

Revive Rugby - A New Ecumenism

Foreword



"Arriving in Rugby in July 2009 I was amazed to find such high levels of trust and co-operation between Christian leaders in the town - right across the theological and denominational spectrum. Elsewhere in my ministry, I have spent much time seeking to build the network of relationships that can facilitate mission together. To walk straight into one, ready-made, was a prayer answered and a dream come true. Evangelistic events such as the J John Advent Mission in 2010, and the visit of the comedian and magician John Archer (2011) can be organised on a much larger scale where such co-operation exists. Similarly shared mission projects such as Hope 4's work among homeless and badly housed people, the work of the Street Pastors, and Christians against Poverty - among others - are I believe fine examples of the kind of joint mission first advocated so ably by Derek Worlock and David Sheppard, among others, in the early 1980s. It is a joy to play a part in John 17 being lived out in a Midlands town. Better Together indeed!"

Revd Dr Michael I Bochenski (REVIVE Steering Group Convenor 2011- present).

Introduction

Following a week of visits to various groups and organisations in Rugby, the Bishop of Coventry, Dr Christopher Cocksworth, commented that he had seen a New Ecumenism in action. This booklet is the story of how Revive Rugby became that New Ecumenism and what it has achieved over the last 6 years or so. It is a story of partnership and trust between church leaders that has, I suggest, taken us all by surprise. This has not happened over night and nor has it always been without contentious issues rearing their ugly heads but has been remarkably fruitful. It is in the fruits that I see what the Bishop referred to "a New Ecumenism" and it is a model which I suggest can be replicated in other places. Essentially it is a twin pronged model of trusting relationships between church leaders and united Christian action and outreach, in a variety of forms. Both of these have served the people of the town, raised the profile of the Christian community among partners in the

Public and Voluntary Sectors and contributed to the realisation of the Nazareth Manifesto¹ in the life of our community.

Growing Trust

Back in 2003 the ecumenical scene in the town was fairly traditional. There were three groups based in the town centre, Hillmorton and Bilton². Each of these groups met regularly and arranged a variety of different activities based on the church's year. These include services for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, Lent House Groups and Lunches and a St Luke's Tide Service for Healing. However, there was a view among many of the ministers that the Rugby Churches Forum, at least, had run out of energy and lacked a sense of direction. So a small group met, initially for prayer, in the house of one of the ministers. After a while, the group decided to meet for breakfast, again in a minister's house. The significance of food, especially breakfast will be seen throughout this story!

One of the early successes was a United Service for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity held in St Marie's Roman Catholic Church. As is often the case, this annual gathering had become a celebration of the lowest common denominator, not stretching or challenging Christians in any meaningful way. At this service, the high point was a Prayer Tunnel in which many of the ministers and church leaders formed a tunnel through which the congregation passed and were prayed for by the ministers. The Greek Orthodox priest made the sign of the Cross over their heads, others prayed in tongues and one simply said "Good Evening" and shook the hand of each person as they passed. This simple activity showed the impact of church leaders praying for Christians in the town together. As one person present remarked, "It was the most powerful experience and really got Revive off to a good start."

From this small start, Revive has grown into a thriving partnership of churches with the following Mission Statement:

- Encourage each Christian to develop the heart and mind of a disciple
- Encourage the community of God's people in the Rugby area to work together to fulfil the Great Commission.

¹ Luke 4.14-21

² Rugby Churches Forum, Hillmorton Ecumenical Group and Bilton Ecumenical Group

- Encourage each church to reach out appropriately and effectively to the wider community, reflecting their own character.

This Mission Statement was presented to about 100 people from many churches across the town at a launch event held in the Indian Community Centre, with great curry (more food!)

There are several key features to this statement:

First, we recognised that at the heart of any activity taking place between churches must be a desire to see individuals grow in the faith and love of God. We believe that it is this focus on individual growth, through a variety of means, which has enabled churches to grow together in parallel. This is the second feature: That our united action must be in fulfilment of the Great Commission. Too often ecumenical activity has been inward looking, united worship, Lent House Groups and so on. We wanted our focus to be on the needs of the town. With hindsight we have also recognised that in many of the areas I will describe later, individual churches would simply not have the people power or energy to bring about the transformation that we have seen. Thirdly, and in some ways most importantly, each church was to be encouraged to only to engage in activity which reflected its own character. Revive is not about forming all churches into one likeness, but rather celebrating the diversity of Christian expression within the borough. The Prayer Tunnel at the unity service was a good example of this, with each minister feeling able to pray in their own way. This is perhaps best summed up by noting that in the New Ecumenism visible unity is not the goal; rather it is the growth in trust between Christians and the united witness and service to the local community which are the hallmarks. Such ecumenical good practice demonstrates the powerful witness that is open to us when we work in partnership and is, I would suggest, a fulfilment of the ecumenical motto of former years known as the Lund Principle:³ “Do apart only those things, which in conscience, you cannot do together.”

Breakfast Time

I have already referred to the importance of eating together in the emergence of Revive. Shortly after the launch in the Indian Community Centre, the group of ministers leading Revive invited their colleagues to a Church Leaders’ Breakfast. This soon became the

³ Because agreed by the 1952 Faith and Order Conference of the World Council of Churches held at Lund, Sweden.

bedrock of Revive's activities and a valued point of meeting for those involved in leading churches. I put it this way because not everyone who comes is a minister, but all are involved in leadership or outreach activity within their church. The role of Canon Martin Saxby, the Vicar of St Matthew's and St Oswald's in the town has been key in the success of the breakfasts.

The format of these monthly meetings has varied over the years but we always start with food. After that some meetings are given over to business, with notices galore about what is going on across the borough and others to a time of worship and prayer led by one of the ministers. On occasions we have invited key people from the local community to speak on issues of common concern. For example, the Borough Council's portfolio holder for Sustainable Communities spoke on the council's view of issues facing the community. The Head Master and Chaplain of Rugby School will attend a breakfast in the autumn to discuss how the churches and the school can work more closely together. I don't think that the importance of these breakfasts can be overestimated. In the formation of trusting relationships, through humour and genuine concern for each other, those who lead the churches of the town have come to see that in spite of different theological views on various issues, what they hold in common is greater than what divides them. This has been a key realisation.

Area Groups

Early on Revive tried to function through area groups and although these have not really flourished they did lead to some excellent working together, especially in the western half of the town as Chris Cartwright of Overslade Church remembers:

Revive churches are divided into areas, and at the time Overslade came under the South West area of Overslade, Bilton and Woodlands. We had a Community Action Week in September 07. All the churches co-operated, St Mark's, Bilton Evangelical Church, Bilton Methodist, Sacred Heart Catholic Church, Woodlands Rugby Fellowship Church and Overslade. We did various things together during the week the most memorable for me being the Over 60s tea and entertainment at Bilton Methodist organised and served by St Marks Brownies; and the Clean-Up Day on the Overslade Estate where, with the Borough Council's blessing (and equipment), we litter picked, cleared the alleyways and the brook,

tidied private gardens and planted daffodils round the Community Centre. Everyone worked together and the local Community really appreciated it!

Day Conferences

Early on in the life of Revive it was decided to hold a day conference, the Revd Diane Bussey remembers the day well:

We used to meet early in the morning, in the small meeting room at the back of Rugby Fellowship Church in Cymbeline Way, to talk about the first day conference that Revive Rugby was to hold in February 09. I remember drinking large mugs of tea and sitting there realising the immense privilege of working alongside a diverse group of church leaders including Father Ted Mullen, Jim Lyon and David Spademan to make this happen. The conference was held at Christ Church, Brownsover. The food was supplied by Sainsbury's and the guest speaker was Paul Alexander who shared with us his Leadership Maxims. Two of which were – "Stuff happens" and God is a "God of seasons" and not of months and years, both of which have helped enormously over the past few years.

I believe that being part of Revive Rugby has helped the churches in Rugby, and the leaders, to sense what God is wanting to do in our town and enabled us to grab hold of God's coattails as he, through us, shows His love in so many ways.

These conferences have become an important part of the Revive programme with JJohn in 2010 (JJohn also led an evangelistic Christmas meeting in Harris School in the autumn of that year) and R T Kendall in 2011.

United Action

Very soon after the formation of Revive suggestions began to be made about united action in which members of different churches might join together in serving the people of the borough. There are now at least 6 different activities which come under this heading and which I will now describe.

Refresh

A chance conversation with somebody from Coventry who was serving hot drinks to clubbers on a Friday night in the city centre led members of St Andrew's Church to see that

their town centre location offered the same opportunity to serve the night economy. Refresh was launched at Pentecost 2004 as our response. Tea and coffee were offered freely to clubbers and others who gathered in the town on a Friday night, although many wanted to contribute towards the cost. We saw this as service rather than evangelism although inevitably conversations about God were frequent and often started with “Why are you doing this?” Our response was to describe staying out on cold dark nights as a means of demonstrating God’s love for all people. We did engage in more overt evangelistic activity on the back of Refresh, most notably *Let’s Make Love at St Andrew’s!* a celebration of St Valentine’s Day, which saw several hundred young people gathering the church listening to a worship band from one of the churches and at which I gave a short, mission focussed talk. Although we did not set out to convert people, some did come to faith and subsequently shared their testimony to great effect in a variety of local churches. Here is the testimony of one man.

At the age of 40, I was born again in Jesus name. I was raised to believe you could not know God, if He was there at all. On the night of October 22nd 2005, I was in Rugby town centre and there were some Christians giving out drinks and biscuits, outside St Andrews Church. My friend and I had a cup of tea with them, having a bit of a joke and a chat. Then I started telling them how messed up my life was, how I went into work most mornings hung over from drink, with cuts and bruises sometimes. How a Christian at work would sing songs to Jesus, how gentle he was and how he had something that I didn’t. “It’s Jesus, he has Jesus “ the lady said. So I went into the church at half past midnight and for the first time ever I prayed to God. The woman and man prayed with me, and I said sorry to God for all that I had done wrong, believing that Jesus was crucified for my sins so that I could be free, be one with his Father. Then the lady asked if I wanted to pray to my Lord, so I did. The tears were streaming down my face as I prayed from the heart, it was wonderful, such a release. For the first time ever I felt truly right inside. I had a new heart, I had peace.

The use of the vast church building dimly lit, with a supply of candles and quiet music was very important. People sat for hours alone or with a companion from the team talking through their questions and issues. I met one young man and sat with him at the High Altar step and talked long into the night. He later told me that I was the only reason he had not committed suicide that night. After a while, Refresh began to struggle to find volunteers and

eventually ceased to run. But around the same time we began to hear of the Street Pastors⁴ initiative that started in South London but was springing up in towns and cities all over the country.

Rugby Street Pastors

When news of Street Pastors began to spread round the country

I mentioned it at a Revive Breakfast and was approached

immediately by Bob Reeve who had also heard about Street

Pastors and wanted to be involved. He visited a scheme in

Blackpool and came back greatly enthused by what he had seen and soon won the backing

of the Pastor of the Rugby Elim Church (RCF) Barry Killick, who also helped him form an

initial steering group. Bob brought to Street Pastors a great gift of organisation and very

soon had volunteered to be the group's co-ordinator. He explored the complexities of the

national initiative and invited them to come to Rugby to brief us on what was involved.

Following this meeting churches were invited to commit to the project. We were amazed by

the response and very soon had a management group set up comprising ministers and

others from the town who saw the benefits of Street Pastors in our situation. The next stage

was the recruitment of volunteers. Bob visited many churches to speak about the initiative

and what was involved in setting up a scheme. Very soon he had found 18 volunteers,

enough to start the training programme. The first Street Pastors were commissioned in

Caldecott Park in August 2010.

Soon afterwards the Pastors began to patrol the town centre on Friday nights, basing

themselves in the day time base of Rugby's Rangers who work for Rugby First, the town

centre management company giving them the ability to communicate with the CCTV

operators also employed by Rugby First. This was a great benefit and demonstrated that the

leaders of various town community safety organisations saw the value of the Pastors (based

on their previous experience of Refresh) and wanted to assist. The Community Safety

Partnership also gave financial support to the Pastors to buy flipflops (for those who could

no longer manage their stilettos!) and lolly pops (to counteract the effects of alcohol). The

impact of the Pastors has been massive, both on the night economy which police and



⁴ <http://www.streetpastors.co.uk/>

council officials have described as being much calmer since they arrived and on the profile of the Christian community in the town.

A year or so on, a further recruitment drive resulted in another 17 recruits who have now also be trained, commissioned in August 2011, enabling patrols to be conducted on both Friday and Saturday nights. The Street Pastors are being extremely well received by the night-time revellers who admire and appreciate that the churches are demonstrating their care for society by having volunteers patrolling every Friday and Saturday night in the town centre looking out for the vulnerable and needy. Recently this work has been recognised by Rugby Community Safety Partnership award to the Street Pastors of an “Outstanding Achievement Award.” This demonstrates the high esteem in which the group, and especially Bob Reeve, is held by the Borough Council, the police and others. A video of the work of the Rugby Street Pastors, among others, can be viewed at:

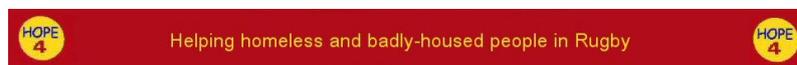
<http://pastordontpreach.wordpress.com/>

Hope4

Another of the major achievements of this united action is Hope4, a “charity for relieving the plight of homeless and badly-housed people in Rugby, and trying to prevent homelessness.”⁵ This began with the passion of two people: Lillian Francis and Brian Coleman. In 2004 they identified that there were people sleeping rough and poorly housed in the Borough for whom there was no provision. They invited people from across the town to a meeting, and were staggered when over 100 people turned up in the Baptist Church. Lillian’s passion and Brian’s careful planning led to the initiative forming both a charity and a limited company - Hope4 Rugby Ltd. In 2005 and in 2006 a Soup Kitchen opened in St Andrew’s Church. This still operates on 3 nights a week and serves about 25 people each evening with teams of volunteers preparing and serving the food on a rota basis. During this time, Brian became a member of the Homelessness Forum of the Borough Council contributing to the establishment of policy in this area. This marked an important stage in the development of Revive more widely as the Borough Council began to recognise the impact that Christians working together can have on the social issues facing the town.

⁵ <http://www.hope4.org.uk/>

In 2009 Revd Dr Michael Bochenski was called to be the minister at Rugby Baptist Church and brought with him the knowledge and experience of working for many years with the Open Door hostel in St Albans. He was able to add a new dimension to the scope and progress of delivering support to those in need. It was then in 2010, that Hope4 took a leap of faith in opening up the Hope Centre on Church Street. This drop-in centre, which is by referral only, offers hot food, showers clothes washing and drying facilities plus advice and support to homeless people. It now employs 2 part time workers who have, between them, built up excellent relationships. The Hope Centre facilities are now visited by guests around 4000 times each year. The centre operates from upstairs in a town centre retail unit, but Hope4 now have aspirations to buy a suitable building in the town as their ministry expands.



Another more recent initiative undertaken by Hope 4 is a Winter Night Shelter in 2011 -12. This has operated from 7 different church halls over the course of a week and has been staffed by volunteers mainly from local churches. Some 56 people used the winter shelter, staying for over 800 bed nights in total during the scheme's operating period, and in the process demonstrated clearly the need for this kind of facility in the town. As an interesting side-effect of this, the winter shelter has seen the strengthening of community among clients and the wider Hope4 network. This has seen people looking out for each other, helping when others have found housing and generally supporting each other in a variety of ways. To deliver all of these services HOPE 4 now has a total volunteer base of around 300 people mainly from REVIVE churches but not exclusively - for example a Rotary Club and Rugby Soroptimists both have a team of volunteers who run a soup kitchen team. The administration for all of this is handled by a Volunteering Co-ordinator, Hazel Harrison. The quality of Hope 4's volunteering network received public affirmation in the autumn of 2011 when they were awarded the Warwickshire Community and Voluntary Action (CAVA) group volunteering award for the year. Their motto text is these words from Isaiah 58: **Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter –when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?**



Rugby Foodbank

Rugby Foodbank⁶ was launched in March 2012, but its conception began in early 2011 when the Rugby Revive steering group realised that such an initiative was much needed in Rugby. They explored the ethos of the Trussell Trust⁷, a Christian charity that was set up in the late 1990's in Salisbury. They provided short term emergency food relief for families and individuals in crisis across Salisbury and have grown to be an umbrella organisation for over 190 foodbanks across the country. The Trussell Trust provides training and a very comprehensive 'how to' guide allowing new foodbanks to set up using a tried and tested model of operation. They also provide ongoing help and support to the local foodbank, along with local and national media links fostering a growing credibility in the public arena for the work and role of the foodbanks nationally.

A foodbank gathers long life nutritional food from the public at supermarket collection, from churches, schools and offices. This is stored and distributed to those in crisis. The foodbanks does not, and cannot decide who is in crisis. It works very closely with agencies across the town who are working with people who are in difficulty, be it benefit delay, low income, debt etc and are themselves helping to alleviate these issues. By issuing a food voucher the client is able to receive 3 days worth of food for their family. They are able to have up to 3 vouchers in any one crisis in a six month period, or at the discretion of the foodbank working with the agency, possibly more. The project is a Christian one and part of the ministry is also to offer to pray with the client along with signposting them to other organisations that may be able to help them with issues they are facing. The committee met with the Coventry foodbank manager to hear why and how the foodbank operated, the value of being involved with Trussell Trust, and what it was achieving across the city. In July 2011 a meeting was held for church leaders across the town at which the midland regional representative, Anne Danks, explained in detail why, who and how foodbanks are managed. Churches were invited to feedback if they would like to be involved in bringing this project and help to the town.

⁶ www.rugby.foodbank.org.uk

⁷ www.trusselltrust.org

In September, under the guiding hand of Michael Bochenski, a committee representing several REVIVE churches was formed. New Life Church and Christ Church were asked to be the lead churches and the initial centres for food distribution given their location and the need in those areas. A launch date of 19th March 2012 was agreed and it was decided that the foodbank would be overseen within Hope4's charitable status, not least as Hope4 had recently broadened its remit, though still mainly to homeless and badly housed people, to include those in the town experiencing food poverty. There was much work to be done, but the committee were totally dedicated to bring it about and it was clear that the favour of God was on it as each need was met, be it food, storage, or volunteers. Warehousing was needed, and through the connections of New Life Church and Peter and Graham Wilson it was agreed that part of the ex Renault garage in Railway Terrace would be used for this purpose. A team of volunteers transformed this room into a fit for purpose storage facility. The foodbank was promoted in many churches across the town and a growing group of volunteers formed.

Asda was incredibly supportive and was willing to allow the foodbank to ask shoppers to buy and donate food. A collection date once a month for the following year was agreed. A week before Christmas saw the first Asda food collection at which 1.4 tonnes of food was donated. It was incredible to see not just single items being given but bags and even whole trolley loads of food! Several more supermarket collections were held before the launch, each yielding huge amounts of food. The news of the foodbank was generally very well received and people agreed that together if each gave a small amount a huge difference would be made to our town. Churches also started to collect food as did several offices. There was very favourable local press and radio coverage which was helped by the reputation that the churches have as they have worked together to help the people of Rugby in numerous ways over the years.

One of the committee dedicated herself to visiting and enlisting the help of numerous agencies across the town who work with those in crisis. To date 30 agencies are enlisted and able to issue vouchers. These include Citizens Advice Bureau, several council departments, children's centres, several schools, health visitors and school nurses, GPs etc. Over 45 volunteers attended a training day which was run by a member of the Trussell Trust

team. The distribution centres were equipped and rotas drawn up enlisting the help of over 40 people, many of whom are Christians but not all.

On March 10th a service of celebration and dedication was held at New Life Church and over 90 people attended including Mark Pawsey MP, the Mayor and 4 councillors. The ethos of the foodbank was explained by the Steering Group chair from the New Life Church, Diana Mansell, who thanked the very many people who had worked so hard together to bring Rugby foodbank to the point of launch. Michael Bochenski led the congregation in thanks and dedication, praying for the town and the lives of those that this new ministry would touch. The foodbank opened on 19th March and by August had helped 371 people across Rugby, including 130 children, provided over 3300 meals and had distributed over 4 tonnes of food. Many of those who came to receive food have also been prayed for and have been moved by the care and love expressed.⁸ Nationally in the last financial year over 128,000 people were helped by Trussell Trust foodbanks and there are now over 250 launched foodbanks.⁹ Rugby joined the network in September 2011 and was the 133rd. Rugby foodbank embodies the slogan *Rugby people helping Rugby people*.

Healing on the Streets

HOTS has been running in Rugby for about 2 years. They meet on a Saturday morning outside the Asda supermarket in the town centre. There are 24 people on the team, some come every week, others every two or four weeks. On a typical morning they pray for anything between 4 and 12 people. They are also supported by people praying for their work at home. There are lots of stories to be told about healing that has taken place, but I have chosen two to tell here.

Two weeks ago, a man walked past, stopped as he got to the banner and looked around. Andy went up to him and the man said he could feel something in the area we were, what was it? 'Love?' Andy prompted, 'No that's not it', 'Peace?' Andy prompted again, 'No', 'Presence?' Andy prompted again. 'Yes that's it, that's what I can feel, I have walked through here many times but this time feels different, I can feel God's presence'. We are there each week taking God's presence into our town centre. We do not always hear the

⁸ Letter from Diana Mansell, August 2012.

⁹ <http://www.trusselltrust.org/foodbank-projects>

stories back, or sometimes its only months later. We pray for people often as they are walking by as well as those that stop for prayer. We pray for God's presence to be in that area. We can be confident that as people walk through that God is taking the opportunity to touch them. One of the team went to pray for a baby girl who had been released from hospital with a prognosis of 24/48 hours to live- she was on oxygen at home continuously with fluid in her lungs from pneumonia and was struggling for every breath. Over the next few days she got better and better as her chest cleared. After a week she was off the oxygen. She has now fully recovered.

Christians Against Poverty



CAP Rugby was set up some 3 years ago when a consortium of Rugby churches realised this would be a good way to serve the people of Rugby. CAP is a national organisation started by John Kirkby¹⁰ after God had intervened and helped him to overcome a debt crisis himself. It offers a free service to people who commit themselves to work with CAP to overcome debt. CAP staff at HQ, Bradford, liaise with creditors on behalf of clients and provide a workable plan for clients to follow to become debt free. Paul Rogers of the Bilton Evangelical Church, a REVIVE Steering Group member, has helped to oversee the launch of CAP Rugby. In Rugby we have a debt coach who visits clients to gather information to assist with this process. She provides comfort and support as people come to terms with their situation, as well as delivering the plan set out by CAP HQ. We also have a team of Befrienders from local churches who go on visits with the debt coach and provide on-going support after she has moved on to other clients. This can take many forms including taking clients for coffee, providing support for the family or simply encouraging people to keep going with CAP when things get tough. As back-up for the coach and Befrienders there is a team of pray-ers who play a vital role as they pray for every aspect of the work. CAP Rugby also runs Money Courses to help people manage their money and this ministry has also been taken into local schools and prisons. We offer to pray with clients, and this has never been refused, and we seek to introduce people to the love of God. We have testimonies from many clients who give thanks to God for CAP who set them on the road to becoming debt free.

¹⁰ www.capuk.org/

Inherited patterns still continue

All of the above might give the impression that the inherited model of ecumenical activity has declined in the life of the town. This is far from the case. A REVIVE Week of Prayer for Christian Unity Service, held in Rugby School Chapel, in January 2012 saw some 350 Christians from across the town gather together for worship, prayer and music using the Churches Together in Britain and Ireland *We will all be changed* materials. The Lent Lunches, organised by Angela Crisp of St Marie's Roman Catholic Church, continue to attract about 60 people each week for a simple lunch and a visiting speaker. The proceeds are split equally between CAFOD and Christian Aid.

There has also been a Good Friday March of Witness in the town for many years. This is attended by several hundred people and concludes with a short act of worship outside St Andrew's in the town centre. This is followed by Hot Cross Buns in the church, a major point of coming together for Christians and yes, more food! In 2012 the march was changed to commence from Jubilee Gardens, led by the local Salvation Army band. The Rugby Street Pastors also joined us for this march and served as stewards during it. The march route covered much of the town centre and ended in the grounds of St Andrew's Church. At several points on the route the march was halted for a short time of prayer & worship linked to some of the Stations of the Cross posters which were on display in the town during Holy Week. Others marched from their own churches to converge for the final outdoor service of celebration, in the St Andrew's Church churchyard. Several REVIVE leaders also took part in the ecumenical Good Friday three hour devotional service in St Andrew's Church that afternoon between 12.00 and 15.00.

Some Issues

To say that everything about Revive has been plain sailing would not be right, there have been issues which have, generally, been addressed.

Ordained and/or lay?

The major one has been that Revive, through its Steering Group and Breakfasts is primarily a network of church leaders, by contrast Rugby Churches Forum and the other ecumenical groupings in the town have been primarily lay led.

There are arguments on both sides of this debate. There is clearly value in church leaders meeting together; the somewhat unfortunately termed Ministers' "Fraternals" of the past recognised this. The accident of Revive was that those clergy who met decided to do things together rather than simply talking and praying together. That this more or less excluded lay people was part of the accident not the design.

However, it is also fair to say that some felt it was important that decisions were made by those who had the authority to ensure that their churches followed the lead being given. This ecclesiological model only applies to some churches and those with Church Councils or elected Deacons found it hard to reconcile with their own model of governance.

Some of these churches felt that the absence of lay people from Revive was a serious shortcoming and did not accurately represent the nature of the church. This tension continues, although there are lay people who regularly attend the breakfast and have made a massive contribution to the mission of the church through Revive.

When is a project a Revive Project?

This issue centres on how what seems to be a good idea from one of the churches becomes a Revive project. What are the criteria by which this happens?

Sometimes there has been complete agreement that a particular idea is one that is worth exploring; on other occasions it has not been so clear. For example, the Street Pastors initiative was widely supported from the outset and took little discussion to see that it was the right way for us to go. A more contentious issue was the suggestion from one church that Revive should have a more formal link with Rugby Inter-Faith Forum. This group exists to forge closer links between different faiths mainly though meeting together for discussion. Some in Revive felt that this was inappropriate suggesting that the supremacy of Christ does not allow for such conversations. The issue was discussed at some length within the Steering Group, although those who were proposing the link were not members of that group and so felt isolated from the debate. The outcome was that individual churches should be free to forge such links, and have done, but it was not an area in which Revive wanted to be involved. This resolution was only partially successful as some church leaders felt that they did not want to be closely associated with an organisation that took this view.

More recently a protocol for establishing whether or not an idea is something that can be supported by Revive has been established. The principle is that an individual church or churches must take the lead in proposing and delivering a new project, in consultation with the Steering Group, and that the REVIVE network can then be used to commend and affirm it. It remains the case, however, that others in the network may participate or not as they see fit. So for example, a recent suggestion of a charity shop to support the work of Life, the anti-abortion charity, has been proposed. This has been led by St Marie's Roman Catholic Church who have invited others to join with them in the project. Similarly the Harvest Fellowship (the Rugby branch of the Redeemed Christian Church of God) are currently proposing the launch of a pre-school breakfast club, again with REVIVE support.

A New Ecumenism?

In order to coin the phrase A New Ecumenism, we need to be clear about the differences between the old and the new. I have already characterised much of the ecumenical life of Rugby prior to Revive. This was good but limited in its scope and failed to engage a significant number of churches, especially those beyond the mainstream denominations.

It was representative of what we might call the Old Ecumenism, or perhaps an inherited model of ecumenical activity. As we have seen, it brought people together with a focus on a deeper understanding of differences and on building fellowship between believers in historic churches through, for example, ecumenical Lent Groups and common denominator worship experiences. Such ecumenism was also rooted in an often hierarchical model of leadership and had local, regional and national structures which were, at times, unwieldy and therefore slow to respond to particular issues or to a joint mission agenda. The national ecumenical scene had also been blighted by the aftermath of the failure of the Anglican Methodist unity discussions in 1972 and the subsequent mixed fortunes of the 'Visible Unity: Ten Propositions' debates.¹¹ Similarly after an exciting launch of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland and Churches Together in England in the early 1990s, inspired in part by the work of Derek Worlock, David Sheppard and several Free Church leaders in the North

¹¹ C. Davey, 'The Story of the BCC'. Available at: http://www.ctbi.org.uk/pdf_view.php?id=100

West,¹² the return to the more familiar “visible Church” pathways of the *Called to be One* process (begun in 1997) failed to inspire new expressions of creative ecumenism.

The term “A New Ecumenism” to describe activity in Rugby is in fact one that has been applied to a number of other ecumenical movements over the last 50 years or so. For some, the term represents the growing Roman Catholic engagement of the 1960’s through the Second Vatican Council and subsequent developments¹³. The Methodist Church¹⁴ in England has recently used the term for engagement with New Churches, and this is certainly a feature of Revive in Rugby by which members of churches not usually associated with traditional ecumenical activity have been drawn into Revive’s development. Perhaps the version that most closely reflects the Revive experience is that commented on by John H Armstrong who writes of “missional ecumenism”¹⁵ and an article by Tom Oden who appeals for “new post-WCC expressions of the unity of the body of Christ” while reflecting on his own experience of ecumenical witness to society.¹⁶

These two writers reflect something which I have already witnessed in Rugby, that the New Ecumenism is not concerned with organic unity, nor with complete doctrinal agreements but rather on united social action and outreach in the name of Jesus Christ. Its main concern is the building up of the Kingdom of God and not just the Church. It is in these two areas especially that a new ecumenism opens up new ground. Part of the reason for writing this account of Revive and its growth is because I believe that this is a model which can be transferred to other places and that the experience of Christians in Rugby may be helpful to others who want to set off in this direction. It is our prayer that our experience may be a resource to others and that through this new kind of mission-based ecumenism the Kingdom of God may help to transform our communities.

The Very Revd Dr Mark Beach, Dean of Rochester Cathedral,

August 2012.

<http://www.reviverugby.net/>

¹² D. Sheppard, and D. Worlock, *Better Together: Christian Partnership in a Hurt City* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1988)

¹³ K Whitehead, *The New Ecumenism*.

¹⁴ <http://ecumenicalissues.blogspot.co.uk/2011/02/new-ecumenism.html>

¹⁵ http://johnharmstrong.typepad.com/john_h_armstrong_/2010/09/how-the-new-ecumenism-differs-from-the-old.html

¹⁶ <http://www.ucmpage.org/articles/toden3.html>