

maranatha



Jehovah-Jireh Our Provider



An account of God's provision during the
move of The Maranatha Community
to 102 Irlam Road, Flixton - "Taste & See"

70p

This account was written in 1998 and has never been reproduced. Perhaps now is the time to remind ourselves how wonderful is our God who provides for all our needs. As we prepare to expand into the premises next door, it is good to look back and recognise our God never changes, is always there and is always working for us – Jehovah-Jireh, our Provider, or as 'The Message' puts it 'God-Jireh - God sees to it.'

Sheila Wrigley – December 2003

The Maranatha Community, founded by my husband, a Methodist lay preacher, and a Catholic Priest, has greatly influenced my spiritual journey.

Ecumenical and scattered throughout the British Isles, with links in many countries abroad, the office base of the Maranatha Community was in our home until recently. As the Community grew, both numerically and with deepening spiritual roots, it became evident that we had outgrown the room allocated to use as an office in our home. We had already overspilled into the lounge and other areas as volunteers with special gifts came to help with what was becoming ever-increasing activity. In my heart I knew we had to move yet within me there was a doubt that we could find a suitable location which we could afford. The Maranatha Community has never had a surplus of funds although God has faithfully supplied all finance needed to accomplish what we have been asked to do. Its members, coming from all traditions, must of necessity give their financial support to their own churches. Recognising this, I nevertheless went round the local Estate Agents and even went to look at a couple of properties. God, in His infinite wisdom, allowed me to go off on my own, going ahead of Him instead of allowing Him to lead the way. In prayer, I realised what was happening, and that all He was asking of me was to wait and pray and He would open the right door.

In the months that followed, despite the fact that the situation at home was becoming more difficult, I steadfastly refused to look at 'for sale' notices and empty properties.

The time came when a shop became vacant quite close to where we live. Driving past I determinedly looked the other way on several occasions. One evening that week a lady came to our home to collect some of the Maranatha mailing, which she could do at home. While we were having a cup of

tea I asked, "do you know who owns the shop on Irlam Road?" She replied, "I own it, and I've been praying for years that it would be used by Christians." My heart leapt - God had moved - and then came the busiest 10 days of my life. The whole proposal had to be put for approval to the body of the Community, which made decisions - representatives of all the groups throughout the country. Meeting every two months, all decisions were made in prayer and action was only taken after a unanimous decision. I needed to present as much information as possible to this group so that they could discern God's will.

After prayer I contacted a man whom I knew would see all the snags and would be more than likely to pour cold water over the whole idea. After thirty minutes of prayer in the premises, which to say the least were unattractive, he excitedly said, "this is it!" He could see the potential and my imagination began to take hold of the vision he was presenting.

Ten days later I presented the facts to the National Representatives, a body made up of representatives from Maranatha groups all over the country. I particularly pointed out the snags, the biggest of which was its position. In an urban housing area and part of a very small and declining shopping area, had we been looking at it from the point of view of it being a successful business venture, it would have been totally unsuitable.

After much prayer it was the unanimous decision of the National Representatives that we go ahead.

The task seemed enormous, but somehow God gave us the ability to take just one step at a time. I believe that had we tried to take in the whole vision right from the beginning we would have been overwhelmed. God, however, unfolded

one task at a time and his provision both in terms of finance and skills, given voluntarily, was awesome. The whole project needed an overseer, a person with multiple skills who could see the requirements, get on with them and in addition instruct others to help carry them out. God provided just such a person who was gifted and skilled in every aspect needed to bring the task to completion. In addition, he was self-employed, and his business interests were in seasonal decline. Some of the tasks that faced us would have frightened off the most accomplished worker, but not our man. He took every fresh challenge with positive assurance that "with God everything is possible".

For example, the area that we had designated to become the café had a 4" slope on the floor from the right hand side to the left-hand side. Within what seemed to me to be a twinkling of an eye, this was rectified.

There was no shortage of help. Volunteers offered to take responsibility for the lighting, the plumbing (including central heating), the décor, the plastering, painting, sanding, and the list is endless. No. 102 became a hive of activity. This was not just physical either, as the work was carried out to the accompaniment of Christian choruses and the fellowship and Christian love and community was evidenced by the fact that those working there fully enjoyed the experience.

It was recognised from the beginning that a sacrifice of time and money had to be made if the work was to be completed. The Maranatha Community did not have the financial resources to fund such a venture and several individuals made interest free loans to enable the materials required to be purchased. All the money loaned was repaid within six months of the opening of the premises.

There were times when the 'enemy' really had a go at me, usually in the middle of the night when anxiety overcame me. Satan's whisperings such as 'this shop will never take off - it's in the wrong position and we will be left with a massive debt.' Whenever this happened, without fail God would show His hand in the most positive and miraculous ways, and His encouragement put me back on track again.

For example, there was one day when we realised that the café would need a counter area and that it would have to be purpose built. The obvious person for this task was already working to full capacity. While discussing and praying about how this could be done, a member of the Community offered to use his skills by designing a purpose built counter.

I remember well the Thursday evening in October when several of us were working on various tasks. The promised 'plan' was presented to us and I remember thinking with a sinking heart, 'who is going to do this work?' It could only have been minutes later when there was a tap on the window. A lady stood outside whom I didn't know and, on opening the door, said, "I can see that this is a hive of industry and I understand this is a Christian venture. My son is a master cabinet-maker and has a day off tomorrow. Can he be of any help to you?" The very next day this young man, with the help of the man in our Community nicknamed 'Jim'll fix it' completed the building and erection of the counter.

This perfect timing, which we came to recognise as God's providence, was replicated again and again.

On another occasion I remember I was dreading the task of contacting catering establishment suppliers to start the, what seemed to me, mammoth task of purchasing the tableware, cutlery and catering equipment needed for the café. When

Linda, our hard-working Community secretary came in on that Monday morning and heard that I was about to start making enquiries by telephone, she remembered her mother mentioning that Texas Home Stores were shutting down all their café outlets. On telephoning a local manager of Texas Home Stores he confirmed this to be the case and I arranged to visit him. A week of furious activity followed with telephone calls to Texas Stores all over the country and by the end of the week we had all the crockery, cutlery, kitchen utensils (including industrial microwave, soup tureen, toaster and large urn) that we needed at a fraction of the estimated cost. In fact, in my ignorance, I realised later that I had totally underestimated the real cost of these items and we would have been very hard pressed to afford them.

Similarly, when the time came to purchase the fittings for the kitchen, one of the large local 'Do-it-yourself' stores had a special offer on kitchen fittings, including a free oven. A member of the Community donated a nearly new freezer and other members donated the two refrigerators we needed for the café and the kitchen.

It seemed that whenever the next item came on the agenda, God had already made provision for us. He often moved ahead of us because in some cases the provision came before we even put our minds to different tasks. The bookshop was a case in point. God knew that when it came to fitting out the bookshop area, we would not have known where to start. Just at this time a young man came to see us at our home because he wanted to learn more about the Community. After we had been talking for well over an hour we mentioned the conversion of 102 Irlam Road. He showed great interest, especially in the proposed book shop area. He asked us quizzically "do you know what my job is?" He was the display manager for one of the largest bookstores in

London!!! On this occasion God had really moved well ahead of us.

It so happened that this young man, who lived in France, was returning home the next day. He took all the necessary measurements and promised to fax us with two suggested plans by the weekend, a utility one and a more expensive one. Needless to say we decided on the utility one for the bulk of the fittings. He even gave us the name of the shop where the units could be purchased - Ikea. A few days previously we had received a small Ikea catalogue through the door in which there were special offers in a sale starting at 10am the following Monday. We were there by 5 minutes to 10 and amidst the rush of customers just managed to secure the five sets of 'Billy' shelving we required. They weren't the colour we wanted but we were just happy to get them at a knock-down price. God obviously knew which colour would be best for our purpose because now we have them filled with books, the black background is a perfect foil for the colourful book covers.

We could go on and on telling of God's powerful hand on all the comings and goings of that time. I would like to add just one more. On the first day the café opened to the public a lady came in on her own to have a cup of coffee. She picked up a Christian magazine, which was freely available for anyone to read. I noticed that her eyes filled with tears and on approaching her and sitting beside her she asked if she could buy the magazine as a particular article had moved her and helped her. I learnt that she had recently been bereaved. Some months later this lady came back to the shop accompanied by her daughter and she testified that the day she came in for the first time was the beginning of a new relationship with God.

Many seeds have been sown and I suppose we may never see the fruit, but the expression in John Henry Newman's prayer which Maranatha has proclaimed - "we are links in a chain, a bond of connection between persons" is a reality in the activities at 102 Irlam Road.

You may wonder why the name 'Taste and See' was chosen. We had not even got to the stage of giving the shop a name when I was awakened in the night with the words 'Taste and See' on my lips. In the morning I was persistently aware of these three words and in my mind was relating them to the shop. Confirmation was given when we heard that the responsorial Psalm for that week in the Roman Catholic Church facing the shop was 'Taste and See that the Lord is good'. It is the goodness and provision of God that has been the hallmark of all the activities that take place in the shop.

"O Taste and see that the Lord is good; happy are those who take refuge in him. O fear the Lord, you his holy ones, for those who fear him have no want. ...those who seek the Lord lack no good thing." Ps. 34 v 8-10.



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