

Earlfield Monastic Community LONDON

Johny Certain Monastic Community Earlfield

(A summary of a recorded conversation over a meal with the group)



John is a member of the Church Missionary Society / Anglican

In Earlwood they have been exploring what and how a missional community can operate. John and his wife came to Earlwood deliberately to establish such a community. The members of the community had been involved with the rave culture in the 90's (aftermath of the hippy movement).

Earlwood has people from extreme backgrounds. You are meeting people in fields, squats and disused warehouses. Post Criminal Justice Bill labeled this area as the 'Club scene'.

They started by running a church in a bar and this devolved from being a church to being a community. Now they are a missional community but they had to go backwards before they could go forward.

They learnt that without an active prayer life they soon ran out of steam. This happened a number of times before they worked this one out.

They became interested in the contemplative life and in particularly Franciscan spirituality. Franciscan spirituality influenced our thinking around urban mission rather than a totally monastic picture. We have created something that is exploring a contemplative life; that is existing to critique and be counter cultural to some of the individualism of society.

We are very keen that the missional life is not dualistic in the way it operates. We are a working community rather than something that is self sustained Work is something that we see as where we engage our lives and the spiritual. We chose not to live all together but in different houses. That might work in a rural or agrarian culture but not in an extremely metropolitan culture like London.

In our community there are teachers, a film editor, a theological researcher, a full time Mum, a child care worker and a guy that works in finance. There is a push and a pull to that. Each person is engaged in their workplaces places and it is one sphere of their lives that they feel that they can sharpen their spiritual understanding and at the same time it sharpens them as people.

We live in close proximity to each other in a certain geographic area and that means we are able to be loving and fully engaged with each other. We started as our family sharing a space with a single young man and discovered through living together that the space between us is where we create the life. It then grew from that and we have a cut of point of no more that 30 persons including our children in our group.

Work wise, there tends to be an ebb and flow between couples with work being flexible. In my work as a child care worker I am able to network with the community at the school gate, playgroups and at clubs.
Our work brings us into contact with the community.

We are not necessarily the sharpest tools in the box as far as missionaries or Christians go and most of what we have discovered we have stumbled across. Being a working community we have found this fits within a contemporary way of life. Half of us came from full time ministry situations but that well tends to dry up when you are trying to be missional in a western urban environment. The mission group (Church Mission Society) we are partnered with might have plenty of money for overseas mission but it is not in their worldview to support mission in London.. Their attitude appears to be, 'why isn't the local church supporting this?' Half of the group was pushed into the work place just by our material need to support ourselves as families.

What does your life as a community look like?

It has been an interesting challenge because we are working people, and we don't all work the same rhythm of work. We tried to do things like meet every morning to pray but that didn't work. We had to agree on, what rhythms we did have, so that even when we are not together we are practicing a rhythm. Some of us have had more time to develop that and others have a real desire to pursue that together. It tends to be contextualised.

We are quite sacramental in our spirituality.
We tend to find Christ in the context of the ordinary world we are living in rather than trying to create an extraordinary world.
We also very interested in guys like Thomas Keating and the whole idea of silence and solitude. We really love the fact that he said it should only be for 20 minutes.
We're interested in Merton, Thomas Keating and some of the guys who are still alive.

We can learn from the Mennonites.
A lot of the church calendar is based in the agrarian calendar. We have a commitment to meet once a week, and whoever is offering the meal offers some sort of spiritual meal to go with it. Meeting in each others homes with the whole family being involved is important.
If something is going on that many of the community are involved with, then the meeting does not occur. We don't want to overload people. We make our choices together. Three times a year we make a priority to be together - Advent, Lent, Holy Week & Easter.

We have an urban allotment that we sow to vegetables and fruit and we have a service for the season. In terms of the rhythm of the land we have three cycles

This allotment was reclaiming the land on the west side and we give the harvested produce to the poor who live in the housing estates. We invite them to come and cook with us, as a teaching experience and for exploring spirituality through food. All the boroughs have a big lunch once a year with a street party. Once or twice a month there is something that is inclusive.

We partner a lot with the local congregations here. Some of us rock up to the local churches to attend the family service once a month. Our commitment in the local service is minimal they do not ask too much of us. In our community if too higher demand is made by the local church then people make their feelings known or have else voted with their feet.

What is the Demographic of the group?

We are people who we have known each other from the rave scene. We met up with again when we individually moved to London. One couple were with YWAM.

The contemplative narrative has been important in our healing and it has made us excited about being missional in the future. Our action is both social and personal.

In maintaining an outward message the personal narrative became less and less primary and critical in their lives. The group's faith became just an expression of social humanism, particularly among the de-churched people of the world. For our own salvation the contemplative is about the continuing pursuit of our own authentic self. The more that becomes a reality in daily life, the more the light of Christ shines and the personal narrative becomes a conversation that others will engage us with. It is intentional but it has to flow from that inner reality. Being missional is not only about engaging the world but how about how we explore that idea. Henry Noun talked about this when he said
The mission is both personal and social and this is as poignant to the de-churched as [‘there is a space within each of us where God dwells and from that communion there is a call to mission.’](#) to the un-churched.

There are 3 kinds of creational spaces that are the make up of our lives.

- That would be the community. The social community (neighbourhood);
- Your family (both biologically and those we choose beyond that)
- Your workplace.

We are looking at ways, in the different spheres of life, that our faith and witness can be fleshed out.

Last year Peter, (the film director), has had a passion about wanting to do a film about time and eternity for a long time and he had an opportunity.

Mutual support is one of our group values so we all got around Peter to help him make this movie and launch it at the short film festival.

The film is about the issues of life and death and how they interact.

It has already created and drawn a lot of attention.

The idea of the movie was missional. It was to stir the muddy waters of this life and world and get a conversations going.

That is an example of the community supporting a person to really use the gifts they have got, to engage within their work and that use that workspace missionally.

It is good to be able to tell you how that turned out such a success story but it doesn't always have such clear outcomes.

There are more than one within our community and each one of us has a struggle.

John, who works in the finance sector, struggles to see where he fits in and how his voice can be placed in the city of London finance district.

The beauty is that we are all wrestling together with him about this.

It is always important to have others to sustain ourselves in the process of daily struggles. John has found a group of financiers who are asking the same questions as himself.

A really helpful book has been 'The Church beyond the congregation' by Jim Thwaites 1999

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