



Pastor's Page

Café Church

Summer and Barbecues go together like Posh & Becks. (see *David Beckham, English footballer* and *Victoria Adams, struggling British pop singer*, for further insight). However, the relationship (back to barbecues and seasons) is seriously threatened when the British climate serves up the wettest summer since records began. And so it was with great trepidation that I contemplated a church barbecue last Wednesday as part of the OM Mission. After praying and panicking (but not in that order!) I came up with a cunning plan - an indoor barbecue! Now I'm not an expert in the area of health and safety but I reckoned that lighting a charcoal fire inside a building was probably not healthy nor safe! So, the food would have to be cooked in the oven in the church kitchen. Thus at about 7.00pm we began to get things ready. Fortunately we still had tables and chairs belonging to the "On the Move" organisation that we had used at the *Connected* family Fun-Day so set them up in the lounge. Then the chef for the evening discovered some cherished church table cloths in red and blue checks which we employed to beautifully adorn the scene. With tasteful restaurant-type music, the smell of food cooking and nibbles on the tables, the scene was complete. All we needed now was guests.

At 7.58pm the Canadians arrived and charming as they were, they were only 4 and I was expecting them to be 12! Others from the home groups had cancelled at the last minute due to personal circumstances, and the idea of inviting friends had not really caught on. So, deciding that this might be the moment to "go out onto the highways and the byways and bid them come in" I invited people from the Midlands Amateur Radio Society who were meeting upstairs to come and join us. And join us they did. Next thing I knew there was a queue of people who I didn't really know waiting at the kitchen hatch to receive their burgers and bangers! Then sitting down at the beautifully positioned circular tables, they chatted away to church folk about the world of Amateur Radio. When they finished they couldn't thank us enough for our hospitality. Great, if only evangelism was this easy! But surely this is evangelism, and maybe this is what people mean when they wax lyrical about Café Church.

Nick Cuthbert in His book *Church on the edge* says; *"Everybody has to eat. It is a common factor in humanity. Traditionally it is the place where families and communities come together. To invite someone to eat with you is to share in a common human experience. To offer food is to give hospitality and welcome. We find neutral ground around the table. So it is not surprising that it is the easiest, most natural, unthreatening place to build relationships."* Much of Jesus ministry revolved around meals. The parable of the Great Banquet (Luke 14:15-23) a 'picnic on the grass' (Mark 6:30). Dinner in Bethany (Luke 10:38-42) Supper in Jerusalem (John 13:1-14) Meal at Emmaus (Luke 24:28-32) and Breakfast on the beach (John 21:1-19) to mention a few. And the Lord reminded me through this indoor barbecue that a meal creates a fitting framework for reaching people with his love.

So as we contemplate how we might engage with people around us and bring them closer to Christ, let's not forget the potential of meals. What happens at our fellowship lunches may be closer to a biblical understanding of church than what happens in our Sunday services! Now there's food for thought!

15th July 2007