

Solihull Town Centre Chaplaincy Report on 2013

Solihull town centre still seems to buck the trend by definitely not being a town centre in decline, despite the current economic climate; though there is still a tendency for shoppers to be 'browsers' rather than 'spenders'. Yes, there are a few empty shops but no more than would be expected at any time, and the town continues to be a 'destination' shopping centre.

We continue to flourish as a team, slowly increasing in size. We said good bye to one member of the team, but have two in training so hope to cover more of the town centre shops on a regular basis. I am, as ever, grateful to all the team who regularly give of their time and commitment to this very valuable and much appreciated ministry.

As ever, the Chaplaincy team delivered Christmas cards to all the retail outlets in the town centre a week or so before Christmas. This is a very important and valuable aspect of our ministry as it is an opportunity to make ourselves known to the smaller shopkeepers whom we call on rather infrequently during the year. It is also a chance for us to assess on a wider basis the economic situation of the traders as a whole.

Again with financial help from the Touchwood management we distributed mince pies to all those who work in the retail outlets in Touchwood but this year we were very pleased that we were able to extend to other streets in the town centre and were ably assisted in this task by members of one of the local churches.

As I write the 'Quiet area' in the Touchwood centre, at present located close to the management offices, is moving to a new location on the ground floor. This will mean that it will be open and available all the time the centre is open whereas before access was only available during office hours and it was closed at weekends.

In November we were very pleased to host the Industrial Mission Association National Retail Chaplaincy meeting. Andy Cole, the General Manager of Touchwood, and Melanie Palmer, the manager of the Solihull Business Improvement District were our visiting speakers. Both affirmed the role of chaplains in the town and expressed a desire to help promote the chaplaincy in whatever ways were appropriate. I hope that in the future closer relationships will be established between the chaplaincy and the BID group and, in practical terms, with the 'town hosts'.

During the last year research has been carried out into the Church of England's involvement in chaplaincy, seeking to establish numerical data and also the connections between chaplains and the established church. Being a team totally made up of lay volunteer chaplains we were very pleased to be among those interviewed, and affirmed by the report.

Beryl Moppett, Team Leader