

## Sacred Space

Many people in the western world do not experience place as a significant factor in their lives. Their relationships matter, as do their choices and self-expression, their particular stand among the cultures of late modernity. They seek out people who are like them and connect to networks which agree with their choices and these may extend over a wide geographical area. If they are aware of place as a factor, they may feel it to be a constraint which limits their options for change and growth.

Andrea Campanale lives in Kingston-upon-Thames, a region close to London where she was an elder in a charismatic church, wondering about her ministry. Her connections with people outside the church were important and she felt she'd failed a friend who'd had an unexpected spiritual experience, an audible voice speaking reassurance at a fearful moment. She had found it difficult to find the language to help her friend, and connect the experience with the gospel. But newly sensitive to spiritual seekers in our culture, she began to attend *Kingston Green Fair* and other creative events and look for opportunities to speak about faith and pray with people. Andrea and other Kingston Christians set up 'Sacred Space' in the town, and organized artistic events which had the potential to open up questions of faith. She learned a listening and prophetic prayer practice, a form of 'card reading', [Ruach Cards](#), which made a way into faith conversations.

Andrea used the language of 'space' (*Sacred Space*) to describe the opportunities they created for talk and listening and, she felt, divine encounter. This seemed to be a kind of protected space which allowed the possibility of an encounter with God despite distrust and misconceptions about Christianity. They made *space* for an experience of God which could not be controlled, which felt protected from human agency or manipulation.

Andrea was meeting many people at an early stage of their journey towards Christ, and many of these encounters were fleeting. New Christians were fragile. She attempted to put some seekers into connection with more mature Christians from the church, but this initiative faltered partly through a lack of confidence among the Christians. Eventually she set up the group she now describes as a missional community. She doesn't describe this as a form of church, or even a 'fresh expression'. It is a community; they share in each other's lives. But as the leader her role is to help members of her community discern their vocation and find the confidence to enter into mission in their contexts, in the place where they are. A newly retired woman wanted to serve as a chaplain in her own town centre. Andrea provided the entrepreneurial skill to get her started.

This form of leadership has connected Andrea with a few striking sub cultures. One member of the missional community is part of the Steam Punk network, a group which takes a stand against current styles, in their elaborate Victorian clothing and in their love of complicated pre-electronic technology. Andrea hasn't tried to enter this network herself, or draw people from it into *Sacred Space*. She does participate in events with her friend, acting as a mentor and supporting and helping him to find opportunities to talk about faith and nurture a group in that context. She does take her Ruach Cards along.

Listening to Andrea one had the impression that the *Sacred Space* events and ministries, perhaps especially the card reading, communicates the expectation that God does speak and God acts. Why is the concept of *space* important and what does this bring that is different to place? For some people on occasion, and especially in an oppressively secular culture, is it helpful to step away from the limitations, the 'rebarbative' particularities<sup>[1]</sup> of place, and enter a space which makes more room for imagination?

[1] This harks back to language originally used by David Casey and quoted by John Inge in *A Christian Theology of Place*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).