

Notes from the Open Forum held at Suffolk Road Church on Tuesday April 29th 2025

Present: 31 people attended from 11 churches.

Apologies: Apologies were received from Vicky Leonard, Roger Pullan, Peter Halden, Malcolm Offord and Graham Pattrick.

The Forum was welcomed by Andrew Dixey on behalf of Suffolk Road Church, Churches Together and Future Vision. He led the Forum in opening worship.

1. Future Vision

Rev Faith Marsden outlined the history of Future Vision. She said that:

- They were grateful for all the support they received in prayer, or finance or in any other way
- Future Vision had been going for 21 years led by Ian Copeman
- In 2001 he connected with Crusaders and the registered charity of Future Vision began
- Trustees were invited to help and were appointed
- They operated on a shoe-string budget so were glad of any financial support
- Ian works many hours for just a retaining fee and mileage expenses
- In January 2007, they left Crusaders and joined with Scripture Union which has proved a profitable partnership
- When the middle schools closed, Ian set up a chaplaincy with Thomas Gainsborough School assisted by Liz Moulton, the youth worker at Bures Baptist Church.
- Open the Book was started in Primary Schools

Faith reminded the Forum that the words that have been shared with love are those that stay with us and remain familiar. She added that the children who have experienced Open the Book share what they have learned with adults. She ended by asking for continued prayer for Future Vision.

2. Open the Book

The Open the Book team gave a presentation of "The Storm". The story was acted out – with Forum members being the children – and at the end the children were given the opportunity to reflect on the message of the story.

It was noted that schools are really keen to have Open the Book and are very welcoming. More volunteers were needed to expand the work. No qualifications were needed although a DBS was essential. Time required was about 1 hour a fortnight. Prayer for the teams and for the schools was needed

Faith commented that children were singing Christian songs in schools with relevant and meaningful words. The Forum listened to a performance by Great Waldingfield Primary School of "Lead me home". Faith then led the Forum in prayer for the local schools and for the work of Open the Book.

3. Chaplaincy at TGS

Liz Moulton explained that she had been involved in youth work but came to realise that she only saw the youth for a very small part of their time as for a large part of their time they were in school. She felt she needed to be working in schools and despite being very nervous about the challenges presented, she joined Ian Copeman as a Chaplain at TGS.

Ian started by describing his work as a chaplain the previous day:

- On arrival he had dealt with a first aid incident – a boy has fallen off his bike. There were other first aid calls on his time during the day
- A year 7 pupil had died so he had 11 sessions supporting the year 7's
- He also supported staff particularly upset by the pupil's death
- He had been helping nervous students to get into their lessons
- He had covered absence at the reception desk

He commented that we were fortunate that in this area Christianity was welcome in schools. Just before Easter they had been welcomed into TGS for a day for which they had set up prayer stations which the whole of year 7 and their staff had gone through. The students had been asked to evaluate the event and there were many thoughtful and positive responses.

The chaplains are providing opportunities, through different activities they offer, for students to think about and explore faith.

Ian added that more volunteers and more money was needed to achieve even more. Churches needed to provide support, back up and prayer and members of the Forum needed to share with their churches the excitement of the opportunity in this area to provide a ministry to children – and adults – in schools.

4. From the Trustees

Andrew Dixey spoke on behalf of the Trustees. He pointed out that Ian would be retiring shortly. He had done a tremendous job as a chaplain – and would continue to support Future Vision as a Trustee. He expressed thanks to Ian for all he had done, and also to Liz [who is not financed by Future Vision]. More money was needed to pay for a replacement for Ian. This could be as much as £7,000 a year. Churches, PCCs were encouraged to consider their donations. It would be a difficult post to fill as the person appointed need to be able to work with school terms.

Help was also needed with the Management Committee. It would be very helpful if every church could appoint a rep to serve on the committee which met only 3 times a year.

Andrew asked for prayer so that the work of Future Vision could be grown.

5. Final Business

Rev Jim Stewart thanked Andrew for hosting the Forum and for the support Suffolk Road Church gave to Churches Together by hosting Kettle and Fish.

Notices

Andy Jowitt said there would be an Ascension Day Prayer Walk on Thursday 29th May at 7.30 pm – 9.00 pm at Foxearth Meadows.

He added that the first outdoor service at Foxearth Meadows would take place on Sunday, 22nd June at 3.00 pm.

It was noted that the Christian Aid United Service would be held on Sunday 11th May at 6.30 pm at St John's Methodist Church.

The next Forum would be held on Tuesday 8th July at Little Waldingfield.

The Forum closed with the Grace at 8.45 pm.