**The Oldham Circuit Mission Forum**

Report on inaugural meeting, 6th September at South Chadderton Methodist. (Graham Radcliffe)

We opened with a welcome and seventeen people attending from six of our churches.

Our opening devotions looked at Jesus telling the parable of the Sower: Matt.13:1-10 and reflected on who it was that Jesus was talking to, how he related to the concerns and everyday struggles of their lives and how he knew just how much to say and what to leave them to go away to think through, allowing room for them to come back and find out more. This is just one of the models for mission that Jesus used.

We then started to share what was going on around our Circuit which opened up into people sharing stories of their experiences. In some cases these activities are not recognised as “Mission” but do in fact give us genuine opportunities to get alongside people.

Maura Cook shared about the work she and Paul Collins are engaged in as Pioneer Missioners reaching out to people who would have no contact with traditional church. Although they have only been with us for about a year and much of this has been restricted by Covid, Maura told us about a “Repair Shop” they were planning where members of the local community could bring along items that needed fixing and they would have a team there to help. Another initiative to reach out to those we would normally have little contact with was a “Tree of Lamentation” set up outside Trinity Methodist Church in Royton, where members of the public were invited to hang items in memory of people or things in their lives that had been lost.

Two of the Street Pastors spoke of their passion for their work in talking with and listening to people they meet on the streets and these are often young people, or sometimes just being there to be seen.

We spoke about activities within our churches such as coffee mornings, lunch clubs, parent/carer & toddler groups meetings where those who are lonely and isolated can come along to. Those involved also spoke with great passion about these ventures. Again, it was the opportunity to talk to and listen to those who come. We looked at how we might encourage those who help run these groups but often don’t see themselves as engaged in mission and who would say “I wouldn’t know what to say to people.” might be encouraged just to ask if we could pray for them during the coming week? It’s about taking small steps. Very often people will ask why we care and why we do what we are doing and this gives us opportunity to share with them instead of having to have a “God Spot” in all our activities.

We also looked at how we might support people who felt passionate about such things as local politics, social justice or environmental issues, particularly our young people on the latter. We spoke about becoming school governors and things where we can engage in community life. Someone told us about having been a volunteer with TLG (Transforming Lives for Good) and giving an hour a week to go into a local school to work with youngsters in danger of exclusion and also engaging with their families. Not only are we working with the individuals we are helping but very often we gain a great deal of respect from the professionals and other members of statutory bodies we work alongside. There have even been occasions where our partners have said how much they value our prayers!

We mentioned the possibility of partnering overseas Methodist churches. It is proposed to the Circuit Meeting that the Oldham Circuit become an All We Can partner Circuit.

We spoke of adopting a policy for smaller groups, for whom it is not viable to pay rent, to use our premises free of charge. It is proposed that the Circuit Meeting encourage Local Church Councils to consider this.

We didn’t have time to look at opportunities we have through our uniformed organisations or the CAP debt project we sponsor, nor the other organisations we could partner such as the Oldham based “Make Jesus Known” and the “Message Trust”.

What we did see was just how much is going on across our churches and indeed the passion and commitment of those involved who are often few in number. We hope to find ways to encourage and support each other and nurture and the passion that is already there. Before the meeting I was asked “What is Mission?” I think from the diversity of activities that were shared during the meeting I would answer: “Mission is whatever allows us to get alongside people.” We will explore this more at our next meeting in the New Year.