

# Who needs a church when you have a café?

That's the view of a group that meets at a coffee house to discuss the spiritual and moral issues of the day

**C**AN a coffee shop also be a church? According to some people the answer is yes and churchgoers meeting at one cafe in Worcester are already putting the theory into practice.

The cafechurch movement describes itself as coffee with a conscience but, in practical terms, it is a network of more than 50 churches which meet in Costa Coffees on high streets up and down the country.

In Worcester, cafechurch followers meet in Costa opposite the Guildhall on the second Thursday of the month to debate modern questions in a relaxed environment and, of course, to enjoy a cup of coffee.

The evening is open to everyone, whether they are churchgoers or not.

In fact, the group welcomes anyone who is attracted to the idea of exploring issues such as climate change, and whether Christianity has anything to say about it, in distinctively un-churchlike surroundings.

In Worcester, members of City Church, who usually meet at Christopher Whitehead Language College in St John's, originally set up the cafechurch.

Although City Church has set up cafechurch, Mr Murphy said the group was open to involvement from any other churches.

They are also keen to encourage more people to drop in to the evenings but want to stress that the coffee shop idea is not a thinly disguised way to recruit people into existing churches.

Neal Murphy, one of the founders in Worcester, said: "The point of cafechurch isn't to make it a halfway house to people coming into a traditional-structure church.

"We would be happy for people to make Costa Coffee their church. That's enough on its own."

Mr Murphy believes cafechurch may feel more accessible to people than a typical Sunday morning service.

He said: "If somebody walks past a church and hears singing it wouldn't necessarily make them want to go in because it's behind closed doors and solid looking walls: Cafechurch is more familiar surroundings."

As part of the cafechurch movement, the Worcester evenings must follow an agreed structure



JOIN US: Cafechurch co-ordinator Ann Coyle at the Worcester High Street branch of Costa, where they meet.

## WHAT HAPPENS AT CAFECHURCH



CAPPUCINO CHRISTIANS: City cafechurch members Anne Coyle, Graham Coyle, Simeon Chapman, Kay Collins, Esther Vaughan and Hannah Drew.

- WELCOME**  
An introduction or entertainment from a host.
- QUIZ**  
A fun quiz for individual tables
- EXPERT WITNESS**  
A short overview of the topic and ways to explore further.
- REAL LIFE STORY**  
Hope and humour from someone who knows.
- TABLE TIME**  
A chance to talk or listen to each other

which normally means a discussion around a theme, a personal story and a chat in tables of four or five.

Last month's topic was on poverty and how 1.4 billion people live on £1 or less a day while October's was set to discuss what influences the way people view themselves.

Mr Murphy said: "It's making it easier to interact with something

rather than going through the formal structures.

"I know the idea of church is a formal style building.

"It can feel you are not too sure whether to stand up or sit down and everyone repeats something and you miss it.

"The aim of cafechurch is to meet people in a more relaxed setting

and to find out about the Christian faith and to understand that it's not just a 2,000-year-old story but has relevance today. "So the topics chosen to be discussed are topics of today.

"Through the Bible and the stories of Jesus there are things that are important and still have resonance today."

Mr Murphy also believes there is something of a gap in today's society for the art of thinking, discussing and forming judgements.

He said: "It's also about saying you may not have given as much thought to your faith or underlying basic standards because you've become lazy and take whatever the media give us.

"We are very easily led and it comes at us in soundbites and there's not enough depth to it.

"I think it's healthy to hear somebody's full view even if you don't particularly agree.

"For me the biggest part of cafechurch is the chance to talk at your table, having heard those five or 10-minute comments and personal story.

"Where does it leave you and how does it make you feel and what are your values?"