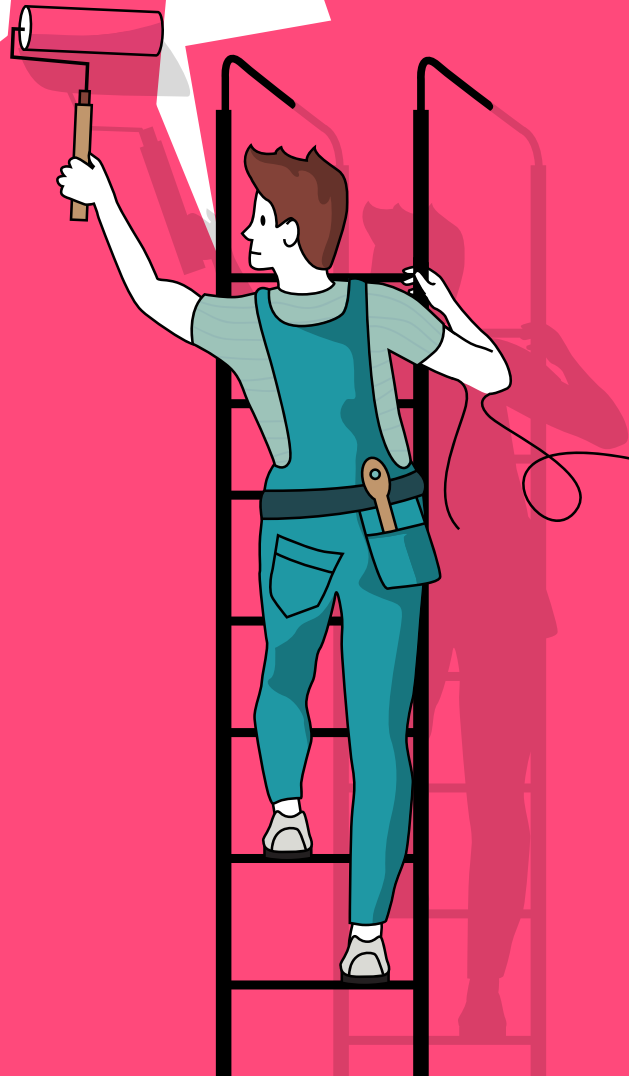


Partnering with Church and Community

N I C O L A B R I G G S

Nicola Briggs shares the exciting vision of the Link Project in Ashbourne, Derbyshire



One of the exciting things in the Methodist stationing process is reading all the profiles of the circuits that are looking for new ministers. It can be interesting trying to guess what some of the statements actually mean. In November 2021, as I was praying through which of the profiles might be on my 'gold star' list as a Methodist minister 'on the move', I was intrigued by the following:

Ashbourne has a Mission Action Plan – A Plan for Growth, 2019-2024. Their leadership team monitors progress of the plan, the development of which is connected to the aspirational 'Link Project' which aims to develop the premises to create a 7-days-a-week Church and Community Hub. Flexible church seating layouts will offer the largest public venue in the town. Permission for the scheme has now been received. Fund raising continues. The Link Project is a key community project in Ashbourne Town Team's proposal for Derbyshire Dales District Council's bid for Levelling Up funding.

This all sounded very exciting: a church willing to partner with others in the community to respond to the needs and opportunities that presented themselves. One question, was this really the case? On visiting the appointment, we discovered it was indeed the case. We found people who were outward facing and wanted ministry in the church to be outward facing to the community and beyond.

As someone who is not knowledgeable in property areas, I wondered what gifts I could bring to all the significant gifts of the volunteers involved. I was told by the circuit stewards that they had the people on the team to do the day-to-day work, but were looking for a spiritual guide.

Having been 'matched' happily with the appointment, I can say it is a joy to be a spiritual guide to such an exciting project. A project that would have been impossible without good relationships with the traders through the 'town team', or without good relationships with the council – where our members are respected and trusted for their commitment to the project, their professionalism and their heartfelt views - that this project is for the community, not for the church members.



Heart shaped window: A window that is remaining as part of our listed building status. Through a window of the past we can see what is happening in the present to serve God in the future.



Pews being dismantled in October 2024



Hoarding signage



Worship space floor progressing January 2025



Volunteers of all ages lifting paving slabs to clear the ground

When the work is completed, we will indeed have a refurbished church building for worship. We will also be able to host events for up to 350 people; we will have meeting rooms of differing sizes for corporate, community or church activities and we will have our Cornerstone coffee shop with its fabulous cakes! All of the rooms will be completely accessible; we will have 7 rooms of hostel accommodation with a community kitchen and lounge facilities, plus 2 apartments to provide reasonably priced accommodation in a tourist hotspot. We will also have a community garden including the brook at the rear of our premises.

Looking into the future, the partnerships that have been built will ensure that we will indeed have a Church and Community Hub open 7 days a week. A huge amount of prayer has and is underpinning this project. An incredible number of hours have been spent by volunteers on tenders, bills of quantities, scoping and rescoping (due to inflation), interpreting legal documents and VAT regulations, ensuring we are complying with ecological needs (don't mention the bats!), meeting the requirements of being a listed building, preparing sales and marketing strategies for the new project as well as looking at employment needs and many more things.

In the last two and a half years I have witnessed some fabulous disciples of Jesus following their callings to deliver this project. I am the first to admit that I am blessed by the calibre and working life-experience of the volunteers. It goes without saying that many other churches would have had to bring in paid professionals to handle some of the things I have listed above.

This week I chaired a church council meeting and was once again blessed that God had called me to serve this circuit at this time so that I could partner with these incredible volunteers. I gave thanks for people who have been willing (and still are) to take steps of faith into the unknown and work with people who do not always share our call to make disciples. That said, these people know that at the heart of why we do this is because the community needs serving and that the community will benefit from this project.

To be in a circuit where people are willing to take holy risks, where people want their communities to know that God loves them and wants the best for them, where people believe growth is possible is an absolute joy, and not one I take for granted.

I encourage you to consider: who are the people in your community who God is calling you to step out and partner with?

REV NICOLA BRIGGS

Rev Nicola Briggs is Superintendent Minister of the Ashbourne Circuit in the Nottingham and Derby District and married to Rev Chris Briggs.



PRAYER FOCUS

THE LINK PROJECT IN ASHBOURNE:

Give thanks for the vision and those who have partnered together in this exciting venture to make it happen; the on-going development of the project and resources to complete the project; for openness and an embracing across the community to the Gospel of Christ, and the reaping of a great harvest of souls. (Acts 2:42-47; Philippians 4:4-7).

FOCUS ON THE CHURCH:

The Methodist Church: The President and Vice President of Conference, Rev. Helen Cameron and Mrs Carolyn Godfrey as their term of office comes to a close; the President and Vice President designate, Rev Richard Andrew and Mr Matthew Forsyth as they prepare to take up office; The Methodist Conference (26 June – 2 July), for all discussion and decisions to be honouring to God; for all in positions of leadership within the church to hold to biblical values and a return to Christian holiness. (1 Peter 1:13-16; James 4:4-10).

MET:Revive: Rev Chris Briggs a Chair; for the Executive and Trustees; for wisdom and discernment on the way forward; Rev David Hull in his Ambassador role - that individual churches will respond to a greater commitment to pray for revival; ongoing Bible studies and prayer meetings. (Colossians 1:9-11; Hebrews 13:20-21).

FOCUS ON NATIONAL ISSUES:

Prison System: Prison Chaplains; openings and opportunities for Christians to share the Gospel with prisoners; forming of programmes which will help transform the lives of prisoners and the recourses to allow this to happen; the Minister of State for Prisons, Lord James Timpson. (2 Corinthians 1:3-4; Isaiah 61:1).

FOCUS ON WORLD ISSUES:

Israel/Gaza: Pray for Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister of Israel and Yahya Al-Sinwar, Leader of Hamas, to continue the fragile peace deal; for the release of all hostages; for all Christians in both Israel and Gaza; for both Jew and Muslim to come to know Jesus as Messiah and seek peace and security in him; for an out working of God's will for the whole area. (1 Timothy 2:1-4; Micah 6:8).

Planet in Crisis: Give thanks for initiatives tackling our exploitation of the planet bringing renewal and change; conservation areas on both land and sea; projects supported by A Rocha; for other such initiatives; worldwide commitment to reduce all plastics and the funding of initiatives to discover environmentally friendly alternatives; the clearing up of polluted habitats. (1 Timothy 4:4-5; Isaiah 24:4-6).