

Life of the Church - report of meeting held on 19 October 2022

There were about a dozen people in the Zoom meeting about the Life of the Church held on 19 October, representing both those who attend the service in person and those who attend online. Committee members had also received written comments from several members of the congregation who could not join us.

We heard a range of comments regarding our current Sunday morning service, now based around the mindful meditation which had so helped us during Lockdown:

1. Although more than half of our regular attenders did not join the Zoom meeting or send in comments of any kind, we understand that most of these people are, for the most part, happy (and some, very, very happy) with the present service format.
2. Some of those who contributed to the meeting said they feel that the meditation part of the service is a bit too long.
3. Some do not want any changes we may try to make the service itself any longer than it is at present. (This precludes us, rather, from returning to our previous custom of 'passing the mike'.)
4. Some suggest we might occasionally have variations of format or voice in the service.
5. Some miss the discussion we used to have after Andrew's address, when we "passed the mike round the congregation"
6. Andrew Brown reminded us that the service has the form it does for some very clear and important, liberal, free-religious and spiritual/theological reasons and that it's a service which has been very carefully thought about, developed and honed over many, many, years.

We talked about how it's tempting to make little tweaks to things and how the consequences of that can upset the balance. We felt we want to concentrate on the deeper principles of the spiritual design behind our present Service of Mindful Meditation. This was borne out after our meeting when, in the service on 5 November, Andrew Brown named these principles as 1. The intellectual. 2. The mystical. 3. The devotional. 4. The practical. Andrew expounded in his address how this balance of nurturing all aspects is built into our service and is valuable. The piece in which Andrew talks about the four "spiritual tendencies" (which the service is trying to touch upon in various different ways) can be found at this link:

A nascent form of integral, liberal, free religious worship

<<https://andrewjbrown.blogspot.com/2022/11/a-nascent-form-of-integral-liberal-free.html>>

And this is the link to the video in which Andrew tells the history and theology of the service, which he posted in May 2021 (along with the order of service and a high quality audio recording):

A recording of the Service of Mindful Meditation, a pdf of the order of service & an introductory video

<<https://andrewjbrown.blogspot.com/2021/01/a-new-recording-of-service-of-mindful.html>>

We recommend looking at these pieces again because they help us understand the problems associated with creating a new liturgy and its music etc..

The Committee's consensus is, for practical reasons, to stick with the current format of the Service of Mindful Meditation but to revert back (from our present experiment) to the minister's weekly words being delivered in the middle of the service. The opportunity for a member of the congregation to contribute a 'Thought for the Day' will return to be at the end of our service. We also have always and value the option of being moved to adjust the readings/ script of the liturgy (just as we choose the hymns, every week) to reflect specific events, such as happened on Remembrance Sunday.

Many people raised that we miss the rich conversation we enjoyed on Zoom during Lockdown and we wondered if we could set up a specific discussion Zoom group on the Wednesday evenings between the Study Group's meetings, which are currently free (as are Sunday evenings, when we used to have our meditation). This would create a conversational space where anyone who wished could join in and where we could explore how we all connect and feel about current life issues etc. We continued to consider ways to be together socially, like setting up interest groups to share Books or Music or Art; the Committee welcomes any thoughts folk might have after reading this report, especially to consider taking an initiative. Another suggestion was to have a Newsletter, maybe as a dedicated section on our Slack site, to which we could contribute all sorts of items; this may be coordinated best by having an editor.

We held in front of us the impact of the Covid epidemic on our little church community, in its often unspecific but variously draining ways, physically and emotionally. Added to the loss of social contact during that time, we recognise the very serious Political, Environmental and Social concerns and challenges pressing on us, our World, at this time and how we need ways to support each other. We have more older than younger people in our congregation and our energy levels can be in short supply. It is for this reason that we recommend we experiment with any ideas for quite short times, feeling it's a positive thing to do to hand them on or lay them down after a limited time. The Committee hopes that folk will continue to bring ideas forward, reassured about this.

One thing that used to happen before the Covid epidemic was the monthly Wednesday lunchtimes, "when one of us gave a talk on a personal subject of interest..... It's important as individuals to contribute..... feeling together helps us set through life together." We heard how important it is that our church life nurtures us, that church is a place where we can "renew our batteries" and feel the support of our community behind us when we return to our secular responsibilities. We hope this account of our meeting and thoughts shows how the Committee tries to hold in partnership the nourishment of both our Liturgy and of our social interactions; and we hope folk will share taking this forward.