

# Faith in Action

Doing Faith in Action: 'SoundCafe'  
Homeless Ministry

Helen Hayes

The logo for the Society for Christian Ministry (SCM) is located in the bottom right corner. It consists of the letters 'SCM' in a white, bold, sans-serif font, centered within a solid orange circle. The background of the entire page is a solid blue color, with a large orange circle on the left side that overlaps the top and middle sections.

SCM

## Doing Faith in Action: 'SoundCafe' Homeless Ministry

I was licenced as a Pioneer Priest working amongst people who are homeless with West Leicester Mission Partnership 2 years ago in December. I had a sense that God wanted to use my professional experience as an amateur and conductor but wasn't sure about how this might be able to happen. Pioneer ministry thrusts you into the unknown and the very idea behind it is that you immerse yourself into the context you are working in and look to see what God is already doing and 'join in'. So that is what I did.

It soon became desperately clear that one of the major problems for people who are homeless or living in hostel accommodation is lack of day-time activity. One Roof Leicester carried out a survey with the service providers in Leicester and this was a key element in their findings. People whose lives had unravelled and spiralled out of control reported that there was little or no day-time activity available for them to find a safe space to 'be' never mind carry out some activity that might be meaningful or life-giving.

The phrase 'safe creative space' kept coming back to me as I heard story after story about the chaos of people's lives and the difficulties they faced in dealing with the complex housing system and gaining appropriate mental health support to enable some sort of rebuilding of lives.

I have a very strong belief that singing with others is healing and transformative. I have seen it as I have conducted over the years in prisons, youth offender units and special needs schools. As a Christian I believe singing connects us deeply with ourselves and God. Our hearts get opened somehow. And when we sing together in community God is able to connect us not only with ourselves but with each other also. We were designed to be in community not little isolated islands. Singing in a choir not only provides a powerful forum for doing that but builds us up and empowers us to deal with the 'difficult stuff' as one of my SoundCafe members said.

We launched SoundCafe on 1st Oct 2014 at 1.30 pm with Bishop Tim giving the opening speech and becoming our patron. Leicester Mercury were in attendance and it wasn't many weeks before we did a live broadcast for Radio Leicester.

Before we knew it we were planning a concert at Leicester Cathedral at the end of January 2015 where the SoundCafe would have their debut performance and invited choirs Chorus Amici and Octave sang the British Premiere performance of Henry Mollicone's Beatitude Mass (Mass for the Homeless).\* It was standing room only and we raised over £4,000.... not bad for a seed of an idea only 3 months old. Then in January 2016 we performed at Leicester Cathedral in 'Hear the people sing' with songs from Les Miserables. An amazing evening where we saw our guests shine as they performed poetry, played instruments and sang not just in the choir but also performing solos.

SoundCafe has since grown in strength and vision. We now regularly get 34+ guests a week and these people are our targeted group of those who are either homeless, vulnerably housed or socially isolated. The stories we hear from our guests tell us that SoundCafe helps people feel valued and cared for. It is a place where people can find meaningful day-time activity and share in music, poetry and art. Already after a year SoundCafe feels like a family, both our guests and volunteers. It is a very special place.

And what of faith you might ask. What about the gospel message of God's love shown through Jesus Christ? Well, apart from the fact that we witness to that every Wednesday afternoon as SoundCafe serves and stands alongside the most marginalised people in Leicester, we have had one of our guests baptised during a residential with Holy Trinity's Triangle project and we have seen another of our guests transform his life and be the most stable he has been in 35 years of homelessness. I could tell you more stories, lives transformed through music and song as people discover their inner worth and value, realising that they are loved and beautiful human beings in the sight of God.

I believe SoundCafe is a miracle. We never know what to expect on a Wednesday afternoon. We don't know who will come and it is never without its hiccups and places of feeling very vulnerable. One thing I do know is that God has never failed to turn up. God's love enfolds us all every Wednesday afternoon and we've seen and heard remarkable things. It's been a roller coaster ride but then following the Holy Spirit is a bit like that isn't it.....who knows where we will be led next!

*Helen Hayes is an ordained priest in the Church of England and the first pioneer minister to homeless people in Leicester.*