



Milton Keynes Mission Partnership
2019 - 2020

Report from Chair of Trustees and the Director of Ecumenical Mission

Introduction



The year has fallen into three relatively distinct phases: the first, up to the end of 2019, was shaped by a number of challenging features which depleted energy within the organisation; the second, in the early part of 2020 was a period of recovery and regaining some stability; the third phase was initiated by the advent of the coronavirus pandemic and the significant changes that are currently unfolding in the country. This report is written within that overall context.

Mission Capacity and Projects

Leadership and Vision



MK: a City Alive to God continues to drive the direction of the Mission Partnership. It is particularly important that we maintain a focus on the vision at a time in which it would be easy to turn inwards towards the shape and survival of the church in the wake of the pandemic. We have made a conscious effort to encourage positive engagement with the changes that the

pandemic is bringing in the light of the vision through conversations, learning opportunities and meetings.

Progress on leadership development was strongly bound up with the Learning Hub project. Serious setbacks in that project have accordingly impacted on leadership development. However, opportunities to step into leadership have increased for both clergy and lay stemming from involvement with both Citizens:MK and Redeeming Our Communities (ROC) and through the new conditions created by the pandemic. It has been heartening to see new people embracing these emerging roles and begin to expand leadership capacity as a result.

Adult Learning



Following the intentional scaling back of the coMPass programme in the early part of 2019, it took some time for engagement to pick up again with low take up for courses in the autumn and early spring. The loss of input on prayer as the Society of the Sacred Mission moved out of Milton Keynes from their base in the Priory at Willen also limited the potential offer. However, there are now signs of some recovery here with good interest in a course relating the Bible and ethics, which moved on line during the course, but more especially with strong response to on line sessions exploring theological questions raised

by the pandemic. It is very clear that interest in the kind of questions raised by the pandemic is high and there are important implications here for enabling this kind of exploration. There are also new opportunities and challenges raised by the enforced move to online learning to which we are paying significant attention. All of this has an effect on the shape of any Learning Hub in the future, radically altering the approach.

Prayer

We recorded last year the imminent departure of the Society of the Sacred Mission from Milton Keynes. This has now taken place and left a significant gap in the life of the city and the church, not least in terms of prayer. However, a new initiative in the form of Pray:MK has emerged through the “Celebrate and Bless MK” process, with funding from the Diocese of Oxford.



This has instigated a new approach with a strong and growing on line presence, made all the more important by the restrictions on physical meeting space necessitated by the pandemic. Worth noting, too, that the pandemic has also generated more online prayer opportunities across the churches and broadened engagement accordingly. During the year, it was a delight to be involved in a pilgrimage through the city, ending with a service at Olney to celebrate the 240th anniversary of the hymn “Amazing Grace” and the civic prayer breakfast was run for a second time, again attracting widespread support from civic representatives. Unfortunately, both of

these events will not be repeated in 2020 due to the pandemic.

Projects

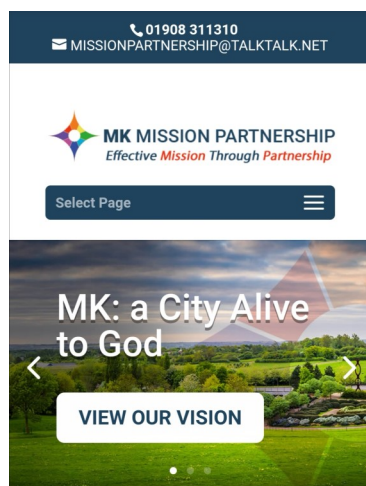
Having invested considerable time and energy in the Learning Hub project during 2019, a number of serious challenges have inhibited its progress. Firstly, highly promising negotiations with the Society of the Sacred Mission to establish a first class venue for the project foundered. This not only meant that the project could no longer develop from a strong physical base, but that the leverage for other elements of the project stemming from the acquisition of the site was also lost. Subsequent attempts to secure the SSM library for the city have also been thwarted representing the loss of a significant asset. Secondly, work on developing the remote learning capacity was compromised by an unavoidable loss of availability of key people. Thirdly, an attempt to grow a mentoring scheme within one LEP struggled to attract sufficient numbers despite strong local encouragement, raising questions over the mentoring approach for the project. These challenges, coupled with the drop off in the regular coMPass programme, meant that the project lost momentum. However, it is strongly believed that the basic need for such a project remains, a position endorsed by the significant interest displayed in the July 2019 Assembly which, with a focus on the Learning Hub, drew a substantial increase in attendance. The advent of lockdown clearly also has a major impact on the future shape of the project with the lack of available physical space and the wider adoption of on line technology it has caused. This must clearly be taken into account going into the future.

The New Communities Group has continued to meet, and it is good to record the launch of a new church in the Whitehouse area sponsored by Loughton Baptist

Church. Alongside that initiative, we note the intent to establish a new worshipping community within the Woughton Partnership, with funding from the “Celebrate and Bless MK” process. However, the intention to establish a pioneer in the Walton Partnership under the same scheme has now been abandoned for reasons outside the control of the Walton Partnership. It is highly likely that one of the effects of the pandemic will be to reduce the level of external financial resourcing for new projects of this kind and it thus becomes more vital than ever that we develop low cost, sustainable approaches in addressing the challenge of the rapidly growing city.

The pandemic has prompted a new project to come into focus for us. It has become apparent that the level of bereavement support across the city is quite low, with, in particular, very little by way of support groups. In response to this, we are attempting to establish a network of “cafes” across the city run by members of local churches. Thus far we have garnered a very high level of support and enthusiasm from the clergy, are investigating training options and looking to launch a pilot when physical space becomes accessible again.

Operations



The Operations Group has continued to work in the background, advising on com-

munications in particular. As a result, the website has now been refreshed and is a more robust and useful tool than it has been recently. As part of workstream management and prioritisation, the group has proved invaluable in handling the complexity and challenge of the last year.

The pandemic caused the temporary closure of the office, with both the Director and Administrator working from home. Despite this inconvenience, administration has continued seamlessly, and communications through the website and facebook have expanded and become more effective thanks to the attentions of Ann Harris, our Administrator.

Challenges

As noted in the introduction, there have been a number of challenging situations during the year, including, of course, the pandemic effect and lockdown. The challenges surrounding the Learning Hub are recorded above.

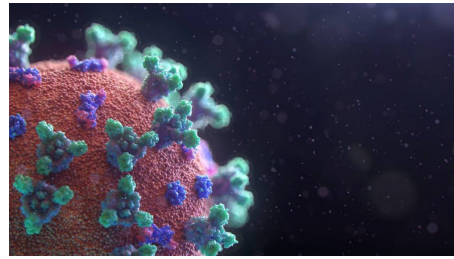
A further challenge was precipitated by the decision by the Anglican Deanery and Diocese to withdraw funding for the post for the Director of the Christian Foundation after many years of generous support. This caused the Mission Partnership which handled the funding to examine its own role and reach the conclusion, following informal legal support, that employment for the post properly rested with the Christian Foundation. Communication between the organisations ensued to resolve the situation which proved very time consuming, complex and painful for all concerned with a negotiated resolution being finalised at the end of 2019. As a consequence, a withdrawal of funding for the Mission Partnership by the Christian Foundation has resulted which trustees, through the work of the finance group, are currently working on replacing. The nature of the

ongoing relationship between the two organisations will need to be given appropriate attention in due course. The Christian Foundation and its Director have been and will remain a valued part of the whole missional offer of the Church to the city. We are very grateful to trustees and others who gave significantly of their time and expertise to this over the year and continue to do so.

In 2019, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA) announced an intention to visit Milton Keynes in 2020 for an evangelistic rally as part of a national tour fronted by Franklin Graham. Having examined the background of the speaker, the Presidents, together with local denominational leaders, wrote to the organisation requesting that the visit be not made. Other churches within the city were supportive of the visit, whilst other organisations, notably those of other faiths, were disturbed by the proposal. This required some delicate conversations over a period of time to maintain positive relationships as well as offering advice to MK Council. In the event, the local venue, along with other venues nationally, withdrew co-operation and the visit appears unlikely to take place.

The “Celebrate and Bless MK” process introduced by the Diocese of Oxford raised hopes of substantial investment in the mission of the church and considerable energy was put into its development locally. In the event, the bid was fragmented and altered during the negotiation process and support was much reduced from early expectations. However, the process is continuing and still has the potential to make a real difference.

The Coronavirus Pandemic



First and foremost, we need to pay tribute to the work of the hospital chaplaincy with additional support from local clergy in responding to the emergency and to the wider social support offered by many in the churches to people in need, often at some personal sacrifice. The churches have also shown their resilience in stepping up to the new and unexpected demands of online worship, organisation and the lack of available buildings. In addition, it is important to record that this disruption to the life of the city and the church will have long term consequences which have yet to be fully actualised. The Mission Partnership is committed to helping the church in MK engage with the opportunities and challenges which develop. Immediate initiatives which have already arisen have included the bereavement support project mentioned above, giving space to the theological questions raised and encouraging conversations about the future in a variety of ways, including the planned July Assembly. Attention clearly needs to be given to the nature of online adult learning and the use of technology in the future. It is also becoming clear that there will be a number of external initiatives being offered into the situation to address various emerging social challenges, and there will be a real need to discern appropriate priorities and help co-ordinate for maximum effectiveness.

Some Broader Engagement

The Director’s involvement in Churches Together in England (CTE), the Methodist

Anglican Panel for Unity in Mission (MAPUM) and Citizens:MK have created invitations to talk about aspects of mission in Milton Keynes to wider groups which have raised the profile of the city. Invitations have also been accepted to train curates in ecumenism, provide training in team building and speak on MK to Diocesan Synod.

The move towards CIO governance for LEPs is still in progress and will need to be completed by March 2021. The Director's involvement in support of the Ecumenical Oversight Group (EOG) continues.



As a board member of the local YMCA, the Director has been delighted to play a small part in the establishment of a brand new and enlarged facility in the city. Work is in train to establish a chaplaincy presence through the Methodist circuit and to provide wider support for young people through Stony Community Church.



An invitation from the local police for the Christian based community group Redeeming Our Communities (ROC) to help develop social projects in Milton Keynes is beginning to bear fruit. The Director has played a role in enabling the initial conversations with the churches and the public and is delighted that a number of church leaders have taken up roles within the steering groups based across the city.



The Council of Faiths has addressed issues surrounding the Franklin Graham visit (see above), engaged in a second year of offering small grants and convened a very successful Mayor's reception. The latter part of the year has been significantly disrupted by the pandemic and responding to this will form a major part of the coming year for the Director, currently acting as Chair.

Mentoring, facilitation, clergy support and advice continue to play a significant part of the Director's work.

Conclusion

In closing, we would want to acknowledge the constant wisdom and support of two of our Presidents who have retired during the year, Rt. Revd. Peter Doyle, RC Bishop of Northampton and Revd. Peter Meek, Moderator of the URC East Midlands Synod and to celebrate the election of Revd. Geoff Colmer, our Baptist President, to be President of the Baptist Union. We wish them all well. We also welcome two new Presidents in the shape of Rt. Revd. David Oakley, Bishop of Northampton and Revd. Geoffrey Clarke as Moderator of the East Midlands Synod. We look forward to working with them in the years ahead.

Finally, we would like to thank all those who have supported the Mission Partnership over the year and look forward to both your continuing support and a growth of those who engage with the work that what we do at whatever level so that we can together see MK: a City Alive to God. The context of our discipleship over the

coming year will clearly be very different, but we pray that we will together find fresh joy and renewed hope as we follow Jesus.

*Revd. Canon
John Robertson,
Director of Ecumenical Mission*

*Alison Drury,
Chair of Trustees*



**MK Ecumenical Sector Ministry –
MK Christian Foundation**



MK Christian Foundation
Growing people and community through social enterprise

These are peculiar times to be writing a report on the last year; our thoughts dominated by the many challenges of the present moment and uncertainty around the future!

It is perhaps right to begin with the difficult news. Following a year of discussions the Mission Partnership took the decision that they no longer wanted to be the home for Sector Ministry. This brought to an end a pattern of working that has existed since the appointment of the first Sector Minister some 50 years ago. We were hugely disappointed and saddened by this decision, particularly for Stephen who has worked alongside the Mission Partnership and its predecessor the Christian Council

faithfully for many years.

The Christian Foundation has temporarily taken on responsibility for Stephen's stipend and housing while we finalise new ecumenical structures to support Sector Ministry into the future. We want to express our enormous gratitude to the Diocese of Oxford and Milton Keynes Deanery for their generous and faithful support over many years and the thoughtful way that they tapered their funding to enable us to transition to the local funding of posts.

One further set-back was the difficult decision to abandon the appointment of a second Sector Minister. Our interviews led to an excellent candidate; however a number of factors, culminating with the emergence of the Covid-19 crisis made it impossible to confirm the appointment. We will begin to look at how we take this forward once we can see beyond the current crisis.

This new phase of Sector Ministry has prompted us to explore fresh and different ecumenical connections. We have been developing new partnerships locally, regionally and nationally to assist with direction and accountability; connections that are already proving to be creative and fruitful.

The pandemic has turned all our worlds upside down including the work of Sector Ministry and the Christian Foundation. It has made us forgetful of things before March (Brexit what Brexit?) and latterly focussed, to an extreme, on responding to the trauma of the ongoing crisis.

Much of the work of the Christian Foundation's social enterprises has come to a halt because of lock-down. Though, of course, our childcare provision has remained open throughout, providing childcare for Key Worker children. It would be easy to forget the visit of OfSTED back in January with its very positive report and 'Good' grading which spoke eloquently of their fantastic work with children from across the community in the previous year.

2019 was the 10th Anniversary for the Urban Farm, celebrated back in October with 4-500 people attending another open day. The current crisis has highlighted the importance of food security and local food growing, two of the central concerns of Growing People. They have continued to provide locally grown food through our Veggiemail service to the community, though it has been restricted to Wolverton over the last few weeks.

Our expanding numbers of bees have not been 'furloughed' during this period, indeed they have been particularly lively and productive. Urban Bee-lievers has continued to work with local businesses and schools, supporting their hosting of hives. As well as jarring copious amounts of honey the team have been producing beeswax wraps and a range of lip balms and other moisturisers. Honey bees and solitary bees continue to be at risk and their thriving is another critical factor in our food security.

We came under some criticism for the promotion of an event to highlight period poverty among young women. Sew and Grow using natural dying techniques has produced hundreds of packs of reusable period pads. As well as fulfilling a large order for MK Council to distribute in schools the team is also selling through several online platforms. Over the last few weeks we have moved some of our production capacity to making masks.

Sadly we have had to close our Think Food Café to the public and we are missing the many local people who came for simple, healthy, locally sourced and fairly traded food. We look forward to the return of the many connections that the café encouraged over the year and building on our belief in the centrality of food to community and individual health.

Cycling has continued to grow in importance both for health and the environment. Cycle Saviours has built on its recycling of unwanted bikes and the provision of repair and maintenance services, working over the year with local businesses on

'cycle-to-work-days', where we provide onsite cycle repairs. We have also provided, in partnership with MK Council, basic cycle maintenance courses in schools and youth facilities. We believe cycling will become even more important in the coming year and we look forward to the full reopening of Cycle Saviours shortly.

Of course our work with young people has continued during closure. A large proportion of those that come to us are considered vulnerable and at risk and our staff have been working incredibly hard to ensure that they stay safe and continue learning. These young people, referred to us by schools, social workers and the Youth Offending Team, as well as gaining qualifications and work experience, are critical to the running of our social enterprises and the delivery of our mission; we are missing the regular face-to-face contact with them.

If you want to find out more about us we were very excited to launch last year our new website. This includes a wonderful video that gives a snapshot of our work made by Wise Guys, a company of young film makers based in Wolverton. And of course once lock-down ends you could do what many have done this year and arrange a visit.

We receive huge support from many places in Milton Keynes and beyond; too many to thank individually. The many businesses and charities who contribute funding and time to our work; our long-suffering management committee; our volunteers and fantastic staff team; and finally the many young people who whilst coming to find their future, provide the energy and creativity for much that we seek to do.

MK Ecumenical Sector Ministry
MK Christian Foundation
www.mkchristianfoundation.co.uk
June 2020

Editorial Note: In respect of the paragraphs above concerning the Mission Partnership's role with the Christian

Foundation, the reader's attention is drawn to the corresponding paragraphs in the main Mission Partnership report under the "Challenges" section.

Milton Keynes University Hospital Chaplaincy



Time always moves quickly in hospitals, but this year seems to have gone faster than usual. Covid-19 has changed so much of what happens and will do for some time.

This year we have seen over 5600 patients, 232 of whom were seen in emergency situations. The team also supported 572 members of staff and led 40 funerals for those who had experienced babyloss. We have also provided support to patients and staff at the Campbell Centre, Topas and the Windsor Intermediate Care Unit, all of which has been well received.

Following the retirement of our Lead Chaplain in December 2019, I was delighted to be appointed at the end of January 2020. I have been at MKUH since 2014 and truly love and value the hospital community. We have sought to appoint a Team Chaplain and undertaken a round of interviews but unfortunately there were no suitable candidates for the post. We will look to re-advertise that as soon as Covid-19 restrictions ease enough for us to be able to hold these face to face.

We currently have four relief chaplains, Revd Pauline Barnes, Revd Alan Bird,

Revd Peter Dudeney and Revd Michael Soulsby, who help to provide the 24/7 on-call cover, four Roman Catholic Priests from the St Barnabus Cluster, led by Fr Francis Higgins, a part-time chaplaincy administrator, nine volunteers, extraordinary ministers of the eucharist, who provide Holy Communion to Roman Catholic patients, and local faith and belief contacts, who give specific religious support to those of their own faith or belief group. We are so grateful to all these people who give their energy and encouragement to the hospital and provide an enormous amount of pastoral, spiritual and religious support to patients, visitors and staff.

In March 2020 our Cancer Centre was opened and already cancer care in Milton Keynes has been greatly improved. The new centre is spacious and comfortable, with lots more facilities available to patients and their loved ones. As always there are more projects on the horizon, including a new Pathways Unit which will streamline admissions and make sure that people can be admitted, assessed, and discharged more quickly, reducing unnecessary hospital stays.

In October I was glad to start teaching a session about spirituality to staff on a new manager's programme. I am hoping that this will develop into a standalone session which will help staff to be better aware of pastoral, spiritual and religious care and their own work.

Covid-19 has thrown so much of hospital life up into the air with visiting very restricted and at the time of writing we are still advised not to visit bed to bed in the ad-hoc way we might normally do, nor are volunteers allowed on the wards. Provided we wear the right PPE we are able to visit any patient.

If you would like someone to receive a visit please call and ask, the chaplaincy office is 01908 996061 and the on-call chaplain can be reached 24/7 via the hospital switchboard, 01908 660033. I am grateful that the Revd Ruth Gookey is providing some support in the short term

so that we can continue to support the hospital community in such challenging times.

I would value your prayers as we look to provide a chaplaincy service to serve this community, particularly as we look to appoint a new Chaplain in the near future. If you would like to join our team of volunteers please do get in touch.

Revd Sarah Crane
sarah.crane@mkuh.nhs.uk

Oakhill Secure Training Centre

Hello, and greetings from Oakhill Secure Training Centre! *

Life in the Centre has been different, as 'lockdown' meant enforced changes to the usual daily routine and way of doing things - for both staff and trainees. At the time of writing - end of May - there have been no Covid-19 cases amongst the boys, and only a couple of staff tested positive. With no education classes or regular activities possible, and all religious services stopped, most boys have to spend the majority of their time 'banged up' and in necessary isolation. Overall they have coped very well, helped undoubtedly by additional phone credit, extra tuck and unlimited DVD's! We are beginning to reintroduce education lessons, including gardening in the good weather, so we plan a slow return to a 'new normality' as we head into the summer.

Chaplaincy work has taken on new forms, as I have made phone calls into Units to speak to boys, supplied faith-based/true life story DVD's, jigsaw puzzles - which have been a great success for a few trainees - and regular 'Chapel Service in Your Room' sheets to replace the usual Sunday service slots.

Amidst all the challenges, God is at work; boys have more time to reflect and think, creating opportunities for more in depth conversations; visiting the Units each day

gives time to engage staff more frequently and significantly, to share concerns and provide encouragement where needed; offer prayer, or a piece of literature which can lift the mood of a young person or a staff member. I recall a quote I read years ago: *'People don't care how much you know; they want to know how much you care.'*

Some Bible verses that have encouraged and inspired me are found in Isaiah 42, verses 6-7 (New Century Version):

The Lord says, "I, the Lord, called you to do right, and I will hold your hand and protect you. You will be the sign of my agreement with the people, a light to shine for all people. You will help the blind to see. You will free those who are in prison, and you will lead those who live in darkness out of their prison."

The phrase 'hidden heroes' has been coined by some to refer to those who work in prisons and custodial settings and I feel many of our staff justifiably deserve that title. But Prison Chaplains seek to humbly serve and make known **the** 'hidden hero', Jesus, who for many is still an unknown life-changer, yet to be encountered. Pray we can do our role faithfully and well...

Tim Cutting
Chaplain



* Oakhill STC is a custodial facility for young male offenders (14-17 years of age) who are on remand or serving a sentence. Opened in 2004 it has a focus on educational and vocational training, also providing relevant interventions and support to the trainees, and their families. Most train-

ees are from the London area, and sentences range from a few months, to 'life' imprisonment. The Centre is privately run by G4S and does not have any direct connection or link to HMP Woodhill.