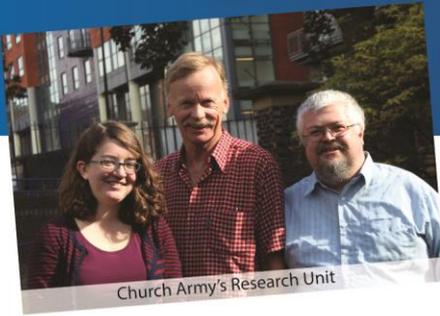


snapshots

stories from the edge

by Church Army's Research Unit



Issue 1: Exploring *Holy Ground*

by George Lings –
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Holy Ground describes itself as alternative and creative worship at Exeter Cathedral. It uses various locations within that sacred space, meeting once a month on the second Sunday. It runs from 7.00-9.00pm containing at least three separate elements, linked by a theme.

In the days of *Encounters on the Edge*, the quarterly booklet from Church Army's Research Unit, our team always tried to have an eye for further additional ways that fresh expressions of church were appearing within the overall mixed economy (parish and fresh expressions existing alongside each other). We thought they could grow in many contexts so were not surprised but pleased to hear of those starting from cathedrals. Our research into the idea of the 'seven sacred spaces' and how cathedrals embody nearly all of them, made us suspect that these were venues that offered more options and possibilities.¹

We had heard of *FEIG* in Gloucester Cathedral, begun in 2006 by Michael Volland and now led by Revd Stephen Clarke. This group talks of itself as an Anglican church and meets twice a month in the chapter house from 4.30-6.00pm as well as fortnightly in homes round the city.²

For a few years I have also been accompanying *Zone 2* in, or should I say under, Liverpool Cathedral, founded by Canon Richard White and meeting in the crypt, café-style weekly at 10.30am, the same time as the upstairs

¹ See *Encounters on the Edge* no. 43 to explore Cell, Chapel, Chapter, Cloister, Garden, Refectory and Scriptorium. www.encountersontheedge.org.uk

² www.feig.org.uk FEIG – pronounced 'feeg' - stands for Fresh Expression In Gloucester.

traditional congregation. They have now begun a second meeting in term time at 4.30pm.³ *Transcendence* is a collaboration between Visions, an alternative worship community and York Minster. It meets on the third Sunday, alternating Mass and Compline.

It seemed time to reflect on at least one cathedral example.



The background

The most obvious feature is Exeter Cathedral itself. Parts of the present building date back to 1122 and are Norman. Major further work in the Gothic style was undertaken in the 13th and 14th centuries. It is said to have the longest vaulted ceiling in Europe. Sited on a spacious, open cathedral green, that used to be its historic burial yard, it has a most imposing western front. With proper pride and innate mission awareness the new Dean, Jonathan Draper, writes on the website:

Welcome to Exeter Cathedral, one of the great cathedrals of England and one of the finest examples of Gothic architecture anywhere... Iconic and beautiful as it is, the cathedral is not a museum. Though we

³ www.liverpoolcathedral.org.uk/worship/zone2-all-age-cafe-style-worship.aspx

are stewards of a significant part of the heritage of Exeter, we are most importantly a living community of faith, working to ensure that everyone who walks through the doors is inspired, engaged and moved by their experience.

The official cathedral leaflet echoes this combination of factors; it unpacks the attractions of a holy space to feed a spiritual journey, explains the memorable architecture that immediately brings to mind a sense of awe and wonder, promotes the quality traditional choral music and offers thoughtful presentation of the heart of what Christians believe and how this is reflected in the cathedral's layout and features. It includes *Holy Ground* among its list of services.

The prototype?

Mark Rylands was the previous Canon Missioner and in 2005 wrote a dissertation, as part of his Cliff College MA, entitled *Mission-shaped Cathedral*, against the backdrop of the thinking suggested in *Mission-shaped Church*. It traces stages throughout the centuries of the changing significance of cathedrals. It explores their various roles: education with school visitors, a cultural contribution to national heritage, the extent to which they depend economically on visitors, their specific choral excellence and what they may offer in forms of attractional evangelism (expecting people to come to us rather than the church meeting them in their context).⁴

At the end he includes diary entries of a summer monthly event, with presentations and installations, called *Life on the Beach*, picking up that the local council saw the cathedral green as a kind of civic inland beach. It proved of interest but too dependent on good weather to be reliable and sustainable. He noted too how in 2004 events badged as 'prayer stations in the cathedral' failed to draw Christians from the diocese but were considerably used by the unsuspecting visitors. All this led to exploration of starting something regular within the cathedral. He applied for three year grants from a charity linked to the cathedral, St Luke's College Foundation, and to the diocesan mission and ministry fund, in order to pay for a part-time

⁴ Readers can read or download this document via the section on our website called SCOLER in which we hold versions of M level and PhD theses related to evangelism and fresh expressions of Church: www.churcharmy.org.uk/scoler

coordinator, the costs of vergers and ongoing discipleship training for a team of volunteers to run what was to be called *Nightchurch*. The costs of the part-time role of the Canon Missioner and use of the cathedral one night a week were covered by the cathedral itself.

From 2006 it met on a Friday night with a variety of aims, all of which separately were commendable: to diversify what the cathedral offered in styles of worship, to engage with the 'missing generations' (that is, the 20-40 bracket), but also to be inclusive and welcoming to all, to provide a placement contributing to the course in discipleship for the annual volunteer group of 8-15 people acting as helpers, and aiming to be a self-supporting congregation of the cathedral within three years, thus embodying the mixed economy.

At its height, more than 100 people were attending from a wide range of backgrounds: people out in Exeter for the evening, students, visitors to Exeter, the homeless, existing Christians from both the cathedral and other Exeter churches, and thus people at very different stages of a faith journey and across the ecumenical spectrum. Mark became Bishop of Shrewsbury in the autumn of 2009 and his successor Canon Anna Norman-Walker, a priest in the diocese, began work in October 2010.

Anna Norman-Walker

Anna grew up the daughter of a Royal Marines Commando officer, who as a result moved home frequently. She learnt with so many homes and schools how to quickly assess both people and situations. By temperament she is naturally strategic and



decisive, goal orientated yet people sensitive. A natural leader who warmly persuades others and also an evangelist, she had come to ordination from a background in nursing and as a working mother of three. She had trained at St John's Nottingham with its evangelical heritage and yet learnt to value other traditions. In her curacy she saw how the attendance of consumerist Christians can both exhaust parish clergy and wreck exploratory and creative work with non-Christians. As a priest-in-charge she had established a fresh expression of Church in rural Willand, using a Radio 2-style of worship for the

whole family, running in parallel with an otherwise traditional service.

By the time she arrived, *Nightchurch* was struggling for numbers but she persevered with what she had inherited and evaluated what she saw. By Easter 2011 she presented a paper analysing the difficulties. At root it was trying to do too many things, for people at too many stages, and with too few resources. It was modelling cathedral-style inclusivity, thus trying to offer hospitality to an unconnected set of people groups. It was also frequently providing creative worship, being a base for groups concerned for social justice and trying to make disciples among those who came. Although by then however, most of the 15 still left who came belonged to churches elsewhere. So *Nightchurch* was brought to an end as covering too varied a clientele, although the official view was that *Nightchurch* dissolved into *Holy Ground* and indeed the monies from trusts that was not yet spent was used to cover *Holy Ground*'s set-up costs.

Consumerist Christians can both exhaust parish clergy and wreck exploratory and creative work with non-Christians.

I am aware from talking to other consultants and pioneers that the trap of attempting to reach too wide a group of people is one repeating temptation for fresh expressions of Church. They may over-react to the accusation that fresh expressions of Church are dubious as being only for highly specific niches, they may draw on the extraordinary ability of Jesus to relate to all kinds of people and they may be a bit desperate to reach someone, somehow. This temptation may be stronger for those kinds that attempt to reach networks (a fresh expression of Church that aims of reach a specific people group or those with a shared interest). In strongly defined neighbourhoods, some sense of shared identity operates. With a diverse set of networks, the problem then becomes that it is very difficult to follow up such a variety of leads. What might suit one group will not be of enduring appeal to other groups; natural meeting places and times for one set just don't work for others. As a result, growing convincing and authentic community is frustrated. The meetings are in danger of becoming a disconnected series of events, in which the only commonality is the leaders trying to make it work for everyone else. This wears

them out and the obvious lack of progress discourages them.

Anna looks back on *Nightchurch* as a prototype from which to learn what worked and what did not. Other lessons to avoid were that by meeting on a Friday, usually in the nave, it was vulnerable to being trumped by other revenue earning one-off events at the cathedral, like a concert. Its life had also been more disconnected from the rest of the cathedral than was healthy. So the genesis of *Holy Ground* deliberately involved other cathedral canons, such as Andrew Godsall, responsible for clergy and adult education, and Carl Turner, the precentor. At his interview, the new dean Jonathan Draper made very clear that he saw *Holy Ground* as an integral yet distinct part of the mission and life of the cathedral. In his previous diocese he had seen such events almost parachute into the cathedral with a show and neither be deeply welcomed nor engaged with its overall life. Positively a precedent had been set, monies had been given, alternative worship approaches had been tried and appreciated, a social justice element was enduring, the space had proved flexible.

***Holy Ground* – what changed and what was kept**

When and its reasons

The day and time changed to second Sunday evening. Second Sunday, due to its alliteration, is easy to remember. First Sundays sometimes are so early in the month that they almost slip by unnoticed: worse, they can clash with bank holidays so people are away, or they are only returning from holidays to spin round for their workaday life. Sunday was chosen to mark the start of a week, although I suspect the secular person thinks of it as the end of the weekend.

The rhythm starting in July 2011 became monthly in the evening, partly to match the resources available, but also to minimise any sense of clash of loyalties for Christian helpers who belong to congregations elsewhere. I find there is an increase in the following views about the strength of monthly gatherings, some of which are pragmatic, others may be deeper. The word 'regular' in relation to church attendance no longer means weekly; the discussion is whether it means fortnightly or monthly, so the surrounding culture of churchgoing is changing. This shift is thought to reflect how full Sundays have become and how pressured life is making absence of further weekend commitments more attractive. Another virtue of monthly is that if big

or deep themes are chosen, their impact may be better assimilated and applied on this monthly frequency than having to compete with different messages sent the following week. A crude test would be to ask existing weekly churchgoers what the sermon was about a fortnight before. In *Holy Ground* the topics, and names of invited speakers, are deliberately not published to minimise the consumerist effect of groupies flooding in to hear their favourite guru but never becoming regulars.

Revisiting the notion of monthly

More resource-hungry kinds of fresh expression of Church, like alternative worship, serious café Church, Messy Church and seeker church (where a service is aimed primarily at visitors rather than existing members of the congregation), all tend to have a monthly frequency, partly out of manageability but also with some sense of intention.

Monthly may also be one apt rhythm amidst many at a cathedral: consider daily offices, weekly services, and even annual pilgrimages. There may also be an inverse relationship between the size of a celebration and its frequency. The notion of having a full Easter monthly is faintly ridiculous and in the case of Christmas would be appalling. Months are themselves named and they are thought better markers of rhythms and intervals than weeks, by which performance figures are gathered.



Some suggest that the virtues of weekly may be exaggerated. The nature of more profound celebrations is that they are spaced out. Something substantial has happened between them. I reflect that weekly worship was not Old Testament practice until the invention of the synagogue in exile. Before then the vast majority of Jewish people, who did not live near where the Ark currently rested, or latterly in Jerusalem, may at most have made annual pilgrimage but otherwise said their prayers at home or in the fields. Others today begin to urge that monthly gathering for worship would leave more time for living life, serving others, and applying new learning. Discipleship may be more about changing our patterns of living, than learning

new facts. It takes time and significant repetition to establish those new patterns.

The downsides are that to miss a month means a two month gap. It is then easier to miss people and not spot when pastoral care is needed. Monthly also can feel too much like a series of events, not the meeting of a community. What may be needed to nurture life in Christ between monthly gatherings? Here one example is the weekly pub group meeting term time at the White Hart, which involves discussion and appeals to the young adults and students. Some of the objections are met by how the monthly meeting is conducted and what interactions are enabled.

Discipleship may be more about
changing our patterns of living, than
learning new facts.

What has continued in *Holy Ground* is use of the spaces the cathedral offers, leadership from within the cathedral staff, some key members from the past, the balance of finance left over from the initial grants, instincts for creative worship and weekly work with a homeless café on Friday nights. This was based initially at St Petroc's Church across the green and latterly at the chapter house. It runs from 7.45pm till closing time, around food and with table games. 30-50 come and two teams of young adult volunteers of 10 lead it, with whom there is prayer beforehand. Most of these volunteers also worship at *Holy Ground* which is where they were recruited from. This unites two meanings of the word 'service': serving others and services offered to God.

Who for and why

The *Holy Ground* section of the cathedral website explains who it may be for:

Holy Ground is for anyone who is interested in engaging with Christian spirituality in a contemplative and creative way and who perhaps finds more traditional models of church a little inaccessible. *Holy Ground* offers an opportunity to engage in Christian worship, matters of Christian concern and prayer to those who are interested in the Christian faith but would not necessarily call themselves Christian. *Holy Ground* provides an environment where questions can be asked, worship expressed and prayers offered without any expectation of becoming 'a

member', friendships can be made and faith journey explored. *Holy Ground* is for anyone interested in creative approaches to worship and prayer.⁵

Behind this lie the emerging convictions of Anna and the team. What is there in a chasm that might be characterised as between the staid diet of *Hymns Ancient & Modern* at one end and, with what seems to them at the other end, the froth of repeated choruses that demand an unflaggingly passionate and highly emotional spirituality? Equally, what is there that remains orthodox yet is open to questions and exploration? What takes seriously the insights of adult education and enables learning through interaction as well as presentation? Where can one find an approach that faces directly the doubts and tough issues poised by today's pluralist, multi-faith society, its ethical dilemmas and absence of absolutes, not to mention the evident and inexplicable suffering in the world?

As the world is so busy and competitive and not looking like changing from that, where apart from periodic retreats or meditation practices (Christian and otherwise) can contemplatives find shared rhythms of quieter prayer? They think that the gifts of liturgy include providing a sturdy shaped framework that gives safe space for silence, stations and time to ponder. Its vocabulary is formed by the love of fewer better words, ones that endure and roost in the memory. These words become familiar language through which one passes to encounter with God.

One answer to all these questions is that there is the Greenbelt festival and this year about 30 people from *Holy Ground* went there, so *Holy Ground* does not meet in August. But that is an annual festival. What might be more local and more regular? There are churches in Exeter that do provide for either end of that musical, educational and exploratory spectrum, but there is little in between. Is this a contribution a cathedral can make?

Anna is vexed that her experience teaches her that there are adults in our churches who tolerate what happens in church for the sake of bringing up their children within them, but cannot engage with what is offered week by week. I hear it said but have not seen the hard

evidence recently⁶ that believing church leavers continue to be a significant statistic. Anna has a deep concern for all these kinds of de-churched people. She longs for the stimulation of believing minds and the reawakening of committed faith.

I think it is meaningful to distinguish between the de-churched who still have a personal faith and those who were but cultural Christians. Yet either kind can become the closed de-churched. Indeed, Anna is aware of ministers who, had they not been in their leadership role, would be among those who had given up attending. Again I hear that a number of clergy on retirement, by choice no longer attend church at all.

There are adults in our churches who tolerate what happens in church for the sake of bringing up their children within them, but cannot engage with what is offered week by week.

Further out from helping those in the Christian and de-churched segments, what might connect with the non-churched and the kind of Exeter middle class thinking people who read *The Guardian*, listen to Radio 4, may vote Lib-Dem, have concerns for social justice and are artists and creatives? What might work for graduates who have stayed on and post grads who arrive, Met Office staff who have moved to Exeter, new Uni staff and the students who may even have come from overseas? Can the safety of anonymous attending, perhaps literally hiding behind a convenient pillar - for both of which cathedrals are praised - be a way forward for all these groups? How can those who come be stimulated and receive, but in such a way that they would bring others? Does that not fit well with the vision of a cathedral to be a resourcing church to its surrounding diocese?

So those who come are still a mix. A third are Christians interested in creative liturgy, but committed elsewhere. Another group are the believing but not attending de-churched, likely to be post-evangelical and/or post-charismatic, whether or not they use those labels. Among them are young and middle aged adults who want to talk about faith. The final third are both church and non-church students for whom

⁵ www.exeter-cathedral.org.uk/worship/holy-ground.ashx

⁶ Alan Jamieson, *A Churchless Faith* (London: SPCK, 2002) examined this phenomenon in the UK and New Zealand.

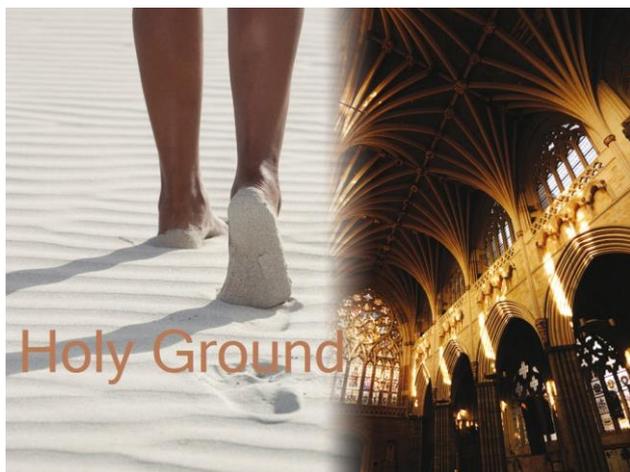
the university Christian Union does not work, and can be referrals from the chaplain, James Theodosious, who is a team member. The overall age group I saw was 20-80, but my visit fell outside university term time so the older ones predominated among the 85-90 people who came.

Getting closer to *Holy Ground*

The values

Quite deliberately, but in a fairly understated way, a *Holy Ground* meeting has three elements. The ethos is given on the two-sided postcard which has been very carefully designed with minimal words and a few striking images.

On the front are two images as shown here: a pair of barefoot ankles walking over what is probably desert sand (I still can't tell the gender of the person on the journey), and a photo of the ceiling of Exeter nave.



Superimposed on the nave roof, on the postcard version, there is a minimalist set of words:

Ancient faith, future hope
 Guided contemplation
 Café style engagement
 Reflective installations

On the other side of the postcard are the feet once more, but set in more desert sand. Below the words 'Holy Ground' is the text from Exodus 3 commanding the removal of Moses' sandals. To the right of the feet and on the open untracked sand are just nine words:

space to worship
 space to think
 space to reflect

Later I understood better. The first group of words is the list of values and the second set explains the format of *Holy Ground*. But it is a matter of 'let those who get it do so', not something imposed. Those who know my work will not be surprised that I turn to values first, for my belief is that without them, the format can be merely copied by people. Therefore, the format become robbed of its inner life.

'Ancient faith, future hope' draws on being in a cathedral. People have worshipped the Christian God here at least from Saxon times; the faith in Christ itself is yet more ancient. *Holy Ground* is rooted in the Christian value of catholicity; it deliberately connects to Bible, saints and tradition. Its first section of most evenings is Eucharistic. The catholicity is expressed too in seeing itself as but part of the whole – one congregation within the cathedral, linked to an ancient past yet today inclusive of several groups in society.

Yet there is also 'future hope', for believers in the kingdom of God think that the present is being shaped by the future, not just influenced by the past. Embracing a future, it has no qualms about using contemporary technology or artistic skills; being concerned for the future, an element of its life is concern for social justice. It seeks to envision and move people on, rather than to renew which perhaps faces backwards in restoration.

'Guided contemplation' draws on the values of inherited wisdom; the term has echoes of monasticism, spiritual direction and retreats. Equally it is not, shall I call it, the charismatic style of New Wine. The 'café-style engagement' honours the minds and respects the opinions of all who are there; it is a forum for conversation and exploration, not a school with a curriculum and teachers.

'Reflective installations' (creative and interactive prayer spaces) takes this freedom and trust further. There is preparation and prayer in what is offered for people to explore, but it is accompanied by trust in both them and the Holy Spirit. Each person will experience and take something different away from this.

The shape and the animators

Space to worship

7.00-7.45pm is influenced by what I would call alternative worship, usually including the shape of Eucharistic liturgy. It can be held in the nave west of the altar, or, as I saw, in the space between the altar and the dominant rood screen. Sometimes it has been held in the quire. Usually the seating will be in an arc. This is a community that gathers, not a film to be watched. It is multi-voiced, the presiding roles shared between two anchor people, and yet further others will read, lead prayers, guide a meditation. There is evident use of the visual, starting with a signature *Holy Ground* loop of images and occasional single phrases or words, set to reflective classical music.

This is a community that gathers, not a film to be watched.

Anna welcomed us, highlighted the theme 'Running over rocks' and explained the shape and options. Her co-presenter James led a section combining the reading from Exodus 3 about holy ground, slides of appropriate images, and inviting people to remove their shoes which they willingly did, in order to notice more fully what they stood upon. A guided meditation by another team member followed, involving movement around the cathedral, inviting us to notice and be grateful for what was solid ground in our lives and name them, but noticing too that the shapes of others' feet were different, how we cannot simply stand in their shoes, and inviting compassion for them. In turn Ian Adams led the congregation in body prayer, prayer that incorporates movement. These, together with some gospel texts read out, constituted exploration of the word.

All those taking leading roles were wearing *Holy Ground* brown hoodies – vaguely evoking a modern Franciscan feel. I expressed later my ambivalence about these garments. Positively it identified them as staff, having a right to lead and direct, rather like cabin crew on a Jumbo jet or hotel staff in the lobby. It created a sense of a team operating well together. The effect was neither clerical nor lay, but marking them out somehow as inner core; yet it was not clear who was allowed to wear one. What would happen if someone attending asked: 'Can I have one too?' Should receiving one be linked to baptism or some other rite of initiation into

Holy Ground? As they are exploring having a rule of life perhaps that is a good context in which those questions can be better pondered. Is the hoodie a badge of office: is it a mark of a further or deeper belonging? If so, what promises might be made, what lifestyle embodied, what covenant made with God and the community within *Holy Ground* and even the wider cathedral community?



James presided at communion in a liturgy combining all advised Eucharistic necessities, yet nuanced to the theme of the evening. All were invited to receive - either communion or a blessing - at the hands of the hooded leaders. Curiously I thought in reception they did not make eye contact with the recipients. Such impersonality has always disappointed me in cathedral worship, as if the weight of human traffic passing through, or the magnificence of the setting, has dulled the domestic communal sense of the Lord's Supper. *Holy Ground* it may be, but discipleship is a communal journey.

The dismissal or sending out was a charming visually supported version of the prayer: 'Christ has no hands but yours...'. Oddly the slides chosen were inspiring images of the glories and intimacies of creation, but contained no images of people. I gathered later it had been bought in and there was no time to provide amendments or substitutes. However, despite such minor niggles, the overall time had credibility, authenticity and humility. It was generous trusting space to worship – just as it said on the postcard.

Time to sup and to choose

We then moved from the nave to the chapter house, transformed earlier that afternoon into a café space. I could not help noticing that once more we were deliberately and usefully moving

around some of the seven sacred spaces ⁷ and the overall evening was better for it. So, some time spent in chapel now met with some refectory and cloister dynamics as refreshments were consumed and people met some they didn't know, some they did, and maybe some they wished they hadn't.

After this short break - normally 15-20 minutes - it is time to make a choice. People can either stay and engage, sometimes with a speaker followed by substantial Q&A, or at other times there is a panel on a topic.

Or, they can move to one of the side chapels where there is Ignatian guided meditation (a way of imagining yourself in a Bible passage). The café option has thoughtful content and so combines refectory and scriptorium functions. Learning is being passed on in the context of a welcome drink. I was slightly surprised that there was no food, not even nibbles or doughnuts, but learnt it was a matter of staffing, taking more time, costs and resources.

Space to think

Andrew Godsall is both a cathedral canon and diocesan Director of Ministry. Within the cathedral his remit is adult education, therefore, there is logic in him taking responsibility for this segment of *Holy Ground* life. In practice this means that he chooses and books up visiting presenters up to a year in advance. He freely told me who was in the pipeline, but in that *Holy Ground* does not indulge in that kind of advertising I should not disclose them. I can say they include known theologians and broadcasters; there have also been poets and artists. It struck me as not utterly unlike a curious mixture of BBC Radio 4's *Desert Island Discs* (where a celebrity chooses which songs they would take to a desert island with them), through the self-disclosure by the speaker, and BBC Radio 4's *Any Questions* with the robust challenges that could be put.

The emphasis is on treating people as adults.

Sole visiting speakers make up only half of the year and at other times there could be a panel

⁷ See *Encounters on the Edge* no. 43 to explore Cell, Chapel, Chapter, Cloister, Garden, Refectory and Scriptorium. www.encountersontheedge.org.uk

of more local but qualified faces. When a panel is present, each presents for a very few minutes, followed by 'goldfish bowl' interaction between them, before it is thrown open to the meeting. At other times people are invited to explore the theme around their coffee tables. Deliberately the café ambience was chosen to assist a more conversational style of engagement and learning. It is assumed that of those present only half may be regulars and half occasional.



The themes have been wide across spirituality, the arts, social and current issues. The emphasis is on treating people as adults. When I was there, Ian Adams did more than a book launch for his recent work *Running Over Rocks*; he touched on the need for Christians to make a difference, how we can learn holy habits, and what lay behind the book's themes. In view of the non-churched and de-churched present, Ian was careful to use soft terms like: 'in the Jesus tradition...' or 'those to follow the Jesus path...'. There was not the sense that this was yet one more vertical cliff face for the intrepid Christian to scale. Rather, it included coming home to deep enduring Christian and so human values, cherishing the earth, our bodies, stillness, even our falls and losses, and seeing wonder in the ordinary.

Question time followed and after a slow start the questions were apt and even sharp as befits a truly open style. Though Ian is a well-known friend of *Holy Ground*, he was not let off the tough implications. Normally 'space to think' will run from just after eight o'clock through until just before nine. That might be half and half presentation and interaction.

My last comment on this section is that I find it unusual to find both the alternative worship and café streams in one overall event. I have no sense that this combination does not work, it is just a bit rare.

Space to reflect

This element finds a home in one of the many side chapels that provide a safe and small enough space. Until now many have been led by Tim Treanor, a curate in the diocese, who sadly for *Holy Ground* is moving to another post and diocese. His own journey has been along the paths of Ignatian spirituality and a concern that the riches found in a retreat context should be taken beyond the monastery.

Guided Ignatian work is both contemplative and deeply charismatic.

While determined that how this is led is hospitable and gives space to participants to explore Ignatian spirituality, Jesus is always central. This would be reflected in the choice of a gospel story as the basis for meditation or by imagining Jesus in an everyday situation.



The broad shape of the 55 minutes includes a led process of stilling and centring, offering an introductory scene and invitation to imagination. Interspersing significant silences with short questions or comment keeps some structure. The closing section is an invitation to have a distilled interior conversation, replaying the tape of the hour and noticing what to take home. Tim himself would enter his own process of prayer and thus be both engaged with Christ in meditation and also wishing to be sensitive to the Spirit as to when he moved the shape onward for others. In that sense guided Ignatian work is both contemplative and deeply charismatic. Giving space to the person meditating, and to the Spirit of Christ to reveal what he wishes, is risky and trusting. Its results underlie the presence of God amidst the ordinary and can be acts of re-evangelisation. Tim concurred when I likened his role to being an actor aware of both the other players and the

audience. A helpful background is created using the richness of the cathedral building and its provision of some more intimate smaller spaces.

Another space to come?

The team includes those with artistic and educational gifts and there are ideas to develop this. There is the germ of one idea that those gifts could widen the media by which the early part of the evening in 'chapel' is experienced, as happens customarily in alternative worship. Another idea is to increase the range of choices put at the mid-meeting choosing time. It would air the opportunity to use yet another part of the cathedral where those who came would be creative, doubtless in a variety of media, which is its own form of work. As such I see 'work' as engaging with the sacred space I recognise as garden. In parts of the monastic tradition it is not just worship which is seen as the work of God, but also study and physical activity.

Filling out the picture

Who are its leaders?

Already there is a loose band gathered around Anna Norman-Walker; these include James Theodosious the university chaplain, Andrew Godsall the Canon Chancellor, Carl Turner the Precentor, Andrew Marries who is skilled in musical arrangement and playing, and Michael Graham the current organ scholar. Such a list sounds both more established and generous than in reality. The practice is that some of them are free to gather on a Friday morning, to pray and to plan 10 days before the next meeting to work through the theme and creative approaches to it. I should add that the broad themes are decided well in advance of this, particularly if there are outside speakers to be booked. Anna would wish to add to the leading some of the young adults, but for those in work, Friday morning is not the obvious choice. Like many a fresh expressions of Church leader, there is still a nagging thought that *Holy Ground* is significantly leader or rather founder dependent, both in relation to bringing creative people and ideas together and keeping the overall direction on track. Reliance on this dynamic is only finally tested when a founder moves on or when a fresh expression of Church gives birth to a further example elsewhere.

Living by a rule

Because the leaders are seeking how a *Holy Ground* identity and practice can become more than a monthly meeting, there has been some work on a possible rule of life (a set of

guidelines on how to live), but this is complicated by uncertainty about whether it should be suitable for use by the whole cathedral community, or specific to those who choose to be part of *Holy Ground*. One response to that question might be determined by what height the bar is set. The lower and more inclusive version would have to be more aspirational, invitational and almost entirely voluntary. A more demanding version would lean more to traditional vows and by necessity be vocational and in that sense exclusive, tested and accountable. Church Army more recently has adopted four pathways for its mission community, which are indicators of different gifts and different degrees of availability, but not of status. Being aware of such variety might even lead to consideration whether both versions could exist, with the possibility of moving by choice and consent from the less taxing to the more intensive level.

A cathedral usually rejoices in very blurred boundaries about who comes.

At present the draft document that was freely shown to me leans more to the former. I noticed it is provisionally called the Exeter Cathedral Way of Life and the word 'rule' is absent from the title, although not the content, and even the less austere sounding term 'rhythm'. This draft version centres around four disciplines - or they may even be casts of mind - called listening, speaking, doing and being. There are both succinct explanations of the terms and then some resources to assist people to apply them. I would welcome the addition of the option to make oneself accountable to another community member for seeking to live by these attributes, if only on an annual basis. But here again a cathedral usually rejoices in very blurred boundaries about who comes, belongs, etc, and that suggestion might feel too tight. I will be interested to see whether those nearer the heart of *Holy Ground* feel in practice that the early experimental version of the rule asks enough of them. It might be a good test.

How does *Holy Ground* get known?

One conundrum here is that most forms of traditional communication are likely to make contact with existing churchgoers or the casual visitor. The former are not the prime reason for its existence and a sustainable life is difficult to build out of the latter. Therefore, it may be right that its existence is merely noted by cathedral

publicity which lists it as one of the services on offer, but usually without a line of explanation indicating how it is connected to and different from all the other cathedral services.

The quality postcard alluded to in the section on values, which introduces the subsequent format, is available without being prominent in the cathedral and can be given by existing members to their friends. It points the acute reader to links on Facebook and Twitter. Anna thinks some 500 visit the Facebook site and there are some 100 followers on Twitter. Notifications via Facebook are sent out to around 150 people, indicating that it has a wider appeal than those who regularly attend. A relational link is through the chaplaincy and students being told of its existence.

I was struck at the end of the Sunday evening that a standard message to those present was: 'We'll tell you about the next gathering via



email. Who is not yet on our regular email list and would like to be?' Several hands went up and people readily signed up. Already 80 are on the existing list. I hear something similar in some youth churches, though that is more done by texting.

Might it reproduce elsewhere?

The leaders are very open to this. It could be made easier by a deliberate choice to operate a franchise over its growing store of ideas and materials. I have already noted that a few other cathedrals are diversifying what they offer. I see no reason why it should be limited to cathedral churches. *Holy Ground* has multiple spaces that can be easily reached from one another, not least in winter. Therefore, many larger churches and especially ones with interconnected smaller rooms could explore this road.

Two factors stand out for me that would be more likely to lead to success or failure. The first is that the use of *Holy Ground* materials should not be slavishly copied but considered and adapted to context. The context will include who it is intended for and what local resources in people and venues are available. The second is that this should not primarily be entertainment for frustrated Christians, nor only a top up event to keep them motoring back at the parish church. If it is to mature it will become a community with a discernible mission and life of its own.

What is *Holy Ground*?

Anna presently defines it as 'a congregation of the cathedral providing uniquely what a cathedral can do'. Congruent with this, the senior staff at the cathedral see it as a *bona fide* part of its overall life. I confess I wish there was consistency over the language that surrounds it in the variety of publicity and far prefer the vocabulary of 'congregation' to that of 'a service'.

Congregation is preferable because unless and until we are serious about the identity and health of the community who are engaged in both worship and mission, the worst parts of Christendom practice, so typical of 'services' - such as passive attendance, minimal personal interaction, clerical domination and the absence of outward facing mission - remain lurking in the shadows and still call the shots. If *Holy Ground* were to be reproduced elsewhere, the term 'uniquely' in the current definition would no longer work and would have to be replaced by a more modest term such as 'classically'.

Holy Ground materials should not be slavishly copied but considered and adapted to context.

Rather typical of cathedral life, there is little sense of formal membership, although posts on Facebook and elsewhere refer to others as 'Holy Grounders' which to me is an intriguing step towards self-identity. By contrast, the present wide mixture of those who come also makes growing a clear identity more challenging. It will be interesting to see how that plays out. My fear for it would be a drift towards an event. It will need a committed core, open to others choosing to join it, to resist that. Those members who come most monthly Sunday evenings and serve in the Friday Café are in a rhythm of worship, sharing lives and serving others in mission. That is a promising core. I am intrigued that, typical of cathedral life, other aspects of Anglican practice, as well as some new monastic communities, describe themselves as 'committed at the core and loose at the edges'.

I leave readers to ponder whether it is a fresh expression of Church. I expect they will ask: 'Is it missional and to whom?'
I expect they will ask in what senses it is church.

I hope they will factor in, in relation to both essential questions, that its context is a cathedral; it has always had looser boundaries of who is in or out because its sheer size and history means it will outlive them all. How good that *Holy Ground* is widening what that means in practice.

George Lings
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