

INFO FOR POTENTIAL CANDIDATES

Background

Hope Community Church is in membership of the Association of Grace Baptist Churches (SouthEast). We are the outcome of church planting work by the London Inreach Project beginning in 1982, carried out first in Soho and then in Covent Garden . At one stage there were two small churches, one in each area, but the two gradually came together and finally united in 2011.

The original aim was to establish truly local churches in central London communities which lacked an evangelical witness. This has proved difficult. History and the housing situation means there has been no ready-made supply of Christians within the community, and the number of local people becoming Christians has been small. The church currently has 9 members. The church has been significantly larger at times, but this was mostly due to Christians joining with us from further afield which has not had an obvious impact on local growth.

Despite this, we are convinced that God has a continuing purpose for us in the West End and have been working towards that. The church has two properties, a flat in Soho and a house in Covent Garden. We have a pastor (Andrew Murray) and an evangelist (Keith Holmes). All of us live locally and are as committed as we are able. We have good connections within the community.

Prior to Covid-19, our evangelism was beginning to develop again. For more than a year we had been meeting in homes while the future of our regular meeting place (owned by London City Mission) was resolved. Just before the lockdown the premises were re-opened by the Message Trust, with a new coffee shop and a refurbished meeting space. The partnership agreement we signed with London City Mission and Message Trust gave us some access to the meeting space and offered potential for us to develop our local witness. This was obviously affected by government restrictions.

During the pandemic, however, new opportunities developed. First, we were able to publish *Looking for Love*, an evangelistic booklet telling the story of Debbie Smith, one of our members. We delivered it as a Christmas gift to 400+ homes in Covent Garden.

A more unexpected opportunity came through Keith Holmes' involvement in work with rough sleepers through All Souls Church and London City Mission. This led the council to ask him to help with a local food distribution programme at a local Roman Catholic church at the beginning of the first lockdown. As Keith got to know individuals, we asked ourselves what we could do as a church.

INFO FOR POTENTIAL CANDIDATES

The outcome was a weekly 'community meal' after our Sunday service for up to 10 invited guests, to get to know people and discover more about their needs. This was a challenging but valuable experience, and we learned a lot! Our prayer was that we would show the love of Jesus in a way that draws people to him. We didn't require attendance at church in order to come to the meal, but some did attend (one continued regularly on Zoom during restrictions!) and three came to a weekly lunch with an evangelistic study.

When coronavirus restrictions eased we began a new phase in our evangelism. We resumed door-to-door work with invitations to Coffee and Chat at Neal Street on Thursday afternoons. This seemed a natural development, growing out of the 'community meal'. We wanted to welcome local people in and give them a similar taste of community life among Christians. Again, the unexpected happened. Perhaps Covid fears meant neighbours were still not entirely ready to mix, and we saw little response from them. But our Sunday friends also came along on Thursday and in time a few others were added. This strengthened the good relationships which had already been established. We firmly believe the Lord has led us through this whole period, but he seems to have moved us on again. In Autumn 2023 a new opportunity opened up to have weekly evening activities in Neal Street so we intend to use that to make connections with people in our community.

A priority for the church now is to prepare for a leadership transition to take place within the next few years. Our pastor, Andrew Murray, will reach retirement age in 2025 and we are looking for a man to replace him within the next 2-3 years. We are flexible about the timescale. A quick transition is not likely, and we are ready to wait for the right person to prepare for the role (including training) if necessary. But there is a willingness to adapt to whatever way the Lord guides us, if that is sooner than 2025.

People tend to think that no-one lives in the centre of London but both Covent Garden and Soho have mixed, village sized populations. Estimates vary but Covent Garden may have around 6,000 residents, and Soho around 3,000. Many live in social housing blocks belonging to the council (Camden or Westminster) or housing associations. But there is also a strong private-rented sector dominated by younger, professional people with reasonably well-paid jobs, as well as a limited amount of high value property. Living in the West End will always have its attractions but also unique challenges. We'll be glad to tell you more about both. We will also be glad to explain some of the spiritual challenges. It is rare for Christians to move into the area, but there is still much opportunity and with two church properties we believe the Lord has a long-term purpose here. If you would like to find out more, please get in touch!

Andrew Murray 07342 041484
53 Kemp House, Berwick Street, London W1F 0QU
andrew.murray@hopewestend.life

INFO FOR POTENTIAL CANDIDATES

ROLE: Pastor of Hope Community Church

PERSON SPECIFICATION

We are ready to consider men who are at various stages of Christian service. This includes those currently in full-time Christian ministry; experienced Christians currently in secular work; and younger men identified by their churches as having shown leadership gifts and ministry potential. The transition process could allow for a period of training to meet particular needs.

Valuable experience could include:

1. Secular employment.
2. Church life in a large city.
3. Church life in a small church.
4. Local church leadership.
5. Theological education.

Ideally, you will:

1. Be willing to relocate with your family and live long term in Soho/Covent Garden from 2026, or earlier.
2. Be committed to developing long term gospel relationships within the local community.
3. Be committed to building up the church and to evangelism.
4. Have a realistic view of the hard nature of gospel work in this area of London, combined with faith in the power of God to change lives.
5. Have clear pastoral gifts and leadership skills, as well as the ability to be an initiator and to deliver.
6. Be able to communicate across the wide socio-economic, ethnic and age ranges within the community.
7. Be willing to be flexible and to adapt to the location and the small church context.
8. Be confidently evangelical, reformed and baptistic in your theology and have a strong commitment to local independent church ministry. (The church is rooted in 'We Believe', the Baptist Affirmation of Faith, 1966.)
9. Be keen to share fellowship and partner with other churches and Christian organisations as appropriate.
10. Be willing to take time to test out your suitability in terms of character, gifts/skills and your fit with the West End environment. (Meanwhile, you would also be testing whether the church and location is a good fit for you.)

It would be important to be open with us if any of these do not apply.

INFO FOR POTENTIAL CANDIDATES

PROCESS

Timescales are flexible, depending on the response to the need. There is no deadline, but we will begin to take things forward as people express an interest. If you need more definite information about timing, please let us know.

1. We would expect to follow up interest initially via emails/phone calls, for clarification on both sides.
2. If there is sustained interest, we plan to invite potential leadership candidates to visit Soho/Covent Garden for an informal tour and an opportunity to discuss things more thoroughly.
3. We would look for a written expression of interest.
3. In order to help identify a preferred candidate, we would then contact referees.
4. Beyond this, we expect to work with one candidate at a time, inviting the preferred candidate to spend time with the church and in the West End over a period to confirm suitability and commitment of candidate and church. The precise arrangements would need to be discussed and agreed.
5. At this stage a final agreement would be made about the specific succession route and a commitment made on both sides regarding issues such as possible training; (gradual?) transfer from previous role; accommodation; timescale; etc.
6. Complete transition.

Hope Community Church: Loan for Future Leadership Planning

In 2020 Hope Community Church arranged a draw-down loan of up to £200k from Grace Baptist Charities for a period of 10 years. This is secured by an agreement to pay back the loan with interest at the end of this time, which would be achieved by selling 4 Stukeley Street - currently valued at more than £1m - if no alternative means of immediate repayment is available to the church. Hope would then expect to buy a cheaper property (probably a 2-bed flat) in the same area.

The purpose of the loan is partly to enable the church to continue its work while it seeks to achieve a self-sustaining financial position, but also to provide resources to enable a transition of leadership during the next few years.