

## **“On the cusp of answered prayers:**

### **An update on the Love Stockton Centre”**

Many of you will remember reading an article in the In-Touch magazine early in 2015 about the potential opening of a Love Stockton Christian Centre on Stockton High Street. The property in the frame at that time was 147 High Street which was the former Burtons building on the same block as Debenhams and Costa and opposite the Parish Church. Disappointingly we were unable to achieve a satisfactory lease with the owners and reluctantly we had to withdraw. We are so grateful to God however that 111 High Street, which stands opposite the shambles and across the road from the Castlegate Centre, became available when the Riverside College moved out in July. The good news is that Love Stockton has now obtained planning permission to develop a multi-use centre at 111 High Street, and we are just weeks away from signing a ten year lease. This means that if all goes as planned Love Stockton will be launching the Centre before the end of April.

The premises occupies almost 4,000 square feet over four floors and is in good around condition and decorative order. We will need to make several changes to allow the space to work well as a multi-use centre but much of this is non-structural. The Centre will potentially house a number of local Christian charities as well as Tees Credit Union and a café that will be open to the general public. As well as a dedicated prayer room there will be meeting and conference rooms on both the ground and first floors. There will be space for visitors to book hot desking space to allow Christian people in particular to benefit from networking opportunities. Our hope will be that areas of the building will be family friendly, welcoming people of all ages. Wouldn't it be great to have a CAP Money course, an adult painting class, and a parent and toddler group all operating in the building whilst other people are making use of the prayer room and café! The Centre can potentially be open from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. and this means that church groups, Christian youth groups and homework clubs can also be established in the space. We still haven't come up with a name for the Centre and so if you have a surge of inspiration, please make your suggestions known.

The bigger picture for Love Stockton is about bringing local churches, Christian charities and other third sector organisations to work alongside the Local Authority and statutory services to better serve our communities. Geographically, Love Stockton spans the whole of the Borough of Stockton-On-Tees including Billingham, Norton, Thornaby, Yarm, and Eaglescliffe and of course Long Newton. Currently we have trustees who worship in many of our towns but we are seeking wider representation. We have already recruited our Centre Manager, Deborah, and she is a very gifted lady who worships in Norton at the Destiny Centre. We expect to be looking for an assistant for Deborah within the next few months and so please look out for the job advert and pass it on to others you feel might be interested.

Love Stockton became a charity just over a year ago but many churches and Christian people have been praying for the Borough of Stockton for multiple decades. The Love Stockton Centre is one prayer which despite a number of setbacks is very close to being answered. Our God is so good!

If you would like to know more about the work of Love Stockton, or indeed about the plans for 111 High Street, then don't hesitate to contact Trevor Birtle (email: [birtlet@hotmail.com](mailto:birtlet@hotmail.com) or Mob: 07506703429) who alongside his wife Pam is part of the Love Stockton Development Team.

## **Ministry Development Team**

The nominations are in, the PCC has made its recommendations and someone will shortly be getting a call from John Lambert, but what is really going on?

Three years ago I received a call from John asking me to join MDT. Someone must have nominated me and, even more surprising, members of the PCC saw fit to recommend me to MDT. I had only returned to St Mary's a short time before and didn't even know what the initials stood for, but I was asked so I agreed. That was one of my better decisions. I have had the privilege of serving St Mary's through MDT for a three year term; a privilege because MDT's role is to look at new and innovative ways to enhance and develop the ministry here at St Mary's. John calls it his think tank, a place where he and a small group can look at ideas and express opinions as to how they might (or might not) work and to try to develop recommendations to pass forward to PCC for their consideration.

Amazingly last year John had difficulty in filling the two vacancies so MDT has run on one person light this year and that does need rectifying. It's not onerous or particularly time consuming. It is worthwhile and a very rewarding way to get to know and understand other people's views on our ministry here in St Mary's, but three years is enough at one go as it is essential that new voices continue to be heard and to drive us forward.

So if you get a call from John asking you to join MDT, just say "Yes". You won't be disappointed.

## **Puzzling Questions**

A couple of years ago we held an Alpha course in Long Newton and although it was well attended and everyone benefitted from the course, it didn't address our original outreach purpose of attracting people from outside the St Mary's and All Saints family.

A degree of research has revealed that this could be due to the Alpha Course assuming a fairly detailed knowledge of the Christian faith as its starting point, a position that in reality does not actually equate with the experience of people who have never been involved with the church. However, there is a new course called Puzzling Questions that seeks to engage people into conversations that explore a series of themes leading to discussions on spirituality and faith.

John has had a piece in the pewsheet for the last couple of weeks to explain the background to Puzzling Questions and there will be excerpts shown before services to give a flavour of the course which will run in The Wilson Centre on the third Thursday of the month from April to July and then September and October. Whilst the ideal is to attend all the sessions, they are all separate modules which build together but can be taken independently so it's not really a problem if you can't commit to every session.

However, our commitment does come in the shape of inviting a guest along to Puzzling Questions. We are trying to make that as easy as possible by positioning it as part of cheese & wine evening but the test of the success of this outreach event lies in the number of non-churchgoers we can attract to the series. If each of us were to bring along a friend, neighbour, relative or complete stranger we would create the conditions for Puzzling Questions to be a success. So it's time to act now. Mark the dates in your diary and start talking to the ones you would like to bring along so that we can help ourselves to make our outreach project a great success.