridge.
6. **BAKE** Preheat oven to 200° C (180° in a fan oven). Bake for about about 12 minutes.

7. ICING. The icing can be prepared the night before and kept in the fridge. If it's too stiff to pipe in the morning, place it in a microwave for 2 or 3 seconds – no more. For the icing, blend a tablespoon of melted butter with 2 tablespoons warm milk and a teaspoon of vanilla extract. Stir in about 250g of icing sugar. For Easter, pipe in crosses or on other occasions, more simply spread across the top of the buns.