

Seer Green Baptist Church: exploring a more missional life

“Like many rural churches, our congregation is quite small and elderly,” says Louise Gilbertson. “The church was beginning to realise that, unless it did something differently and thought about being more missional, there was the risk it might die in a generation”.



Louise is the missional leader at Seer Green Baptist Church, in Buckinghamshire. The church has been established since around the 1820s and has a long history of witness in the village. It has many community activities like a toddlers' group and lunch club, but few choose to come to the church gatherings and even fewer have become followers of Jesus. Hence the church's decision to 'try a new thing' - a brave and significant decision that has included being and doing church differently.

When its previous pastor moved on, the church decided to call a missional minister - someone who would have a real focus on mission as their key role. Louise, a former therapy manager with the NHS, had not long finished her ministerial training at Spurgeon's College, and during her training been part of the missional journey at Chichester Baptist Church.

She's been in the part-time post in Seer Green around 18 months.

“It's something in between pioneering and being a traditional pastor minister,” she explains. “I do some of the pastoral side, but much of the care is provided by other members in the church. They've really released me into leading them into mission.”

After a time of listening to God, one another and the village, Louise says the church realised it needed to prioritise friendship building. So it started to experiment, and this has included introducing a new monthly rhythm to Sunday gatherings. It now meets as a gathered church twice a month for prayer, worship, celebration and teaching. One Sunday a month it meets in small groups for fellowship and discipleship. And once a month the church holds a Community Sunday where different small groups engage with the village community, seeking to bless and serve their neighbours. The fifth Sunday, when it occurs, generally coincides with a special celebration.

The missional Community Sundays have been the most exploratory and members have tried out various 'connect' groups including a craft group, walking group, welcome team (plenty of cakes and coffee) and children's creative fund-raising group. They've also launched a Forest Church jointly with the village Parish Church which meets every other month - a family orientated gathering up in the woods.

“There's an element of sharing faith discussion in all of them, and many have a moment where we pray,” explains Louise. “But it's all about building relationships

and inviting people in that wouldn't normally be with us on a Sunday. We're experimenting, trying to find ways of building bridges, seeing it as relational based, which encourages people to explore faith. The vision for the next three years is to become a church that is a blessing and spiritual home for many in our village by sharing through action and words the life-changing good news of Jesus with all.”

Alongside this the teaching has focused on what it means to be whole-life disciples (using material from the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity licc.org.uk) and what it means to share faith.

“It's still early days,” Louise adds. “There's still a need to keep listening, because we're not there yet. But we're willing to give it a try, and there's been a big mindset shift by the congregation: they've been great, as it's been a sacrificial journey for them as we form new ways of doing church together.”

“We are excited to see God at work in new ways as we connect with our neighbours.”

Facebook: Seer Green Baptist Church