

## Deacon's Report for Leeds Methodist Mission Council

To badly paraphrase Ecclesiastes I currently find myself in a 'time of being' rather than a 'time of doing'. The past six years have felt demanding and busy, but suddenly, as some pieces work come to an end, there is time to raise my head and reflect on my time here and the work God has called me to do.

Arriving as a probationer, at a time when Oxford Place was about to celebrate its 175th anniversary, but still recovering from a difficult year when the Superintendent was absent, it quickly became apparent that my stationing profile was not accurate and my supervision limited. I floundered for the first few months and then was reminded that the District Chair had said 'make it Jenny-shaped'. Jenny-shaped means networking; finding out what is already happening and how effective it is; finding out what is missing; analysing what were the issues being raised by those using the Person to Person Listening Service; discussing with politicians, council representatives, Third Sector groups, support agencies, ecumenical partners etc. And then asking what can and should the church do?

Benefits and the Welfare System have been an enduring theme. Mental health and homelessness are another. Initially my work revolved around trying to sort out the presenting problem – e.g. offering a listening ear, organising Crisis Loans, furniture; listing organisations that could offer help; walking with people too drunk/drugged to get lunch at St George's Crypt – but whilst doing my Probationer Studies I came across this well-known quote from John Wallace of the Sojourners movement, 'Christians are often good at pulling people out of the river when they are drowning, but not so good at going upstream and finding out who is pushing them in.' and I found myself convinced that I and Oxford Place were well positioned to be working more strategically on the issues facing the most vulnerable.

Offering space for one the early Food Banks (whilst not the best location) gave momentum to the embryo movement in Leeds and involved us with the wider issues of poverty and led to my involvement in the mapping exercise of food provision for those in need within the city and then encouraging groups offering street outreach to adapt their times and locations so that those in need of food were better served. This work evolved into the **Food Aid Network**, which now has responsibility for any request to the Council for food and encompasses the Food Banks, Fare Share and other food provision (some specifically for refugees). It also provides training and networking for those involved in food provision. As part of the steering group I have also got involved in **End Hunger UK (Leeds)** which has an academic research element, as well engaging in conversations with the city's MPs. The city's **Debt Forums** have also been a place where I have been able to contribute as well as learn.

Responding to the Refugee crisis and the overwhelming amount of donations was a role Oxford Place took on in the short term. As with the Food Banks, the location was not perfect but it sufficed until better premises could be found.

Poverty is not just about income, but about access to services and the invitation to join the Leeds City Council's Welfare Reform Board has allowed me to bring a faith perspective to those discussions. Did you know that laundrettes in the poorest communities can cost up to three times more than those in wealthy parts? Funeral poverty, pay-day loans, no access to IT, bad transport (if you have money to use transport), long waiting lists for GPs and dentists – the list goes on and on – and church

communities across the city are providing support in their communities. The most inspiring was the **Leeds Poverty Truth Challenge**.

I was able to host conferences on Welfare Reform at Oxford Place and have used the **Scandal of Inequality Map** on numerous occasions and this led to conversations with **Leeds City Credit Union** and the council's **Financial Inclusion Team** culminating in an event at Oxford Place promoting Credit Unions. Those conversations led to my involvement in a submission to Sir Hector Sants and the Archbishop of Canterbury's Task Force on supporting the growth of Credit Unions.

Links with **St George's Crypt** are well-developed.

This area of work has led me to sitting on numerous other groups Good City (formerly Leeds Christian Social Justice Forum), Network, Faithful Neighbours (Inter-Faith), Problem Gambling Research (in response to the Casino proposal), Responsible Gambling Forum (now the Casino is open). **Leeds Citizens** is a significant development. Currently, focussed on the General Election, but its themes for this year continue with mental health, poverty and a new area of working with young people. **JPiT Yorkshire** was launched earlier this year and is now set to engage theologically with the issues facing this region.

However, I do not just sit in meetings. Before the **Oxford Place Children's Centre** closed earlier this year I did spend significant time managing that project and working with the staff on almost anything that was not the everyday care of the children. I have continued the links with the **Civil Service** and **The Courts** mainly through the Carol Services, but I have also led Bible studies at their weekly fellowships. One of the greatest privileges of this role has been to work with the **Hospital Chaplains** as they hold their annual baby bereavement services at Oxford Place.

The **Person to Person Listening Service** continues but is not well used. I think this area of the city has enough provision for those seeking help.

Mentoring ex-offenders (lifers out on licence) has been a recent development which has been challenging, but affirming. Supporting those attending PIP Tribunals is another recent role.

**Leeds Christian Fellowship Church** used to invite me to take part in services, including a wedding, but since my involvement in Out in Faith they are less keen on my presence. **Out in Faith** came about after the massacre in an LGBT club in Orlando, when Rev Leonora Wassell asked if they could hold a vigil here. That didn't happen as one had already been arranged, but the group held a service at Leeds Pride and has built inter-faith relationships for the LGBT community, which led to a successful conference here at Oxford Place. Further events are planned.

In preparation for entering stationing I accepted an invitation to lead **assemblies** at Sharp Lane Primary School. Whilst I found it terrifying they seem to have valued my contribution and I have returned on several occasions.

**Lighthouse** is my passion. We lie when we put up signs outside our churches saying 'All are Welcome'. Lighthouse is a fresh expression of church held in St George's Crypt for those who 'are battered and bruised by the storms of life' – the homeless, the addicts, the ex-offenders, those in mental health crisis. Lighthouse not only introduces people to the love of Christ, it supports them on their faith journey and their life journey as well. That support may be visiting them in hospital

or prison; attending Court or health appointments, working with social services and community nurses. It also has an academy where they can study scripture and Christian living. I have been a trustee of Lighthouse for a couple of years and am currently working on their policies.

And, of course, there are those responsibilities that are part of being a minister in the Methodist Church

- Chair of Leeds City Centre Churches Group – Women’s World Day of Prayer, Good Friday Witness
- Local preaching: I have enjoyed preaching across the district – mainly in Leeds (South and West) and Leeds (North and East). I am stunned by how little our congregations know about the issues facing the city. I also attend services to assess LPs on Trial services.
- Fellowship Groups
- Supporting the circuits in various ways. E.g. an interview panel for a lay worker
- District Grants Officer
- Connexional Committees.
- Methodist Diaconal Order commitments
- Speaking appointments, including the National Assembly of RC Deacons, Leeds City Council staff

I also see an important part of my ministry is continued study and reading around the subjects listed above as well as theological study is time-consuming.

One of my sadnesses is that many of the excellent ecumenical links that were obvious when I arrived in Leeds have disappeared. LCTiM (Leeds Churches Together in Mission) is a great loss. Leeds Church Institute offers some good programmes, but I have only been in position to access a few of these.

And then there is the property .....

I’ll finish with a challenge given by Andrew Grinnell at one of the Debt Forums. I find them stimulating in my role as a deacon, but I think they answer the question WWJD (what would Jesus do?)

1. Create Outrage
2. Challenge Inevitability
3. Create Alternatives

God can be found in every aspect of this city’s life. His mission is all around us, we just need to join in.

Deacon Jenny Jones  
5<sup>th</sup> June 2017