

# Sharing Our Story...



## Hattersley Baptist Church, Tameside

**Michael Forman is the minister at Hattersley Baptist Church, a small church community in an overspill estate on the Eastern edge of Greater Manchester, part of Tameside. The estate was built in the 1960s and was in the news a few years ago with the distressing story of two police officers murdered on a routine investigation. Michael's ministry is supported through a Home Mission grant, and he and the church seek to share God's comfort hope and presence to the community here in practical ways, as he explains...**

“One of the significant things we have developed is the Foodbank, which is based in the church building. Its purpose is to relieve and support members of the local community, who are living in conditions of poverty, need or distress. It has grown significantly over the last four years and now has two distribution centres providing about 18,000 meals to about 1,200 people; including over 450 children. Hattersley Baptist Church continues to be the main distribution centre. In the last few months demand in Hattersley has risen significantly – about 50% compared with the same period in the previous year.

Our ethos is ‘love your neighbour’ which we also express as ‘Care by the community and for the community’. This has been very well received by many more secular bodies. For example, all the local councillors have been willing to volunteer at Foodbank events. Over 50 organisations now refer people to the Foodbank, including government agencies, charities, schools, churches and community groups.

The Foodbank has made a real difference in the community, helping families who have experienced benefit cuts or delays in payments, debt problems, low income, lack of income through illness, etc.

About 70% of Hattersley residents live in social housing. For many clients we are the only people with the time to listen to their individual problems. Feedback from referrers and clients show -

- we have helped families stay in their home and avoid eviction and/or the build-up of rent arrears
- we have helped families avoid having children taken into care or put on the 'in need/at risk' register
- we have helped families with illness to recover and ensured they do not experience increased stress, which would have hindered their recovery.
- we have helped young offenders and ex servicemen re integrate in society
- we have helped prevent people from having to skip meals, turn to money lenders or steal to survive.

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Home Mission: Supporting, equipping and enabling churches in God's Mission

# Sharing Our Story...(continued)



## Hattersley Baptist Church, Tameside

As the Foodbank grew the church decided it needed to extend the building to create a food store and additional community room. We currently store food in three locations and this creates significant logistical problems. There are also volunteer safety issues around lifting heavy boxes of tins in confined spaces. We want to offer confidential advice and IT services (eg budgeting, benefits and job club) that directly address the main reasons people are referred to us, as listed above. The new building will also free up space for much-needed activities for children and families. We have now raised the required £90,000 and intend to build in the spring of 2017. Some of the funding raised is in the form of an interest-free loan of £20,000 from the Baptist Building Fund, so we are still working on the funding needed to repay this.



Through our Foodbank, we are following the heart of Jesus' teaching in Matthew 25: "I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in.... Truly I tell you whatever you did for the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

The ministry of showing God's love to people sits alongside our evangelistic work, for example, this year we introduced a new scheme working with all the local primary schools to give children's holiday meals to children who qualify for free school meals during term time. In addition to giving parcels containing 30 meals per child to these families we invited them to a summer holiday club and 21 children came along.

We have excellent relationships with other local churches with every church in Hattersley, Mottram, Holingwoth and Tintwistle donating food to the Foodbank. There is no way we could have supplied all the food ourselves! We work with a smaller group of four churches on evangelistic missions. This year this group of churches hired a marquee for five days of mission. The marquee was set up on the car park at the community hub in Hattersley and we visited most of the homes in the area with invitations. About 150 adults came each evening and over the five days all the schools brought groups of children. We estimate that a total of 450 children attended presentations at the marquee. We are now following up on the mission with a Christian enquirer's course held at two locations one of which is Hattersley Baptist Church. We give thanks for the ways that the local churches are working together to reach our communities with the good news of Jesus.

We have a good team of volunteers in the Foodbank including some from other churches and some non-Christians. We need to strengthen our Church lay leadership team and we would value your prayers for this – we need workers in His harvest field.

**For your thoughts and reflections:** How does your church respond to the call to 'feed the hungry and the 'least of these'?

In what ways could you strengthen relationships with other churches locally for the benefit of building God's Kingdom?

