

**The Avonmouth Ladies –
Our story of the Northern Ark Mission Initiative
...(so far.)**

The Avonmouth Local Ministry Team, with Jenny Low & Joe Hasler

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The Avonmouth Ladies – Our story of the Northern Ark Mission Initiative.

The Learning community of seven women at St Andrew Avonmouth, Bristol, has successfully begun to make the transition from a learning community to a Local Ministry Team. They were asked to make some notes on what the process had been from their own perspective. Four of them did this, and as you would expect, their stories were quite similar. These were put together in parallel columns and given back to them in this form. They met with an interviewer with further questions about what they had said.

The correlated story, in the words of their original stories, is reported below. In the boxes are their remarks from the interviewer's further questions. (This interview is recorded on a wav file for the purposes of evaluation.) These questions were as follows.

- 1. What was the good idea?**
- 2. See each other in a new light? Is that true?**
- 3. This was not always easy to understand..**
- 4. Why didn't you do the spiritual side before?**
- 5. We have had some good, and constructive feedback.**
- 6. Does it feel like doing an apprentice-ship?**

Their story speaks loudly of the work of the Holy Spirit energising the move toward *ministry as a team* from the experience of being a learning community. It also speaks of the steps in faith and hope they have taken personally within the Northern Ark process of discernment, selection and training in the context of working class estate based community.

The Northern Ark - Avonmouth Story

By Deysia, Judy, Julie and Julia

<p>The initial contact.</p>	<p>During October 2010- Joe Hasler and the team from Lockleaze - 'popped in' to a PCC meeting - here at St. Andrews Church. Joe explained how their Church members had met together to identify each other's gifts, and the outcome was a very strong, supportive team, who used their talents to lead 'Services' , and to take responsibility for other roles within the Church. The team of 6 explained their roles, <i>which were very inspirational in their achievements.</i></p>	<p>Julia</p>
	<p>When Joe brought the team to speak to us at our PCC meeting, I was very impressed with them, and thought <i>what a good idea their system was.</i></p>	<p>Deysia</p>
	<p>We met the Leadership team from Lockleaze at our PCC Meeting. It was very interesting to see the obvious connection between them, how supportive they were of each other and how well they knew each other. I thought how wonderful to have that kind of team.</p>	<p>Julie</p>
	<div style="border: 1px solid yellow; padding: 10px;"> <p>What was the good idea?</p> <p>Everyone was doing what they could to take stuff off the vicar basically and getting your hands dirty, and the challenge to? It was how the team were supportive of each other and how well they knew each other. I pictured them as a puzzle with all the pieces locking into each other. Each one gave something that the other pieces didn't.... inspirational.... I was inspired by the way they were passionate about what they could contribute..... There was no 'self' if you know what I mean. They came to explain it to us. They weren't grandstanding or anything They were like 'thee an I', you know?</p> </div>	
<p>The gifts day and sessions about working in groups</p>	<p>Following this, Joe came along to discuss, and for our team of members who attended, we identified each others' talents and personalities within the group - e.g. - leader, supporter, pacifier etc.</p>	<p>Julia</p>
	<p>We met with Joe and Jenny and did some exercises to discern each others' gifts, which was very enlightening and sometimes quite surprising. We did another exercise about "what the vicar does" which was quite an amazing list of tasks with a wide spectrum but we thought that a team with a wide range of talents could probably cover much of it – with training.</p>	<p>Julie</p>

<p>The Theological Bakes</p>	<p>Our church then had a series of meetings with Joe Hasler and Jenny to identify each other's gifts and learn what they believed ours were. This was a fascinating exercise. <i>We began to see each other in a new light</i>, examining what they had to offer and what made them tick. Not something we would normally identify in church attendance or even home study groups, because we had an agenda to tease out ways in which each of us could use our gifts to serve our congregation and wider community in the name of God.</p> <div style="border: 1px solid orange; padding: 10px; margin: 10px 0;"> <p>See each other in a new light? Is that true? Yes. We got to know each other better in a way you don't on a Sunday morning or even in a house group. Looking at our gifts for a start and appreciating that we all had different gifts that we could respect and hopefully complement each other. I found it fascinating to hear what other people thought about me. If I am honest I felt a little bit uncomfortable about that. It was about being honest and feeling about other people trying to be honest.....</p> </div>	<p>Judy</p>
	<p>Future informal meetings were set up - hence - 'Theological Bake' - and enjoying a cake and cup of tea/coffee, while studying theology.</p>	<p>Julia</p>
	<p>The team have completed 7 modules, each of three sessions....</p>	<p>Julia</p>
	<p>So we embarked on a course with David Lloydand called it "Theological Bake". It is all about the way people have come to understand the nature of our relationship with God from ancient times until the present day and the way in which we have responded to him.</p>	<p>Julie</p>
	<p>Eventually a smaller number of us attended the Theological Bake series of modules, learning basic facts and theories about our faith and our personal relationship with God through Jesus. <i>This was not always easy to understand or assimilate without further study or discussion but gave us a general background about how human response to God and the life, death and resurrection of Jesus has evolved through the ages.</i></p>	<p>Judy</p>

<p>The Apprentice Practise</p>	<p>This was not always easy to understand...</p> <p>It would have helped to have the script.....I've actually bought some books. I've got one that tells you what words mean. Like eschatology and things The discussion is a lot to do with it. It</p>	<p>Deysia</p>
	<p>Since then, we have been attending the Theological Soup/Bake sessions with a view to setting up our own ministry team. I have to say, we have worked well as a team at St Andrew's for quite a long time, now, due to couple of very long interregnums. We had to get on with it, so we did! <i>This new idea isn't so much different – just a few more things to be responsible for.</i></p> <p>Some of it we've been doing before. It's the spiritual side we haven't been doing. Why didn't you do the spiritual side before? Nobody ever suggested it and it didn't seem appropriate. It's new to us isn't it..... I've led women's world day of prayer. We did Sunday school. It's all right doing women and children; it is about knowing your place.</p>	
	<p>In the meantime the same small group were encouraged to become a ministry team working with the students to prepare and present a Service of the Word once a month. This has been a further learning curve where we have been able to examine themes, choose appropriate readings, hymns and give a talk. We have worked well as a team, deferring to the special talents of each other but also allowing everyone to choose what particular role they would like in any given service. Reading lessons, leading intercessions, leading the service and giving the talk have been divided out among the group and we are gaining in confidence. Some of us have taken on all the roles and probably have our favourites in which we feel comfortable and connected with the congregation. We are able to experiment on ways of presenting the theme (PowerPoint slides, flip chart, dramatised readings etc). The response to this new form of service has been mixed but we have had individuals complimenting us which is encouraging.</p> <p>We took on the responsibility, with the help of our context students, for devising and presenting our second-Sunday services. We had a meeting before each service to decide what our theme would be, which hymns to include, and who would take each role, i.e. leading, reading, interceding, and addressing. We were a bit fuzzy at first, but we got better each time. I think we all now have an idea of who is suited to which job.</p>	<p>Judy</p> <p>Deysia</p>

<p>How it is received</p>	<p>...and the Ministry team are now regularly leading 2nd Sunday Services. <i>We have had some good and constructive feedback</i> - which has been helpful.</p> <div data-bbox="517 304 1805 400" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p>Like Dick got accosted in the shop (Jude's husband) by two ladies telling him what a wonderful service we'd done.</p> </div> <p>We were able to put our team to the test and we started to take over the 10 o'clock service on the second Sunday of each month with the support of Richard and Joanne (two context students from Trinity college.)</p> <p>The team are growing in confidence, and their dedication is appreciated by our Church members.</p> <p>It always takes a while to get people used to new ways and the reality is that we will not always have a Priest in Charge ordained through conventional means, there isn't enough coming forward. We therefore have to look at alternative ways of organising ministry and an obvious way is through the committed members of the congregation doing an apprenticeship and having that recognised by licensing them as Lay Ministers or ordaining as OLMs, if they are suitable for the roles. I believe official titles or status will convince sceptics that they are having a 'proper' service.</p> <div data-bbox="517 823 1671 1193" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p>Does it feel like doing an apprenticeship? Kind of. Yes. Yes. We have not gone a college course, that would scare most people off. Who else is their other than the people who come to church? And we are here. We belong to the history. We are not strangers to this place. (The traditional pathways are mentioned.) But the only thing is having people's negative attitudes to that, because people in the past have been interested in becoming a reader and I have heard people say "Oh no that wouldn't be any good for you 'cos it's too academic". You don't even think about it after that. Doing it this way is not so scary. You're not excluded exactly because if you really wanted to, but you're discouraged.</p> </div> <p>My own experience of the N Ark is that I have grown in my understanding of what ministry means and feel privileged to be able to take part in ministering to my fellow Christians in Avonmouth, both in church and outside. I have developed great respect for the individuals in the ministry team, and am pleased to learn different views and ways of doing things. I feel the future is challenging but exciting in terms of providing a church ministry.</p>	<p>Julia</p> <p>Julie</p> <p>Julia</p> <p>Judy</p> <p>Judy</p>
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	<p>We have learned a lot about our own and each others' gifts and the real nature of worship, and gaining more confidence in ourselves and one another.</p> <p>Personally, I haven't been able to dedicate fully within the team - owing to personal commitments, but I fully support the purpose of this initiative.</p> <p>My own sense of call didn't exist until you mentioned it in connection with Northern Ark, and then I had to let it stew for a while but as the course has gone on and we've started doing the Service of the Word I've felt more comfortable with the idea of a more formal ministry i.e. ordination if I'm accepted but if not as a Lay Minister. The call has crept up on me and grown over the past year or so. I feel that my own journey of faith has deepened with the NArk process along with other challenging things that have happened in my recent life when I've really felt the presence of God and the Holy Spirit and I have a sense of wanting to share it so others might feel comforted and encouraged. A case of if it can happen to me it can happen to them.</p> <p>I think Judy would make an excellent Licensed Minister; Julia a very good Counsellor peacemaker; and Julie a really good Leader. Marlene would be ideal as Sacristan; and Mary is really good at intercessions/all prayers. For myself, I think what I do best is reading and intercessions and, outside of the church services, home communion and house groups.</p>	<p>Julie</p> <p>Julia</p> <p>Judy</p> <p>Deysia</p>

The original papers written by the women involved and a sound file of the group interview are kept but only available by the permission of all participants.

About the Northern Ark.

The Northern Ark is a collaboration of six council housing estate parishes forming an arc across the North of Bristol. They are working together to create indigenous 'Local Ministry Teams' in each parish with a view to becoming less dependent on imported 'stipendiary' clergy. The underlying principle is that mission and ministry is best exercised by those who confidently present the Christian faith to their own working class culture. Secondly it is better for the Church's ministry to be seen to 'belong' to the community, even when challenging it.

The approach was pioneered at St. Mary Magdalene Lockleaze. The apprentice style of training of the Ordinand, Reader, and unlicensed members, was developed with, and approved by, the Revd Malcolm Herbert and Revd Canon Derek Chedzey as the appropriate Bishop's Officers, as pilot schemes.

This Training approach, known in Bristol as *Go-local, Grow-local*, was launched in the diocese on 22nd July 2010.

Anticipating this launch, the Archdeacon of Bristol called a meeting of the incumbents of the Northern Ark parishes on the 7th May 2010 to explore the possibility of collaboration of the Northern Ark initiative by using the *Go-local* scheme. A proposal was developed for the Archdeacon.

On the 3rd of October 2011 the Bishop of Bristol approved the initiative, initially for a three year period, with a review to begin after 2 years to assess its future potential. He seeks to offer this as a pilot to the Ministry Division.