

Shopping City Chaplaincy

Newsletter Issue No1 January 2021

Happy new year and welcome to the first newsletter of the Shopping City Chaplaincy. This year has started off with a national lockdown, which is not perhaps the way we wanted 2021 to begin. However we hope and pray that this year will bring an end to the covid pandemic and a recovery of normal life. For those who have not encountered the Chaplaincy team, let us introduce ourselves.

Beginnings.

In October 2019, Tim Coleman, a Methodist minister in Runcorn, approached the management at Shopping city with an idea to start a retail chaplaincy. To begin with the chaplaincy consisted of Tim on a Wednesday wandering the mall and chatting with staff and shoppers. When the Lockdown in 2020 occurred Tim continued his work from home via social media and the occasional visit. In the Summer the management suggested that we could work more closely and the empty unit the Sanctuary now occupies was made available. The team also grew with the recruitment and training of other volunteer chaplains from the Churches in Runcorn.

With the Lockdown we are having to re-think our approach until the current Lockdown ends when we will be able to resume normal operation with the Sanctuary open once more to visitors.

What is it we offer?

The role of a chaplain is primarily a pastoral one. We are present in the shopping complex, available to anyone who wishes to talk with us for any reason. Sometimes we are able to offer practical help, or signpost someone to the right organisation that can help them. Sometimes we just need to listen and by listening help someone cope better with their problems. Quite often we get questions about matters of faith, God, Jesus and how to pray along with requests for prayer. There is such a wide variety of people who we meet, people of faith, any faith or no faith.

The work we do splits into two strands, there is the Sanctuary where we receive visitors who want to talk or to make use of the quiet space to pray or

reflect or just to be still. We also visit the shops and make ourselves know to the staff, to be available to anyone that want to talk or who ask for prayer.

Over time we expect the ministry to develop as God guides us.



Why are we doing this?

The primary reason is because we care about people, specifically the people of Runcorn. We care about the Shopping City community. In some towns there are churches located in the heart of a community open for prayer and reflection and so it is good to be able to offer that sort of space in shopping city.

Another reason is to be available to people who are not normally part of a church community, to offer a way in which they can receive the pastoral support that would normally be available in a church community.

Our hope is that by serving in this way we show the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ. We exist as a bridge between the people and Jesus.

If we can make the community where we live a better place for all to live then maybe we are seeing something of God's Kingdom on earth.



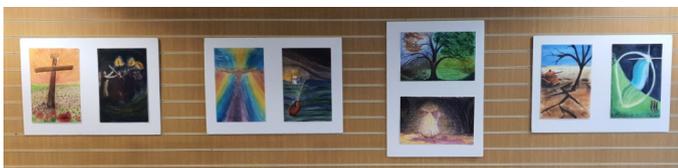
How has the chaplaincy been received?

The chaplaincy has generally been very well received and has been used by a number of people.

Some examples. A man stepped into the Sanctuary carrying a burden of grief for a relative who had died of covid. He could not attend the funeral which was in another part of the country and he was able to express his grief to the chaplain in that space.

Another man visited on several occasions and spoke of his sisters death. Another Woman wanted prayer as she remembered her daughter who took her life 10 years ago. Some just want to talk, to share something of their life, past and present. One shopkeeper, concerned for a relative asked if we would speak to them by phone and so pastoral support extended beyond the Runcorn area by the chaplaincy. The chaplaincy was also asked to contact a young person in need of housing and by signposting to local service and some pastoral support they were enabled to find a home. In amongst these are a number of casual encounters and conversations about faith, Jesus and the Church.

A number of the retail staff have been very positive of our presence in the community. We express a concern for their wellbeing just by being there. Just to notice somebody, to ask how they are doing, even just a smile and a wave can help someone know that they matter, that somebody cares about them. As representatives of the Church and Jesus, just by being there we send the message that God loves them.



A word from one of our Volunteer Chaplains

What an exciting opportunity has become real, to volunteer as a chaplain in Runcorn shopping city, especially now during the current pandemic and the difficulties highlighted by retailers and shoppers we can provide time and an ear for those who want it.

There has been a great deal of background work done by Tim Coleman approaching the management of shopping city who are very supportive of the idea, also hours of prayer walking and interaction with the retailers to become familiar to them.

The plan to get a team together was vital, which is where a dozen or so intrigued individuals underwent an easy to follow, focused and well presented Chaplaincy Everywhere course, it consisted of 7 sessions methodically taken over 14 weeks. Each session started and finished with prayer, encouraged a focus on how chaplaincy can benefit our community and how to go

about it. It included scripture and examples of chaplaincy in a number of different setting. Team building was established throughout the course which we undertook on zoom. Our vision of using the sanctuary as a quiet place has been put on hold through the current lockdown measures, so as a team we are planning new strategies of working safely in our community while still be 'virtually' present.

Support from churches together is crucial, firstly through prayer for protection and guidance and also for further volunteers who may feel a calling to their community to work alongside those already volunteering, once they have completed the training. ~ Anne Knox

Chaplaincy in Lockdown

Although the Sanctuary is closed, we are keeping the window looking good with appropriate materials to

Hope Corner Prayer line: 07395 313052

Text4Prayer: 07452 958955

encourage and signpost to other services.

We are also developing our social media presence with content suitable to encourage. (check out on Facebook Sanctuary@shopping city group page)

Being aware that many need prayer support we are signposting people to available prayer lines:

We are in the process of setting up a virtual Sanctuary using Zoom with three 1 hour slots through the week to provide a listening service.

In addition we want to provide a phone line for support of retail staff to call if the need to talk to someone (a listening service), limited to certain hours with a voice message for out of our calls.

We are also exploring the idea of pull-up banners with appropriate messages and signposting to be placed at key places in the Shopping mall to encourage and support all who pass through the mall.

Once the Lockdown is lifted we will resume our presence in shopping city and continue to develop the ministry and the team. We plan to recruit and train more team

members so that we can staff the Sanctuary every day of the week. We might also develop the chaplaincy beyond shopping



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