

Café Church report March 2024

Background

Café Church is an all-age, informal church gathering with some structure, but no set rules, providing the space for anyone to come along and enjoy refreshments, company, activities, and Christian worship together. Café Church has been running for two years this Easter.

Location

Church Hall, Smallfield

Time

3pm, every second Sunday in the month, excluding August. The second Sunday in December accommodates the usual Smallfield carol service.

Format

Tables are set up café style and refreshments are served. As people arrive, they are welcomed, encouraged to take a seat, have a chat, share some refreshment, and do some activities.

Over the last 12 months the setup has changed slightly, so that if possible, craft activities are included on the café tables rather than separately (unless particularly messy).

Somewhere between 3.30-3.45pm, everyone gathers to sing some songs and listen to a short bible message.

Café Church meetings

Since the last report was submitted in April 2023, Café Church has met every month except August (summer holiday) and December (carol service). Broadly speaking Café Church meetings have mirrored themes and bible readings used in other church services on the same day. Themes and activities were as follows:

Date	Theme	Activities	Songs
Good Friday, 7 April 2023	Easter	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Easter gardensPastel cross/heart picturesBead crosses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">HosannaWhen I surveyThine be the glory
Sunday 14 May 2023	The Holy Spirit John 14: 15-21	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Pinwheel windmillsThemed colouring and activity sheets	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Wind, wind blow on meWalk in the light
Sunday 11 June 2023	Jesus calls Matthew Matthew 9: 9-13	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Follow me flip flopAbacus counting puzzlesThemed colouring and activity sheets	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Faith is flowing like a riverOne more step along the world I go
Sunday 9 July 2023	"Come to me, all you who are weary..." Matthew 11: 25-30	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Origami chairThemed colouring and activity sheets	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Give me joy in my heartCast your burdens
Sunday 10 September 2023	Harvest Matthew 6: 25-34	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Corn cob key fobThemed colouring and activity sheets	<ul style="list-style-type: none">All things bright and beautiful

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thank you Lord for this fine day
Sunday 8 October 2023	The vine and the branches John 15: 1-8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grape vine cork paintings • Themed colouring and activity sheets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bind us together • His banner over me is love
Sunday 12 November 2023 (Remembrance Sunday)	Remembrance (John 15: 9-17 – love one another)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wire and wool poppies • Themed colouring and activity sheets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where have all the flowers gone? • Let there be peace on earth
Sunday 14 January 2024	Jesus calls Philip and Nathanael John 1: 43-51	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fold-out Nathanael and fig tree • Themed colouring and activity sheets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will you come and follow me? • Cast your burdens
Sunday 11 February 2024	The transfiguration Mark 9: 2-9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transfiguration collage • Themed colouring and activity sheets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be still for the presence of the Lord • Shine Jesus Shine
Good Friday 29 March 2024	Easter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easter gardens • Decorated hanging eggs • Card and wool crosses • Easter egg collage • Themed colouring and activity sheets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hosanna • When I survey • Thine be the glory

Key notes, observations and learning

- Café Church provides a relaxed, friendly atmosphere for informal worship.
- Although Café Church numbers were regularly reaching around 25-30 people last year, over the last 6 months numbers have decreased. January and February 2024 saw the smallest numbers to date at around 10 people. It's hoped this is purely related to poor weather and dark afternoons and that numbers will pick up in the spring.
- An article was written for the Parish News in March to remind people about Café Church and promote it. The hope is that the Good Friday gathering will bring in more people and there will be an opportunity to re-engage with people.
- Feedback is generally positive. People seem to enjoy Café Church meetings and the opportunity to chat.
- Preferred activities seem to be those that can be done at the café tables easily. Word puzzles appear to be particularly popular, along with colouring sheets and crafts using beads, wire and wool.
- Attendees have suggested favourite songs they would like to sing, which have been incorporated where possible. The music is always much appreciated.
- Volunteers are essential to enable Café Church to run smoothly and huge thanks go to all involved. There has been great support from volunteers helping in the kitchen, setting up, tidying away and playing the music. Café Church wouldn't be able to run without the efforts of the volunteers involved.
- An important aspect of the Café Church planning originally was to ensure the format was easily replicable every month, so that it doesn't necessarily rely on just one or two people. While this is generally the case, new volunteers are always welcome.

- Last year Café Church received a small amount of funding from Southwark's Fresh Expressions fund, which is dedicated to supporting churches to start, restart or develop Christian communities. As a result of receiving this funding, Café Church was asked to provide a case study, which is included below.
- We have also been invited to attend Greenhouse meetings – a gathering of people from local churches all involved in setting up their own fresh expressions. Local teams gather together two to three times a year to learn, pray, plan, find mutual support and to swap ideas. Liz Faulkner has attended both meetings so far on behalf of Café Church and all are welcome to get involved if you're interested.

Future dates 2024

- 14 April
- 12 May
- 9 June
- 14 July
- 8 September
- 13 October
- 10 November

Please continue to pray for Café Church.

Café Church Fresh Expressions case study submitted to Southwark, August 2023

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, The Windmill United Benefice had been running Messy Church. After a break of two years, things had changed. Some of our volunteers were no longer able to give their time, a number of families had moved on and the needs of the parish were different.

After running a survey, getting people's views and evaluating the responses, we decided on a new approach – our Fresh Expression: Café Church. It's an informal, all-age church gathering, with some structure, but no set rules, providing the space for anyone to come along and enjoy refreshments, company, activities, and Christian worship together.

The first Café Church took place in April 2022 and we've been meeting once a month ever since, (except in August when we have a summer break and December, when we have a carol service). Tables are set up café style, refreshments are served and people can participate in arts and craft activities such as colouring, origami, collage, painting and creating things with beads. For about 15 minutes at the end, everyone comes together to sing some songs and listen to a short bible message.

Café Church provides a relaxed, friendly atmosphere for informal worship and there's a core of around 25-30 regulars who come along most months. Feedback has been positive. Many enjoy the art and craft activities – the colouring and puzzle sheets seem especially popular with all ages. Everyone enjoys the singing and people often join in on percussion instruments too.

It is noticeable that Café Church brings together people who would perhaps not normally meet, for example older people with young families. Some Café Church attendees have said they appreciate the opportunity to meet socially and for worship on a Sunday afternoon, as it breaks up the weekend when they would normally be on their own.

Our team of volunteers are essential to enable Café Church to run smoothly. Their help with setting up tables, serving refreshments, playing music and tidying up has been invaluable. An important aspect of the Café Church planning was to ensure the format was easily replicable every month, so that it doesn't necessarily rely on just one or two people.

Café Church has so far proved sustainable and is certainly fulfilling a need as evidenced by the continued participation and support it has received.