



Following Jesus is about the whole of life, not just Sunday

The 'sustainable' rhythm of gathering for Light of Life Baptist Church, near Great Yarmouth. Interview with Elizabeth Stoner.

I think our rhythm of gathering has helped us recognise church isn't about a few people up front, it's all of us," says Elizabeth Stoner. "And that following Jesus is about the whole of life, not what happens during the two hours on a Sunday morning."

Elizabeth is the part-time minister of Light of Life, a Baptist church in Ormesby St Margaret, near Great Yarmouth. "Light of Life was founded in the 1980s and has always been forward thinking", she says. This DNA, alongside Covid restrictions on its old chapel, has led the church to evolve its own pattern of meeting.

Currently, gathering looks like this:

On the first Sunday of the month it meets from 10:30 in the chapel for a breakfast and a social time together. The church's life groups take it in turns to host these 'Nourish' Sundays. This is followed at 11:00 by a 30-minute a time of worship, based on Ignatian spirituality, which always has a set format and could be led by anybody. There is a short reflection in the middle - something interactive or a Lectio Divina. It is particularly accessible for those new to church or exploring faith.

The second Sunday of the month is a podcast. Generally this is a message recorded by

Elizabeth or another member of the congregation. There is an encouragement to sit with others and listen together, discuss and pray afterwards.

The third Sunday is the most traditional, with all the congregation encouraged to gather at the chapel. They sit around tables, and ensure the inclusion of the children and young people. Communion is always served.

The fourth Sunday is sabbath. Some of the life groups take this opportunity to meet up with neighbours for breakfast or lunch, games or a walk, whatever helps them to rest and enjoy creation together.

There is also a particular emphasis on life groups, which meet weekly or fortnightly.

"While having one Sunday of the month devoted to sabbath is unusual", Elizabeth says, "it's a practical response to the realities of leading a small church." The congregation had been without a minister when she joined five years ago, and though it had been 'punching above its weight', it was 'on its knees'. Elizabeth herself is part-time, and having one sabbath Sunday frees her up to intentionally spend more time in the community.

"Having a break from the usual teaching allows us time and space to hear from God in a different way and to practise hospitality," Elizabeth explains. "We learn to rest and be in God's presence, allowing him to take control. And we've found it to be sustainable. What's happened in the past is people have just dropped out because they're too



tired. This not so onerous on the volunteers."

She adds the traditional service on the third Sunday is 'a real celebration', because everyone being together in one place happens less frequently.

Elizabeth admits "it's a different idea of what I grew up to believe church was," and shares how three couples left when the church adopted this rhythm.

But now new people are joining, in part because they love the look of the rhythm.



"It's saying following Jesus is about the whole of life, and that includes doing other stuff," she says.

"We want church to be a springboard, and not a whirlpool - we want Sunday mornings to equip us for the rest of the week, to give us energy to meet with family, friends, neighbours - with people who have no church background.

"It's the church gathered and scattered, and we've found this to be working for us."

Elizabeth Stoner is the minister of Light of Life Baptist Church