

ISLINGTON AND CAMDEN MISSION CIRCUIT



‘Second Chance’ – the charity shop of Archway Methodist Church.

Described by those involved as ‘a doorway into church from a different aspect’, the story of the ‘Second Chance’ is a reminder of what can be done with inspiration, hard work and making the most of a church’s resources. Vivienne Mitchell, a volunteer at the shop tells the story and additional information was provided by John Mason.

‘This venture began in 1995 when 2 church members asked if they could use a vacant shop on the premises to open a charity shop. The shop opened on Tuesdays and Saturdays for a few hours only, selling second-hand clothes, books and a few gifts. It soon proved popular and in 1998, when larger premises next door became available a church leader who had spent 30 years in retail, was appointed manager. The shop expanded and the opening hours of Tuesday – Saturday, 10a.m. to 5p.m. were established.

The trading policy that had begun to evolve was agreed:

‘The Second Chance charity shop is for the benefit of the Methodist Church locally, nationally and overseas as well as supporting local and national needs and people in need.’

We are here for the benefit of the local community by selling goods at reasonable and fair prices. All our goods came at first from Methodist churches in the London North West District, but now we receive more and more donations from the local community.

Apart from the paid manager, and since 2001, another paid employee, the shop is staffed by a small band of volunteers who sort, iron, wash glass and china, check electrical items, price and sell. The shop stocks everything except large items of furniture and staff are constantly amazed at the items that prove popular. The fact that the shop is situated in an area with an Art College means that students on modest grants not only stock up on items for the ‘bed-sits’ but for their design courses as well – pieces of metal, wood, brass, buttons, keys, pictures, magazines, books, stationery items are all in demand. The vinyl record box has a regular stream of customers as does the CD/Video collection and the paperback books (6 for £1) arm the traveller for the potential delays of the Northern Line.

For those in need the shop is a valued support. An ex-prisoner with only the clothes he has on is told to choose shirt, jacket and trousers, and he leaves the shop looking and feeling a different person. Mothers find baby clothes and nursery equipment. Good quality toys are available for Christmas presents for under £5 – a boon to the family on benefit.

It is testament to the hard work of the staff and the shop policies that Time Out magazine recognised Second Chance as the best charity shop in London a few years ago. It is the Christian witness, however, that I, a recent volunteer, have been privileged to see. Customers receive a warm and friendly welcome and find people prepared to listen. Being near the large Whittington Hospital, the shop often has people looking

round because they are early for appointments, or visitors waiting for wards to open. Sometimes patients themselves, if they are mobile, pop in for a cup of tea and a chat. Some of these are facing difficult diagnoses, most are anxious for themselves or a loved one, all are in need of a comforting word, a sympathetic ear, even the offer of prayer. The church news magazine is always displayed and seems to 'fly off' the counter. This year every customer was offered a leaflet announcing the Christmas services and including a Christmas message. The windows were tastefully decorated with Advent posters and the curtains of lights all around the church and shop proclaimed to all, even those driving up the A1, the Good News that 'Christ is Born'.

There has not been a vast increase in the membership at Archway as a result of this venture, but many lives are being touched. The gospel is being seen in action. Thousands of pounds have been donated from the shop to many, many causes as one would expect from a Charity shop, but the work is much more than selling for a good cause. It is one way of being the Church in the Community.'

In addition to the many Methodist local and Connexional charities, the shop has sent donations to: CARIS, local BB, Brownies and Guides, Donkey sanctuary, Orbis Flying Eye Hospital, Open Doors UK, Cancer Research, Water Aid, Tsunami Appeal, L'Arche, Enfield Women's Aid, Send a Cow and many more.

QUESTIONS:

- 'Second Chance' was greatly helped by being able to use the experience of the member who became shop manager. How well do you think the experience of your church members is used? Or the building resources? What more might be done?
- The project benefited in its early days from the support of other churches in the District. What does this suggest about the value and potential of our new District? In what ways do you think your church might most benefit from the District? What might you have to offer?
- It was a great achievement and a source of encouragement to receive recognition from Time Out. How important as a source of encouragement and motivation in the life of the church is recognition? Are there practical ways in which our churches might do better in this area?
- Some excellent communications are taking place in this story. What do you think your church might be able to learn about communications with the community?
- '...one way of being the Church in the Community'. In what ways would you say your church is 'being the church in the community'? What more might you do? The range of donations given by 'Second Chance' suggest that 'community' is not just those that live nearby. What do you think 'community' means in our global city?
- In your experience how important is the 'listening ear'? What makes a good listener? What are the challenges involved?

Bible Study: rather than a Bible passage, John Mason suggested that the hymn 'Wonderful Love' (**Hymns and Psalms 691**) was a source of inspiration to the people of Archway for this project.

- What would you say is the message of this hymn? How important is that message to your own faith?
- In verse 2 Jesus' example is seen as one of 'joyfully ... coming ...at measureless cost'. How easy do you find it to remain joyful in the face of the struggles that come with church life? How would you suggest people can best remain joyful?
- Sharing the pain...seeking the lost... how good would you say your church is at following Jesus' example? What could be done better?
- What Bible passages does this hymn remind you of?