

idea

THE MAGAZINE OF THE EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE
SUMMER 2023

EAUK.ORG

A photograph of a man and a young girl reading a book together. The man is on the right, leaning over the girl on the left. They are both looking down at the open book. The man is wearing a blue and white striped shirt, and the girl is wearing a light blue shirt. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light blue.

A time to share

just10

just10 is a ten-session series by J. John to explain the Ten Commandments and their relevance today.

A free-to-use video series for churches, small groups and individuals.

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Welcome

Summer has arrived! Along with the sunshine comes longer days and often with that more invitations to events and gatherings, creating more opportunities to get out and connect with others. That's why this edition of *idea* magazine entitled 'A time to share' is so befitting. Throughout, we explore the many ways Christians are sharing the God story through hospitality, compassion, discipleship and more. We see how High Street Methodist Church in Northern Ireland is creating a safe space for young people to learn and deepen their relationship with God. We hear from our very own unity team and the great work they are doing across the UK, unifying the church and supporting leaders. As well as the compelling story of Marion and how she 'home-shared' with families fleeing from Ukraine. So, as we read these powerful stories from fellow Jesus followers, may we all consider how we will respond to the



Great Commission in Matthew 28:16-20, and ask ourselves how will we share Jesus today? We have included some useful resources that can help you as you choose to share Jesus, perhaps with friends, or colleagues or those in your local community. God bless you.



Nicola Morrison
 Editor

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BIND US TOGETHER, LORD

How can musical worship help us to be of one mind? asks **Dr Rebecca Uberoi**, programme leader and lecturer in music and worship at London School of Theology.

Bob Gillman's song, 'Bind Us Together, Lord', voices the call to unity expressed by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 4:1-6. Paul writes in verse 4, "There is one body and one Spirit." Of course, the word 'body' refers figuratively to the body of Christ (the church), and it is the indwelling Holy Spirit who brings unity to the people of God.

An important aspect of unity in the body is having a shared mindset. In 1 Peter 3:8, Paul encourages believers to be "of one mind" – something that can be achieved because we have "the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16). The English word 'mind' doesn't quite capture the sense of the original Greek word, which is better understood as inner perspectives that influence outward behaviour. In Philippians 2:5,

believers are encouraged, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" after which Paul describes the actions of Christ in humbling Himself. A little earlier, in verses 2-4, the call to be 'of one mind' is fleshed out with instructions about humility, love, and preferring the other.

In putting Paul's teaching into song, Gillman provides a prayerful resource to focus the church on unity. Placing a theology of unity on the lips of worshippers is an admirable task, but does music offer us something beyond this? How might the mind of Christ, as thought-in-action, shape aspects of musical worship aside from the lyrics? And how might such worship help us to be of one mind?

In his book *How Musical Is Man?* the musical anthropologist John Blacking

described music as "humanly organised sound." He then cleverly turned this idea the other way around to say that music is also "soundly organised humanity." There is a clear connection between music and society. As Thomas Turino argues in *Music as Social Life*, music can help to form and sustain social groups, give tangible form to the innermost feelings and qualities they share, and help people to experience a feeling of oneness with each other.

In the context of corporate musical worship, there are many ways in which music can demonstrate our shared values of love, humility, and consideration for others. By participating in such music, it can in turn shape us and help to form church communities that are of one mind.

So, what are some practical suggestions for incorporating the mind of Christ into our musical worship, such that we come to share that same mind?



1. Singing to each other

The idea of singing to each other appears in scripture, from antiphonal patterns in the Psalms to Paul's encouragement to speak "to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). From historical documents, it seems this pattern of worship was practised in the early church; in his letter to the Roman Emperor Trajan in 111-112AD, Pliny the Younger described the Christians in Bithynia (Asia Minor) as singing songs "in turn among themselves." Think about incorporating some responsorial patterns, call-and-response, and perhaps even open mics to your worship times (although this last one might need to be sensitively managed). Singing to each other in these ways can release the ministry of the body, as we seek to build each other up and grow in unity.



2. Singing in the Spirit

Corporate singing in the Spirit, or singing in tongues, has a beautiful quality to it. While each member of the congregation improvises their own unique line, their voices weave together into a rich tonal tapestry. The sound is accessible and inclusive, with contributions from single notes to soaring melodies finding their place within the texture. No matter what people sing, when it's in the Spirit and therefore an expression of oneness and love, it all works together. I like to think of it as a sonic embodiment of "unity in the Spirit" (Ephesians 4:3).

3. Sharing musical space

Uniting around shared tastes is relatively easy, but how do we come together across difference? It's important to make room for each other in the space of musical worship, even if this means laying down our preferences and stepping outside our comfort zones. Intercultural, intergenerational, and interdenominational worship are expressions of love and preferring the other. Consider sharing decision-making, singing each other's songs, or creating new songs and arrangements that blend elements from different cultures and traditions present in the congregation.



4. Leading musical worship

If we want to follow Christ's example, we need to abandon any desire for prestige or position and walk humbly in our roles as musicians, worship leaders and singers. Sharing leadership through team planning, rotation, and co-leading creates room for more people to serve the church with their gifts. Worship leaders should know how to give way to others, being willing at times to lay aside that exciting new idea they had, or to include the song they really hate singing but the preacher has specifically requested.

Dr Rebecca Uberoi, an ethnomusicologist who researches Christian worship in a range of cultural contexts, leads the theology, music and worship programmes and lectures in music and worship studies at London School of Theology. To find out more about LST's music and worship programmes, contact the team at: enquiries@lst.ac.uk or call 01923 456000.

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BE THE SALT OF THE EARTH

Chief executive **Lloyd Cooke** shines a light on how the Christian organisation Saltbox, is meeting the needs of local people in desperate situations through its wide-ranging projects in Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire.



“You feed them” was Jesus’ challenge to His perplexed disciples when faced with a hungry crowd.

When Saltbox was set up as a Christian charity 40 years ago, its founding vision was to provide Christian support and encouragement for local churches in order to help them grow and develop.

However, during a seven-year city-wide prayer campaign based on 2 Chronicles 7:14, I felt that God was calling Saltbox to focus more on engaging with the wider city and to address some of the social needs in our communities. As we saw people struggling with a range of issues, Jesus’ words to His disciples hit home. And so, we began a journey of showing Jesus’ love in action to a range of people in need.

Saltbox now provides three caring services – Restart provides housing and support to the homeless with a specific focus on those leaving prison; CareLink provides a telephone befriending and health intervention service for older, lonely people; and Money Matters provides money and benefits debt advice for the various Stoke-on-Trent foodbank locations.

A fresh Restart

Restart manages more than 60 local properties providing support for 130 potentially homeless people; Steve* joined Restart’s service in 2019 and had a wide range of support needs including mental health, alcohol/drug dependency, offending and money management amongst others. He had previously been rough sleeping and sofa surfing so had no place of stability to call home. After intensive support over the last four years, Steve’s life has been transformed – he eventually stopped using, his offending

also stopped, and he is now being helped to move into his own accommodation.

Matt Hammond, Restart’s client support manager, said: “We are supporting those who are very often pushed out and isolated from society, we aim to give them the tools to not only reintegrate into society, but to become a welcome and valued member of their community, finding work, addressing their support needs and positively progressing in life.”

Supporting the elderly

CareLink’s staff and volunteers support 300 elderly people providing 15,000 phone calls per year; many of our clients are over 70 years old, most live on their own and, sadly, many don’t have close family members to support them. Alice* is 83 years old, and lives alone since her husband passed away. She suffers from osteoarthritis which affects her mobility, as well as suffering from anxiety; she had also stopped going out alone which hugely reduced her social engagement. CareLink’s team has supported Alice, including helping her join a CareLink support group, attend a local ‘Chatty café’ and also improve her digital skills.

“Carelink’s passion is to support older people who may have issues around loneliness and isolation to help them live independently for longer,” says Carelink service co-ordinator Nikki Simpson.

Money Matters

Another project we are passionate about is Money Matters, which provides in-person and digital support to folk struggling with debt and needing benefits advice. Mary-Anne Rapson, manager at Money Matters, said their aim is to “support clients with their

benefits and debt through the tough times to help them regain control of their finances”.

Lisa* met one of the team at a local foodbank and had various challenges including a substantial amount of fuel debt, rent arrears and council tax debt, deductions from her Universal Credit, and non-priority debts. Thankfully, Lisa was supported throughout the debt advice process and was eligible for a Debt Relief Order which eventually cleared all her debts.

One life at a time

Today, at any one time, Saltbox’s 50 staff and 40+ volunteers are helping almost 500 local people in need. We have increased Saltbox’s strategic engagement with a range of partners including police, probation services, prisons, the NHS, hospitals and social services together with many other voluntary sector organisations and charities.

When asked “how do you change the world?” my answer is simple: “one life at a time” and Saltbox seeks to do this in the name of Jesus.

Jesus told His followers that they were to be the salt of the earth. After 40 years, Saltbox continues to seek to be “salty”, to make a difference in the world, and aims to positively respond to Jesus’ “You feed them” challenge.

**Names have been changed to protect the identities of those mentioned accessing services*

Lloyd Cooke is chief executive of Saltbox and wants to encourage others that God answers prayer. For more information on Saltbox and its many available projects, visit: saltbox.org.uk



SPOTLIGHT!

Emily Hooper, from our unity team based in Stockport, shares how the small but mighty team are laying solid foundations for united mission in the north and beyond.



Ben Jeffery, head of unity, hosting event

Hello! I'm Emily, the unity events co-ordinator. Ben Jeffery heads up our team, and Mark Hopkins is our unity champion in the East Midlands. Together we make three! Collectively we spend our time connecting with local leaders across our regions, supporting churches and Christians to stand united with one another, and championing them to reach their communities.



It's been a lively time for our recently formed team, having just returned from having undertaken tours of north and southwest England. With growing representation across regions, our team travelled more than 1,300 miles (ranging from Lancaster to Truro), gathering more than 400 leaders together across 14 locations to lay solid foundations for collaboration.

These have been encouraging times of sharing and listening to how local leaders are reaching their communities. We also shared some big-picture insights about what God is doing across the UK and created opportunities to forge new connections.

Here are four takeaways from our regional tours so far which we hope inspire you at such a time as this.

1 Now is the time to lean into evangelical unity.

In a post-lockdown, polarised society, we understand the temptation to retreat or try to go it alone. Some leaders feel isolated, while others are experiencing tensions within their denominations. We need to lean in and support one another in a way that hasn't felt necessary before.

2 The growing unity of local churches is varied and inspiring!

Many leaders are gathering and working well together: friends grabbing coffee and sharing life, while others are meeting to pray, some are using their time to plan and discuss strategies. It is exciting to see the different ways that leaders are working in unity.

3 There is expert guidance to help local Christians navigate difficult topics.

Many Christians do not realise the opportunities and freedom we have or how to navigate challenging topics. Whether it is sharing the gospel at work, talking about race, navigating pronouns or gender identity, there is so much help for local churches to equip their congregations. Check out eauk.org/resources to explore more.

4 There is an expectancy about what God is doing.

In every single place that we visited there was a palpable sense of excitement and expectation about what God is going to do next. Against the backdrop of challenges, there is a growing hopefulness and hunger that God will bring renewal and revival to our communities. Let's keep praying!



Ben meeting with church leaders

We've heard some great ideas that put church unity into action. Mark has had the privilege of hearing amazing stories of collaboration across cities in the East Midlands and to witness leaders coming together to pray for their cities and for God's power to be released across the nation.

We have been inspired by the use of a prayer walking app where, as people pray for each street, the colour on the map changes and we are witnessing the church uniting through prayer. The app's developer, Phil Harwick, has seen it in use across multiple cities: "We've seen churches come together who wouldn't usually work together, people's hearts have been stirred for the streets around them and it's given a way to track and form a daily habit of prayer. It's a real encouragement to see the streets change colour and know everyone has been lifted up to the Father."

To find out how this app can work in your community, visit: prayerwalk.app

 **Prayer Walk** APP

Christians in Lincoln are seeing unity develop around action and prayer. A significant project they have seen as a result is the Night Light café initiative – a partnership between the local churches and the local NHS Trust. These evening cafes offer a safe space for anyone experiencing a crisis in their mental health. Trained volunteers provide a warm welcome between 8pm until midnight, in a peaceful environment created to calm those who attend. These are now being replicated right across the county of Lincolnshire and beyond.

Sian Wade, church leader at The Bridge Church and active faith lead of the Transform Lincoln Network, says: "It's incredible what can be achieved when Christians meet around specific



Mark presenting on unity tour

needs. The suicide rate in our county was above national average and we knew this broke God's heart. It is too overwhelming for one church but bring 10 churches around the table to pray and dream about what is possible, then you start to see something quite miraculous and special happen. This was just the start of a brilliant relationship between the faith sector and the NHS."

We are so inspired by the different expressions of unity across the nation. Our prayer is that of Jesus in John 17, that the church would be brought to complete unity so that our communities will come to know God's love for them.

Please continue to pray for the unity team and the Evangelical Alliance as a whole as we continue to support Christians all over the UK.

Chaplain praying
with a manager



RUNNING THE RACE TOGETHER

It's often said that sport is a universal language – and for us at **Sports Chaplaincy UK**, we see that as a huge opportunity. It's our belief that sport is the largest untapped mission field in the world – and that's where you, me and millions of other Christians come in!

Welcome to the community of sport... a mission field consisting of more than 160,000 clubs, totalling 30 million men, women and children. The church cannot ignore a community of this size and significance.

In the United Kingdom, we are getting to grips with conversations around mental health and there is room for these conversations in all areas of life, including sport. In recent years we have seen how mental health issues can impact even sports stars - (they are human after all!); high-profile England cricketer Marcus Trescothick cut his International short due to depression, Adam Peaty withdrew from the British

Championships citing fatigue and ongoing struggles with his mental health and stories of the former Wales manager Gary Speed's suicide was widely documented in the news and media, meaning sport has been forced into conversation and reform.

This is where Sports Chaplaincy UK can step in. Week in and week out, from the amateur level right up to the elite echelons, there are people in sport all over the country in need of support, an ear to listen, a shoulder to cry on and a word of encouragement.

At Sports Chaplaincy UK, we believe we are not there to force our beliefs on others; we are there to respond to the questions of life and be there for people

who are often treated as commodities by their sport and its fans.

When it comes to taking faith outside the walls of the church, we can sometimes create towers in our minds that we must climb in order to effectively reach people, but Sports Chaplaincy proves that the small things really can make a big difference.

When I walk into a club and ask people how they're doing, offer a genuine interest in their welfare and concern for what is happening in their world, with believers and those with no faith at all, I am conveying the heart of God which says, you are valued for who you are, not what you do or can achieve.

“My chaplain was there for me when my dad died, they supported me, prayed for me and listened to me at what was the most difficult time in my life and on reflection I don’t know who else I could have turned to in my club.”

– Academy player

Chaplains are not there to preach sermons to players but to help guide perspective on life, given the rigorous demands sport can take on mental wellbeing.

Often people involved in sport embody addictive personalities; if they are to succeed and reach the top level, they must adopt this ‘all-in approach’, but the consequences can be fatal, which is why it is crucial chaplains are available to bring hope, offer an alternative view of life and encourage people, especially when injury hits or form dips.

As the church, we have a crucial responsibility not to force people into a decision as to whether to be in the sports community or the church because we gather at similar times – thus alienating such a large demographic of our nation, but to step out and be a loving presence to communicate the heart of God.

If we can impact sport, we can impact our wider community and the United Kingdom as a whole, which is why Sports Chaplaincy UK has a vision to see a chaplain present in every professional and amateur sports club across the nation. This is best captured in our

dream statement that we believe God gave us, which says, “We want to see an expression of God’s love and compassion in every community called sport”.

But what does this look like for the local church? Simple acts of kindness like dropping off a bag of oranges to your local club, celebrating community champions, or maybe putting on an end-of-year BBQ for them. Or could you serve as a chaplain? Well, chaplain probably throws up some stereotypical images, but as a former bouncer in excess of six foot, walking around with no dog collar, I probably break the mould. With the correct training, anyone with love for God and people can become a sports chaplain. At Sports Chaplaincy UK, we run training courses and seminars to equip and inspire current and future chaplains, all centred around our key values: presence, excellence, relationship, confidentiality and humility.

Could you help fulfil this God-given dream to see the community of sports impacted by the love of God?

Head to our website sportschaplaincy.org.uk to access our resources or register your interest.

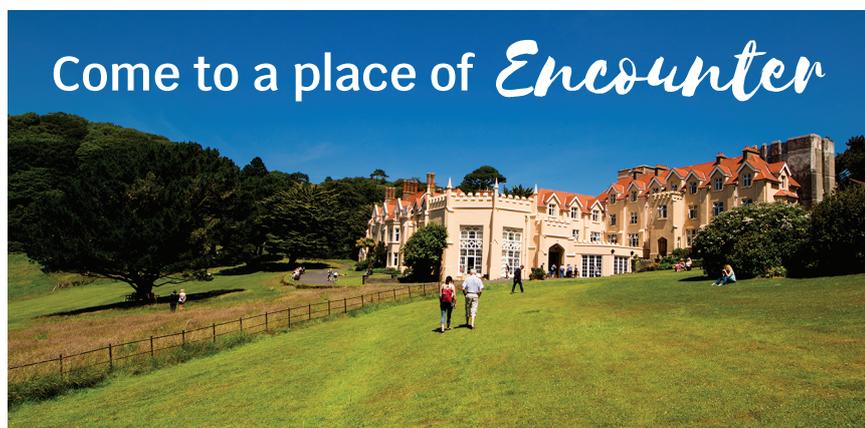


Warren Evans IMART games with player

“Our chaplain was a tremendous help to me through challenges in my life and career and having that support available to me no matter where I played has been crucial. He is for me, and I highly recommend this support to all players.”

– International athlete with relational and mental health issues

Warren Evans is CEO of Sports Chaplaincy UK, he loves people and has a desire to see them be all that God has called them to be, healthy and fruitful.



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Adrian, Australia

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HOMESHARE

Nicola Morrison shares the story of Marion, a dedicated wife and mother, who is passionate about ‘homesharing’ and providing a warm welcome to families fleeing to the UK from overseas.



When Marion and her husband were blessed with a gift in her dad’s will, she knew she wanted to do something amazing with it. And when the war in Ukraine broke out, it seemed like a “no brainer” to use it to provide hospitality to those coming to the UK as refugees.

Brought up in a Christian family in High Wycombe, Marion was one of three daughters. As she got older, she grew a deeper understanding of what her faith meant to her personally.

When her dad passed away, she and her sisters inherited money. Amazingly they have all embraced hospitality in different ways through his generosity, something she says was quite different to their upbringing, with busy parents and the demands of running a household “we didn’t often have people over”, Marion recalls.

I asked Marion what her dad would make of what she is doing now with his gift, and she gushed and replied, “I think he would be delighted!”

Marion, her husband and sister bought two homes after her dad’s death in 1996. “We had been renting to people we knew on low incomes, and family or friends of our neighbours, but had been having some work done on them and they were vacant when Ukraine was invaded, and my husband and I felt this was an opportunity”, says Marion.

Her husband picked up the baton and started the necessary preparations and

application process and a few months later their vision arrived on their doorstep – quite literally!

“It was just meant to be!”

“The first family that we housed were actually originally from Afghanistan and had fled to Ukraine as refugees years before, only to be displaced again when the war in Ukraine broke out!”

In their second home in the neighbourhood, they housed a family from Ukraine, who had applied through a government scheme. “After a telephone chat, facilitated by a Ukrainian lady staying with another local church family, we knew we wanted to welcome them into our home.”

Marion has been able to share her faith with the families she has housed. “The Ukrainian family came to church the first week they were here. They have got involved in social activities with the church since. The dad has really embraced the opportunity to meet British Christian men. Language has proved more challenging for his wife and has made her a little less forthcoming. The Afghan family is Muslim and have family in the UK.”

Being so close to these families Marion says is a humbling experience, “it has been a great experience for all of us, including our 14-year-old daughter... it brings the world situations so much closer to home...we are engaging with

people and have an insight into their lives. It really puts things in perspective.”

When I asked Marion how she approaches engaging with families that have experiences so different to her own she said: “We have to humbly accept that we can’t understand their experiences but that doesn’t mean we can’t stand with them...we let them open up as much as they are comfortable with, without being intrusive.”

Marion believes that whilst enriching the lives of these families, her family is benefitting too: “the families we have come across are amazingly positive and optimistic... it’s nice having them close by and we love interacting with them.”

Marion says that close bonds are formed as the families have been able to offer advice and engage together on the WhatsApp group.

She says that most of her family and friends have been supportive, and the new families have been widely embraced by the local community. “One of the neighbours popped round with a cake to welcome them to the neighbourhood,” says Marion.

When asked what she would say to others considering ‘homesharing’ she said: “I would encourage people to look into it, if they are in a position to help. We have been blessed to be part of their story.”

If you are interested in hosting a family or would just like to find out more, visit: welcomechurches.org

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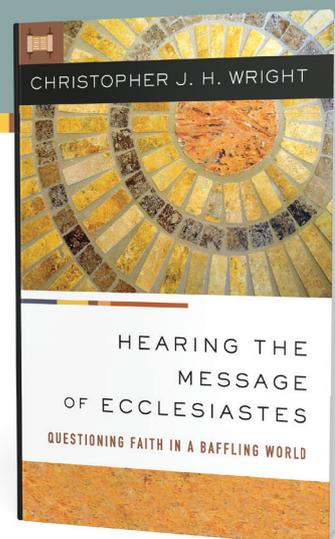
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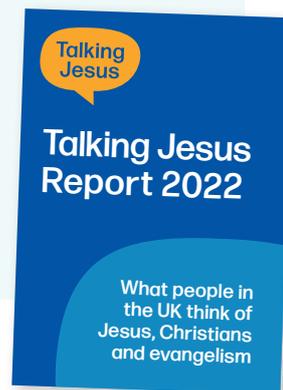
As evangelicals we all know the importance of sharing our faith with others and creating an opportunity to connect those around us with the good news of Jesus. But, for many of us this can be a daunting task. Here we receive encouragement from some of our Evangelical Alliance colleagues as they signpost us to some helpful resources.

Sharing Jesus in your community...

“It can be scary thinking about sharing Jesus with non-Christians, but be encouraged. Our research tells us that many people are open to finding out more about Jesus. Maybe start by just listening to them and offering to pray for them.”

Our collaborative *Talking Jesus* report produced by the Evangelical Alliance, Alpha, Hope Together, Kingsgate, CV Global, and Luis Palau Association provides key insights into what people think about Jesus, Christians and evangelism in the UK. Access the report and more of our evangelism resources at: talkingjesus.org

– Rachael Heffer, head of mission

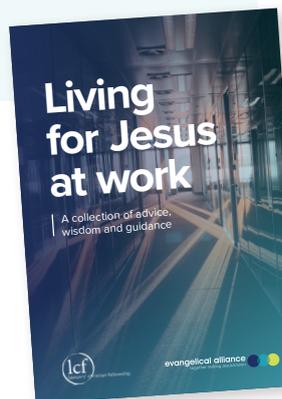


Sharing Jesus with colleagues...

“God has a specific purpose for you in your workplace. Pray that He would give you the courage to pursue opportunities to share your faith with colleagues with confidence and wisdom.”

See our resource *Living for Jesus at work* in partnership with The Lawyers’ Christian Fellowship, for useful tips on how to approach faith in the workplace. Visit: eauk.org/living-for-jesus-at-work

– Jo Evans, advocacy co-ordinator



Sharing Jesus with friends...

“Most new Christians credit a friend with playing a significant role in their journey to faith.”

We’ve created a suite of resources to help you share faith with friends. Find out more at: eauk.org/friendship

– Phil Knox, evangelism and missiology senior specialist



CREATING A *safe space* WHERE YOUNG PEOPLE CAN *flourish*

Mark Hand, youth pastor at High Street Methodist Church in Lurgan, Northern Ireland, reflects on the importance of giving young people room to share, fellowship and go deeper in their faith.

‘Following Jesus, serving others and transforming lives’, this is the mission statement of High Street Methodist Church in Lurgan. Together, our hope is that as a community of believers following Christ, He will transform us and those around us.

Each week, we have more than 100 young people connect with our youth

groups. We offer a range of activities, from residential trips away to first aid training, from sports to baking classes. Our heart is to build deep trust-filled relationships with young people so that God’s kingdom is made known.

Recently, I witnessed a young person step up and speak of their experience on a weekend away. For many of us this doesn’t sound unusual, but when we

first met this young person they were shy, quiet and introverted. Speaking to one person would have been a push, never mind a room full of adults. Over a number of years, we had witnessed their confidence building, a passion was

ignited and they are now able to stand and speak boldly in a place they feel safe and their voice is valued.

With a sports hall, some games equipment, several old sofas (maybe too many), a tuck shop and an amazing team of volunteers, we have created a space where young people can come and find acceptance, belonging and community.

In our youth group chat, one of the last messages was simply the words, “We can’t wait!”

We are so amazed at how God is using us to provide young people with the opportunity to grow and develop, and we continue to lead and shape our programme to fit their needs.

Andy, a parent, said: “The youth provision in our church is excellent. My son has benefitted greatly from the fun and fellowship at the youth group. It is one of the highlights of his week!”

Beyond our own church walls, we partner with other local youth agencies: Reach Mentoring and Aspire. Hundreds of hours go into regularly walking



Mark with some of the youth leaders



Carole, one of our volunteers, said, “My favourite thing about volunteering is getting to know the young people and children in our church family. To be able to have a way to demonstrate our promise as a church member when they were baptised / dedicated is so very special. And I love it that I can play a part in teaching them about God's love for them and His desire to help them throughout their lives.”

alongside young people, offering one-to-one support and free tutoring, so that young people can progress through school and achieve their potential.

For over 20 years, we have joined with other local church youth groups,

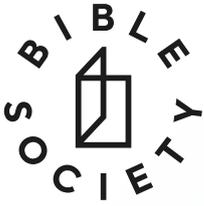
under the banner of GLO: twice a year we organise street clean ups, offer gardening for the elderly, paint hope-filled murals in the community and run community events. GLO was birthed in a prayer room when Christians from the town came before God in prayer. Psalm 133 speaks of God's blessings when there is unity and God has been faithful to bless our simple service to others over the decades. In all that we do, we know that putting God's love into action in practical ways is the first step towards building relationships and being able to share the good news.

Of course, there are hurdles and challenges. During the worst of the pandemic, we had to pause our programmes, and lost contact with several young people and potential volunteers; we're still responding to that gap in volunteer provision. Young people are facing a barrage of new challenges, and as a church we desire wisdom and knowledge in helping young people navigate the pressures they face.

Please join us in praying for:

- The relationships we're building with young people, their parents and wider families and for continued transformation.
- Our volunteer team - that others would come and get involved so that we can meet the local need.
- The schools work we're involved in and the young people who connect with us because of this partnership work.
- All of the churches and community agencies in Lurgan - as we believe that God is working significantly within our town.

Mark Hand is married to Beth and they have three little girls. He has been a youth pastor since 2016 and his heart is to see young people reach their full potential and see the wider church family look beyond its own walls and into the local community.



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SHARING RESOURCES AND TRANSFORMING LIVES

Bible Society is resourcing and supporting the growing church in China and transforming lives one book at a time.



A student receives the Chinese Study Bible, which will resource her in ministry. © United Bible Societies China Partnership

The Christian church in China continues to grow and grow. In the four decades since churches have been allowed to meet and the Bible has been tolerated, Christians have

increased from one million to at least 46 million*. Supporters of Bible Society here in Britain have responded to the huge desire among Chinese people to read the Bible by helping fund the printing in China of more than 90 million Bibles for distribution there.

The church welcomes a million new members each year. Kua Wee Seng,

who led Bible Society's work in China until recently, says the growth he saw in those years convinced him that God's word is unstoppable. He said: "I am reminded of Luke's description of the growth of the early church in the book of Acts, how the word of God spread, increased, multiplied and prevailed mightily."

A lot of this growth occurs at the village and family level. Kua says, "very often, after a person came to faith in Christ, they begin to share their faith with family, friends and neighbours. And they would gather at homes to pray, sing hymns and read or listen to the word of God. The home fellowship would grow and become a church."

This rapid growth brings challenges, too. There's no chance of church leadership expanding to match church membership, and China remains chronically short of ordained ministers.

Article continues overleaf ▶▶▶

On average, one minister will serve 6,700 believers, which means multiple congregations in various locations. Rev Liu Xiaofan told us he hasn't had a day off in 35 years!

A recent Bible Society shift to supporting the training and equipping of volunteer leaders is helping to meet this leadership need. Since key support for China's overloaded ministers comes from 190,000 lay preachers, the potential impact among believers is magnified. One seminary lecturer, seconded to teach lay preachers, is expected to ultimately reach more than 16,000 Christians through the influence each preacher will have on their respective flock.

Lay leaders aren't paid but show enormous dedication to their congregations. Chen Ruifen, for example, is just 25 years old, but she fills almost every role at her church. Training funded by Bible Society has helped build Chen's confidence - not in herself, but in the strength of God's provision. Chen said: "Serving the church is not dependent on my limited self but trusting that God will work with and through me."

Wang Zhengxiang learned to put his trust in God while in prison. Facing a year behind bars for his role in a road accident found him, "eager to read the Bible again after all these years".

So, Wang asked his family to send him a Bible and a hymnal, and spent his time in prison re-engaging with scripture and worshipping God. Once released, "I took every opportunity to share God's goodness in my life. Some



Worshippers with their Bibles at the church in Long Ci, near Nanjing.
© Clare Kendall/United Bible Societies China Partnership

folks were encouraged by my sharing and even pointed out that the Lord had shielded and protected me despite the challenges I have experienced," he says.

These are the people driven to preach by the joy of God's work in their lives, but unpaid and untrained - Bible Society is routinely arming people like this with study Bibles and empowering them through training courses.

Zhou Yaqin, who studied at Batou Bible training centre, said: "When we see these books, we feel the love of God through generous people overseas, and it is an inspiration to us all. They serve as a reminder for both teachers and students that we are not alone in dedicating our lives to God's ministry."

Even in the face of increasing pressure, the church in China is gaining strength, growing both numerically and spiritually, thanks to solid Bible teaching. Kua Wee Seng has a daring

vision. He says: "I pray that the church in China will become a key member of the global church, playing its role in global missions. I pray that they'll be able to support churches in other parts of the world in the future."

Find out how you can support the amazing growth of the Chinese church by visiting biblesociety.org.uk/bam-ea

**Official estimates of 46 million necessarily under-count because they only include Christians registered with the government. Daryl Ireland, at Boston University Divinity School, estimates 100 million.*

James Howard-Smith creates digital communications for Bible Society. He loves the Bible, likes a bit of poetry and enjoys a good-natured debate with friends! He's also part of the leadership team at his church in Swindon.



Lay preachers receiving their copy of the Chinese Study Bible.
© United Bible Societies China Partnership

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Sam on holiday with friends in Dubai, after his diagnosis

HEART BEHIND THE ART:

AN INTERVIEW WITH SAM SURIAKUMAR

A musician, worship artist and blogger, living with a brain tumour – **Sam Suriakumar** explains why he is still inspired by God's faithfulness.

South Londoner Sam Suriakumar works in recruitment and loves writing music, singing, and playing piano in the worship band at church. His personal blog documents his journey with God, his life with his wife and two young daughters, and how he faces the challenge of being diagnosed with a brain tumour just before the pandemic.

Growing up, Sam had a longstanding "deep and trusting relationship with God", but over time he grew to realise the extent of God's faithfulness.

A child of immigrant parents from Sri Lanka, Sam was encouraged in his twin passions of South Asian and Western music. His mum and dad supported him to start learning classical piano aged six, and a drummer got him into the mirudangam (Indian drum) after spotting young Sam tapping

away at a party. Sam confesses he has always been "quite loud, wanting to be the centre of attention", and dreamt of fame and fortune in becoming a Bollywood composer.

Sam talks fondly of his parents' unconditional love – even in his rebellious moments. He's grateful for the sense of responsibility his hard-working dad instilled, and for his mum who played worship songs with him and his sister and brother, despite her "limited knowledge of the guitar". Talking of her impact on his faith and constant prayers makes Sam emotional: "She is sacrificial, leads by example." He recalls that although she was concerned when he left for university, instead she chose to pray, saying: "I'm very comfortable knowing you are in the palm of His hands."

However, there were times growing up when Sam got angry – shipped back

and forth to the Tamil church two hours' away, he missed friends' birthday parties and got called a 'Bible-basher' at school. Some children were unable to get their heads around Sam being both Sri Lankan and a Christian too, so he kept quiet about his faith.

Now, aged 37, Sam has become confident and open about his faith, and prioritises going to his church, Sutton Vineyard, with wife Sindhu and daughters Avaana, eight, and Arya, six. He nurtures their young faith as they pray together before school and bedtime – and during down time, thoroughly enjoys playing dress-up with them too.

Little Avaana and Arya also love joining Sam in his studio. They light up when they see him demonstrate a musical skill they haven't heard before – excited for him to teach them.

Sam has played at the Royal Albert

“I always had a steady faith but now I feel like God is waking me up, saying, ‘We need to do more’ and is changing the way I think.”



Sam in his home studio
(photo by Kabz Raviraj)

Hall, the O2 and Wembley grand arena, but has also reangled some of his childhood ambitions. He finds contentment in enjoying music when he can, recognising other responsibilities. He admits there was a season of frustration: “comparison for the sake of ‘looking into someone else’s garden’ was really hurting me mentally.” This made him fall out of love with music and start doing songs for ‘likes’ – “ignoring the people who supported me”.

Sam also writes a blog, called ‘Walk with Sam’, which he started after being diagnosed with a brain tumour. In it he opens up about his diagnosis, his family, mental health, and his trust in God.

Initially, Sam fell into a black hole, fearing he wouldn’t see his daughters grow up. “It was like everything went

mute for me,” Sam remembers. His neurosurgeon advised him to “put the tumour in a box and let me deal with it,” and focus on mental health and finding a support network.

Though it was an awful time, Sam says, “God had already set that team around me... a strong squad.” In the ups and downs, he knew everyone was praying for him. “I felt very much at peace... My mum had been praying and she said, ‘[God] said I’ve got this; I’m looking after him!’ It’s led to a whole new way of seeing things. I always had a steady faith but now I feel like God is waking me up, saying, ‘We need to do more’ and is changing the way I think.”

Strength and vulnerability go hand in hand in Sam’s life, and he feels that Philippians 4:13 is a constant theme in his life: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

“Since my tumour, my philosophy’s changed. I’m a massive part of the church band now. Friendships at house group are a part of worship. It makes it so much easier and freer when your heart is in the right place.”

He now feels he can connect with God whether in front of one or 1,000 people, and that when it comes to his own songs, “the only person who matters if they like it or don’t like it is God”.

Some people ask Sam why he was sharing such private things in his blog, but he sees it as a positive

way to be honest about how he feels and to get things off his chest. “Not every post is shared, there are about 50 posts I have written, and I haven’t shared. It’s a place to be a bit vulnerable. There are some really hard days.”

When people reach out to say, “I really needed to hear that”, or “this is really helping me and inspiring me, please keep going”, it makes Sam feel great. From his health, to his faith in God, Sam is choosing to be vulnerable: “I don’t hide anything.”

The blog even led to a new connection with a brain tumour specialist who has become a really good friend and even helped Sam with his diet. A confident artist, Sam has an energetic, go-getting impulse to put himself out there, reach out to others, perform and play music – but he’s also looking upwards and outwards to see how he can benefit others, as he shares his journey with everyone. He’s even raised a lot of money for the charity Brain Tumour Research and has been part of a campaign calling for better funding into research along the way.

If there was a soundtrack for the more performance-oriented season of Sam’s life, he would have chosen ‘Vellai Pookal’, a song by one of Bollywood’s most iconic composers, which Sam loved for its “gorgeous” sound more than the meaning behind it. But more recently, his go-to song is ‘Promises’, by Naomi Raine and Maverick City, which he would listen to over and over again to strengthen his faith: “Though the storms may come and the winds may blow, I’ll remain steadfast.” Listening through tears, it makes Sam feel like he is coming home every time.



Sam en route to Snowdon (photo by Sam’s wife Sindhu)



MAKING COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Richard Steadman of Oaklands Church Swansea illustrates the many ways they are sharing the gospel in their local community.



Two young mothers sat in the congregation listening to the gospel being preached for the first time. Peter Yeoman was ministering and, emphasising the necessity of repentance, he called for people to turn to Christ. The two young mothers both responded and while weeping, prayed with the leadership team. They were both spiritually hungry and as it turns out, had been on quite a journey.

The two women had both previously been involved in all sorts of eastern mysticism, yoga and meditation, but had come to the end of themselves in their spiritual journey. One of them, Kate*, had previously been meditating on the word “Messiah” which had come to her. She was confused, and so she asked the other woman Vicky*, what the word meant. Vicky told her, “That’s Jesus!”

From then on, they started to

distance themselves from their previous spiritual experimentations and started to read the Bible. In her home one day, Kate got down on her knees, cried out to the Jesus of the Bible and immediately she had a vision of Christ, with a golden pathway before Him. He said to her, “I am the way”.

She asked the Lord what would happen to those who continued in spiritualism, and immediately the golden pathway melted away. Kate and Vicky continued to read the Bible together despite not being connected to a church.

We were unaware of what was happening on the other side of town. But one of our churches in Kate and Vicky’s town was planning a simple family fun-day (with bouncy castles, a BBQ, facepainting etc). The purpose of the fun-day was to reconnect with the community post-Covid and invite people

We always try to “shine our light, rather than shout at the darkness”.



to the evangelism service the following day. As a result, Kate and Vicky turned up, and after some discipleship, were baptised. The two women were relieved to have connected with a church and people they could trust after their previous experience with spiritualism. The rest as they say is history!

Ever since Oaklands Church was started (back in 1991), we’ve noticed the prevalence of spiritualism in our area but, as emphasised by Peter (our founding pastor along with his wife Lynne), we always try to “shine our light, rather than shout at the darkness”.

Peter and Lynne initiated a gospel-push into the communities of the Swansea Valley. Now, with Andrew and Helen Yeoman (their son and daughter-in-law) leading the church, we have pushed outwards into some of the surrounding communities and valleys.

In terms of how we share the gospel, I think it’s fair to say that we’ve tried

most methods. However, in more recent years, we’ve been encouraged by Marilyn Harry (an evangelist with the Elim Pentecostal Church), who equipped us to start thinking more evangelistically. We purchased a 100-seater marquee and started to run small tent missions – with community fun-days on weekends.

We have seen hundreds of people visit these fun-days. During one season, three tent missions had been planned – but with momentum and the blessing of God, this was extended to 12 different communities being reached over a period of 12 weeks. Some of our small groups have, as a result, become fully-fledged churches. The fun-day that Vicky and Kate attended was our first one post-Covid – but it was a pleasant reminder of why we go outside our church walls.

We’ve even taken worship outside and declared Christ’s kingdom in song as well as in word.

It’s amazing when you hear worship music resound off buildings and hillsides – often with people opening their windows wide to listen!

We now regularly try to use calendar events to express the gospel in ways that get us out into the community.

Even on Remembrance Sunday, one of our churches invited those paying their respects to have refreshments in the meeting hall, leading to lots of connections being made. We really push teamwork – with team leaders taking responsibility for each area. We’ve found that, if individuals within the church are willing to engage with evangelism, then even flipping a burger becomes ministry!

Like other churches, Oaklands’ evangelistic activity was affected by the pandemic, and it has taken some time to begin to restart some initiatives. However, people are surprisingly more attentive to the gospel than before. Jesus told us that, “When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth,” (John 16:13) and we are witnessing the Holy Spirit at work in the preparing of hearts. Like Vicky and Kate, many are searching for meaning and hope – and if we reach out with the gospel, they will listen.

Please pray for us as we reach out as a church, as several of our connected leaders are currently experiencing serious health problems. Find out more about us here: oaklandschurch.org

**Names have been changed.*

Richard Steadman is associate minister at Oaklands Church and River of Life Church. He is a father of two and husband to Joanne.



ISAIAH 61

movement

'I struggled to share my faith and discovered 80% of Christians do too.'

That's why our mission is to see **every Christian confidently sharing Jesus**. We found a way that works, setting simple goals in groups and journeying together. It changed me, it can change you. Come see for yourself.'



John Kirkby
Founder of
Isaiah 61 Movement



'i61m MAKES SHARING JESUS DOABLE'



Maria,
Doing i61m in her
Church group

'We are delighted and excited to be Strategic Founding Partners of i61m.'

It is a vital ministry for this time. I am totally behind what they are doing.'



Gavin Calver, CEO
Evangelical Alliance



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10 minutes with...

JOHN KIRKBY

John Kirkby, co-founder of Christians Against Poverty tells us about his passion for evangelism and the vision that led to a new innovative app.

John, tell our readers a bit of your background

At age 30 I was in a mess and lost everything, then I met a man called Paul who became a friend. He invited me to meet Jesus and then God began the 30+ year journey of transforming my whole life.

In 1996, my wife Lizzie and I founded Christians Against Poverty (CAP). After 25 miraculous years and over 200,000 individuals becoming debt-free, we passed the baton on to an amazing team. Then we asked God the famous question, 'what next?'

You recently launched Isaiah 61 Movement and a 'Jesus sharing' app (i61m), can you tell us about it and the vision behind it?

God led me back to one of my life application scriptures, Isaiah 61:1-2. I felt like He was reminding me of His Spirit in me, and in all of us to proclaim good news. My friend had shared Jesus with me which transformed my life, and I wanted to find a way to do that for my friends too.

At the same time, the Evangelical Alliance, one of our founding partners, laid bare the challenge that eight out of ten Christians really struggle to share their faith. So, over the last two years we've forensically examined why so many Christians don't 'share' Jesus. After development and trials, we've found an innovative solution that really works.

Our vision and mission is audacious: 'Every Christian confidently sharing Jesus'.

What is unique about the app and its approach to evangelism?

It's simple. It's doable. It's for the 80% of Christians who just like me, find it a challenge to share their faith. We've split the journey into three sections, 'share life' - deepening new and existing friendships, 'share faith' - growing in confidence to share your story and 'share Jesus' - an invitation to discover Jesus for themselves.

As Christians we know we should share Jesus, and we really want to! The app simply takes our intentions and, with simple goal setting and accountability, helps us turn it into action. No goal is too small, just add the details and the date you want to achieve it by!

The beauty of i61m is that you're not alone. Most Christians find it hard. We're in this together.

We've found that the best way to journey with i61m is within small groups; you get support, encouragement and time to pray together as your confidence grows and grows. We host regular online groups called i61 LIVE where anyone can join with myself and the team. One of our core values is generosity, so our app, our videos, our guides, and access to our support team is completely free!

What would you like to say to those considering using the app?

Since our launch in March this year, thousands of people are now on the app from hundreds of churches. The movement is popping up all over the world - Africa, India, USA... but here's what it's really about: a member of our team was on the phone with a man from Manchester last month who used the app.

He told us that for the first time in his life, he'd journeyed with a friend, shared his faith, and grown confident enough to invite his friend to meet Jesus and now they know Jesus too!

In September, we launch new, monthly video resources for small groups as they journey to share life, faith, and Jesus. Search i61m in any app store and have a look. It could lead you to help someone find faith!

To download the free app, visit: i61m.org
To read John's article on bitesize evangelism, visit: eauk.it/bitesize-evangelism

A close-up, soft-focus photograph of a person's hands writing in a spiral-bound notebook with a fountain pen. The pen is dark with gold accents. The background is a blurred, light-colored wall. The text is overlaid on the image.

TOP TIPS ON LEAVING A LEGACY IN YOUR WILL

Grace Steele, director of Wills & Probate, simplifies the process of leaving a gift in your will. Alongside colleague **Rose Woodward**, she answers some frequently asked questions and explains why the process need not be so complicated.

The decision to leave a gift (a legacy) in your will to a loved one or a charity close to your heart is a very important one. Legally, you are free to distribute your estate (everything you own) however you wish. This can include leaving legacies to certain people, organisations, or charities.

1 Why should I leave a legacy?

If you wish to leave a legacy, it must be set out clearly in a will. This makes it legally binding and will ensure your wishes are followed. Unfortunately, all too often people do not specify legacies in their will, or indeed do not write a will at all. As a result there is no guarantee that the people or organisations you had hoped would benefit from your estate will receive anything from you.

2 Do I have to choose just one recipient or charity?

You can leave as many legacies as you like in your will. We would advise that you start by thinking about how much you wish to leave and to whom. There is no limit to the number of legacies you can make, and you can leave different amounts to different people or organisations.

If you wish to leave multiple legacies to charity, but you are unsure which, you can leave an amount of money or a property in a Trust for your Trustees to distribute in line with your wishes. You can leave your Trustees a letter of wishes outlining any preferred beneficiaries and the amount they should receive. This letter can be updated over the years at any time without having to amend your will.

3 Does it have to be a monetary gift?

A legacy doesn't have to be a cash gift. For example, it could be a property. I am aware of a gentleman who generously gifted his house to his local church who, after his death, were able to use the property as accommodation for families in need.

4 What if there is a change in my circumstances?

Everyone's financial circumstances change over time, and so may your personal views or connections with certain organisations. Therefore, we recommended you regularly review your legacies to ensure they are up to date and reflect your current wishes. You could do this at the same time as your will, which we advise you do every three to five years.

5 Will my gift be taxed?

Any legacies left to individuals may be subject to inheritance tax depending on your circumstances. Currently, inheritance tax is charged at 40%, however, legacies made to a registered charity are not subject to inheritance tax at all. This means that if you have a high value estate and you leave the entire estate to charity, no inheritance tax will be charged. Many people are also unaware that if you leave 10% of your estate to a registered charity, then doing so will reduce the rate of inheritance tax from 40% to 36%. This will benefit any individuals who are inheriting from your will.

If you are unsure whether your intended legacy is subject to inheritance tax, our specialist team of lawyers can help advise you.



Leaving a legacy is a special way of making a positive and genuine impact on a charity or in the life of a loved one.

If you would like to leave a gift in your will to the Evangelical Alliance or to find out more about our free will service, please visit eauk.org/legacies or contact our head of giving, Wendy Pawsey on 020 7520 3856.

Wills & Probate director Grace Steele at Ellis-Fermor & Negus Solicitors has over 30 years' experience as a private client solicitor helping families plan for the future. Grace is also a chartered tax advisor specialising in inheritance tax planning. Rosie Woodward is a chartered legal executive. For advice and more information, visit: ellis-fermor.co.uk

“COME TO ME ALL
WHO ARE WEARY
AND I WILL GIVE
YOU REST”



Whitchester Christian Centre (WCC) is described as ‘an idyllic, secluded oasis in the upper Teviotdale valley in Scotland’ and has been run since 2019 by husband-and-wife duo, Simon and Amanda Kimberley. The facilities are often used for quiet day events and retreats, where fellow Christians can get away from the hustle and bustle of life. But for Simon and Amanda it’s not just a building; their hospitality and this unique place create an opportunity to pour into God’s people and serve in a unique way.

Here's their story...



Amanda and Simon Kimberley

Simon and I have been married for 32 years; we met through mutual friends at a birthday party in London and immediately realised we had the call to East Africa in common. It was while we were living in Uganda that I realised the importance of places to retreat to.

People in the Scottish Borders often ask where we are from, but we really have no fixed abode. We spent 16 years on the Isle of Man (our children were five and three when we moved there). Once the nest was empty, we felt free to seek God's next move for us and spent a year training with Acorn Christian Healing Foundation. Through a somewhat challenging route (good lessons learned along the way) we were led to take up positions as deputy wardens at Whitchester in 2018 with the understanding that we would be handed the baton the following January.

Whitchester's purpose is to provide a place of rest, refreshment and restoration in a holistic way; we do this in peaceful countryside surroundings, in a comfortable 12-bedroom mid-1800s house along with lots of good home-cooked food and chapel time.

We feel our responsibility is to create a space where guests can meet with God, and be ministered to at their point of need (to quote Bishop Morris Maddox).

We have the words from Matthew 11:28-30 painted in gold lettering on the wall of the chapel – these verses for me really encapsulate what we are here for.

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Whitchester is an ideal size for groups to come and run their own programmes and we frequently welcome church weekends away, clergy groups and those gathering to pursue common interests: hobby and craft, reading, prayer, walking, and exploring the Borders Abbeys Way or St Cuthbert's Way. We also run our own Quiet Days, for those living more locally, and short retreats. Simon and I also make ourselves available for one-on-one listening/prayer times during these events (we are both trained in these areas and I am also trained in spiritual direction).

Over the years, we have witnessed some amazing moves of God and spiritual breakthroughs for those who attend during and after their stay.

On one occasion, a father was seeking the Lord for his son who

unfortunately had a long history of drug abuse. He felt the only course of action for his son was an uprooting from his present home near himself and his wife and to relocate him far away from his peer group who were part of the problem. A complete fresh start – but would their son agree? Amazingly, after returning home from the retreat, not only did their son consent but he was actually excited about having a new beginning. Over the next few weeks, the dad supported his son in his move and the start of a new career.

A couple of cards we've received following recent visits both included the phrase 'just what I needed' and another said, "I had a lovely stay at Whitchester Christian Centre. A sense of peace and support was present. Our hosts were welcoming and helpful."

We are really excited about the National Retreat Week which is being held for the first time this year from 23-30 September, endorsed by Bishop Stephen Cottrell.

Please join with us in prayer that it will be a success, and that we can be resourced with more staff so that we can continue to provide more retreats and Quiet Days, and be able to continue to serve God's people.

To learn more or to arrange an event at Whitchester Christian Centre, visit: whitchester.org.uk and for more information on the National Retreat Week, go to: renewall.org.uk

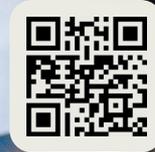
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A prayer for open hands and open hearts



Rev Israel Oluwole Olofinjana, director of our One People Commission, prays for our eyes to be opened to the many ways we can share God's compassion towards others.

In this fragile, fragmented, and contested secular society that we live in, Lord, help us to share in all manner of ways.

Let us share in hospitality with strangers, with those who are marginalised and with those who feel disconnected.

Lord, help us to recognise the humanity of people who are homeless, people who are seeking asylum, refugees who have fled their homes for various difficult reasons and those who are suffering financial hardship.

Lord, would you help us to share in the suffering of others, being sources of encouragement and strength, empathy and support?

Give us opportunities to share in common interests and share space with those in our communities, connecting and creating bonds, for we know the importance of togetherness and that you did not intend for us to be alone.

And most importantly, let us continue to share the good news of you. Let us be vessels that you flow through and let your words penetrate the hearts of those who do not yet know you.

May we share in the great commission with our brothers and sisters, and may we continue to strive to make you known.

Amen





SHARING IS CARING

Gavin Calver, CEO of the Evangelical Alliance, challenges us to consider what we share most passionately with others and to ask ourselves, is God at the centre?



I vividly remember getting down from preaching at a conference when a lady came over to me and told me that she was really encouraged by my enthusiasm and energy. As we chatted further, she told me that she was a ‘passion expert’ who focussed on helping people to grow, develop and channel their passion into what they did. She asked me, “do you know how you can tell what people are passionate about?” I confidently answered, “yes I believe I do; isn’t it what they spend their money on?”

Immediately she said that I could not have been more wrong. Apparently what you spend your money on is entirely socially conditioned. She quickly gave me the correct answer by saying there were two things that clearly reveal what we are most passionate about: what we spend our time on, as there’s nothing more precious than time, and what we talk about. She went on to say, “If you spend half an hour with someone, you can tell what they are passionate about as you hear it out of their mouth.”

This really got me thinking. If you spend half an hour with me, you most definitely discover that I am passionate about Jesus, my family and AFC Wimbledon!

What would people hear out of your mouth, or see in your life, if they spent half an hour with you? Where does your passion lie? I was chatting to a certain friend of mine and it was clear that their primary passion was for fitness that would push them to the limit physically. They were talking about upcoming opportunities that they could sign up for to do extreme sports, and were encouraging me to join them. They went on and on about it and their passion was unstoppable.

This all gets me thinking about how we can be more passionate about Jesus, more caught up in wonder over the love and power of His resurrection, and more keen to let this passion overflow from our lives to those around us. Is the impact of the gospel so deep in our hearts and lives that it affects those around us and leads them to want to know Him too? What about you? After half an hour together, would people know that you are passionate about Jesus?

Since the pandemic, I have been privileged to have lots of conversations where I’ve noticed a change in the person listening; they seem to be far more open to hearing about the hope that I have in Jesus. I am sure that many of you have experienced the same. Now, they haven’t been saved on the spot, but there is an openness and I have been

able to talk to them about more than the football! My barber, my homeless friend in Kings Cross, our neighbours – in all these conversations, something is shifting.

When the people next door moved house a few weeks ago, there was a moment when I felt prompted to go and say goodbye. They had lived there for over 20 years, and it was a big deal that they were moving. As we briefly talked about the time they had spent at the house, and they thought ahead to life in a new location, I knew it was a moment to offer prayer. They are not believers, but as I prayed for their transition, asking God to help them in the closing of one chapter and the beginning of the next, the wife became emotional, and as I departed it was clear that the love of Jesus had impacted her heart.

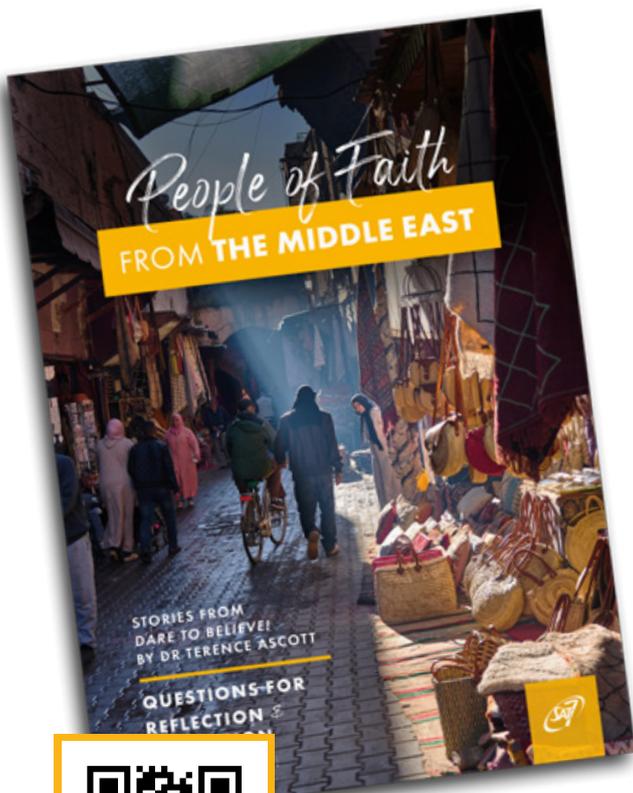
It’s early days but I believe we are going to see these small moments lead to deeper conversations and witness many, many people come to know Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. The question is, in this window of opportunity, are we passionate enough about Jesus that it overflows and touches the lives of others? This is the hour for the gospel, and my prayer is that we would all be passionate about our first love, Jesus, and make the most of the moments in front of us. Let’s go for it!



People of Faith

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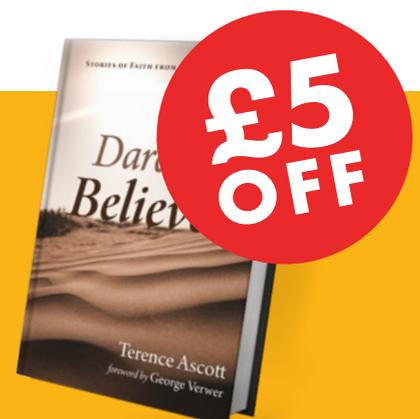
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