

SPRING 2021

IGNITE

SPARKING PASSION FOR THE GOSPEL
ACROSS THE UK



SOWING THE SEEDS WITH SEAFARERS

SHARING GOD'S LOVE WITH MEN IN NEED



ALSO FINDING LIGHT IN THE STRUGGLES OF LOCKDOWN
IMAGINATIVE WAYS BRING TECHNOLOGY TO LIFE
WHAT MIGHT A 'BLENDED' CHURCH LOOK LIKE POST LOCKDOWN?

WELCOME TO IGNITE



None of us thought that we would still be in lockdown, yet here we are. The burden on lives, businesses, schools and families is immense. This edition of Ignite takes an honest look at some of the joys and struggles of Counties' Evangelists and Church Planters over recent months.

Tim Cracknell gives a frank overview of the challenges of church planting in this season, and yet there are still signs of hope and fruit. Paul Davies and Steve Loader have very different ministries, and both have made huge adaptations to adjust to changing opportunities. Yet, both are faithfully sowing Gospel seeds into the lives of children and seafarers respectively. Their stories are inspiring.

Aderyn, a Counties Trustee, helps us reflect on what a blended church may look like moving forward. Her article will be further expanded in a book on evangelism that Counties are hoping to produce this summer.

Finally, we say farewell to Ruby Powell. Her life and work, with her husband Ivor, are beautifully explored through the eyes of those who knew them best.

May God bless you. Thank you for your support and prayers.

Martin Erwin,
CEO Counties

Counties exists to make Jesus known across the UK through our evangelists, exhibitions and resources, in biblically faithful and culturally relevant ways.

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COUNTIES CONNECT CONFERENCE

CHURCH IN A POST COVID WORLD - FRIDAY 25 JUNE 2021

Book the date for an exciting online one-day conference which Counties is planning for Friday 25 June. This unique conference will build on the success of our 2020 February Connect Conference when 220 people gathered from across the UK at Daventry. It was a powerful time in God's presence, being inspired, equipped, and encouraged by likeminded gospel people. Our focus for this year's conference is "moving our churches from maintenance to multiplication in a post Covid world."

Looking forward, our prayer for the event is that we will see churches strengthened through making disciples and stimulate a new generation of church plants across the UK.

We have a fantastic keynote speaker booked in Shodankeh Johnson who is from Sierra Leone. He is a leader who has overseen the launch of 3,000 churches in Sierra Leone – each church with an average size of 48 people. His heart and passion for the gospel is truly inspiring and we are thrilled that he is willing to share his heart and wisdom with us for the conference.

INFORM AND INSPIRE

Sixteen people joined together online for the latest 'Inform and Inspire' event. They were joined by Counties Training Officer, Beverley Bedford, who explained what Neighbourhood Chaplaincy does.

There was also a Q & A session so people could find out more and sign up for training to be a Neighbourhood Chaplain. As a result, six people from one church are now launching a Neighbourhood Chaplains scheme. Another attendee, from Kent, is hoping to launch a Neighbourhood Chaplains after Easter. "This is really successful for a one-hour event" says Beverley.

His message is one that the UK Church needs now more than ever, and we can't recommend him highly enough.

Video conferencing will enable us to make this a dynamic experience brought direct to your home. A host of gifted, highly effective leaders, with a proven track record in multiplication are being lined up to lead seminars and bring us keynote sessions. The big group teaching and worship times will be blended with lots of small discussion breakout rooms, Q and A with the speakers, relaxed virtual coffee times to reconnect with friends, and make new connections and so much more.

All done at a pace and creatively designed to enable everyone to become energised, inspired and equipped for the season ahead. To make sure you receive all the latest information on the conference please email connect-conference@countiesuk.org or bookmark the website.

If you would like to attend an 'Inform and Inspire' event to learn more about running Neighbourhood Chaplains from your church please email beverley.bedford@countiesuk.org



LIFE EXHIBITION GOES VIRTUAL



Life exhibition, run by Counties, and aimed mainly at Key Stage 2 children, has gone online.

The original exhibition is an immersive experience, using interactive tablets, QR codes, graphics, quizzes, films, songs and a discussion café, which are contained in different pods, with lessons usually lasting for about an hour.

Normally, children walk through different pods as they are talked through how aspects of Jesus' life relate to the schools' Local Agreed Syllabus, but due to lockdown this has not been possible.

So, to make this resource available again, Counties has designed the Virtual Life exhibition which can be shown in any classroom on Zoom or other video conferencing platforms.

Katie Gooch, from Sidegate Primary School, was involved in one of the first trials and said:

"Our Year 6 children have been missing visits this term. They had a fantastic interactive virtual visit to the Life exhibition yesterday.

Three classes were able to join the guided visit via Zoom. They loved the questions, misconception-quashing, links to religious texts they have explored, videos and music. As a teacher, it was great to hear the children's confidence in discussing points based on their own or others' worldviews."

The virtual exhibition costs just **£30 per lesson.**

To see the exhibition in action please visit: www.youtube.com/c/CountiesConnect and the Life exhibition Playlist or search "Life exhibition Virtual tour".

Contact Kevin Baldwin, Life exhibition Coordinator, at lifexpoo@countiesuk.org or ring 07968705623.

FUNERAL OF RUBY POWELL

WEDNESDAY 6 JANUARY

Ruby Powell went to be with Christ on 6 December at the age of 91. She leaves three children Dave, Maggie and Rachel. Please pray for Ruby Powell's family as they adjust to life without her.

Ruby was born in 1929 in Bedfordshire. She was the eldest of three children. In 1936, the family moved to Hanslope where she attended the Gospel Hall. She was twelve years old when she was saved and was baptised the following year.

Ruby was married to Ivor Powell. When they first met, Ruby described Ivor as: *"The boy with ginger hair and wearing short trousers with a BIG Bible under his arm!"* Their son Dave said: *'It was not an instant attraction. Dad would always prayerfully consider his decisions – hence taking four years of courting before finally proposing to mum.'*

But together they made a formidable pair. Ivor joined Counties in 1956 and Ruby worked alongside him after they married. They were both thrilled at being part of the 'Counties family' right to the end of both of their lives.

Dave adds: *"There's a saying that 'behind every great man is a great woman'. This was certainly true of mum and dad. They worked as a team with mum often holding*

the fort when dad was away leading Church missions around the country.

"We have recently found notebooks where Mum recorded names and addresses of all the places they stayed or where they had tent missions, from 1955 to Mum's last stay with Maggie in Dorset, Christmas 2019.

"64 tent missions are mentioned in those books. From late May to end of August, Dad would be running tent missions.

"In the summer holidays Mum would operate 'home' from the Counties caravan, looking after us and any visitors and students who came to stay to help. Mum would play the organ for all the services, provide tea and refreshments to any visitors and generally be on the go. Their last tent mission was in July 1982.

In one of the many letters we have received the writer said: 'When I heard the news, I felt that a beautiful melody had been stilled'. This seems a very fitting phrase for our lovely mum."

The inspirational writer, Shannon Alder, wrote: *Carve your name on hearts, not tombstones. A legacy is etched into the minds of others and the stories they share about you.*

Ruby and her husband Ivor will be fondly remembered by those whose lives they touched and none more so than Martin Buckby who shares his own memories of them.

"I first met Ivor on 2 October 1971, when I was taken to a Gospel Rally. I recall Ivor spoke on that lovely verse from Revelation 3:20 'Behold I stand at the door and knock' and for an illustration he used a simple small wooden door demonstrating that the door handle was on the inside and the opportunity to open it was on the inside. I recall going home and praying a simple prayer asking the Lord to come in and change my life.

When I recently visited Ruby just before the first lockdown, her expression of anticipation and hope in going to be with the Lord was so evidently strong and her memories of Ivor and God's faithfulness so enriching.

At Ruby's funeral recently the family had kindly left me a bag containing items including Ivor's Bible and his notebook of sermon notes, which I first saw on 2 October 1971.

On arriving home, I randomly opened the Bible and on that page was a scripture calendar note for 2 October. I wonder if this was a coincidence or a wonderful reminder to me of the influence of grace and that of dear Ivor and Ruby?

Along with others, Ivor and Ruby became people whom I looked up to and saw in them the God of grace. After leaving school I would join Ivor with 'the tent' and have great memories of times together. Ruby had such a gentle supportive role – looking after the family, preparing meals and then being ready to support the services with playing the foot pedal organ. Her testimony of care, support and love was so evident.

Ivor stored his caravan in Cambridgeshire, and a tractor was needed to tow it back to the house. Ivor drove his car and I was given the opportunity to drive the tractor.

I remember one morning Ivor and I were planning to deliver invites to the tent. Before leaving I said: 'What will we have for dinner today?' He replied: "I don't know because we have nothing in, and I have no money, but the Lord will provide". Amazingly, when we returned from delivering the invites there was a supply of groceries on the caravan doorstep. I learnt so much from that experience about trusting God.

My life, the journey from conversion, through times of waywardness to the discovery of God's wonderful restoring grace, I remain thankful to Ivor and Ruby.

My enduring memories of them are their radiant smiles which so clearly reflected their trust in God and Him being their treasure in life and in death.

I am so thankful that my life was so enriched by knowing them and their memory is something I will treasure."

COVID IS A REAL STRUGGLE FOR OUR CHURCH PLANTERS

Church Planting Officer, Tim Cracknell, explains how Covid is affecting church planters but he encourages positivity.

As Tim Cracknell sits in his office at the family farm on the Herefordshire/ Gloucestershire border, sipping coffee, he looks the picture of rural tranquillity. But looks can be deceiving, as Counties Church Planting Officer, Covid-19 has meant it's been a tough year for him and all those involved in church planting.



would normally have been possible. Tim adds that it's been "paralysing for some" particularly for those who are new to an area as people may think "why should I speak to you?"

It's not just building connections with people outside of church, there is also the issue of building relationships within the church. In particular, building teams has been challenging when they can't meet in person.

"It's not impossible" Tim adds: *"But original plans have been thrown out of the window. A hard job is made even harder and these churches really need our prayers."*

In addition, the Counties Planting Network operates a programme for lead planters and one aspect is coaching. Normally, everyone would get a monthly, one-hour coaching call but right now those calls last much longer.

"A lot of the time on that call is being a pastor to the planter. Holding their hands,"

"It's been bloomin' hard. We have ten fairly new church plants across the country at the moment. Some of them began in 2019, in places as diverse as Elephant and Castle in London, Ross-on-Wye and Kendal. Others began last year – one church is Ethiopian led and the another is Nigerian. This adds to our diversity as an organisation which is great."

Tim adds though that: *"Many of our church planters have been hit hard by Covid-19. One leader went to hospital in an ambulance and another has been struck by long-Covid. 30% of our lead planters have been seriously ill with the pandemic related illnesses."*

"And, of course," Tim laughs, *"There's Zoom. You can have a conversation but it's really difficult to pick up on people's body language or really get to know them in the same way as you would do sitting together over a coffee."*

All these issues combine to mean that new churches are struggling to connect with their communities in ways that

says Tim. *"Many church planters also ultimately live by faith and although some are bi-vocational and there can be access to different funding streams, the lack of congregational financial support via a weekly collection, adds an extra burden."*

Tim is keen to emphasise that even in 'normal' times the life of a lead planter can be emotionally demanding.

"You need to be a people person, and flexible; things change, and plans don't work. You need what Rick Warren calls 'a thick skin and a tender heart'."

The biggest challenge Tim sees leaders face is around dealing with people: *"You get close to people and you help them, you invest your life in them, and you see them make progress spiritually but then something totally leftfield can knock the person off course. It can be anything. They may be very fragile, or something has happened in their family life and suddenly they batten down the hatches and don't return your calls anymore. And that can be a real slap in the face."*

It's not just new churches that are struggling, however, many established churches are also in decline. Tim says the pandemic has "turbo charged the decline" so some of the more established churches will sadly not open after Covid. But he adds that there is good news coming from some of the closures.

Wollaston Evangelical Church, on the outskirts of Birmingham, is going to be a new Counties church plant called 'Church in the Community' led by a young couple, Jordan and Lacy Armstrong. They are being mentored by Andy Hodson who is an experienced Counties church planter and went to WEC as a child.

Tim is equally resolute in his belief that lockdown has brought many positives by forcing all church leaders to think differently about how they 'do' church. Counties has not been prescribing ways that church planters should use the internet or social media, but Tim says many church planters are using Facebook to do live broadcasts or Zoom. He's definitely excited about the possibilities and the results he has seen in his own church.

"We set up Facebook groups, a book club, and 'Wellness Wednesday' where people came together on Zoom, then went out for a walk and came back together afterwards and shared what they had seen, followed by scripture meditation. Some groups were clearly Christian, and others were to create community and connections. We put our pre-recorded church services on YouTube too. We do interviews and testimonies with people. Our sermons are now fifteen minutes rather than half an hour; so, trying to make everything snappier."

For Tim and all church planters the current lockdown brings its challenges and rewards and they need our prayers and support.

To find out more email Tim.cracknell@countiesuk.org



Andy Hodson outside Wollaston Evangelical Church

SOWING THE SEED WITH SEAFARERS



Counties evangelist Steve Loader works with merchant seafarers at the port of Bristol. His work introduces men of different nationalities and religions to the love of Jesus.

Showing God's love to men who are often at breaking point, is one of the hardest parts of Steve Loader's role. Trying to provide practical support and spiritual succour to seafarers, who have been thousands of miles away from their families for nine months or more, is tough. But Steve arrives at Portbury and Avonmouth Docks, five days a week, relying on what he calls God's 'Divine Appointment'.

Steve's ministry began when he started going on the ships in 2006 with a chaplain friend who was already working as a full-time evangelist. The friend retired in 2012 and Steve carried on the work. He was accepted by the Sailors' Society and made an honorary chaplain, which gave him the official authority he needed to carry on doing the work.

In 2014 Steve linked with Counties and he says he now "wears two hats".

The ships that come into Avonmouth docks travel around the whole world and the crews are mainly overseas nationalities. The average nine months these men spend onboard a ship causes a host of problems.

"There is a huge cost for these seafarers doing this job because they sacrifice their time at home with their families. Most are relatively young, recently married, they may have babies and young children. Often, they are not just supporting immediate family but wider family too. It's a huge problem being away from loved ones. There is isolation, loneliness and money issues."

EVANGELISM AT SEA

They do the job though because for many it's a good wage so they are able to send money back home.

Steve adds: *"They all talk about a life of sacrifice. So, there is a huge strain on them to 'come up with the goods'".*

There can be up to six nationalities on one ship and they are under a lot of stress. Covid has made it a lot worse because of limited flights and quarantine. Steve says some seafarers have been on ships for over a year.

"It's horrendous really and causes huge problems especially if there are issues back at home and they can't do anything about it. Also, because they are desperate for work, many of them have been duped and the money they receive is not what they thought it would be."

"I've had seafarers who are in tears because they are at their wits end. I have helped men who are caught in modern day slavery. They are working but not

being paid and are trapped on the ship. I don't have the authority to help them personally, but I know people who do."

Steve starts his day with an hour of quiet reflection and prayer time which sets him up for the day. He then looks to see what ships are in dock and what nationalities are on board so that he has booklets, in the right language, to give out. Many of the men also desperately want mobile phone SIM cards so they can phone home.

"Normally, I go aboard the ship and introduce myself and say 'I'm from the Seaman's Club' which is an old expression they all understand. It essentially means 'I am a Chaplain!'"

In non-Covid times he would go to the Mess Room, where they have their breaks and meals and chat to men. Now Steve can only go onto the deck with his mask and introduce himself. He shows them what he's brought with him.





to have intimate conversations. But he carries Christian booklets and DVDs in the hope that seafarers will get a chance to engage with them later.

"Seafarers occasionally contact me to say that they will never forget what I shared with them, which they found very helpful."

One friend Steve made, a few years ago, was a Filipino cook. His wife had been badly sexually assaulted. The man had been home since the attack, but then had to go back to work on the ship and couldn't cope with being away from his wife.

Steve says the man told him: *"I wake up in the night crying and I don't even know what I am dreaming about. My head is like a kettle boiling all the time."*



"Normally, it's woolly hats. I've got enough woolly hats to sink a ship," he laughs. "At Christmas time we give presents. They come from volunteers like the Women's

"I wake up in the night crying and I don't even know what I am dreaming about. My head is like a kettle boiling all the time."

Institute. One ship received 60 hats, with over 100 given out on that day. I also give out coats and warm clothing."

Steve often gets the chance to talk to men of other faiths, particularly Muslims who will listen because they feel they are on neutral territory.

"I have to listen. I am not there to ram it down people's throats. I like to pray if seafarers share problems. You have to be ready for anything. Seafarers get killed occasionally and there can be bad accidents or families at home are having difficulties. You have to be able to take the rough and the smooth."

At the moment, it is difficult for Steve because being outside means it is hard

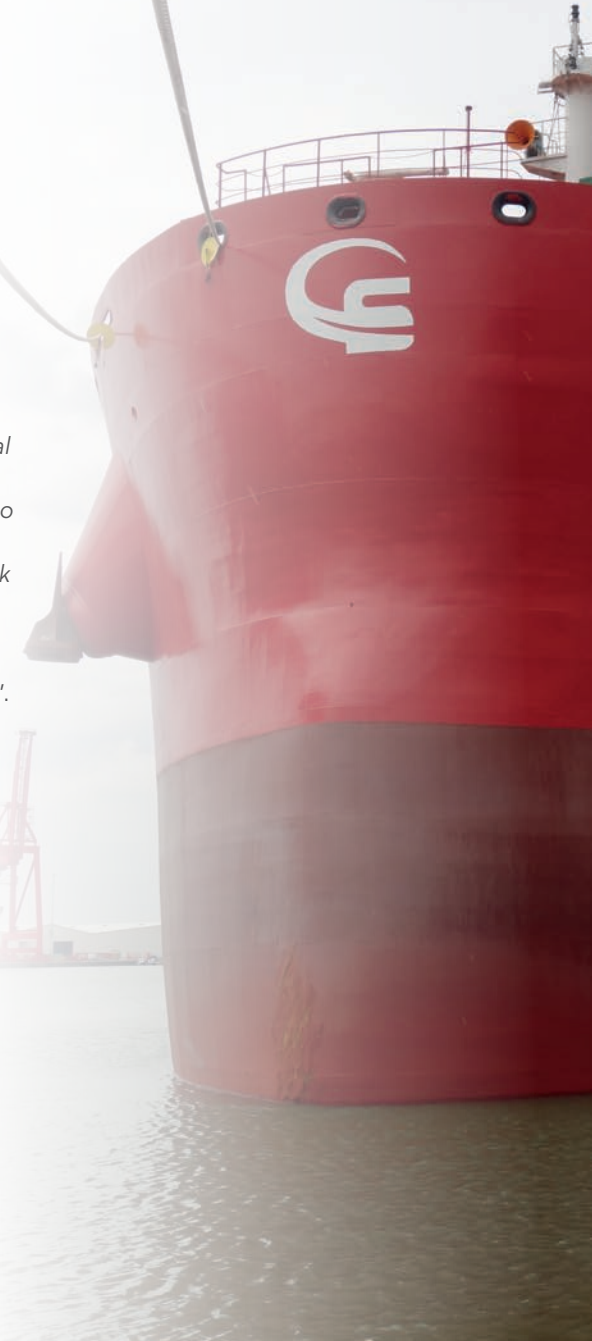
So, Steve spent time talking and praying with him and got some information to help those dealing with sexual assault. The next day, the cook said that he had slept through the night for the first time.

"But most of what I do, you don't get to see the fruit of the work. I am sowing the seed. There have been many opportunities for me to explain the Gospel, but seafarers listen more when they know you are a friend. It's not conditional."

"I try to clarify that they can have a personal relationship with Jesus and that when I am gone, Jesus is still there. There are also times when I meet seafarers who already have a faith, and occasionally they will ask to pray for me which is so lovely. I don't get that very often."

Steve calls his work 'Divine Appointment'. He laughs: *"Sometimes when I visit a ship the guy I end up talking to is not the person I planned to talk to. It's some other guy who has been lurking around, and even though I may have not initially noticed him, I realise that he's the one God wants me to talk to."*

"They like the fact that I am not pushy. This is me. This is my faith. This is what I believe in."



STUDENT ZAC JOINS THE TEAM



18-year-old Zac Whitehouse from Swansea has joined Counties training programme for Gap year students – TEAM (Training in Evangelism and Mission). Ignite chatted with Zac about how he's finding it.

Why did you decide to join TEAM?

I did a BTEC in Business at college and felt it wasn't for me; so as soon as that finished, TEAM came at the right time. I've done kids clubs and youth groups for the last few years, so I have been exposed to that kind of stuff before. So, it's an opportunity to hone the skills and experiences I have and grow in that area and see where God takes it.

How do you think TEAM will help any future ministry you do?

I would like to learn more about 'behind the scenes' stuff. So, there are things I didn't really appreciate that went on before, and now I am being told to go and organise them. Also, I am being exposed to different areas of ministry.

Have you always been a Christian?

I grew up going to church so I've always been exposed to that side of things. I would say that only recently I have taken it as my own personal faith. I think I was sharing the faith of my parents or my pastor or friends. Recently, I have realised it needs to be my own faith.

Is it hard being a young person and a Christian?

There are different challenges now to previous generations. I was talking to my Pastor and we were talking about how addictive technology can be – that you would rather be on your phone than reading your Bible and how you work around that. It's the same temptations but in a different way.

INTERVIEW

As a Christian, it can be difficult to be in the world but not of it. Working with young people, you always have to ask: "How can I be relevant to them?" So, topics like self-image and the future. I think for younger Christians than me there are more and more things to be distracted by.

What's your favourite Bible passage?

It changes every two weeks! I am currently reading 1 Peter 1:3-11 every day. It finishes with things that angels long to look into. Every time I think of that, I see we can't really get bogged down in stuff, when angels would feel overwhelmed by being able to look at this. Sometimes, I feel like I need to get my Bible reading done, to get it out of the way, but then angels would be overwhelmed to hold the Bible in their hands. So, it puts it into perspective that angels would long to look into something that we sometimes get so used to.



FROM CHOCOLATE ORANGES TO STONES: THERE IS NO LIMIT TO REACHING OUT WITH THE GOSPEL.

Since Jacquie Bodman became a Counties evangelist and Neighbourhood Chaplain, she has used her boundless enthusiasm and imagination to impact her local community in ways she never imagined.

Back in Summer 2020, Ignite told the story of Jacquie and Tim Bodman and their fight against Covid-19 which ended with Tim being so ill, that he was rushed to hospital. However this wasn't to be their last encounter with the local hospital – but the outcome was not what either of them could have imagined when they contracted the disease during their first week as Counties evangelists.

Last Spring, amongst all the other work they did as leaders of Camborne Community Church, Jacquie and Tim had been getting ready for their Easter



Jacquie handing out gifts and Christian literature

Sunday service, where they normally welcomed 400 people. There were two thousand pieces of literature at church unused due a national lockdown and Jacquie lying in her sickbed. Jacquie felt God telling her to bring them back to their home, even though she had no idea why.

The literature included Bibles, leaflets, and booklets from Counties, Hope Together and the Gideons. Shortly after, Jacquie discovered what God had in store, when she was contacted by the local hospital.

"They approached us to ask if we could help with their 'End of Life' packs. By the end our team had literature on the wards, in the waiting rooms, for staff and for patients, and in five doctors' surgeries and the 111 car. We had also made leaflets offering spiritual and practical help, which were being made digitally available by the doctors in the hospital."

Their local cottage hospital then became the focal point for patients in the area. There was a special ward set up which dealt with 'end of life' patients.

"The hospital had been used to being a minor emergency unit", Jacquie says, "but suddenly the pressure mounted, and the staff were hit with so much work. We became aware, in November, that they were on their knees. They were exhausted."

So, Jacquie and her team had some Neighbourhood Chaplains cards made; and got the names of each of the doctors and nurses on the front line – 66 of them. They wrote a personal note to each of the staff, telling them how much they were appreciated and how tough they knew it was for all of them.

They also gave them a Chocolate Orange they had individually wrapped. *"They were blown away by the love. One nurse couldn't contain herself and threw her arms round me,"* Jacquie adds.

Jacquie also says she was amazed that they didn't encounter any opposition: *"When our leaflet was made digitally, we thought they would take the verses of scripture out, but they didn't. So, doctors were sending out our leaflets digitally with scriptures on them, offering prayer and pastoral care."*

Encouraged by what they had seen, Jacquie saw a suggestion from Counties, to reach out to communities by painting a baby Jesus on stones and hiding them around towns, for people to find.

So, helped by members of the congregation and toddler mums; two hundred stones were painted and hidden around the town centre on a Friday night. They advertised what they'd done on their church Facebook page, where it reached 13,300 people.

"We gave people two Saturdays to bring them to church and we asked them to add the stones to a Nativity scene. They would receive a gift which was a 'gospel in a bag' really. We had different bags with literature in them for men, women, teenagers and children."

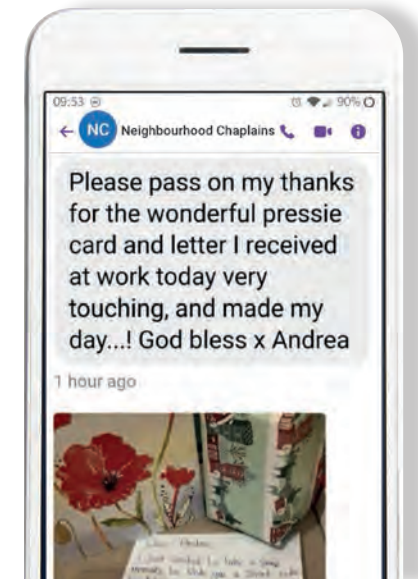
"In the end we gave away 330 bags. People travelled to find a baby Jesus stone and



bring it to church. We had adults doing it without children. We had people desperately trying to find stones and they would rush into church and say, 'I found a stone'.

The church foyer had been decked out as a Santa's grotto and they played loud music: *"It was very much a party atmosphere,"* Jacquie laughs.

Far from putting her feet up after such a busy year, Jacquie is still raring to go. *"We are going into old people's homes next, restrictions permitting. We've already got three lined up."*



LOCKDOWN DOESN'T HAVE TO BE ALL ABOUT ZOOM.

Swansea Evangelist Paul Davies tells Ignite how storytelling and imagination have reignited his ministry.

Tell us about yourself?

"I have been married to Laura for 12 years. We have two boys, Isaac, aged five, and Malachi who is three. We have recently been living with our in-laws."

What have you been doing online during the last year?

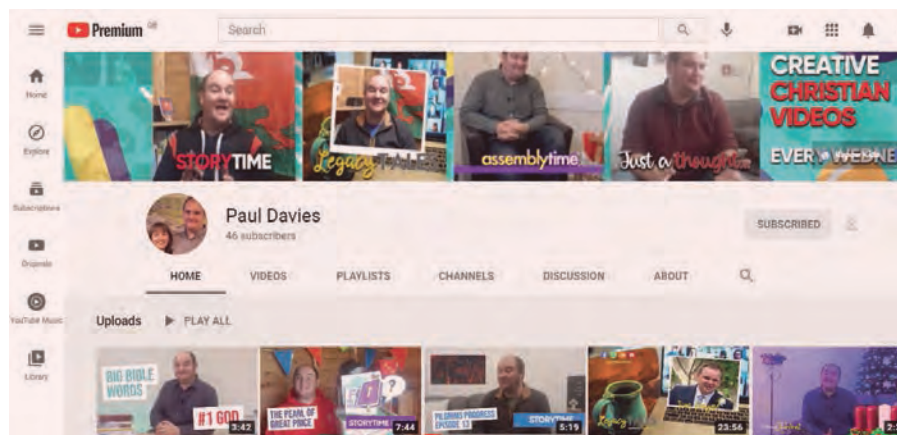
"Life has changed so much for everybody, so it's finding ways to still reach people. I have developed a weekly email called the Kapow Bible Club for families, featuring craft ideas, Bible stories and songs to use for 'Church at home', and particularly to help engage children. My particular passion is for children and youth. It is because they are the next generation. If they discover who Jesus is now, then who knows how God will use them."

You've been serialising Pilgrims Progress on video every month. Tell us why you choose this book?

"I started hosting it in my shed. I hadn't read the story myself for years and I thought: 'It's a great gospel story and it has plenty of cliff-hangers to keep it going. Lots of churches have used it in their services and people have said how helpful it has been, as I always put some kind of 'application' with it. So, there is a point to it."

Tell us about your latest venture, Big Bible Words.

"It's theology for kids. There is a book called 'Bite Sized Theology' and I have adapted it for video. I am currently testing it out, but it might be useful for older children and teenagers."



And you have been doing 'Assembly Time' and 'Just a Thought' videos for schools too.

"Yes, it's amazed me how many schools have seen it and reacted to it. This includes schools that, traditionally, we haven't been allowed to go into for one reason or another - they are suddenly watching our videos. So that's blown me away. Churches have been using the videos too; one child commented that it was the best part of the service because it was as if it had been made especially for them."

You have been using online assets so imaginatively – do you feel that's part of your calling?

"As hard as this time has been, I have found it really encouraging as churches have really stepped up to the challenge, and many of us have decided: 'Let's have a go'. That's how the Assembly Time started as I couldn't go into schools anymore in lockdown."

You also do a monthly podcast, tell us about that?

"The idea is to get people's testimonies. People have been coming back to me with really encouraging stories. A friend of mine told his amazing testimony of how, not only him, but his whole family came to faith. He shared about how distant the family was before, but how they all came to faith together. It's really interesting talking to people because you finally discover who they are."

Do you see yourself as a storyteller?

"Very much so. I have always enjoyed storytelling. For schools, I love telling Bible stories because I think that if I don't tell them, will they hear it anywhere else? Which is really sad."

What's your favourite Bible story?

"The story of Jesus on the cross. It sounds a bit of a cliché, but it is the centre of everything I do. In terms of telling the story it's Daniel and the Lion's Den."

What can stories teach us? What's so special about stories?

"Stories are important because everyone can grasp them. It doesn't matter your age, or your background, everyone can understand a story. And stories are memorable. If you do it right and creatively, stories last in the hearts and minds of people – not just children. We all remember the stories we learnt as children."

"I taught about Daniel and the Lion's Den in one school and the Gospel was in there too. When I returned, the teacher asked the children what they remembered. One child said: 'He told us about Jesus and how he died on the cross and came back to life again'. And I thought: 'The story was Daniel, but you got the main point and that's what matters.'"

You can find the videos on Paul's YouTube Channel, search "Paul Davies pilgrim's progress"

WHAT MIGHT A 'BLENDED' CHURCH LOOK LIKE POST LOCKDOWN?

"This article is a taster for a chapter in our upcoming book on Evangelism in a post-Covid world. Here Aderyn Taylor-Roberts, a Counties Trustee and leader at Forest Community Church in Cinderford, whets our appetite and challenges us to prepare for blended church, so that we might make disciples."

Martin Erwin, CEO

In true Twitter style (direct and provoking), let's get straight to the point:

"We really need to get over this idea that church has to be physical. God isn't. Faith isn't. Prayer isn't. Worship isn't. Church is a community of people worshipping God, seeking to follow Christ. We can do all of that online regardless of a virus." Tweets Dr Peter Phillips, Head of Digital Theology at Premier Christianity and researcher at Durham University, in late March 2020.

January 2021 brings a more nuanced approach because we have largely proven that yes, we can exist online. We have been forced to practice what we preach – that *"we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building,"* 1 Cor. 3:9 and that there is nowhere to *"flee from His presence"* Psalm 139:7-12. But is



existing and merely being present online enough?

Moving swiftly past the need for a ground-level discussion about the proof for the reality of the physical Church, let's look at where we are now with the blending of the physical

and spiritual church, the offline and online, fixtures and fittings and swipes and Zooms.

2020 has taught us so many lessons and made us re-think our attitudes and perceptions regarding church, mission and of course the place of online church. While the building has closed, the church has not. We continue to worship, pray, teach and minister both online and offline. I have witnessed such diversity from churches who have upskilled and moved quickly to continue to witness to the mission of God despite the buildings being closed.

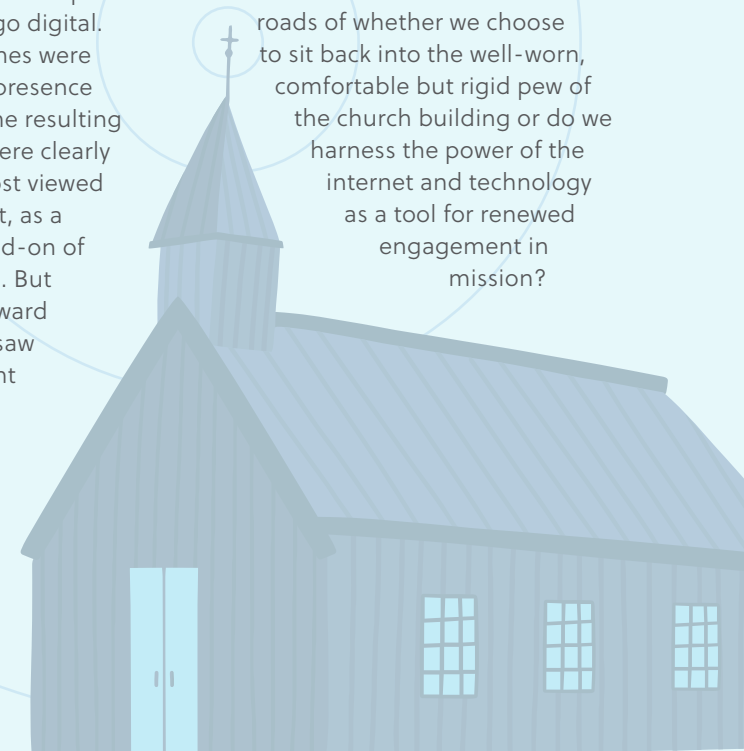
That said, it took a pandemic to really get the bulk of the church to understand that there is a desperate need for the church to go digital. For certain, a few churches were rethinking their digital presence long before 2020 and the resulting quarantine, but there were clearly defined differences. Most viewed the digital world, at best, as a tool and last-minute add-on of their "normal" activities. But there were the few, outward thinking churches that saw it as a ripe and abundant mission field.

For our church in the Forest of Dean, rather like the masses, the pandemic rather abruptly awakened

us to become culturally relevant again in the digital age - we had to be relinquished from the shackles of the physical, because the option to meet in the building, simply wasn't there. Real, missional online church was always on the backburner, an afterthought because mission was always considered to be only authentic in the flesh.

Sound familiar? What has changed now is our perspective – what started by merely trying to hold our church congregation together, quickly evolved into a new attitude and recognition that the digital world is only secondarily a tool; it is primarily a mission field.

We have now come to that crossroads of whether we choose to sit back into the well-worn, comfortable but rigid pew of the church building or do we harness the power of the internet and technology as a tool for renewed engagement in mission?



It's not as though the church is unfamiliar with renewal. In Acts 15, the early church found new ways to welcome Gentiles. With Constantine, renewal came again (with all its ups and downs) and William Tyndale with his printing press and new Bible translations, the church was propelled through yet another renewal. I think you get my point - there are and have been many variations of renewal in our history, but the constant is that the church could not return to its previous state. This Covid era is our time for renewal and we cannot go back.

Church buildings will reopen, in time, with in-person services, church community activities will resume however, here are three starting points for the church to engage with as it seeks to encounter fully this new mission field of the blended church in the post-quarantine era:

1 A broadcast Sunday Service is just the start – it is a naturally evangelistic tool that enables people to check-out their local church while remaining anonymous. However, live-streaming your service, while giving valuable insight into your church and providing a platform for the gospel to be heard, is simply putting your physical church service online. It is a 1-sided conversation where the viewer becomes a consumer not an engager. Livestreaming is just the start of the blended church, but how do we recreate that offline experience of church that offers warm hellos and greetings of “how’s things?” that actually wait patiently for the real answer, drinking coffee and eating

biscuits, sharing communion? If we only offer a broadcast service, we deny those who are searching and peering in at the church’s perimeters, the rich, multisensory and authentic experience of God’s intention for His church.

2 Put your money where the mission field is – moving forward church leaders will realise that people who are engaging from home or other places will count just as much as those who attending in the building. What we have to understand quickly, is that this trend of more people accessing the church online and choosing to participate from home, isn’t about people dropping out. It’s about people who are leaning in. And to continue to serve those and reach out missionally, our budgets need to reflect this. Pastor Carey Nieuwhof, recently stated that he now encourages churches to spend 50% of their staffing budget on online services. This may initially seem crazy, until you realise that at this moment over 90% of all church staff are now online pastors or producers. As we move into the post-quarantine era, most will return to their day-jobs, but the demand and need for online church will remain. With all the “normal” ministries starting up again, how will this need be met? Do we just drop-out of mission field and go back behind the wall or will our next hire be in the area of online church?

3 In an age of excess, simplicity is key – as highlighted above, the post-lockdown era will see a somewhat assumed return to the “normal” hub-bub activities of church life, but can we be more effective if we

focus on simplicity as we prayerfully seek to forge new paths in this developing mission field? Can we keep the church lean, whilst reaching the most? I call this Back-to-Basics – a return for churches to go back to their true calling – disciple making. It requires churches to focus on doing a few things well and trimming the excess. There is a correlation between what you do and what you get – if we return to trying to do a scattering of everything from our building and now as well online, we return to being another social club, community centre or fan page, that in turn draws us away from discipleship – discipleship not as a programme but as the entire aim of the church. Just as we can’t be everywhere physically in our community, we can’t be everywhere

digitally and we must often evaluate and return to the basics when needed.

As we face this new era of renewal and uncertainty, there is a danger that as people return to their “old” roles that all the hard work and investment in online services, discipleship and community will be lost – not entirely because of a lack of desire but because we didn’t prepare for it. Let us plan now for the rise of the blended church that seeks to put the heart of the gospel at its very core both online and offline. Let us not fear the uncertain path for *“The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.”* Deut. 31:8 NIV.





KEY TO LIFE SCHOOLS' RESOURCE REACHES OVER 1,200 CHILDREN

The country's national restrictions have made it challenging to engage in direct schools' ministry, however Key to Life has been successfully working in a Covid safe way. Dave Thomas and Kevin Baldwin, Counties Schools Resource Team are staying positive.

In November and December, Key to Life was welcomed into four schools in Hereford, Wrekin (Telford), Holt and Devizes (Wiltshire). Local volunteers led lessons to over 1,200 children, on Key to Life, sharing about the life of Jesus.

Kevin shares: "We're Covid ready and secure for when schools re-open."

Schools and volunteers are reassured by the safety measures taken on board the resource. As Key to Life is in an expanding lorry, every surface in the classroom is able to be cleaned between classes. We even have a 'fog machine' which sprays antibacterial mist into the lorry.

Katie Jackson, Curate at the United Benefice of Broughton Gifford, said about the Holt visit: "We have received some fantastic feedback from the school about Key to Life. It was thoroughly enjoyed by both pupils and teachers and we are so grateful that we were able to use Key to Life."

Dave Thomas, Key to Life Coordinator shares: "We have done everything we possibly can to work within the government and schools' guidance to be Covid secure. We would love to share the good news of Jesus once again, with more bookings from Churches, helping them to reconnect with schools."

KEY TO LIFE

Key to Life is a 7.5-ton lorry, which expands into a mobile classroom. The resource can be booked from one week, to a full six-week half term. Key to Life is primarily aimed at Primary Schools, though it's adaptable for any age group.

The programme can range from 20 minutes for younger Key Stage 1 children to an hour for Key Stage 2 children. There are three floor-to-ceiling interactive walls so the children can stand up, touch the screens, play games and learn about the life of Jesus.

Lessons can include: the birth of Jesus; Jesus in history; Jesus' parables; Jesus' miracles; the Easter story and why does it matter now. The content can be rearranged, which allows volunteers autonomy to adapt the lesson to the children's learning and local agreed syllabus.

Kevin says that teachers and pupils are always surprised by what they see: "They have this huge lorry come in with all the high-tech stuff and it goes to show that Christians can be up-to-date. It is a fantastic starting point to asking the school about opportunities for pastoral youth work and mentoring as it gives the local volunteers 'credibility'".

The exhibition is often booked through local Counties evangelists, 'Youth for Christ' groups, Churches Together, youth workers, as well as individual churches who all wish to connect and work with their local primary school. All local volunteers receive training from Counties.

Dave's hope is that the local church makes long-term connections with the schools involved. This could include school assemblies, mentoring, conducting lessons and different kinds of follow-up sessions once the exhibition has left.



Rev. Lee Plummer, who is a newly appointed Chaplain and Head of Religious Education at Old Hall School, Wrekin booked Key to Life in October 2020. He said "Key to Life has been fantastic, kids and staff have loved it! Key to Life was a total success. It was brilliant, it's been so easy to produce some fabulous lessons, there is so much material and it's easy to use for all ages."

If you are looking for a way to make RE lessons exciting, fun, and engaging, Key to Life can support your school by providing a one-of-a-kind learning experience about Christianity in a Covid-secure and interactive environment.

If you are interested in learning more, or booking the resource, please email Dave Thomas: keytolife@countiesuk.org

JUST A MINUTE

WITH WARWICKSHIRE EVANGELISTS

IVOR AND ANGELA COOPER

Tell us a bit about yourselves.

We've been married for 45 years. We have two married daughters who are both primary school teachers, and have two children each. We live in Leamington Spa and have done all our lives. I was an engineer before becoming an Evangelist and Angela worked in various secretarial roles.



So, Ivor, how has cancer affected your future aspirations working with Counties?

Because of the brain tumours I am in a period of assessing, "Lord what do you want me to do?" I have had forty years of active Christian ministry with Counties. Some people say I could retire but I don't feel I want to do that because being an evangelist isn't just a job; it is a calling, a vocation.

How did the cancer diagnosis affect your faith Ivor?

I think I have a robust theology regarding suffering and pain and why things happen. So that helped me as I thought: "Why not me?" The things I have had, haven't been half as bad as others. So, now I have had six brain tumours, I can say it has given me more sympathy for other people – particularly those who don't have a faith.

How has Covid-19 affected you?

I think the pandemic has caused a lot of us to assess what we do as Christians. I think if the church just says: 'Let's put 2020 behind us and default to what we did before' we are missing a trick. We might have been surprised by 2020, but God wasn't.

Have you come up with any solutions?

No, except to say that we could look at technology and how we are using it and also church buildings. We could look at the amount of investment we put into them and think about how we could perhaps use that for other things. We need to use this time to reassess what we look like as a church as a whole.

How did you both become Christians?

Angela reflects, "I was taken along to a Sunday night coffee bar by a friend which is where I met Ivor. I started going to church shortly afterwards. Ivor was already at that church, having grown up in Christian family. He publicly gave his life to the Lord in his early teenage years, after hearing Counties Evangelist, Ivor Powell, speak at an outreach meeting."

Tell us about your work as a Counties Evangelists

Ivor says, "We joined in 1987. I have done a whole range of things: Counties schools' work – which I have enjoyed the most, youth camps, preaching and even playing the bass guitar. I have always tried to live by the quote: 'Make truth plain; make truth interesting; and make truth moving'. Angela has loved youth camps and house parties and the number of people upon whom we have hopefully had an influence."

Angela how have the last few years been different for you both?

Ivor was diagnosed with brain tumours two and half years ago, having already had kidney cancer. So, we've had to strip back a lot of what we do as it has taken away a lot of Ivor's capacity, like driving. Although, we've got through it with a lot of humour – dark humour mainly!

YOUR LOCAL EVANGELISTS

NORTH OF ENGLAND

Tim & Charissa Cooke
Jonny & Pamela Gios (ETP)
Julian & Ella Gutteridge
Martin & Angie Korchinsky
Lee & Lesley Marsland
Matt & Nicola Rich
Aaron & Rachel Shah (ETP)
Jackson & Sarah Turner (ETP)
Rob & Sarah Watson
Phyllis Jenkins (Senior)

MIDLANDS

David & Lindsey Brown
Ivor & Angela Cooper
Tim & Katrina Cracknell
Craig & Georgie Dowling
Andy & Isobel Hodson
Paul & Vanessa Willmott
Roger & Hazel Chilvers (Seniors)
Bob & Rita Telford (Seniors)

SOUTH EAST

Charles & Elizabeth Addoco
Shaun & Livi Almond (AE)
Will & Lynne Andrews
Tim & Joy Ayrton
Mark & Amanda Bingham (AE)
John Hardwick
Kim & Jo Hobbs
Tony & Ruth Hood
Colin & Linda Johnson
Caleb & Adanesh Mathewos
Andrew & Rachel Mugford
Madelene Bathgate (Senior)
Lionel Clargo (Senior)

AE – Associate Evangelist
ETP – Evangelists' Training Programme

Ray & Carol Dadswell (Seniors)
Wendy Iliffe (Senior)
Victor Jack (Senior)
Andy & Miriam Jelfs (Seniors)
John & Jane Martin (Seniors)
Betty Saunders (Senior)
Gladys Whittern (Senior)

SOUTH WEST

Jacque & Tim Bodman
Steve Ellacott (AE)
Mike & Su Stange
David & Katie Symons
Jean Campbell (Senior)

SOUTH CENTRAL

Jonathan & Heather Brain
Jamie Broadey (AE)
Ian & Sally Carr
Gordon & Penny Curley
Steve & Dawn Loader
Stephen & Jean Gillham (Seniors)
Hettie Hall (Senior)

WALES

Clive & Fiona Cornish
Liz David & David
Bhaskiaraj (ETP)
Paul & Laura Davies
Phil & Sheila Davies
Janet Hawking (AE)
Mike & Jan Thomas (AE)
Steve & Gwyn Treseder (AE)
Grace Anderson (Senior)

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