



In the days before free and easy access to electricity, when houses relied on wood or coal for heating, for hot water, and to provide a place for the cooking of meals, the hearth was the centre of the home and of family life. At the hearth, the family would gather to share in their meals. The hearth is where visitors – both friends and strangers – were welcomed and cared for. And it was at the hearth that the family would gather to share the stories of the past, the present, and explore the future together. Of course the hearth is just a location. It is the sharing of the meal, the care for and welcome of strangers, and the shared narrative of family life together that is most important. These are ways in which relationships grow and are strengthened, where hospitality is shown, and where family traditions are established and enjoyed together. And all of these things are so vital for us in Christian community too!

This is why we have decided to name our regular time of worship and bible study : ‘The Hearth’ and move it into the church hall at St Mark’s – where we can indeed gather around the fireplace together – a visual reminder of place, and a source of warmth and comfort.

Our vision is that this will be a place where we will grow together as the united family of God – celebrating our unity in diversity through Jesus. We want to share meals together, to welcome and care for one another, to explore God’s story from Creation to the coming Kingdom (and our place in it together!) through music, word and prayer, and to seek God’s will and purposes for us.

We have decided to meet more often, and so ‘The Hearth’ will be open on the 2nd and 4th Sundays of each month (beginning on 28th September).

Instead of a bring and share meal, we want to explore the idea of hospitality and serving one another and so will invite one family or couple to host each gathering of the hearth: providing a meal, serving it for the group, cleaning up afterwards and directing the time of prayer at the end of the night (leading it, giving guidance, encouraging small groups to pray together, etc.). The meal doesn’t need to be fancy, and we will be using disposable plates and cutlery due to requirements regarding Covid-safe practices. Being prepared to host ‘The Hearth’ is not a pre-requisite of coming along! As it is a place of welcome for visitor and family alike, hosting our gathering is an invitation to you not an expectation of you, and you are welcome to simply come and be blessed! As we become aware of them, we will always seek to cater for any dietary needs.

While we want to be flexible and responsive to God’s leading as we seek him, ‘The Hearth’ would normally follow this sort of pattern (the times themselves are there as a guide, not a strict schedule!):

5:00pm – 6:00pm – Musicians gather to practice together and pray

(Hosts might like to arrive in this time to ensure the meal is prepared and ready)

6:00pm – 6:30pm – We give thanks to God for his provision and share a meal together

6:30pm – 6:45pm – clean up and prepare to worship God and open his word together
(this is the timeframe to arrive if you don’t want to share in the meal)

6:45pm – 7:20pm – Worship and Word

7:20pm – 7:30pm – Prayer (led by the Host family) and packup

As with the hearth in an old home, there will be seating available, but you might also like to bring blankets, cushions or portable seating as well. In the warmer months, we may even move outside and gather around a firepot together.