

Introduction

This leaflet has been put together to try and answer some of the most common questions about Antioch. Because Antioch is both ecumenical and a community, both things that are unusual, we need to explain ourselves more often than some other Christian bodies.

The first item gives a quick summary of who we are. The items thereafter go through answers to typical questions about us. Throughout you will find quotations from Antioch members, which we hope you find put some flesh on the bones of our answers.

We hope you find the leaflet useful.

Antioch's Nature and Purpose

Antioch is an ecumenical, charismatic, covenant community of nearly 200 people, all members of local churches, based in West London. We are united in a common way of life and mission, and are part of the Sword of the Spirit, a world-wide 'community of communities.'

As a community we are united across church and national barriers in our worship and missionary service together. We are united by a covenant to love and serve the Lord, each other, and all those the Lord sends us. As part of this we share what we have with one another, though not normally living financially in common. We strive to be radical disciples of Jesus Christ our Lord and in this want all that we do together to serve his purposes and not our own. Our vision is more than just to live as a community; it is to do so in a way that fosters evangelism, family and single life, youth work and the unity of the Christian people.

We are a charismatic group and in this we seek to exercise the gifts of the Holy Spirit and to see the Spirit purifying us and humbling us as we walk each day with him, hoping that his fruit will grow in us. We seek to know the will of the Lord and to follow it with our whole hearts whilst recognising our own weakness in discerning it. We want to be available with all that we are for the mission he has given us.

What does it mean to say that you are ecumenical?

Being ecumenical means that we believe that all Christian people are one people in God's eyes (Ephesians 4:4-6) and we are called to love one another (John 15:12-17). We consider that we are primarily divided by history but also by different beliefs on important, but not-essential-to-salvation, theology. This common unity is recognised in the documents and theology of many of our churches, including the Roman Catholic Church, and the Anglican Church, to mention just two.

Being ecumenical, however, does not mean that we all agree with one another on every issue, nor do we play down our ecumenical differences. Rather, the approach we take to ecumenism, whilst recognising our differences, looks to see how we can share in the riches of our respective traditions. This is particularly expressed in our worship and in encouraging the reading of authors from denominations different from our own.

Even though we cannot hold all of our theology in common, we can share our lives and carry out mission together. All of our missionary outreach, including Koinonia (student work) and Youthlink (youth work), are both ecumenical in their staff, and in the backgrounds of the people who join.

'I came from a small town in the Midlands...there was a distinction between one another, and I never mixed with Catholics. I went to a prayer meeting when I first came to London and the Holy Spirit spoke to me and said "I am bringing everyone to myself in the same way...so how can you think that you are superior as a Protestant?"'

Evangelical Anglican family man

What is a covenant community?

Antioch is a community in the sense that we hold a series of values and ideas in common, and express these in the way we live out day-to-day life. Some of these are:

- A theology shaped by traditional orthodox Christianity but not uniform as we come from different churches;

- Practical teaching on how to live out Christian life in the modern age and day-to-day help in making this relevant in our lives;
- A desire to express ecumenism in an active way through prayer, mission and fellowship together, and by the support of unity initiatives.
- Worship that both draws on our various church traditions and the work of the Holy Spirit through the charismatic movement;
- Support of one another in day-to-day life through sharing groups and, for many people, through moving into neighbourhoods where we are within walking distance of one another.

We say we are a *covenant* community because we have made commitments to live out our community life with one another for a period of time. For community life to work well, we have to be able to rely on one other, and, in our opinion, this requires a higher degree of commitment than is normal in most of our church settings.

What does it mean to say that Antioch is Charismatic?

During the time of the Acts of the Apostles the Holy Spirit brought about manifestations of the Holy Spirit that are called in the Bible the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Paul in his writings refers to these same gifts as being given primarily for the building up of the body, the local Christian community. For much of the history of the church after the early period these gifts were only practised in a very limited way. However, during the 20th century the Holy Spirit worked to revitalise the gifts as part of the active expression of the church through what has become known as the Charismatic Movement or the Charismatic Renewal. In the last decades of the 20th century the Charismatic Movement spread to most of the major church denominations.

We in Antioch actively encourage the use of the gifts of the Spirit in our worship meetings, particularly the gifts of prophecy, tongues, words of knowledge and healing (1 Corinthians 12). However, we recognise that for the gifts to be used effectively, they need to be used in good order, as Paul encourages us in his first letter to the Corinthians (14:26-33) or they will come into disrepute. As a result, although we encourage spontaneity in their use, we seek to do so in an orderly way so that the Spirit's voice to us is not confused.

'I was very sceptical about charismatic worship to start with but gradually God revealed himself to me through his Holy Spirit and showed me the unity that his Spirit brings us.'

Evangelical Anglican single man

What do Antioch people do? Are you all serving in Christian work?

The variety of Antioch members' work is little different from that in church; it ranges from corporate executives to primary school teachers, from computer programmers to medical doctors, from homemakers to undertakers. There are some Antioch members working part or full time for the community or for our missionary work, but the vast majority of us have 'normal' jobs.

That being said, the outworking of our Christian faith means that many of us have found ourselves choosing work that matches our beliefs and ideals, be that work paid or voluntary. Much of the voluntary work we are involved in is work we do in the context of our local churches and our members are involved in many activities. Two examples of this are care for the homeless and marriage counselling.

In the last ten years three of our members have moved on to be Anglican ministers and three to be Roman Catholic priests, and we have been delighted to encourage them in their particular vocations, seeing it as an honour that God has sent them out from us.

'One of the things that persuaded me to get involved in Antioch was their commitment to mission, particularly in the University of London, and to doing it in a way that involved both Protestants and Catholics.'

Evangelical Anglican single man

Do you live financially in common, and in the same houses as some communities do?

Members of Antioch do not normally live financially in common, although we have in our midst a brotherhood of celibate men, Protestant and Catholic, who have chosen to do this, and individual family groupings are free to do this if they want. We do, however, encourage our members to give a portion of their income to their church, and a portion to support our life as a community.

Some families have others living with them, most commonly single people, but there is no

expectation that this should be the case for every family. We do, however, encourage younger single people to live together in households where they can grow in faith, love, and understanding of the Lord's Word, and secure the habit of regular prayer and reading of the Scriptures. Households of this sort are mini-communities, and for many young people are the first place where they learn the give-and-take so essential for married life, and for serving generously throughout our lives as our Lord has commanded us.

'Community opened up a whole new dimension of Christian life to me. However I didn't really know what community meant until I started to live in a household.'

Catholic single woman

What is the difference between a community like Antioch, and a local church?

Antioch is a community, not a community church or a church of any other sort. This is a very important distinction, one that was critical for our foundation in 1979 as a community actively supported and encouraged by both Anglican and Roman Catholic bishops. Currently all of our leadership is non-ordained and drawn from several denominations, and all of our members attend their own churches. To help make this practical we go out of our way to avoid timing conflicts with our church services by having our main twice-monthly community meetings on Sunday afternoons, rather than Sunday mornings or evenings.

Since we are not a church we have different understandings amongst our members of some theology, and one practical outworking of this is that we cannot all celebrate the Eucharist/Lord's Supper/Mass together since this would be against the teachings of some of our members' churches.

However, we are ecumenical, something our individual churches often find difficult to express in practical ways. In this we express the unity that God sees in the universal church but which our historical divisions and prejudices often cover up. Our theological unity is in adherence to the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds and traditional Christian moral teaching.

Can you explain how Antioch sharing (small) groups run, and how they differ from other sharing groups?

To be an Antioch member it is normally necessary to be part of a sharing group. Our sharing groups are different from some you may have been part of. First of all, we put a strong emphasis on accountability to one another, and we encourage people to be open with their lives in the sharing group context. Our experience is that this accountability, when matched with confidentiality, can be a protection for us against our own sinful tendencies, and gives us the opportunity to grow in the Lord. We have found over the years that when men share with men, and women with women, the sharing groups are more open and fruitful, and so our normal pattern is for sharing to be done by men's and women's groups separately. Since our sharing groups are normally ecumenical in their make-up, this is also a place where we express our fundamental unity.

Sharing groups are also a microcosm of our community life and part of the way we are structured as a community. The members of a sharing group are encouraged to look out for one another in day-to-day life and to go out of their way to support one another in times of difficulty and challenge.

'When the war ended some people from another country attacked people in our village; my father was injured, and thereafter suffered from severe headaches. It left bitterness against the people from that country... Then I joined Antioch, and my first sharing group leader turned out to be from that same country. By the time I realised this however, she had become a very dear friend to me. There was something that needed working through in me, but before that could happen I needed to get to know her as a sister and fellow believer... and this opened my heart.'

Lutheran grandmother

In what way are Antioch members part of their local churches?

Antioch is not a church but rather supports the churches to which its members belong. Antioch members are church members in good standing with the churches of which they are part, be they Anglican, Roman Catholic, Baptist, Lutheran or free church to name just a few of the denominations from which our members come.

An Antioch member is therefore both part of a local church and part of Antioch, an ecumenical

community, and we see these two memberships as complementary. As with all church members the extent of participation in the local church varies but many Antioch members are very actively involved in their churches in leadership, teaching, youth work, practical service, pastoral work and evangelism.

'Being part of a community and a local church means I have a full life! Yet I really feel that being part of Antioch makes it possible for me to serve as actively as I do in my church as a lay preacher and Junior Church teacher.'

Anglican single man

What is the Sword of the Spirit, and what is Antioch's relationship to it?

The Sword of the Spirit is a network of more than 60 communities around the world that have a common vision, way of life and spiritual culture. Each community is self-governing but receives help and support in living out its life as a community from the sharing of resources with other communities around the world. The leaders of Antioch will spend time with other leaders in Europe and the Middle East one or more times a year to discuss and learn about areas of common concern. Additionally, Antioch members may be invited for teaching weeks or to join in with common events such as summer camps for our children and mission trips for our youth.

In Europe and the Middle East there are Sword of the Spirit communities in the UK, Ireland, Belgium, Germany, Spain, Portugal, Poland and the Lebanon. Whereas Antioch's ecumenical mix is primarily Protestant and Catholic, the ecumenical mix in the Lebanon is primarily Catholic and Orthodox (Greek and Armenian rite). Wherever our communities are, we are active members of our local churches. The Sword of the Spirit has a strong common culture that transcends our international differences. As a result, when members of different communities get together, even though they may be from different parts of the world, there is a profound sense that we are part of the same international community-of-communities.

'At school my children are proud of the fact that they have friends in Germany and many other countries through our being involved in Antioch.'

Catholic father of five

In what ways is Antioch involved in missionary work?

Antioch believes wholeheartedly in mission and evangelism. Many of us only came to faith through others reaching out to us, and for this reason, and for love of the Lord, we actively support mission. Many of our members are involved in mission in their churches with young people in youth groups or in Sunday schools. Others are involved in *Alpha* courses as leaders and sponsors, and in the normal evangelistic activities of a welcoming church. Antioch itself sponsors and staffs two outreaches to young people:

- *Koinonia* works on the central London campus of the University of London and runs evangelistic events and discipleship training for 18-25 year olds. It has a paid staff of four to five, and normally has several gap-year students giving time voluntarily.
- *Youthlink* is a Christian youth group in Acton and typically has 15-20 teenagers, from various backgrounds, involved. It is staffed by volunteers from Antioch, but youth attend from a number of different churches.

In addition to our youth work, and the work we do in our local churches, our members are encouraged to have an evangelistic heart, to look for opportunities to speak about the Lord with those they meet, and to invite people to events that will help them grow in faith.

What does Antioch offer married people and families?

Antioch is a trans-generational community. This means that we recognise that being a disciple is something not just for one age group, but something for all ages. Therefore in all of our work we seek to help people grow in the Lord at the stage of life they find themselves. We therefore help children to grow in worship, not just in the adult meetings, but also in their own meetings. Similarly, although our teenagers are part of our life and worship, we recognise that they have their own needs and so we have youth groups to help them grow in faith.

The challenges of family life in the city can be immense; this can put pressure on married relationships and on the ability of parents to bring up their children well. One of the blessings of community is learning from one another's

wisdom through our sharing groups and teachings. Moreover, since accountability has an important role in sharing groups, this also can help to protect our marriages when we encounter difficulty.

Furthermore, through our commitment to one another, we learn to trust one another. One of the out-workings of this is the way in which our children can grow up safely with strong Christian friends and older role models, the combination of these can help them to stand firm against the temptations that assail them. Our sincere desire is that our children will be more radical for the Lord than we ourselves.

'I want my children to be better Christians than I am; I think Antioch is a place where that is a real possibility.'

Catholic family man

Antioch seems to support family life. But how does it support those of us who are single?

Although we recognise that most adults in our community will be married, we know that our community will always have many single people. We are convinced that singles and married are equal members in our life, just as they are equal members in God's Kingdom. The fact that we have single people in our leadership and serving in nearly all areas of our life bears out this conviction. We recognise that often single people contribute to our life and service in different ways from married people and that that is a real blessing from the Lord, adding to the richness of our life. We are also aware that single people often have some different needs from married people and we actively try to take this into account in all that we do and say.

'As a single person I have relationships with children in families...and I think otherwise I would have missed out.'

Catholic single woman

'For me the real blessing is being able to have an extended family. I don't have children of my own but being able to get to know and share in the upbringing of so many young people is something special. I often feel that I am an older brother or an uncle to them and they relate to me in that way.'

Evangelical Anglican single man

'Joining Antioch and engaging in committed community life brought a new reality to our life as a Christian family. We had the opportunity to live 24/7 as a Christian witness. The whole family found support

and encouragement from those around us; we could be accountable for every day hour of each day—not just on Sundays and the occasional mid week meeting.'

Free Church family man

Why would someone who is a committed church member want to be part of Antioch?

The following are some reasons that have convinced many of us:

- *Being ecumenical:* the Lord himself commanded us to be one and said that our witness would not be fully effective unless we were united. Antioch, as an ecumenical community, but not a church, provides a way for the church to express its fundamental unity practically, without ignoring the historical and theological issues that divide us.
- *Community and Discipleship:* Antioch gives an opportunity to live a high level of discipleship with others who want to live out the same call, and community is the context that makes this possible.
- *Teaching:* Antioch has a body of teaching that helps make living the Christian life in the modern world practical. All our teaching is rooted in the Scriptures, but we draw on our common experience of living as a community in practically applying the teaching to our lives.
- *Complementarity with church life:* for all of us our churches provide many things that are necessary for a good Christian life. However, not all of our churches can provide all of the things we need.
- *A call:* community life is not for everyone, and most of us in Antioch would describe our involvement as a response to a call from the Lord.

How does someone get involved in Antioch?

If you just want to have a look then drop an email to AntiochUK@btinternet.com asking for our most up-to-date list of Sunday afternoon meeting dates and times. Guests are always warmly welcomed.

If you are interested in becoming involved in Antioch then what we recommend is that you chat with the person who gave you this leaflet, or drop an email to the address above, asking about the courses we offer for those interested in getting involved, and maybe come along to one or two of our Sunday afternoon worship and teaching meetings to get a better feel for who we are.

If you decide to look further then our normal pattern is to invite you on an 'Introduction to Antioch' day and then, if you like what you see, a series of evening events that go through the basics of what it means to be a community.

Our greatest desire is that the Lord be honoured in all that we say and do, and to live out the call he has given us and given you, be that to be involved in Antioch or to be involved as a disciple of His elsewhere.

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