

# Targeting *ways to connect*

As part of PCI's 'Present' initiative, **David Thompson** finds out how Alexandra Presbyterian is being present as God's witnesses through its summer darts club.



**A**lexandra congregation is situated on York Road in north Belfast. This summer, it started a darts club as a way of increasing its connection with the local community.

Each Thursday evening in June and July, people of all ages and abilities gathered in the church hall for a bit of craic, chat, a cuppa and a couple of legs of 501.

Minister Ian Cahoon explains why they landed on the idea of darts:

"Really this idea came through our community mission worker, Jason Sime. Historically, there had been a few darts clubs around the area, but like so many community activities these days they became unsustainable and had closed down. We knew some people missed playing and would be keen to have another place to pick up their interest again. Darts are often played in pubs and clubs. Bringing the game into the church setting opened it up so that all ages could play without some of the negative influences that often go along with pub culture."

As well as seemingly the right connection with the local community, it was also important that this was an activity that the congregation could easily deliver, especially during the summer season when there were fewer people around to open up, serve refreshments and just be there to talk with others. However, it was also a good time to give something a time-limited try as other activities had drawn to a close for the church year.

Set up for the evenings was minimal – four dart boards and a few sets of darts. As only two people could play at any one time, there was plenty of time and space to chat and get to know people between games. Darts is a game young and old can play together and the rules are simple to learn, even if the technique takes a bit of practise to master.

**Present**   
**WHERE GOD HAS  
PLACED US TO BE  
HIS WITNESSES**

The initiative added yet another simple, but significant, way in which the congregation built upon its existing efforts to make God's presence felt in inclusive, welcoming and appropriate ways shaped specifically to its local area.

Numbers weren't huge, but that isn't what matters. Ian describes the impact like this:

"It was just another way of using our space in the community to connect with others in a relaxed setting. Like so many initiatives in the church, exploring ways to be present in the community today, it was a bit like, try it and see what happens. People came. They became more comfortable being around church, got to know some of our members and perhaps edged that little bit closer to a future openness to finding out more about faith."

Darts may not be at the bullseye of your congregation's activity in trying to target ways to connect with others in your community, but it is always worth asking what might be. The answer will emerge from time spent getting to know the interests that people in your area share, how your congregation could host the kind of activities around which they would gather, or join in with them where they are already happening in the neighbourhood.

So often, being present where God has placed us to be his witnesses is not about doing big things that take a lot of effort. It's about identifying the right thing, finding a way to deliver it simply, then giving it a go and seeing what God does with it. Even then, it doesn't need to be a programme that lasts forever or that we keep going until it has run out of steam. Instead, it can be the right thing at the right time for a particular season in the church's and community's life.



*Rev David Thompson is Secretary of PCI's Council for Congregational Life and Witness.*