

REACHING NEW PEOPLE THROUGH: *Football*



“All I wanted was a game of football,” says Revd Joe Pienaar, Vicar of St Hugh’s Lewsey.

Initially disappointed at not being able to book the football field across the road from the church for a weekly kick-about with a few friends and friends-of-friends, Joe was elated to find a new kind of church developing: Sunday Night Football Church. It was quite unexpected and at least as beautiful as the beautiful game.

The pitch they booked on the other side of town was a fifteen minute drive away, but Joe says: “we didn’t realise that was going to be such a blessing: a lot of discipleship happens in the car to and from. Y’know, giving lifts to people, loads of questions come up and a few weeks into playing and talking, a couple of guys turned to me and my colleague and just said: ‘could we get baptised?’ It turned out they had been on the road of discipleship themselves, watching You Tube videos and reading the Bible at home independently, and there was no reason not to baptise them.”

It became clear that the players wanted to get together away from the pitch so the team began to get together an hour before playing, to do some Bible stuff, pray and to practise mutual accountability. Fourteen to fifteen come early every week out of 22 to 24 who play, and a total squad of 35. So with different people turning up each week, there is a real sense of a growing community.

Each week, the men explore scripture and consider how they can apply it in their everyday lives. Through a What’sApp group, they encourage each other throughout the week, occasionally meeting others in the church for prayer. Then they gather on Sunday night and share stories of how their lives are changing.

Football Church remains connected to St Hugh’s, where the baptisms happened during Sunday morning services. Joe values the connection to St Hugh’s, but is considering how Football Church might develop, maybe to include Holy Communion on Sunday nights.

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