

A weekend of dreaming and reflecting on the possibilities for the Methodist Church in and around Bath. Led by Niall Briggs, Mission Enabler for the Bath Mission Area

I invite you to share your dreams with each other – in individual churches and across the Bath Mission Area. I will lead a morning of reflection and conversation on Saturday 1st May on [Zoom](#). I'm disappointed that we're not able to do this in person, especially as the Covid restrictions over the last year mean that there are many people I've not been able to meet or get to know as well as I might have liked.

Mission Planning

Over the last year, I've been working with people from all six churches in the BMA on what it means to be church today; through a variety of conversations, we've talked about the challenges and opportunities for faith and church today. We've talked about the changes in society – even before the last year and the effects of the pandemic – and how that might affect the ways we 'do' and 'are' Church.

The most significant pieces of work as part of this have been two pieces of research carried out by people from each church:

- A Church Review – looking at what's at the heart of each church: the things that bring people together, the gifts and passions of the people as well as some of the gaps and challenges.
- A Community Audit – looking at the community or communities that the church identifies with – or could. This might be linked to particular neighbourhoods, or be a network linked to a particular theme or concern. These audits help us see who is part of the community, where our connections or disconnects are and to start to think about ways to connect more strongly.

In both cases, churches have taken the lead on what questions to ask and how with my support.

During the Reimagine Church event, we'll present some headlines from the work, but if you want to see the full picture of your church, chat to your church rep for each activity.

Dreaming – Reimagining Church

Now it's time to reflect and bring everyone's dreams and ideas together.

In creating space to dream, we should recognise that the world and the Church are changing and have changed. Some of the things we once knew have passed, their time has gone; some of the dreams we once had have not come true, but maybe there is something in the longing behind the dream that still has value.

As we recognise that we can only ever move forwards, will we have the courage to reimagine church as ancestors of the future rather than heirs of the past? As we consider the time we're moving into, and our dreams for then can we also imagine our legacy? What will the people of the future say of the values that we expressed?

Thank you

I hope you find this exercise valuable and will contribute to the larger conversation on Saturday morning. More details, including the registration link are at <http://www.bathmethodists.org.uk/reimagine-church>. There are also several blog posts on that website which explain more about the process and some of the ideas we've been working with.

If you'd like to let me have comments or feedback directly, please send it to me, by email to mission@bathmethodists.org.uk, by post to 188 Hanham Road, Bristol, BS15 8NU or give me a call on 07504 990078.

Niall Briggs

Activities

If you can chat to one or two people before the Reimagine Church event on Saturday 1st May, that would be ideal, but please continue this conversation after then as we discern together the direction for our Church and churches. It would be particularly helpful if at least one person was able to join in on Saturday and reflect some of your conversation back to the wider group. There are other ways to share as well – details at the end.

These are reflective exercises. You don't have to report everything back and nothing that you don't want to share, but working together is powerful, so be open to what can happen when you share with another person.

1. Lost Dreams

With the passing of time, our choices narrow, we learn to recognise that some things probably won't happen – maybe we'll never get to climb *that* mountain or have dinner with the Beatles, but other blessings come along instead.

Take a moment in silence to remember things that have happened or dreams that never did. Briefly share them and recognise that they've served their time. Give thanks for them – as good times or inspirations, and then gently let them go.

Spend a moment reflecting on the space you've created in their place.

2. Starting Over

Recognising that we rarely start from nothing, for a few minutes, imagine your church doesn't exist, but it could. If you were starting over, what would be essential parts of your new church? What would you not do this time? Who would you tell about it – what would get them excited? Are you excited about this? What is the source of energy in this?

3. Spreading Out

Come back to the church as it currently exists. Where would you invest for mission? What one thing would you do that would connect with the mission of God (the *Missio Dei*), that would share love? If you had a budget of £100 what would you spend it on? What if you had £10,000? What if there was no money available?

4. Being known, finding a focus

It's very hard, even for large organisations to be all things to all people. There is value in having a focus, knowing what you're about and doing it well. It doesn't have to be complicated or 'fancy' to show the values behind what you do. People mostly want to know who you are and get to know you.

We are all part of the one Church of Jesus – in partnership, not just with other Methodist churches, but with those of other denominations too. Recognising that something might be the calling of another church and not your focus is as valuable as finding your 'thing'.

With the idea of focus in mind, try to find a few different ways that you could complete the following sentences. Try to let the words and phrases come naturally as this will better reflect your feelings. As you share them in your conversation, note which ones have energy across the group – these might point to a focus for your particular congregation. Note too, those which you feel passionate about, but not everyone else gets as excited by – it might be that these are pointers to work across the Mission Area, or with people currently outside of the church.

- "We're the church that ..."
- "I dream of a church that ..."
- "I would like my church to be known as a ... church."