

The Joys of Car Sharing!

Back in a long-ago pre-Covid time, when everyone was expected to (physically) turn up at the office on time, work a full day and then endure the commute home (even if that commute regularly included a stint on the country's second biggest car park, lovingly referred to as the M60), I began to car share. Starting with one person (who lived in Chorlton), it eventually grew to include four of us, commuting from four locations in and around Manchester to Leyland and back, five days a week.

The perks were that we were saving on fuel and doing our bit for saving the planet, and there were two reserved parking spaces at work for those who were car-sharing. The downsides were that getting home always took longer; you never left work on time (and leaving late meant getting stuck in even more traffic), and because of geographical constraints, you still had to travel to and from someone's house and therefore had to drive on the days you weren't "driving".

However, those weren't the problem. The difficulty for me was that, although I'm able to stand up and talk *to* groups of people, I find it quite difficult *with* one-to-one (or one-to-three) conversations - especially with people I don't know very well, or have little in common with, and especially when they're younger than I am, have different culture references and can work smartphones efficiently.

So, it took a while, but, we got beyond the trivial chat and how it was at work and moved on to slightly more personal stuff about ourselves and what we thought and believed and felt. After a bit, it didn't matter if we chatted or if we sat there not speaking to one another if that was how we felt. A particular high point was one potentially ghastly journey home in horrible traffic being fun because we were having a frankly ridiculous debate about whether one of our number, who liked only vertebrate seafood, was allowed to have prawns because a prawn's exoskeleton qualifies it as a vertebrate.

After a while, the car-share finished. Someone moved closer to work, and for the rest, the time-logistics didn't work out. Suddenly, I had up to three hours of extra spare time added to my average day, and I was free to take diversionary routes when the bottom of the M61 choked up. And you know what? I missed it! I missed the company and conversations and learning about exoskeletons. I even missed being told off when my bad driving was challenged.

At the time of writing, we are about to hold church meetings about Christ Church & Didsbury URCs merging. The vibes so far have been good so I'm taking a punt on a 'yes' vote but, even if that's not the case, the principles I describe below still apply.

There are bound to be some things that may be a bit uncomfortable - ways of doing things, or theological standpoints or expectations. There is the potential for, "This is my car, so we're taking *my* route" (sticking with the car-share analogy here as I thought there was mileage in it). There is also the potential that some passengers might feel stuck in the back, being taken for a ride they have no say or control over.

In a way, I hope that everything is not plain sailing (really mixing metaphors now), because it would show we care deeply and are willing to express our thoughts and feelings to one another. I hope that we can take this opportunity to treat things as a new start, to consider our church life and where we fit into it, and to look at how we can be the church God wants us to

be in the difficult and challenging times we find ourselves. And I also hope that, even at the times when our church feels like it's stuck in an M60 tailback, we can learn how not to waste the time but rather to enjoy talking to, and finding out about, one another.

David Blackburn

The church meetings of Didsbury URC and Christ Church, both held on 19th February, were unanimous in agreeing to a merger.