

From URC to community hub



In June 2013 the small Wiltshire village of Broad Chalke witnessed the strange sight of best-selling author and local resident, Sir Terry Pratchett wielding a sword to cut through a string of sausages tied to the railings outside the United Reformed Church.

Watched by over 100 villagers and two local MPs, Sir Terry was formally opening the 'Chalke Valley Community Hub'. It was the culmination of a very long process which has seen the transformation of a Victorian chapel building into an ecumenical church and community centre for a string of villages just to the west of Salisbury.

The prologue to the story goes back nearly ten years with a close partnership which grew between Broad Chalke United Reformed Church and the local Parish Church. After working together for several years a legal sharing agreement for the URC building was signed in 2006.

Its traditional interior was transformed into a more flexible and comfortable worship and meeting area. This relationship evolved into a Local Ecumenical Partnership with a covenant commitment 'to develop the use of the URC building as a resource for church and community activities.'

In 2012 that commitment became a reality more quickly than we expected. The local village shop was due to close on the owner's retirement, which in any case it was too small and in the wrong location. Could the churches help? The URC building was in the right location and the congregation prayerfully considered the way forward. Here was a creative and imaginative way for the URC, in partnership with the Parish Church, to continue as a place of worship and to be of real service to the community as the home of a whole range of community facilities. It would be a genuinely practical way of responding to 'human need by loving service.'



The whole village was surveyed, the URC congregation approved the scheme in principle, and we were launched into twelve months of fundraising and planning. It became a whole community enterprise and the project team, including local professionals giving their time freely, met weekly. We worked against the clock to secure funding, and an Industrial Provident Society was formed as the legal body responsible for fundraising and future management. At times we met with bemused responses from both church authorities and from the local press and radio about what we trying to achieve. Through it all the church partnership was crucial, not least in the ready welcome given by the Parish Church in hosting URC communion services.



Today, the 'hub' is up and running in an exciting partnership between church and community. The URC premises now house a shop, a post office counter, a coffee bar with wi-fi access, the local history archives and a shared office for the hub manager, the Anglican benefice administrator and the local police officer. Worship, both URC and Anglican, continues in the shared worship area, which is also open for community gatherings throughout the week.

The transformed Broad Chalke URC is at the cross-roads of the rural Chalke Valley and we hope it is a building whose continued purpose is fully justified by worship and through the witness of its service to the community.

Julian P Thomas

United Reformed Church Minister, Broad Chalke and Salisbury

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