

SESSION 2 READINGS

READING 1: THE GLEBE CAFE CHURCH

Cafe Church, an initiative of Glebe Uniting, has been exploring faith and life through unorganised religion for the past 18 months. Cathy Kirkpatrick, a member of the team wrote this about the journey.

It's 7.30 on a Sunday night and the crowd is seeping in. The slide on the wall says:

"Welcome ...help yourself to some coffee and cake ...find a seat ...the proceedings will soon begin..." This time is for meeting and yarning. Jazz vibes and coffee aromas are in the air. Someone is improvising on the piano, or on guitar or on double bass. Candles on the table provide most of the lighting. The team is in our usual state of calm panic as the MC for the evening starts to speak. Tonight the theme is Life, or Death, or Power, or the uniqueness of Jesus in the mishmash of the universe. We'll read poems and Scriptures, see artworks or mimes, hear the music of others and sing harmonies of prayer. There'll be a band or a film; a speaker or a debate. We'll be struggling with the usual; faith, life, hope and integrity, meaning ... Trying to connect with each other and communicate with our God. This is Cafe Church!

It's late and I'm not sure where to begin to tell this tale.. I'm not sure I fully understand it myself. The idea had been around for a while. The people of Glebe Uniting had been dreaming about an alternative kind of "Service" that would more effectively relate to 20 to 40 - something year olds, in the Glebe area and beyond. At the end of 1995, 6-8 of us got together to brain storm. We are the missing generation. We are no longer "the youth group" and we are not "young marrieds with kids in the Sunday School". We wanted to create a place where we could help each other stumble forward in the faith, and which others may also value.

In January I wrote :

"Amazingly (to me, anyway) many of the people I have spoken to about this future "happening" have been enthusiastic ...Some have even said that they would like to come and check it out. Hmm... I believe that there is an opening for this generation to reconnect with their God, faith, and other believers. There are lots of dudes out there who have left behind a pattern of meeting with others. Some have done this deliberately, leaving behind pain and misunderstanding, or irrelevance and disillusionment. Others have ceased for no particular reason and would be interested in beginning again, given the right circumstances. I think that God knows what's going on, and is doing a whole lot of stuff ahead of us. I pray that we can be humble and gentle enough in our lives to come into line with God's moves, and can find room in our hearts for each other and for those who find us:"

More team correspondence of the time:

"Aiming to explore the `gospel' and its implications for us in the 1990's while remaining - culturally relevant; non-judgemental; doctrine exploring rather than defending; open to Christian, non Christian, unchurched and churched. To be a church where people can communicate their doubts and questions and perhaps be renewed : where they can explore and participate at their own pace and in their own language; where preconceptions are broken down and truths can be discovered".

In February we met to pray. Opening night was March 3rd.

It is a strange creature. The people who have tried and valued the experience are diverse. Some of us are part of other congregations or house churches and visit Cafe Church to add another dimension to our experiences. Some are taking "time out" to process some difficult issues. Some haven't been officially involved with any church for years. Some of us have had no previous interest in Christian stuff. Many are looking for others with whom to talk, struggle, laugh, drink, pray and wonder what it's all about anyway ...

It is a creative space. The richness is in the people. Many of the ideas come from the grass roots level, and much of the content is executed by the people themselves. News of the gathering is spread by word of mouth. Those who wish to know what's coming up receive "menus" in the mail. Since the

style and the content of the evenings can vary radically, we try to give people an idea of what to expect. There is tension between realising that people will come and go as they wish, and also communicating that they are valued and have belonging in the community. It has often been referred to as a place that is safe and very real. We think that this is because those who are offering themselves and their gifts to create the evenings are often vulnerable, and sometimes unsure of themselves. I personally waver between being very excited, and being in wild panic; thinking that I see what is happening, and having absolutely no idea...

I no longer wish to rush in where angels fear to tread, stir up a lot of trouble, then rush out again. I am looking for sustainability. I am looking for people with some like-mindedness and with diversity, with whom I can walk in, and keep on walking into the depths and over the rises. I have stumbled into a team whom I trust and value. We reflect the extremes : theologically, aesthetically, socially ... we are not a homogenous lot. The issues for the team have been the issues for Cafe Church .as a whole; how do we work together, affirm, hear, love and encourage each other? How do we handle our differences, work through them, and seek to point one another towards the Creator? There has been "blood on the carpet" at times, but we are committed to walking the way of valuing each other, valuing the people who are coming and providing a space where things can be worked through.

I do not know what lies in our future. It is my prayer that Cafe Church can metamorphose through time to increasingly meet the needs of those who are participating in it, and reflect the desires of the One who is behind it.

(From GNOME Newsletter, NSW Synod Board of Mission, November 1996).