

How to ...

Open a community cafe

Aims and Purposes.

The first question to ask is, "Why do we want to do this?"

For most churches, the main driver will be a desire to become more accessible to the community living around. The main focus is to offer a warm welcome and the opportunity for people just to come inside the church building.

However, issues of finance will never be far away. They will need to be considered from the outset. You will need to decide whether the cafe will operate on a not-for-profit basis, or whether it will aim to raise money for Church funds or for a charity. There will be initial set up costs so an agreement needs to be reached with the PCC as to who will fund that initial expenditure and whether that money will be expected to be paid back or not.



Form a Committee

It is important to have a group of people with both the practical and creative skills necessary to get this enterprise off the ground. You will need plenty of enthusiasm. If you can get someone with catering experience on your committee their help will be invaluable.

In the first instance you will need to contact your local Environmental Health Officer. He is based at the Local Authority. Explain what you are going to do and ask for any advice or guidance. You will need to register with them and they can support you whilst setting the café up.

The committee will need to establish a vision for the café which will guide it through the initial set up phase and on into the future. But there will be many practical details to decide. These will include:

- Opening times
- Menu and pricing structure
- Waiter/ess or counter service
- Seating arrangements
- Equipment required
- Training required
- Will the cafe be run by paid staff /volunteers or a mixture of both?
- Who is going to manage the cafe and ensure health and food hygiene regulations are adhered to?
- What kind of advertising will you have? How will people know you are there?
- Will there be a policy on uniforms?

Know your food safety

Everyone involved will need to be aware of the relevant law regarding food safety. The *Food Standards Agency (FSA)*, the government body that regulates food safety in the UK, produces the '*Safer Food, Better Business*' leaflet which contains key pointers on serving food, including cooking, cleaning, chilling, management, contamination and keeping a food diary.

You will need to be familiar with the *Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point, or HACCP*, which is an internationally-recognised method for identifying the most common food safety hazards in a preparation process. The law states that those involved in food handling should have training. This can be done in a variety of different ways and may be provided by your Local Authority or could even be completed on line. It is also important to be up to date on the allergen information. A record of the ingredients in every dish on the menu must be available for the public to see in case they have an allergic reaction to a particular food group.

Important Factors to Consider

- Be professional - you will be visited by Environmental Health so you will need to ensure you are operating to the highest standards.
- Communicate clearly and effectively with all staff/volunteers. The easiest way is by email. However, you may well have volunteers who do not use email so you will need to ensure they receive relevant information by post or telephone.
- Ensure you have the right amount of staff/volunteers to operate effectively. Not having enough to do can be as discouraging for volunteers as having too much to do.
- Will payment be cash only? Will you accept cards? Do you need a cash till?
- Who will manage the accounts for the café?
- Will the cafe be staffed by church members only or will people from the wider community be encouraged to volunteer? Actually, working in the café alongside church members, can be a way into the church community for people.
- How old will people have to be to volunteer at the café? If volunteers are under 16, all other volunteers may have to have a DBS check – unless a parent works with them.
- How will you manage staff/volunteer lunches? What will they be entitled to?
- Try to have a *Unique Selling Point (USP)*. One example is free refills on hot drinks.
- Think about how you can let customers know about church services, events or activities.
- Have special events or themed days to keep customers and volunteers excited and interested. Harvest, Christmas and Spring provide opportunities to organise events closely tied in with the church's calendar.
- A card on the table is a good way of explaining what the café is about. There are some excellent Christian magazines which can be made available, and will be appreciated by customers, especially those who come in on their own.

An Open Door

A Church run community cafe will help you reach out to a community. That is why it is important for volunteers to have time to laugh and chat with customers.

The warm sense of community in our Rock Café has proved to be a lifeline to some people. Opening the door and walking into the café has been for others the first step on their pathway to faith.

It can be hard work. There will inevitably be a host of rules and regulations. But a community café, run by the church, can add something very special to the community.

Written By Anna Richardson, Chair of the Rock Cafe Committee, St John's Church, Haydon Wick