

# **The Carrs Lane Lived Community**

## **Introduction**

As a community we are attempting to live together as a Christian Community at the heart of a busy city. Our community life is built around a rhythm of daily prayer, a shared life together, openness to others in hospitality and service to the city in which we live, pray and work.

Choosing to try and live this life does not make us stronger or better than anyone else, rather we live in community as weak and fragile people. It is our awareness of our weakness which leads us not to attempt to sustain ourselves by our own efforts, but rather to draw on a deeper source than just ourselves. Our life together is sustained first and foremost by entering into a relationship with a God who loves us more deeply than we can ever understand or imagine, and by an attentiveness to the needs and gifts of one another.

We are attempting to live a challenging life which is only possible because we know that we are loved by a Trinitarian God who calls us into relationship with himself and one another.

## **Prayer**

As a Christian Community the source of our life together and the strength to live as a community bound by love is found in our relationship with a God who has loved us first. The first vocation of the community is to pray together. A routine of regular prayer allows us to commit, together, to stop and spend time intentionally in the presence of God.

We pray because we are loved by God and want to be nourished by a relationship with Him. Our prayer is not a work that we do, rather it is a time to pause, let go of our need for usefulness, and allow ourselves to be present to God's presence. In prayer we are reminded that we are loved unconditionally by a God who is and only can be love. Finding our common identity in the experience of the love of God gives us a universal commonality and helps us avoid defining ourselves and our relationships by our human capacities.

We pray together because the experience of being loved draws us into deeper relationship with one another. To meet God is to also meet more deeply those who live alongside us. We are open to God's work of unification. While it is a sad but inevitable reality of city centre life that all individuals will occasionally be absent, it is crucial that we hold on to the spirit and habit of being present to and with one another in our times of community prayer.

Different people connect with God more easily in different ways. The style and structure of our prayer must be an evolving reality, discussed and developed by the community. In planning prayer, members must be sensitive to the need for both creativity and tradition, respecting the tension which can exist between the two. As the space in which we open ourselves to experience the unconditional love of God, an extended silence is an essential element of our community prayer. Being silent together has a special quality, different from personal silence. As something which, in a world of noise, it is common to shy away from, silence is one of the potential gifts this community has to offer to the city.

Prayer should never look inward, so the community prayer, while sustaining the life of the community will also be public and open to all who wish to join us, whether regularly or occasionally. This does not mean the community leading prayers for others, but inviting others to join us as we pray. We will remain attentive to the prayers being as accessible as possible to those beyond our immediate community. Above all we must always remember that our prayer is a time for being in the presence of God and the role of the leader and the content is to facilitate collective openness to God, not to act as a Divine mouthpiece.

### **Being present to and with the Church**

Conscious of our identity as part of the wider Church, the community will not lead its own prayer times on a Sunday, leaving space for participation in the life and worship of the wider Church.

The community will worship with and be involved in the life of the wider Carrs Lane congregation. While supported by and supporting the Church at Carrs Lane, the community hopes to cultivate a culture of openness to other Christian communities in the city centre. The regular prayers will be advertised and open to those from all Christian traditions and community members will be encouraged to be engaged ecumenically and to worship with other Christian communities in the city. The community itself is ecumenical and open to those from all Christian traditions and we will respect and aspire to learn from each others experiences.

We commit to our part in maintaining an ongoing dialogue with the Elders of the Church at Carrs Lane We recognise their role in recruitment of new members and, should any member fail to live up to our commitment to community life, that the elders or their chosen representatives have the right and the responsibility to ask us to leave.

### **Living Together**

Our vision is to build a life together in a spirit of unity and family, not just to live as a collection of individuals sharing the same physical space. An assumption of inclusivity should be present in everything we do.

Eating together regularly is important. In the gospels, community is created and strengthened when people sit down and share food together. The community commits to eating together once every day. We want to build positive relationships with one another; spending time together, both formally at agreed times, and informally by being present in communal areas is important; but it is also necessary to respect one another's need for personal space and time to be alone.

The practical work of the community such as cooking, cleaning and maintenance should be a shared responsibility. Particularly important is that the least desirable jobs are shared by everyone. In seeking equality we find it first in living as equals in simple tasks.

We are loved and are trying to live that love tangibly with one another. A culture of positivity and affirmation is of paramount importance. We must endeavour to acknowledge and compliment the good we see in each other. Words, gestures and acts of kindness; being attentive to the needs and successes of each other; genuine thanks and praise; and living with a spirit of service towards each other all help to build up our community life.

Consideration takes many forms and our kindness is often as much about what we choose not to do as about what we do. Our acts of kindness should be carried out gently and quietly without actively seeking recognition. Perhaps especially important are our unseen acts of service.

The community will need to regularly discuss how it lives together. In these discussions it is essential that we are able to be honest, sharing how we feel about our life together. When agreements are made among the community a spirit of obedience is sometimes necessary, with a responsibility to abide by what has been agreed, even when we might not personally agree.

Our community must be a place where there is space for failure. When we are hurt by one another, our love for each other must be strong enough to impel us to assume forgetfulness and thoughtlessness rather than intentional harm. However, we also seek to live in honest relationships with one another and at times there will be a need to challenge another member whose actions or inactions are destructive to our relationships and life together. We should not shy away from this responsibility because of a lack of courage; but should

challenge as kindly and gently as possible. Equally, when we are challenged we have a responsibility to listen and take seriously the criticism which we receive. We must be able to challenge and to accept challenge without allowing this to destroy relationships, we must remember that challenges also come from love. Honest challenge, about seemingly insignificant day-to-day irritations, allows the little things not to become the big things which tear us apart. Where possible these discussions will happen privately and discretely, public criticism and talking behind people's backs should be avoided; however, at times there will be a need for honest, open, sensitive debate involving all the community.

As a community we will remain attentive to the knowledge that, should we not be able to resolve any disputes among ourselves, we would be wise to seek external mediation at the earliest opportunity.

Above all we must remember that we are weak people who will make mistakes and hurt others. Our community can only exist in the knowledge that we are loved and forgiven by God. We must live in a spirit of trying to show this same forgiveness and grace to one another.

### **Shared Financial Accountability**

Money is a necessary tool but all too often a source of division, inequality and conflict. In order to achieve harmony, we agree to live in economic equality with one another. We aspire for our attitudes to money and material wealth to be one of the ways in which we witness to the world around us.

All long-term members of the community make a commitment to working part time, no more than three days a week.

All our income from paid work (after tax, NI contributions, student loan repayments and pension contributions) will be pooled. It is important that this money is understood to be owned by the community, and that those who contribute more or less, have no more or less say in how it is spent than any other member.

As citizens of the West we are, whatever our income, among the richest of the world's population. We are stewards of our wealth and bear a responsibility for its use. Ten percent of our income will be given away, an acknowledgement of our commitment to those poorer than ourselves.

Each member of the community will receive a monthly stipend which should cover all our personal expenses, travel, clothes, gifts, holidays, socialising, savings etc. It should be such that we live in simplicity but not poverty. The rest of our income is to be used for communal expenses, including providing hospitality.

As a community we accept a spirit of financial accountability to each other, and will be willing to both challenge and be challenged as to our personal expenditure and consumer choices. We will keep these shared details private among ourselves.

Mindful that our commitment to the community is not permanent, any savings members have from before their arrival in the community can be kept, but generally not spent. If a member has reason to wish to draw on their savings, perhaps for a specific project, this should be discussed with the community.

### **Living ethically**

While aware that it is impossible to live a completely ethical life, we commit to making ethical consumer choices wherever possible. We will buy fair-trade, local, organic and sustainably produced products when these options are available and possible within our financial realities. While it is impossible to avoid all unethical products, we will, in discussion with one another, decide to deliberately avoid those companies with

a particularly unethical reputation. We will hold our community and personal bank accounts with an ethical (or as ethical as possible) financial institution. As a community we commit to an ongoing dialogue on these questions, continually challenging ourselves to be less oppressive towards other people and less destructive towards our planet.

### **Openness to others**

Hospitality is a core value of our community and a spirit of welcome is integral to our life together. Our community is not a closed group concerned only with itself and our own relationships with one another. Together, we look outwards. Our home will be a place where others are made welcome.

As far as possible, guests are invited to join the rhythm of our community life, being part of our prayers, meals and social times. All guests should be seen as guests of the community, not just the individual who invited them. As such we have a responsibility to inform the whole community, with due warning, of the presence of guests, and we all have a responsibility to make others feel welcome among us.

Both with community members, and those we welcome, we will encounter a diversity of cultures, views and personalities, and will need to remain attentive to dealing sensitively with our diversity.

The community will need times without guests to spend time with one another and to rest.

### **Serving the Community**

Living as a Christian Community allows us to experience the love of God and the love of others, a love which inspires us to a ministry of service. Our community must be outward looking and mindful of the poor.

Each of us commits to an unpaid ministry of service, which should be orientated towards the poorest in our society, be that poverty material, emotional or spiritual. Located in the city centre, our community is called to live in the city, for the city. This means our service will often be made visible in serving the population of the city of Birmingham; but we will also engage with and respond to national and international issues. It is up to each individual to decide where to use their skills and abilities to best effect. This service will be shared by the community in the support and encouragement we give to one another, knowing we have an outlet in which to share the joys and challenges of our chosen ministry.

If the most appropriate ministry for a member happens to be paid, or if a voluntary project subsequently receives funding for paid employment, the community collectively will reflect on whether this additional income can be well used by the community, or whether it should be given away in the spirit of the voluntary service it replaces.

We realise that the demands of our city and our world are never-ending. We accept our human limitations and will learn to balance the demands on our time and energy, those placed by others and by ourselves, with our own personal wellbeing and needs, both individually and collectively. It is a sign of our commitment to sustaining this life that we also take the need for rest seriously alongside the other commitments we make.