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News:

Wellbeing café movement growing

Just over a year after Renew 37, a wellbeing café in Nottingham, won funding to replicate its work, nine more cafés have opened or are due to, writes Kira Taylor

Since winning the Cinnamon Project Lab award in 2016, Renew has expanded, with churches from Doncaster to Northampton opening (or about to open) their own wellbeing café style spaces where "it is okay not to be okay".

The project won the award for having a "strong model and methodology that it can train other churches to use", according to the Cinnamon Network. The award funding came alongside access to expert advice and government and market contacts to help other churches set up similar projects. In addition to the nine which have subsequently opened, there are "more in the pipeline", according to charity director and Baptist pastor Ruth Rice.

Such has been the growth Ruth has stepped away from being the pastor of New Life Baptist Church in Nottingham to become the full-time director of the charity Renew Wellbeing.

Explaining why the movement has grown, she said, 'I think it's because God was already in it. We just joined in. He gave me the idea in a dream. It's so simple too and based on prayer.'

'So much mental health social action is exhausting and damaging and non-sustainable. This is simple and calm and life giving. The partnership with the mental health team means the church does not over give or try to do health care that it can't do.'

Renew 37 has been running for two and a half years now and seeks to provide a sense of belonging without labels, and with access to mental health advice. It was set up in response to Psalm 68: "you put the lonely in families or set the captives free". It is open Monday to Thursday and offers a wide range of activities from mental health workshops to a guitar group.

At a time when mental health services are stretched, Ruth says the cafés are needed: 'Regulars self-report feelings of belonging and feeling less depressed and anxious, less lonely.'

'Based on one person's story over one year at Renew 37, the saving in health care costs was around £40,000 if you compared his service usage and hospital admission from the previous year.'

'Success is difficult to measure, but there is good anecdotal evidence from several centres. Especially those that have been open longest. Several folk have come to faith.'

Looking to the future, she added, 'I long to see places of welcome like this in every town and village.'

'I think every church would benefit from a renew space and every community would find their wellbeing improved.'

Modern Slavery summits in EBA

There is a good chance someone in your neighbourhood is a victim of modern slavery. Could you be part of God's rescue plan for them? Baptist minister Dan Pratt explains why the Eastern Baptist Association has organised three modern slavery summits

Churches within the Eastern Baptist Association have found themselves encountering people who have been held in modern slavery. Here at 57 West, Southend, we have regularly come across people who were being exploited for labour in carwashes or paving people's driveways. Some were being held against their will. With the help of the police, we were able to safeguard some of these people.

In January 2017 we ran an awareness raising workshop about modern slavery for local churches. Through the workshop another local church identified someone vulnerable to modern slavery. With the help of the police this individual was safeguarded.

These examples are not isolated. Since the beginning of 2016, Essex police identified 253 potential victims of modern slavery within the county.

The Eastern Baptist Association recently sent a questionnaire to each of its churches relating to modern slavery. From the 47 churches who responded, 69 per cent of the churches indicated they thought it likely that instances of modern slavery were occurring within their community. Nineteen per cent of those churches had knowingly been in contact with people who had experienced modern slavery or who were at risk of being enslaved.

The surveyed churches highlighted the need of educating and training churches about modern slavery. Suggestions included:

- how to spot the signs of slavery;
- how to work in partnership with the police and other community groups;
- how to offer care and safeguard those who have been exploited, or who are vulnerable to exploitation.

In response to this questionnaire and feedback, the Eastern Baptist Association has teamed up with the Church of England's modern slavery project 'The Clewer Initiative'.

Together we are co-hosting three Modern Slavery Summits in Norwich, Cambridge and Chelmsford. The summits will provide training in knowing how to combat modern slavery.

Input will be given by local police and other antislavery organisations. There will be opportunity to learn how to spot the signs and report concerns, and how to work in partnership with local agencies to make your community slavery free.

Witard Road Baptist Church, Norwich is hosting the first summit next Saturday (27 January). Its minister Steve Thomasson writes, 'According to some statistics there are at least 13,000 people in modern day slavery in the UK today! Surely not in my neighbourhood? Not in Norwich?

'If a relative of mine was innocently caught up in the slave trade, wouldn't you hope and pray that someone, somewhere would notice them and come to their rescue?

'I need my eyes opening that I might be part of God's rescue plan for someone. I hope this summit will help to inform and equip me to act.'

All are welcome to these free events, but please do sign up here:
Saturday, 27 January, 10.30-2.30pm, Witard Road Baptist Church, Norwich.
Book via Eventbrite: <https://norwichslaverysummit.eventbrite.co.uk>

Saturday, 3 March, 10.30 – 2.30pm, St Paul's Church, Cambridge
Book via Eventbrite: <https://cambridgeslaverysummit.eventbrite.co.uk>

Saturday, 17 March, 10.30 – 2.30pm, Central Baptist Church, Chelmsford
Book via Eventbrite: <https://chelmsfordslaverysummit.eventbrite.co.uk>

New YouTube channel for young Christians

YouTubing is the number one activity of all 11-18s - and Youth for Christ has created the Sync Coach to engage them and help young Christians share their faith

The Sync Coach has been designed to captivate young people 'with the message of the gospel and train them to share their faith in a relevant, relational way'.

The channel has been created following YFC's ground-breaking research 'Gen Z: Rethinking Culture', which revealed that YouTubing is the number one activity of all 11-18s.

'The Sync Coach invades this space, engages young people where they are at and challenges them to reach their mates,' YFC said in a press release.

The Sync Coach, which is completely free, comprises a series of films for young people - ten daily sessions that take young people through a fun and relational way of sharing faith through stories. There are four interactive youth sessions for groups to take part in, and a film series for youth workers to watch alongside their young people to train them to be more effective evangelists.

It is probably 'the most holistic' resource YFC has created, continued the press release. 'By the end of The Sync Coach, each young person will be able to share their story and communicate the gospel in a relevant way, be praying for a few friends and be committed to great relationships with those around them.'

Youth for Christ National Director Neil O'Boyle said, 'I am so excited by the launch of Sync. We are convinced it has the power to change a nation. Imagine the potential of every Christian young person equipped and committed to reaching their friends.'

You can check out the free films and sessions at www.yfc.co.uk/sync

Honiton Family Church

A church which has undergone transformational change and invites people to 'Come and join the adventure'

This church has undergone a transformational change. Their minister Luke arrived in 2013 and the church said they knew they were dying and needed to change. There were 27 people in the church, most of them over 70. That was a shock to Luke and the family as they were used to a larger, younger church, but the call was there.

Acts 17:23

For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, 'To an unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.

Paul's approach in Acts 17 is what Luke has used. They listened and looked at their local community. They started a kids club and this grew over time. Luke's own children were small so they started a toddler group. Luke's wife is a natural

evangelist and they have avoided the normal difficulties churches have with toddler groups. Key to this each year is the graduation service for all the children moving on to school. This a special service in church.

As the church began to grow, Luke asked the church 'are we prepared for the disruption that these new relationships will bring?' The answer was yes.

This wasn't about doing things that church 'do' but praying and reflecting carefully and looking for opportunities.

One of these is Pub church on a Sunday once a month. A local Pub didn't open on Sunday and they could use it for free.

Luke is passionate about sport and men's ministry and they have football team. Sport is a great way to spread the Gospel. These conversations have happened for Luke in the pub after the game. They also have a 'Nerf night' for younger people.

Church began to grow and baptisms started to happen and soon the question was asked 'what is the next step?' So they moved to a local school with significant space and opportunity.

Next year they are taking on another new initiative and running a large conference, 'The Encounter Conference' - three days of life changing worship, teaching and ministry.

'Come join the adventure' is their invitation.

Features

Looking for a new resource to help you journey through Lent? Our reviewers assess some of the latest titles

Songs of the Spirit by Megan Daffern

This book on the Psalms by Megan Daffern is a classic Lent book. Each day during Lent, starting from Ash Wednesday and culminating on Easter Saturday, is assigned a Psalm.

Each individual reading starts with the author's own translation of the psalm from the Hebrew, and this is one of the enormous strengths of this book. Daffern's translations are fresh and arresting, and the combination of careful scholarship with a deep personal faith has resulted in translations which are a delight to read.

The psalm is then followed by a commentary, which usually runs to two or three pages.

Finally, each daily reading ends with a question, such as “Who are shepherds in our society?” for Psalm 23, or “Do you have angry thoughts and feelings you can hand over to God?” for Psalm 137.

This book is heartily recommended to all those who wish to enrich their Lenten journey in 2018. There can be no better way to journey through Lent than to root our prayer life in the Psalms, and Megan Daffern is a wise and knowledgeable guide on this journey.

The Art of Lent: A painting a day from Ash Wednesday to Easter
By Sister Wendy Beckett

In this beautiful, full colour, pocket size book Sister Wendy Beckett’s short daily reflections invite us to prayerfully consider some of the timeless questions of the Lenten narrative such as, how do I choose and surrender to joy or embrace courage, even in the midst of powerlessness and suffering? Or what does it mean for me to live a meaningful life, what passions and sacrifices bring me peace and enable me to live fruitfully?

Sister Wendy, well known for her poignant understanding of art works through her BBC documentaries and best selling books, brings alive 40 of the world’s greatest paintings using her knowledge of the scriptures and her prayerful observance of daily life. Themes of silence, humility, peace, joy, confidence and love are accompanied by both contemporary and traditional art works and a depth of wisdom gained from her many years of study, contemplative prayer and intercession, centred on the self emptying life of Jesus.

This little gem is the perfect gift for those who are on the fringes of church as well as for those of us who want to explore alternative and creative ways of journeying through the coming season of Lent.

Lent Talks: A collection of broadcasts by Nick Baines, Giles Fraser, Bonnie Greer, Alexander McCall Smith, James Runcie and Ann Widdecombe

This slim volume – 65 pages – bearing the BBC Radio4 logo features the distilled thoughts of two crime writers, a playwright, a former cabinet minister, a bishop and a parish priest. What emerges is as varied as the contributors themselves and often unorthodox, but nevertheless thought-provoking.

A strength of the book are the five Questions For Reflection which conclude each talk and allow the major ideas presented to be chewed over. They enable Lent to not

only be observed but harnessed as a time for profound thinking – drinking in, as well as giving up.

This can be a tool for the Christian who wishes to come at the familiar events of the Passion from a fresh angle.

The Way of the Carmelites by James McCaffrey

A helpful introduction to Carmelite thinking. The book consists of six chapters explaining various aspects of Carmelite life: the Rule, the heritage of Elijah, reading scriptures with Mary (Lectio Divina), Terseian spirituality (prayer), the love that leads to Calvary, and the Holy Spirit. Each chapter ends with three questions to reflect on.

There are some useful aspects such as the explanation of Lectio Divina.

However, the subtitle of the book is “a prayer journey through Lent”, and within two sentences the author admits that Carmelites rarely if ever speak about Lent. I came away from reading this book with more knowledge about Carmelite saints than ideas on Lenten practice. Perhaps those more in the Catholic tradition might more easily make links.