

Applying our faith in life and work

Readers may be interested to know of a recent initiative in an Anglican church in Gloucester. The church has had a tradition of occasional Saturday morning 'Christians At Work' breakfasts, where different members of the church have spoken about their work during the week and how their faith has made a difference.

This year the church developed a new approach. Inspired by the 'conversational' and 'story-telling' focus of Agora, and with Chris Sunderland's support and advice, we held a series of three evening meetings in February on 'Christians in Society'.

We selected issues that had particular local interest or concern. Our topics and leaders were:

'Postcode lottery? - justice and equality in public services' introduced by Rev Jeff James, Chief Executive of Gloucestershire Partnership NHS Trust, and Curate at Minchinhampton

'Immigration - threat or opportunity?' introduced by Chris Sunderland

'Issues in human sexuality', introduced by Rev Dr Helen Sammon, a GP and a Curate at Painswick and Beacon Parishes, with Rev John Longuet-Higgins, vicar of Painswick and Beacon Parishes

We advertised the evenings as 'conversations' rather than 'talks' so we could learn from each other. Our leaders were well informed, and skilled in creating active participation. We started each evening with a glass of wine and ended with a short act of worship.

We were delighted to see over 30 people present, mostly from the church. Individuals shared something of their own stories, sometimes very bravely, and the leaders were very sensitive in promoting active non-judgemental listening and learning. The debates were lively and stimulating, and could have continued well into the night!

The outcome? We're now more informed, and we've been helped to think through the implications of our faith on some of the key issues affecting society today. Feedback was very positive, many folks wanting more.

What went well? A good deal of planning time was needed (we started three months ahead); canvassing local interest ensured helped to get salient topics and a format to suit; the weekly series of three sessions was short enough to gain commitment and frequent enough to maintain momentum; clear positive advertising worked well; but probably more important than any other factor was the quality of the leaders.

What could have been better? We had hoped that folks would join us from other churches and none, but only a few came from outside our own church. Some folks would have appreciated continuing one subject in more depth.

The next step – who knows?

Bruce Clifford