

Alan lowe - Manchester (A summary of a recorded talk with Alan with the group on tour)

Cafes and bars have become a place of engagement for churches and community over the recent years.

Sanctus 1 is a Fresh Expressions style of worship that worships in a café style discussion environment. The leaders are not allowed to lead worship. The locals do it.

Nexus Café in Manchester is a place of engagement. It is a converted part of the dungeon of the Methodist Church building

It is operated as a Methodist / Anglican joint ventures. 50% funding



What does Nexus look like?

'Nexus' is more emerging than emerging.

Nexus has been operational for a number of years.

I am the second minister to take over management. I have been here for eighteen (?) months. I am full time another two people are working elsewhere part time making up a leadership team of three

If the first minister was the starting pioneer I am the sustainer, maintenance pioneer. I have a lot more administration and financial management than I should at the moment because at the same time as the minister left we had a significant number of staff leave over that same short period of time. They all left for different reasons.

We have currently 10 members of staff and 60-70 volunteers. We are open 7 days a week. Only one or two staff are Christians

This venue includes art exhibitions, a venue for live music, a green team (environmental issues and garden) accordingly we have a whole host of volunteers.

It is more to do with community and belonging than consensus of spirituality. It is now a limited company but it does not make a great profit, financially.

It is a place that offers an invitation into a safe space with an opportunity to engage with spirituality.

There is a tension, when spirituality is made to be a key factor in the café situation. There appears to be a critical mass – when this is diluted beyond a critical point you lose the spiritual emphasis. However, to fill the place with Christians would make it less welcoming to non-Christians.

You need to be engaging with people and this cannot happen when it is overtly or obviously Christian. 'Church' has some very negative connotations amongst the populous. We would be accused of proselytising people and customers would feel, or sense that and not come.

Nexus is actually very opportunity driven it cannot be pre-programmed and planned too far ahead .

Church needs to be all about teaching people how to go about growing disciples – about becoming more Christlike.

Growth in numbers and depth of spiritual walk happens as people let it happen. This space here at Nexus allows for the conversations to occur. Conversations that will help people to grow in their relationship with God and their understandings of the meaning of life are the aim.

This space also provides a form of discipleship that allows us to feel comfortable inviting non church people to hang out. The 10.30 church sandwich does not encourage invitations to the unchurched in the same way.

We have a reasonable expectation that people will come along if they are invited. We do not consider ourselves as normal evangelicals.

About 100 people drop in each day and 'engage' in conversations at various levels.

We need a skeleton staff that will do the engaging but we need to be flexible because we operate 7 days a week. Hopefully people will take discussions further when they return at another time.

There is also an integrity issue.

People coming to look at the art do not want to be evangelised.

There can be opportunity for conversation, for us to have dialogue with people.

Some people working here are not comfortable with the idea of spirituality.

We must remember God calls disciples.

The church is asked to provide opportunities for people to respond to that call

Various paid staff covers the financials of the café and Art areas.

The minister is needed to be providing momentum to keep the project going.

Nexus is post evangelical.

The people we reach are:

- People who have attended church and got burnt;
- People who have issues with the leadership styles of some church: People who have issues about evangelising and certain doctrines.
- People who have never heard anything about Christianity.

What is it to be church here?

Why are they no longer engaging in city centres?

Locally Methodist churches have closed.

Many churches are no longer open churches.

Old ways of church have not or are not working with today's society

So we have to investigate and trial new ways to re-seed?

How do you sustain the imagination and vision of Nexus?

We have to have a clear understanding of how this project fits in with kingdom values. This vision has to be continuously brought before people. We work as a team of three.

For example: Allowing people to be creative in regards to art exhibition engagement. This means we have approx 8 weeks turn around with our exhibitions. Sanctus has linked spirituality with the themes of these art exhibitions e.g. Transformation, bread making were included in aspects of worship.

The 'post modern' context influences how we seek to engage people.

Leading here at Nexus and Sanctus can seem as if you are a lone ranger within the wider church. Recently Prayer support has just been formed with the Sanctus group and the wider church supports generally.

Various activities use the space in the evenings including life drawing classes, music and drama. Despite many groups being involved there are gatekeepers that uphold the sacred space. Nexus is about breaking the barriers between sacred and secular. People talk about a natural spirituality in the place.

What Level of training have I had to prepare myself for this ministry?

Almost none from the church, one month about mission at theological training was all that I had. I have had to draw on worldly experience rather than on ministry training. There is no official training for any of the lay people here. It would be good if there was some training available but it would have to be local and suited for our people.