

“Helping Hand” Project

I would be grateful if members of the Deanery Synod might read this note and attached document, which I wish to raise under Any Other Business at the next meeting.

The document below was a proposal I put to the PCC of Amersham with Coleshill earlier in the year. The PCC asked if I would continue to develop the idea, and to seek the opinions of others in the Deanery, as it was felt that the issue was one that is wider than one parish. I spoke with several members at the last Deanery Synod meeting, and was encouraged by their responses.

I feel that this proposal fits well with having an active Mission, and I would be grateful if members could read the proposal paper below and consider how it might, or might not, fit into their parishes. I am aware that many of the rural parishes may not have the same issues as Amersham and other towns, nor do they have the resources of cafes and charity shops. I would nonetheless appreciate all feedback about the idea.

Stephen Fitzjohn

Give a Helping Hand

This proposal is submitted for discussion by the PCC of the Parish of Amersham with Coleshill

AIM

To establish a system for the homeless and others in need of immediate assistance: refreshment, clothes, etc, in and around Amersham.

BACKGROUND

On several occasions homeless persons have attended the church, seeking assistance. These are generally people who have – by choice or otherwise – not sought assistance through local government. For instance, they have felt unable to stay in their “home” area (for whatever reason) and therefore – in the eyes of local government – made themselves “intentionally homeless”.

Many of them simply need a rest, a warm drink, something to eat and a change of clothes. It is impractical for the church to hold supplies of these but this project proposes a way in which we can have an active Christian Mission, support those in need, and engage with local businesses.

METHOD

The Church will engage with local cafés, charity shops and, ideally, the sports centre, and set up formal arrangements with them to provide goods or services under the terms set out. The church would also set aside an appropriate amount of money (eg £100 a year?).

The Church will have a number of people happy to act as “Helping Hand contacts” (HHC), and will display a poster prominently in the church. This would invite anyone seeking assistance to contact one of the HHC. (From experience it is known that most of those who are homeless nonetheless have, or have access to, a mobile phone.) The poster would explain that those in need can obtain free drinks and snacks, clothing, and washing / sanitary goods, from participating businesses.

When one of the HHC is called, they would establish the person’s name and what they require. Having done so, they would undertake to call the person back with details (to save their phone bill). For instance, if they required a warm drink and some food, and a coat, they could be directed to a local café and one of the charity shops (from a list held by each contact). The charity shop could be contacted and asked if they had a coat in a suitable size, and the café to make sure they could accommodate the person (eg in case there was a large party there at the time). They would also give the shop / café a unique reference number.

The HHC would then call back the person seeking assistance and explain where they should go. They would also send a text message, saying, for instance:

“This is to introduce [name], who has asked for a Helping Hand. We would be grateful if you could assist: reference [unique reference number].”

The text message could also include the names and addresses of where they should go.

The person seeking assistance would then attend the café, shop, etc and show them the text message – which would, of course, match the reference number given to them. They could then obtain what they wanted: the café or shop would then make a note of the cost of the items and notify the HHC of the amount, against the reference number given. This amount would subsequently be paid to them (it is expected that in some cases they might provide the goods or service for free, but this should not be regarded as the norm).

BENEFITS

This project would enable us, as a church, to:

pursue an active mission, providing to those in need;

come into closer contact with local businesses;

reach out to other churches to expand the scheme (part of the Diocesan plan).

MOVING FORWARD

From informal discussions, I believe that the cafés Café Africa and JACS, in the New Town, and 1220 in the Old Town, would be interested in this scheme. I have not yet spoken with charity shops. More ambitiously, it would be good to get the cooperation of the Sports Centre, with a view to having them allow someone in need to use their changing rooms to shower, etc. There is also a need to be able to provide washing / shaving / sanitary goods. How these could be provided is open to question: one possibility is that they could be kept at the Parish Office. Engagement with other local churches would also be of great benefit.

Submitted for consideration by the PCC

Stephen Fitzjohn