

In my current diaconal appointment I am serving a specific area and community, the Methodist congregation within this community although supportive and very faithful, have a small membership of which many are not as able as they once were, which brings its challenges. This is a new diaconal appointment and not wanting to exhaust the few members that could help, I knew I'd need to find partners in the community who I could work with in meeting whatever needs we met. I prayed that God would use the diaconal appointment in fruitful ways, that God would provide good partners to work with and that God would provide us with opportunities for mission.

SNaP the dedicated youth provision within the community were the first to welcome me and use my role to support them, I go into sessions at their 'base' and lead occasional sessions. Aspirations are quite low and so once I was asked to talk about my life and the things I've done. In turn SNaP have supported the ministry to the community by bringing young people along to volunteer at Messy Church, Holiday Clubs and outreach events. We have worked in partnership to get the Red Box Project up providing free sanitary provision within the secondary school. Although this is ending as the government have committed to meet this need.

Initially I contacted and spoke with all sorts of people as I found my way around the community, one night I sent off a message to all the nursery schools and playgroups. Straight away a message pinged back from the South Normanton Nursery School saying lets meet up and talk. I explained the things I was looking at and they said there was a real need to more toddler groups. I said we'd love to run a toddler group, but needed help. 'No problem, we'll help you!' Great, but the next thing was we had very few toys and so again I sent off an enquiry to the Derbyshire Toy Library asking if they might be able to lend us some toys while we got up and running. Again I had an instant response 'Yes, that would be brilliant as we are just moving out of one location and needed to relocate toys.' The first week we opened we had nearly 40 children attend. Together Time @ Zion – Stay & Play (incorporating the 3 way partnership in its title!) has just celebrated its first birthday and numbers continue to grow. We've wondered about capping numbers, but the Kingdom of God doesn't cap numbers. The Church building is a huge space and I particularly don't want to turn away anyone who wishes to come. For me it says something about the love and grace of God given freely to everyone. There certainly is a need for this ministry to young families. I dressed as an Angel when we did the nativity last Christmas, the toddlers were mesmerised by the outfit. I've never had such a captive audience, wonder if it would work on other ages?

Here I am dressed as an Angel for the toddler nativity



When I arrived I'd also been given a contact name Mark North from the Freedom Community Project as they were keen to work within the area. The main aim of the Freedom Community Project is to support people who live in deprived areas, to care for all people no matter of background, race, religion or sexual preference. To show the love of Jesus in action, listening, supporting and helping people in local communities. To work with people in order that they might make a change in their lives, helping themselves out of the situation they are in and moving into a better future for them and their family. Doing so by providing support such as job search advice, skills training, food banks, clothing, household provision, activities to build self-esteem, financial support and money management and counselling. We've had really good community engagement through this ministry. For example one gentleman from the community came along the first week we opened. Now he is always there first waiting for us to open us, he helps us to set up, sits and enjoys company all morning, helps us to pack away and is the last to leave. I think John 4 has to be one of my favourite Bible passages, Jesus with the woman at the well. This passage highlights how we strike up ordinary conversations and do ordinary things but they have a much deeper meaning. Jesus so often was speaking at a heavenly level to those listening at an earthly level. Is it not for us to try to bring what we believe is heavenly to earth in the same way? The Freedom Community Project can meet very real needs that may appear to be simple, but I think we are serving at a much deeper level.

I particularly enjoy Schools work and the schools have welcomed my ministry and together we have done the usual things like assemblies, harvest festivals at the Church. We are just talking about the school coming to Church to learn about Easter. We were even able to get *Puppet Power* (a Christian puppets ministry team) from Grimsby Baptist to give up a Saturday and drive over and perform a puppet show as outreach to the local community.

Here I am with one of the cast who came from Grimsby.



Messy Church wasn't being run in any of the other churches and I really wanted to try that, the Churches Together help me every way they can, particularly South Normanton Community Church. And so we run Messy Church which always proves.....messy! Working ecumenically and showing unity is important, as the Churches Together in Britain state we are many churches with one purpose.

As a former nurse I am always keen to know how we can help with unmet health needs within community. I'd had experience of Baby Basics in my last appointment and so made contact with the local centre. They were willing, supportive and allow us to hold baskets locally so that together we can serve a larger area which they alone cannot reach. Baby Basics is supporting new mothers and families who are struggling to meet the financial and practical burden of looking after a new baby. It provides much needed essentials and equipment to mothers and families; including but not limited to teenage mums, people seeking asylum and women fleeing domestic abuse and trafficking.

Working with midwives, health visitors and other professional groups to provide support. Baby Basics lovingly collect, sort and package up a 'Moses Basket' to help these new mothers practically and generously, demonstrating the love of God. God is at the centre of Baby Basics, it is inspired and motivated by Gods heart for everyone. We have had health professions leave us in tears as they are so grateful that they are able to provide this practical support to locals mums who have little for their baby.

Here I am passing on a basket to local Health Visitor Caroline Blake -



Also as a community nurse I used to visit people in their homes who were incredibly lonely. If there had been an MHA Live at home Scheme in the area where I nursed, I would have made good use of it! In the early days of the appointment here I asked if an MHA Live at Home Scheme might work well across the circuit. It has taken a while but the circuit said yes and we have just begun setting it up. Live at Home is a variety of exciting and fun social activities for people aged 55 and over. Its aim is to enable older people to live independently in their own homes for as long as possible, helping them to live later life well in their local communities. The Theology and Ecclesiology underpinning the Diaconate and the Methodist Diaconal Order report to conference 2019 asked that the words of the Methodist Worship Book be amended to include 'Deacons are ordained to a ministry for witness and service in the world.' The word witness is important here as I believe the Live at home scheme as well as being a service to the community will be a Christian witness too.

Jesus said in John 10:10 I have come that you might have life, and have it to the full. I certainly have that, as I am also a half time deacon as we have children. The Diaconal rule of life helps me to keep my life in balance and focussed on the fullness of life Jesus was referring to in this passage. The Diaconal Order is a source of mutual support, spiritual guidance and acts as a critical friend. I continue to believe I am called by God to be a deacon, I love serving God both in the local community and within the community that is the Diaconal Order.

When I think of my appointment here, I think of Rublevs Icon. Icons are something my husband Rev Peter Taylor and I grew to appreciate while we served as Mission Partners in Bulgaria. Icons, like the rule of life for deacons, sanctify daily life. The trinity believed to be depicted in this Icon displays the mutual support, the harmony, the circled love which I feel underpins the ministry here established in partnership with others. And as Ecclesiastes 4:12 says a cord of three stands is not easily broken. My appointment here is planned for 5 years and my hope and prayer is that the particular work and ministry of a deacon will grow and flourish. Rublevs icon is based on Genesis 18 1:18 where Abraham entertained angels. This feels very apt, as I always feel God sends angels. We felt we met many angels in Bulgaria, people who were angels to us, who helped us tirelessly without complaint. And it is just as true in the appointment here, so many angels who have come alongside the ministry and enabled it to happen. Zoe who helps to run Together Time @ Zion – Stay & Play jokes that she is my angel with a Hoover! She is also an encourager and a person of prayerful support too and for me she really is an Angel.



Deacon Samantha Taylor