

PRESS RELEASE

2nd November 2019

New Community Centre boost from Allchurches Trust for St. Thomas Church Lancaster

St. Thomas Church is beginning a major “Heart of the City” building project to house a new Family Life Centre supporting those in need in Lancaster and the surrounding area. Lancaster City Council gave planning permission for the project to go ahead, over the summer. The congregation had already pledged £1.86 million towards the total cost, but the church still needed another £700,000 to make the project happen. This shortfall has just been boosted by a grant of £40,000 from Allchurches Trust, one of the UK's largest grant-making charities.

In 2016, St. Thomas Church Lancaster celebrated its 175th anniversary. The time was right to consider a new, purpose-built church centre. This development has been named the “Heart of the City Project”. The church cost just £1,200 when it was originally built (about £85,000 in today's money), so the congregation had a sharp intake of breath when the cost estimate for the new centre plus essential repairs to the main church, came in at £2.6 million.

The plan for the new centre is to offer a much greater level of support to the community in Lancaster, and its vulnerable members, at a time when this is needed more than ever. The flexible, multi-use community building will house a cross-disciplinary “Family Life Centre”, bringing together health, education, counselling/listening and financial services, and providing early intervention social support for families under pressure.

The services offered by the centre will be offered to any family in need, regardless of religion, ethnicity, orientation, etc, and with no strings attached. Some rooms in the centre will be available for hire by local organisations. The centre will be available for community activities six days a week, while on Sundays it will be used for church activities currently attended by about 100 children each week.

The Family Life Centre will house multiple services and make use of good practice and key partnerships which are developing nationally. The core activities are expected to include the following:

- PEEP (Peers Early Education Partnership) for pre-schoolers and their parents.
- Parish Nursing, providing health care integrated with Christian spirituality.
- Parenting and relationship courses, to strengthen family bonds.
- Safe Families for Children, helping families ‘on the edge of care’.
- Transforming Lives for Good, bringing mentors together with children at risk of exclusion.
- Christians Against Poverty life course, teaching money management and cooking skills.
- A listening Service, helping people struggling with isolation, depression and anxiety.
- A variety of support groups.

The Centre will employ a part-time Parish Nurse and a part-time Manager.

St. Thomas' church is now contemplating how they can meet the financial shortfall required to see the project through to fruition. The congregation have been working on their own fundraising initiatives and have raised over £25,000 from a variety of events including sponsored walks, afternoon teas, an auction of promises and many other novel activities.

The Allchurches Trust grant of £40,000 will make a significant difference towards helping the church meet the shortfall in its financial goal. Allchurches gave more than £16 million to churches, charities and communities in 2018. Its funds come from its ownership of Ecclesiastical Insurance Group.

Jon Scamman, vicar of St. Thomas Church Lancaster, said "We are so grateful to Allchurches Trust for their generous grant. Our Heart of the City project is a sign of our commitment as a church to the future health and well-being of the City of Lancaster. This significant grant will help us bring that commitment to reality, with building work starting next year."

Peter Mojsa, Grants Officer at Allchurches Trust, added: "St Thomas Church has a long history of providing support and social action in Lancaster and we were delighted to support this ambitious project that will provide a lifeline to some of the most isolated people in the community. The new building will give the church the space to grow and develop their children and family work, house their family centre and provide flexible space for groups to meet that is accessible to all."

St. Thomas Church's fundraising still continues and anyone interested in donating, or finding out about forthcoming events, can find more information on the website (www.st.tees.org.uk) or via the Heart of the City Facebook page (www.facebook.com/StTeesHeartOfTheCity/) or Twitter account (www.twitter.com/StTsHOTC).

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Notes for editors

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About St. Thomas Church Lancaster: St. Thomas Church is in the city centre of Lancaster. With a vibrant and energetic congregation of nearly 600 adults and children, across three services, we are a large, family-friendly church. For more information, visit www.st.tees.org.uk.

About Allchurches Trust:

Allchurches Trust is one of the UK's largest grant-making charities. Our grants further our charitable objectives of promoting the Christian faith and other charitable causes. We welcome applications from all parts of the UK and Ireland, particularly from areas of social and economic deprivation. We fund projects that tackle homelessness, poverty and social exclusion. We also support the repair, restoration and wider community use of churches and cathedrals of all denominations. Follow Allchurches Trust on Facebook and Twitter @AllchurchesT or visit our website: www.allchurches.co.uk for more information.

Attached:

3D visual of the new centre

Jon Scamman, Vicar, assessing repairs to the spire of St. Thomas Church Lancaster