

Looking Ahead Bulletin No: 1

Last Sunday we started the process of 'Looking Ahead' to the future of Union Chapel. Each month for a while we will be using one Sunday morning not only to worship together but also to discuss, clarify and plan the way ahead. After each of these sessions we plan to publish a Bulletin which will give a summary of what went on. We hope this will refresh the minds of those who were at the service and provide information for those who were not. So here we go.

After worship we split into two groups for a Bible Study on **St Luke 14: 12 - 24**. We were asked the questions:

What do you think about the passage on reading it?

What are the implications of the passage for a local church

Points arising in discussion:

Responses to the Luke text:

- Query use of word 'compel' - indicates use of force! would you want people to attend who had been forced?
- Was compulsion an expression of the seriousness of intent to engage with the outsider?
- Shock - this is not the usual behaviour of inviting family/friends. Could poor/lame (etc) mix together with family/friends
- Is the principle to be generous without expecting anything in return?
- This is not restricted to food, but meeting all kinds of needs. Also not restricted to 'coming in' but could happen wherever you are.
- This vision of the kingdom relates to people who expect to be excluded from it.

Applications for local church?

- Priority should always be the 'other'/marginalised people (a contextual version of poor/lame).
- Exhortation to 'go out'. If people knew the door was open they would come.
- Beware of motives when doing this i.e. not looking for status. Also concerns about the them/us division - are we the poor? How do we identify?
- An awareness that we might not understand what needs exist. Could we do with looking around at the streets.
- Perhaps we should do things that are meaningful to us, and not try 'too hard'
- Are we too comfortable with people who think our way?
- Lots of courses in a 'great dinner'/feast - indicative of a need for diversity?
- Be careful who you invite unless you are prepared.
- Contrast between Jesus's parable and the fact that he was at a party - accepting hospitality and being so willing to question it's motives

What types of church do we know about?

Briefly we talked about different types of church ranging from the formal (vestments, candles etc) to the concert (rock bands etc); from the mission orientated evangelical to the liberal social.

After a coffee break we read 1Corinthians 13 and talked about how we should approach our Looking Ahead sessions.

Looking Ahead Lovingly

Safe Spaces

People said:

- We need a safe space where we can speak freely.
- We should always look for the best in each other.
- We need to be open with no hidden plans
- We should be confident and remember that mistakes are allowed.
- We need to listen carefully and get involved
- Love is gracious, forgiving, trusting, aware.
- Love never gives up, cares more for others than for self, doesn't force itself on others, doesn't fly off the handle, or keep score of the sins of others or revel when they grovel. Love puts up with anything, always looks for the best, never looks back but keeps going to the end. 1Cor 13.

Looking Ahead Now

What kind of a church are we? Why do you think that?

People said:

- Welcoming - we make it easy to fit in.
- We think carefully about worship. In my experience we are continuously evolving.
- Accepting - we are free to say what we like.
- Although Baptist is in our name I love the fact that there are no set answers or ways.
- We are a church with fuzzy edges helping people to find their own way ahead.
- A liberal crafted church. Relaxed and comfortable.
- Caring to all generations from the children upwards.
- The five words on our logo are Open, Friendly, Different, Questioning, Accepting. Should we remove or add to them?

Looking Ahead Next

Not everyone wants to voice an opinion in an open discussion. Therefore it is planned to have a 'Looking Ahead' box where people can post any comments anonymously. We will use these contributions in planning future sessions. Also they will be published in the Bulletin so that people are aware of all our thinking. If you cannot see the box please post your thoughts through the church office letter box. Mark it for the attention of the 'Looking Ahead Group'.

First Comment from the Box: A paid administrator?

It was commented that to provide the sessions with some continuity we re-use some of the same liturgy/scripture.

The morning concluded with singing a hymn written by Joy Dine

God who sets us on a journey
to discover dream and grow,
lead us as you led your people
in the desert long ago

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keep us travelling in the knowledge
you are always at our side;
give us courage for the journey
Christ our goal and Christ our guide

The session was planned by the Looking Ahead Group, Ian Geere, Andy Howes, Gwen Mattock, Colin Marchbank-Smith, Alan Redhouse and Lorna Richardson. Owen Roberts is joining the group. Anyone else who is interested in joining should contact Ian.