

Progressive Christianity Network – Britain

Starting and Running a PCN Group

Introduction

This leaflet is addressed primarily to someone who is keen, or who has been asked, to start a new PCN group, or to become its convenor. But it may be helpful for all members of the emergent group, in order to understand the group's relationship with PCN. No two PCN groups are the same – these are guidelines!

Why a PCN Group?

PCN groups support, encourage and resource those who are seeking in their own way to explore their faith – or lack of it. PCN exists to complement, not to replace, established churches, and very much hopes that its members will, through the local group network, be helped to remain part of their worshipping communities.

What are the advantages of being a PCN group?

- You have access to resource materials and speakers
- PCN will advertise your group and local events
- You may receive support for local events
- You have your own page on the PCN website
- You can be linked with other groups in your region
- You can keep in touch with progressive Christians across the UK.

What makes it a PCN group?

The convenor of each local group should be a member of PCN and in sympathy with the Eight Points as an expression of how we live as Christians. These can be downloaded from our website or obtained from our Administrative Assistant. All members of local groups are encouraged to join PCN, in order to ensure the future viability and expansion of the organisation.

What resources are available from PCN?

- Living the Questions DVDs, available for purchase or loan
- The Eight Points – an American Study Guide is available
- PCN Newsletters carry many articles worthy of discussion
- Together in Hope – PCN's first publication in co-operation with other likeminded organisations. A set of PCN study guides are in production.
- Suggestions of a range of literature by progressive Christian theologians
- Members of the committee available to visit or speak at your group
- Sharing material which other local groups have found helpful, through a forum on the PCN website dedicated to group convenors.

NB Be aware of copyright infringement when distributing certain resources.

Local groups – the practicalities

Getting started, Finding members

- Contact PCN's Administrative Assistant, who will give you a PCN email address and can put you in touch with local PCN members who may be interested
- He can also put you in touch with an existing group convenor who can share his/her experience of having started a group.
- Read "Experiences and Reflections on starting a PCN Group" at <http://www.pcnbritain.org.uk/index.php/resources/category/C21/>
- Use word of mouth – talk to people you know, spread the word
- Advertise locally – devise a simple flyer, spread it through local churches, libraries, village or town notice boards, get a slot on local radio...
- Ask PCN's Administrative Assistant to create a group page on PCN's website
- Find out if there are other local progressive groups – e.g. Sea of Faith, Free to Believe, Modern Churchpeople's Union – and work with them.

Where will you meet?

In a home/moving between the homes of members/in the local pub/in a local friendly church room.....

How many people?

Some are large (around 40), some are small (around 5). Ideally you need 8-10 to be viable and make a start, since not everyone will make every meeting. If your numbers grow to 15 or more, you may want to consider dividing. A 'hub' of local groups can arrange to meet regionally every so often, e.g. to invite a speaker.

How will you structure your group?

Informality is the key...but it is helpful to ensure:

- meetings of the group are advertised to all potential members in good time
- there is a 'programme' planned in advance by common agreement – and if necessary, decisions are made about who will lead each session; or you agree on a 'free flow' of topics month by month
- dates and times suit all actual or potential members (e.g. daytime meetings usually exclude those in paid work)
- practicalities are known and shared, e.g. sharing of food and drink, worship.

How often will you meet?

To suit what is needed and manageable by members - usually 4-6 weekly.

Suggested “ground rules” for harmonious meetings

These need to be agreed! – some examples:

- Confidentiality maintained within the group if personal information is shared
- Treat all views with respect
- Don't interrupt the person talking
- Make 'I' statements – i.e. don't speak on behalf of others
- Agree to disagree
- Gently remind talkers to give way, so that quiet members can contribute
- Communicate between meetings in good time, and by preferred method (which for some will be snail mail)
- Agree start and end time
- Agree whether to include space for worship, prayer or meditation.

Money matters

There is no such thing as a free group! You need to ensure that your local meeting expenses (e.g. hire of premises, food, drink) are covered between you by chipping in accordingly.

For larger expenditure, for instance if you want to host an event with a speaker, you need to consult with the Secretary of PCN Britain in good time for advice and guidelines on financial management and advertising.

Do you want to run an event?

You can do this in the name of a friendly local church, and advertise it as 'in association with PCN Britain'. Alternatively you can run it as a PCN event. In this case –

- You must negotiate with the PCN Management Committee, through the Secretary, well in advance of the event
- The Management Committee may agree at your request to underwrite any losses incurred up to a certain sum, in exchange for sharing some of the profits
- In this case, any formal contracts (e.g. hire of premises or speakers) must be undertaken in the name of PCN, and income, e.g. ticket sales, must be paid to PCN Britain
- You should advertise the event using the PCN logo, and the Committee may wish to approve your advertising material
- PCN can assist in advertising your event, through other local groups, on the PCN website, in the PCN newsletter, and through other like-minded organisations we are associated with.

Some facts about PCN Britain

- It is a membership organisation.
- It is a registered charity whose trustees (the management committee) are elected by its members at the AGM.
- The trustees meet every two months, plus annually for planning
- It is almost entirely financially dependent on annual membership fees collected from its members
- It depends for its operation largely on the voluntary time given by committee members, in particular the chair, secretary and treasurer, and employs a part time Administrative Assistant
- It works to a 3 year strategy, and consults regularly with its members on past achievements and future directions.

Relationship with the charity

As a PCN group, you are a self-supporting unincorporated association; your activities, income and expenditure of are not under the control of the Management Committee of PCN Britain, and consequently your financial results are excluded from the PCN Britain accounts. The exception is when you ask PCN Britain to underwrite a local public event. Where the Committee agrees to do this, it is on the basis that all the profit or loss accrues to PCN-Britain, and the income and expenditure on the event will included under the "Events" heading of the PCN Britain accounts. Unless your event has been underwritten by the PCNB Management Committee it will not be covered by PCNB's public liability insurance.

Want to have your say in PCN?

PCN tries hard to ensure that its Management Committee has a balanced representation of geography, gender, lay/clerical, age and ethnicity. But we don't always achieve it! Is there someone in your local group who would like to stand? Travel expenses are paid. Look out for the invitation for nominations in the PCN Newsletter before the next AGM.

For more information:

Look at our website – www.pcnbritain.org.uk .

Contact our Administrative Assistant at info@pcnbritain.org.uk, or by writing to

PCN Britain, 26 High Street, Newnham, Gloucestershire GL14 1BB

Progressive Christianity Network Britain is a registered charity, no. 1102164.