



**SCF:
REACHING OUT
INTO OUR COMMUNITY -
A MISSIONAL CHURCH FAMILY.
27 January 2019**

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1. Context

This paper is intended to form the basis of a preach scheduled for the 27th of January 2019. The preach forms part of a teaching series on what we, as Elders of SCF, are discerning as the key focus areas for 2019.

RCW
15Jan19

INTRODUCTION

SLIDE 3

Today we're continuing with the theme of the areas where God is asking us to particularly focus during 2019. Other things won't stop, and won't stop having our attention BUT there are some specifics where we as Elders are discerning God is calling us to concentrate during this year.

SCF never has been a one leader church. Throughout our history SCF has maintained a belief in collective leadership by the Elders. Ben, David and I spend a great deal of time seeking God together - seeking to discern His will for the direction He wants us as SCF to take. We never move forward until all of us are in agreement. Over the last year God has been stirring our hearts for a greater love and care for our community - as we've prayed together, God has affirmed His call in a number of different ways.

Let's recap:

6Jan19: David Wort: that great picture of John the Baptist pointing the way to Jesus - God is calling us to be more intentional in pointing the way to Jesus - corporately as the SCF Church family and also as individuals.

13Jan19: Ben Lees: God's call on how we live as a church family particularly being intentional in our discipleship journey. Being firmly rooted in our relationship with Jesus, the author & perfecter of our faith.

20Jan19: Martin Allen: Growing in a discipleship culture: at the end he summarised how a deep discipleship culture will birth a missional church family - doing life together in different settings - modelling our values as we share fellowship, food and fun - focus on transformation not information.

SUMMARY

SLIDE 4

Today:

we're going to remind ourselves that:

- God has really blessed us as a church family; about
- God's overall vision and purpose for SCF;
- **Doing His will and building relationships with people in our community isn't a choice;**
- **We're called to bring God's unconditional love and care for people;**
- **Our care has to be authentic - we can't do that in our own strength - only by allowing The Holy Spirit to work through us; and**
- **being willing to allow Him to use what He has given us as His stewards.**

We're called to be a "Five Talent" Church Family - to be good and faithful servants - NOT to bury what He has granted us in the ground.

We are all - including me - being called to allow God to stir our hearts - to hear His call and obey - to allow His love & care to invade us and out of that love to be moved to act.

1.1 God's Purpose for SCF:

SLIDE 5

Those of you who've been on our Joining the Church Programme, or who've read the material in your Home Group, will recognise this summary of the Vision God has given us ...

Members of SCF are to be salt & light (Mission) in their places of influence whether that is at home, their place of learning, work, or at "The Bridge". We recognise that, working to nurture and grow a deep desire within members of the SCF family to be disciples (and to disciple others), is foundational to this mission.

"The Bridge", is our church building in Shirley. It is the place where all members of SCF can come together and express themselves as family; God has granted us an incredible asset. The Bridge - located right on the edge of Solihull's busiest park, next to a growing shopping area and new residential development - is an incredible gift from God. Just like the talents given to the servants of the Lord, we are to use it wisely, seeing its use grow and develop for the purposes of reaching people with the Love of Christ and to make disciples.

1.2 God's Vision for SCF:

God has shown us that:

- **members of SCF will grow (stronger and deeper) as disciples of Christ:** members of SCF will grow as disciples, and their relationship with

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God will deepen; they will have a passion to be ever more Christ centred. As members of the church family go about their daily lives they will exert Christ's influence. **SCF will be a missional family; we will be salt and light to people in and around Shirley, and further afield. Every aspect of our plans and purposes will be founded on our deep desire to be in God's will and to do His calling; everything will continue to start with, and to be covered by, prayer.**

- **people will see Christ-in-us transform lives:** people will see Christ in us, both as individuals and as a "fellowship". They will experience Christ-in-us transforming lives and communities;
- **The Bridge is to be a light in the community (Isaiah 60:1):** the people of SCF are being called to develop **resources that reach people physically, socially and spiritually;**
- **everyone will know about The Bridge and SCF:** everyone in Shirley, as well as people in the wider community of Solihull, are to know of The Bridge and SCF and to be clear who we are;
- **government and community agencies will come to us for help:** as SCF's influence grows in the community, agencies and community groups will come to us for help and support.

2. Overview:

As we reach out into our community then we will seek to ensure that we:

- Work alongside the activities of the church; and
- Meet people at their point of need.

Whilst ensuring that,

- Everything has a Kingdom focus; and that we,
- Give people an opportunity to be empowered & equipped to lead a fulfilled life.

In doing so we will:

- Enable people to engage with the Gospel;
- Create a pathway to Christ; and,
- Create a route to engage with SCF.

3. Why do it?

SLIDE 6

God's word to us at this point in SCFs history is to be a **missional community.**

God is impressing upon us that this isn't a choice.

We are called to:

- *"loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke", Isa68*

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and

- be Christ's hands feet and voice for those in need "*For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was ill and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.*" Matt 25

We are also called to:

SLIDE 7

- be salt and light.
- share the Gospel of Jesus Christ;

plus

- we are *commanded* to make disciples;

and

- "*..From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.*" Luke 12:48

Out of a spirit of deep gratitude...

4. What is the focus that God is putting on our hearts **SLIDE 8**

A network of spaces - including our homes and work places - with The Bridge as the hub.

Safe spaces:

**Accessible to everyone
where needs are met
with real love and care
for the whole person
including all those who they care about**

Where everyone is empowered to make a difference **SLIDE 9**

**in their own lives
and in the lives of those around them**

A community

where people can "be" without having to "believe" or even to "belong"

where they experience Christ and learn to trust through relationship

A pathway

for Christ to walk upon

SLIDE 10

where the Gospel is lived out
leading to a place where the Gospel is preached and
people can discover Christ for themselves

5. The Bridge.

SLIDE 11

The original vision when we were capturing the design brief for “The Bridge” was that it should be a **community resource, easy for people to come into and feel at home.**

During early 2004 I ran a number of workshops to capture a vision for what was to become “The Bridge”. Many perceptions, of what God’s heart might be for the building, were captured in the notes of those workshops; one of the consistent themes was captured as:

*“An attractive & accessible multi purpose environment that welcomes people of all ages and backgrounds (race, culture, abilities) ... **that will help the church to contribute to the spiritual, moral, social & physical well being of the community.***

Through providing a meeting place for worship, friendship, prayer training and practical help.”

(The Bridge Design Workshops 27 February 2004)

6. Looking forward:

How can we make even more use of what God has blessed us with - including The Bridge - to impact our community? SLIDE 12

6.1 Our starting point has to be Authenticity:

Our words and actions must be **congruent [stop: explain: Oxford Dictionary: “In agreement or harmony”]. A true heart of love and compassion, and a humble and teachable spirit, drive words and deeds that are consistent.**

Congruence comes from **being in tune with The Holy Spirit.**

Being in-step with God’s heart is the only way that we can have an authentic care for people. We can’t do it in our own strength.

That care includes **a deep desire for them to have the best.** Having the best includes living life to the full and being everything that they are meant to be; **fulfilling everything that God has planned out for them, and living in the fulness of His promise.**

Congruence also comes from **understanding and respect.**

Understanding comes from **interested enquiry and through listening with an open heart.**

Respect is an essential element in building trust.

Effective communication is only possible in an environment of trust; when people know that they and their views are respected, then they can feel safe.

Respecting someone is NOT the same as agreeing with their views or their lifestyle. However, building trust involves **listening and speaking in ways that demonstrate our love and care and our respect.** [STORY] Trust also involves a willingness - out of our faith - to allow The Holy Spirit to do the work of conviction.

We have to be willing to be patient and to move at His pace, not ours; **to ensure that we speak just the right sized helping of truth in love, and at the right time.** A wrong word spoken in haste can shatter trust which has taken a long time, and hard won yards, to cultivate.

6.2 Hub and spokes:

SLIDE 13

God has granted that the majority of us in SCF have homes. He has planted each of us in our home, in a specific location, within a community, at this specific time, for a purpose. We all have the ability to build relationships with our neighbours, to get to know them along with their families and their friends.

It isn't always easy to reach out and to get along, never mind care for, our neighbours and to **have the heart of Christ for them.** However, through prayer and supplication we can have that mind and heart of Christ and we can call upon The Holy Spirit for wisdom and discernment.

Our homes can become those safe spaces where we can start to build understanding, demonstrate real care and so build trust. We can pray for opportunities, and for the right spiritual environment, to invite our neighbours to something which may be happening at The Bridge. We can then continue to authentically pray and care for them until the next opportunity for a "God moment" arises.

Some of us may like to take a look at Care for the Family's "**Kitchen Table Project**" Although it's aimed at children in Christian families it may well speak to parents and carers who aren't yet Christians too. It could be a great resource to help parents of younger children build a safe place in their homes. [play video clip] (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Seh8ztq9iU>).

There are **many amongst us who have a gift of hospitality.** It may be that you're **hearing the call to use your kitchen to reach out to your community.** Get some Christian friends together and enjoy a meal, but be intentional. Keep it small to start with, you need space to expand. Bless the time together in prayer, and play some Christian music in the background. Talk about real issues. Share simple testimony. Give God the glory. Start to share words of knowledge for each other in a simple and natural way. Seek God for

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which of your friends, from outside SCF, He wants you to invite. Bring them into this simple fellowship that you've created. Build a trusted relationship with them. Let them know that you get together regularly and they're welcome to come next time. As it becomes appropriate, invite them to something that's happening at The Bridge.

Many of us have a **place of work or study outside our home**. God has placed us there for a purpose. Why not start a prayer group? Just reaching out to colleagues or fellow students who you think may be interested, may seem like a challenging step, but press in. Seek approval, do it in the light, not in secret. That process of speaking to those in authority will be a challenge but it will be a huge witness. Set a prayer agenda where you pray for the organisation you work for or study at; pray for blessing and for God's favour on that organisation and upon your colleagues. Pray for your colleagues; seek words of knowledge and seek God for opportunities when you can ask people if they would like the group to pray for them about specific issues.

Testimony: there were many times in my career when I stepped out in faith and prayed in specific circumstances or set up prayer groups. More recently I've established and chair a charity called The Trusted Executive Charitable Foundation. A couple of months ago I had the opportunity to share about the charity with a group of business people. As I stepped out in faith to share the vision and be absolutely up front about our Christian ethos and purpose I was hugely surprised at the positive response I received. Just before Christmas one of my fellow trustees shared during an event for senior business leaders at The Gherkin in London. He was amazed when he received a round of applause at the end. If you found your vision in prayer, move out in faith and seek to honour those you're seeking to reach, you'll be amazed at how supportive people can be.

6.3 The Bridge as a hub: **!!CHECK TIMING!!**

In a "hub and spoke" model, **part** of The Bridge's function is to be a resource for our different community based groups - our homes and our work places - to use.

At some point in the future we trust that God will lead people we're caring for within our community towards SCF. However, through our friendship and care, **we are building a pathway for them towards Christ**. As long as we are faithful in following God's prompting then, how fast they travel that pathway is the responsibility of The Holy Spirit.

Our focus must always be to build trusted relationships which are founded on our care and respect for those we are befriending; **it's not about counting sheep into the pen.**

6.4 The Bridge: extending the tent:

SLIDE 14

Part of God's vision for SCF is that:

"The Bridge is to be a light in the community (Isaiah 60:1): the people of SCF are being called to develop resources that reach people physically, socially and spiritually."

As we reach out into our community then we will identify a variety of needs which need to be met. Those needs are also an opportunity to extend God's use of The Bridge by building new relationships.

At the moment the majority of activities at The Bridge are clearly run by SCF. A small number operate without an SCF badge e.g bereavement support. Others are run by external organisations with input from members of SCF e.g. breast feeding cafe (NHS). The key is that they are all compatible with SCF's charitable objects - they are aligned with what God has called SCF to be and to do.

7. Where do we see need in our community:

SLIDE 15

The need is huge but God isn't calling us to meet every need and we don't have to carry it all ourselves,

A helpful analogy for extending our use of The Bridge may be that of department stores. Within a John Lewis store, not all the counters are staffed by John Lewis partners or carry the John Lewis brand. However, there is significant benefit to the companies involved, as well as to the shopper, by them being in the same place; shoppers move between the different counters and brands to meet their needs. **We can remain flexible to God's call in the ways that we seek to ensure that The Bridge is a light in our community. Our test is that all activities at The Bridge should be consistent with God's vision for SCF, and part of an integrated pathway to Christ.**

Needs fall into two broad groups:

- i. **building community:** there is a need for people to feel a stronger sense of community, of belonging and of "place" - this would tend to express itself in doing things with other people to pursue common interests and to build friendships;

and,

- ii. **specific need:** people who have specific areas in their lives where they would value help.

The number of specific areas within each of these categories is huge - way beyond what we could cope with at The Bridge. **We will need God's guidance through The Holy Spirit in order to discern which areas He specifically has for SCF.**

i. Building community: doing things together:

This category could encompass a whole range of areas including:

a. Community groups

People who want to come together to pursue common interests e.g.

- sport / fitness;
- the arts;
- crafts;
- life long learning (cf University of the Third Age).

b. SCF as a friend to the lonely

People are lonely. Our Community Lunch has created a place for fellowship and community. It provides space for a simple meal with SCF people there to serve and befriend. Everyone is welcome and people are invited to just come. They receive a warm welcome with love and care regardless of who they are. Friendships have started to develop between those who come, as well as with members of the SCF team.

ii. Meeting specific needs:

This category could encompass a whole range of areas including:

Finances

- Debt problems
- Understanding Benefits
- Benefits gap
- Tackling the root cause.

Addictions:

Life Skills

- Parenting Skills
- Marriage enrichment
- Job Interview techniques
- Identifying your potential
- Cooking skills.

8. SUMMARY:

SLIDE 16

God has granted us much - He has a unique plan for us - towards the end of 2018 we received a prophetic word from Stephen Wood - one of the founding Elders of SCF - that God was calling us into a new era - not a new phase but a new era.

God's call for every one of us is to help transform our community - it's **not a choice, it's a command.**

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The call is for us to be **pro-active in offering unconditional love and care** for people in our community.

This love and care **MUST** be authentic - we cannot do this in our own strength, we have to remain in-tune with The Holy Spirit so as to do the work that Jesus Christ is calling us to. We have to abide in Him by being good disciples.

Our homes, our workplaces and The Bridge are gifts from God; let's step out in faith by being inspired by The Holy Spirit to use them with courage and in God's grace.

Let's be that "Five Talent" church and receive the accolade from the Father as "good and faithful" servants - NOT as wicked servants who bury our talents in a field.

9. What next:

SLIDE 17

As I've sought God I believe that He's calling us to come together as the **whole SCF church family for a time of prayer:**

that we will have God's desire deep within us - His love, His passion - to be that Missional Church Family which helps transform our community. To know His call on each of us personally. **For the faith to allow The Holy Spirit to convict us and to give us the courage to step out and do His will.**

Our Father who art in heaven... your Kingdom come, your will be done...

As we take Communion together let's each seek God for deep inner conviction.