

SUMMER 2020
CORONAVIRUS SPECIAL EDITION

IGNITE

SPARKING PASSION FOR THE GOSPEL
ACROSS THE UK



HOLDING ONTO JESUS THROUGH COVID-19

CORNWALL EVANGELISTS SHARE HOW GOD
CARRIED THEM THROUGH CORONAVIRUS



ALSO COPING WITH SOCIAL ISOLATION - NEIGHBOURHOOD CHAPLAINS
NEW VIDEO CHANNEL - WHAT IS GOD SAYING TO US THROUGH PANDEMIC?

WELCOME TO IGNITE

As I sit at my home desk, still living in 'lockdown,' I sit in wonder and praise for our amazing God! The stories that will unfold before you in this special edition of Ignite will touch your heart, and I trust, cause you to give God thanks for all that He has done, and is yet to do.

Counties, as with every ministry, business, family and individual across the UK, and throughout the globe, has had to adjust to a pace of challenge and change that none of us have ever experienced. This magazine is filled with:

- testimonies of God's faithfulness to those who have been ill, or are isolating due to age or health conditions;
- the creativity and innovation of evangelists who believe the Word of God, that says that *'God is not willing that any should perish,'* (2 Peter 3v9), and have instantly responded and adapted to new circumstances and glorious opportunities;
- teaching and inspiration from Scripture as together we grapple with the question 'what on earth is happening?'

May God fill you with hope and encouragement as you read these pages. Thank you for travelling this road with us, and may God journey with you along the road.

Love in Jesus

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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Address: Counties 30 Haynes Road, Westbury, Wiltshire BA13 3HD

Telephone: 01373 823 013 Email: office@countiesuk.org www.countiesuk.org

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Editor: Helen Rimmer - helen.rimmer@countiesuk.org

Design: Hullo Creative - www.hullocreative.com





INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 5 Whole street gathers to remember neighbour in memorial service
- 6 Counties Connect is launched
- 7 Helping ex-offenders at a distance
- 8 Neighbourhood Chaplains rally around communities
- 10 Life stories: Surviving Covid-19, read Cornwall trainee evangelist's story
- 14 Coping with social isolation by Counties widow Wendy Illiffe
- 18 New Christian website launched to help with Covid-19 worries
- 20 Bible teaching: What is God saying to us through pandemic?
- 24 Resources: What's happening to Counties schools' resources during lockdown?
- 26 Just a Minute with Tim Cracknell



NEWS IN BRIEF

CHURCH HELPS VULNERABLE CHILDREN WITH HOT MEALS

A secondary school in Gloucestershire has praised the work of a local church who are making hot meals for 24 of their most vulnerable pupils whilst they are off school.

The school contacted the Forest of Dean Community Church in Cinderford asking for help. Tim Cracknell, Counties Church Planting Officer and pastor at the church, said:

"We have been able to set this up quickly with Katrina and Lin cooking each day for them and then we have another team taking the hot food out to the doorsteps, whilst being careful on social distancing."

"This has gone down really well and the headteacher has said in a message to his staff: 'We are so lucky to have their (church) support. I spoke to the county council today and no other school in the area has been as lucky as we are. This is really special.'

"It has been an extraordinarily busy time and has been very challenging, but our overwhelming feeling is one that God is doing a new thing (Isa 43:18-19). Forcing us out of our comfort zones into his new plan. Lots to pray for: wisdom, strength and stamina! And lots to rejoice in: new openings for the Gospel!"



COUNTIES FAMILY DAY POSTPONED

The planned Family Day in June has been cancelled following the rules on social distancing in the midst of the

Coronavirus pandemic. Please put Saturday 26 June 2021 in your diary for Counties Day next year.

FREE CHRISTIAN CARDS AVAILABLE

Counties Neighbourhood Chaplains are supplying free quality greetings cards to help you support your community.

Over 1300 cards have so far been sent out to churches all across the country. Use them to connect with members of your church

and community, as part of a food support or essential supplies parcel.

Call or email Dave Thomas on **07398 280329** or **neighbourhoodchaplains@countiesuk.org** for 25 FREE 'thinking of you' cards.

PEOPLE COME TO FAITH ONLINE

Five people in Oldham have committed their lives to Christ and one woman received instant healing after watching church online at home.

Oldham trainee evangelist and pastor Lee Marsland says: *"Please keep praying that we are able to keep a strong online Gospel presence on Facebook Live. Our daily show has a mixture of preaching, prayer and testimonies.*

"We have been doing lots of online live streaming of preaching and we saw five people commit their lives to Christ and quite a few receive healing. Praise God!"



NEIGHBOURS GATHER OUTSIDE FOR MEMORIAL SERVICE

Almost an entire cul de sac in a neighbourhood in the West Midlands took part in a mini memorial service led by Counties evangelist David and Lindsey Brown to remember an elderly neighbour who recently passed away.

David explained: *"None of us were able to attend a funeral service due to current restrictions, so we decided to lead a tribute out on the street for Jean, who we had known for around 20 years. We had an amazing time, with around 40 people taking part.*

"We included Jean's two favourite hymns - 'What a Friend We Have in Jesus' and 'Make Me a Channel of Your Peace' and we were able to refer to her faith and hope. Please pray for the Lord's leading on how to build on these opportunities."

David is now regularly hosting a 'Friday @ 3 Song on the Street' event on his street, singing a different hymn each week. David said: *"We have lived here for 26 years and a month ago never imagined this would happen!"*

counties CONNECT+

equip | encourage | evangelise

NEW VIDEO CHANNEL LAUNCHED TO HELP EQUIP AND ENCOURAGE CHURCHES

A new video channel with daily devotional videos and a weekly magazine show has been launched by Counties.

Counties Connect will host videos from Counties evangelists, staff and network members, with the aim to encourage and equip local churches with digital resources.

To be hosted on Counties Facebook page and YouTube, the channel will feature devotionals with connecting themes and the weekly magazine show will dig deeper into the Bible, evangelism and explore topical issues for church leaders.

Martin Erwin, CEO at Counties, said: *"At the start of the Coronavirus crisis, lots of evangelists started live video devotionals on Facebook, which have been very well received, often with hundreds of views and comments.*

"We are sensing the Lord moving us all towards reaching out to our communities in new and exciting ways. Our church buildings may be temporarily closed but church is still very much open. We hope local churches will be able to use our videos and help them to reach out and make Jesus known in their communities during this period and beyond."

Themes for the weekly show may include:

- What will Covid-19 do to and for the church?
- What does church look like now, how are we responding?
- What might church look like next?
- Should we go back to normal, or is there an opportunity to reshape church for a greater harvest?
- Testimonies - stories of grace and hope.
- Creativity on the internet – what is happening and how can we learn from it?
- Church planting.
- Pooling resources for small churches – not everyone can do technical/social media. How can we support these churches?

Counties Connect will launch on **Monday 25 May**. Visit www.countiesuk.org to find out more and view the channel.



CODE WORD SYSTEM SET UP TO HELP PEOPLE WITH DOMESTIC ABUSE

People who may be at an increased risk of domestic abuse during lockdown measures have been given a code word to help them seek support.

Suffolk evangelists Tim and Joy Ayrton run the Number 72 centre in Sudbury and have adapted their support services in the light of Coronavirus and social distancing.

Tim said: *"Since the crisis began, we have developed new initiatives to respond to local needs. This has included helping victims of domestic abuse. We have created a code word system to enable those threatened with or suffering to contact us covertly. A separate code enables the victim to ask us to call the Police in an emergency.*

"This work has been arranged in conjunction with Clare who is our Domestic Abuse Champion. The Facebook post advertising this new service received over 8000 hits from people across a very wide area. We have also received messages from those using the code words as well.

"We give thanks to God for his wonderful provision in allowing us to develop the service in a new way during these difficult days. We believe the reach of the ministry is potentially greater now than before."

For more details on Number 72's online services, including a bereavement support webinar, visit: www.number72.net

HELPING EX-OFFENDERS WITH SOCIAL DISTANCING

God's faithfulness is helping Counties evangelist Kim Hobbs overcome challenges as he attempts to keep on supporting ex-offenders and those with addictions during the Covid-19 crisis.

Kim shares: *"We have been meeting with people who we support on street corners, observing social distancing and chatting for just ten minutes each. Despite the huge challenges, there is always something good that comes from these meetings and we see God's faithfulness every day.*

"I was encouraged last week when on my way to visiting a guy whose life has for years revolved around daily gym workouts and now, more recently his engagement with activities with us at Cornergate Foundation. He has made a commitment to follow Jesus

but he like many, constantly doubts himself especially as he still battles addiction. This lockdown has hit him hard.

"When I called him, he was quite chipper and was excitedly telling me that following recent encouragements from me, he was dragging his bike from the back of his shed to clean it up and get riding again. We chatted for a while and I was able, once again to explain the Gospel and the plan of Father God for the world.

"He asked to pray so we both prayed out loud on the street with people going by. It was wonderful! This story does not mean that this guy is now all ok, nevertheless we continue to journey with all these guys, trusting God for their salvation and their protection in these tough times."

NEIGHBOURHOOD CHAPLAINS RISE TO THE CHALLENGE

Volunteers from Counties Neighbourhood Chaplains scheme have been rallying local groups to support the most vulnerable people in their communities.

The scheme, which aims to support the lonely through friendship, prayers and practical support, has adapted its methods in light of the lockdown and the current pandemic.

Local teams across the country have joined forces with other groups in their areas to provide help with grocery shopping, helplines, bereavement support and prayer.

Jacquie Bodman in Cornwall helps to lead Neighbourhood Chaplains in her local area. She has taken Christian literature to her local hospital and surgeries and has set up a Covid-19 Facebook page, as well as a bereavement support group.

Jacquie said: *"Our Neighbourhood Chaplains team is up and running, with what was going to be a soft launch, we are amazed at God's timing that He called us to this work for such a time as this!*

"Praise God that our local surgeries and hospital have taken so much Christian literature from us – such as Counties booklets and tracts, Bibles, hope magazines and good news newspapers.

"The doctors and nurses were so happy to receive it and asked if they could refer their patients to us when they were discharged."

Local residents have also been very positive about the help and support offered from Neighbourhood Chaplains.

Tomi Brown from Newport is a Neighbourhood Chaplain. She shares: *"An older man asked for shopping, he said he didn't want to use a church group, as he was non-religious.*



"But when we said we'd help him whatever, and dropped off his shopping, he came to the window to thank us and said he'd decided to 'go to church when all this was over!' We didn't even ask him!"

Jenny Rossiter, Neighbourhood Chaplains Coordinator, said: "We have been so proud of the bravery of our church volunteers, as they are taking risks being out and about that they would not face if they stayed indoors.

"We always emphasise responsible volunteering, ensuring people should only help out if they are not in an 'at risk' group themselves. The nature of the crisis has meant that initially a lot of churches, volunteers, charities and public organisations seemed to go through a sort of 'capsize' where everything turned very fluid as people were trying to figure out how to get help, food, medicine and support to people.

"However, things have begun to stabilise, and I think it has created a completely new work zone for churches in society, like a computer re-starting. It's been crucial for Christians to be in the centre of this 'capsize' alongside their communities, because going forward I don't think things will go back to normal in the same way.

"There will probably be lasting long-term impacts from this, and the sense of going through it together with our communities has created huge opportunities through new relationships alongside the sadness and the struggles."

NHS WORKERS GIVE THANKS FOR 40 DAYS OF PRAYER

Doctors and nurses have thanked the Neighbourhood Chaplains prayer team for its 40 days of prayer – shown live on Facebook each day.

A hospice nurse shared her anxiety about going on a weekend shift to Beverley Bedford, Counties Training Officer and Neighbourhood Chaplain lead in North Devon. The nurse was anxious about the lack of protective equipment and being tired through very little sleep.

Beverley shared: "I prayed with her and for her over that weekend. It was so thrilling to have a text message the following Monday which



read 'Since we prayed together my anxiety about going into work has lifted, I have slept well since and amazingly a new supply of PPE was delivered on my arrival to work.

"Some who have contacted me have never asked for prayer before and are experiencing extraordinary peace in the workplace and have rang to say thank you."

“I CLUNG TO JESUS” - ONE FAMILY’S EXPERIENCE OF SURVIVING COVID-19

“I clung to Jesus. I was distraught, but I completely trusted Him, I knew that there is a time to be born and a time to die and nothing was going to change that for my husband Tim, I just had to accept God’s will. I knew He was carrying us through this time,” said Counties trainee evangelist Jacquie Bodman from Cornwall.

Jacquie had just said goodbye to her husband Tim, as he was taken away in an ambulance after his Covid-19 symptoms had deteriorated at home. She wasn't sure if it was their last goodbye. She continued: *“I tried to be brave and not show that I wanted to cry, I said goodbye to Tim with a little hand wave, I can’t remember if he waved back.”*

Thankfully Tim stayed in hospital for just one day and was released to begin his slow recovery at home. Here, Jacquie, who also had Covid-19, explains in her own words how God helped them through the experience:

“I had felt rough for a few days with a sore throat, aching muscles and sometimes feeling really cold and shivery but I thought I was having a flare up of a chronic nasal and sinus condition, before I realised it was Covid-19.

Tim looked pale and exhausted after he preached on the Sunday morning, but said he felt fine. However later in the afternoon he started feeling very strange and had a bit of a sore throat.

Hearing alarm bells in my head as I knew that I was feeling the same, I told him to take his temperature which was 38.3° and it got higher as the day progressed. We were both ill at the same time, but Tim was a lot worse than me.

We have two lodgers living with us, so we had to isolate to our bedroom as we wanted to protect them. It was tough, Tim was incredibly ill, he was delirious sometimes with the high temperatures. His coughing fits would rack his whole body, which exhausted him. I was worried about Tim, I had never seen him so ill, pale and just so unaware.

There were times I was willing him to

live and I was aware I was fighting for him. Until Tim was stronger I spent every bit of time I could, laying next to him, answering to his every need, praying, pleading with God to spare him but telling God that I knew His will was perfect and if He was going to take Tim I would trust Him. I had to tell myself, who was I to try and keep Tim from heaven, that is where we all want to be and it's selfish to ask God not to take him from us, but it hurt so much the thought that he might go, but I promised God I would trust Him and accept His will.

Tim now says he was aware I was there but couldn't articulate that. He knew he was fighting but not deliberately, he had a sense that it wasn't his time to go and that his body was fighting to keep him alive all by itself.

The night Tim went into hospital his breathing was particularly rapid and shallow. When the ambulance men arrived, they could see through Tim's blood sugars and his heart that his organs had been working really hard due to the lack of oxygen. I followed him to the ambulance and as they helped him in and got him on the trolley, the ambulance man turned to me and told me I couldn't go with him or see him at all, and they suspected he would be in hospital for a few days.



Tim reads his Bible at home



Jacquie during her illness

I came in and cried, the sobs that came out of me were like an animal, loud guttural sobs. Our lodger Matt, who is a Christian social worker, woke up and I told him that Tim had gone to hospital and I just cried my heart out. Matt calmly listened to me and we talked about how if this really is his time, God is able. He stayed up with me for a couple of hours until I had completely accepted that God's will is perfect.

"Once Tim got to hospital, they put him in a separate room and did all the tests from there. They were happy and sent him back home the next day, telling him it was better for him that he went home and continued treating the virus as he was. We heard the next day that during the night four people died in the Coronavirus ward, where the ambulance men had left him outside of before the staff took him to a separate room. Isn't God gracious that even in that, the Lord spared Tim the trauma of witnessing that, and it was obviously normal protocol to go into that ward.

"We must remember in any context, spending time in the Lord's Word and in His will is an absolute blessing."

It was such an amazing miracle for him to come home so soon after seeing how concerned the ambulance men were. Tim continued to be very poorly at home, but he never had to go back into hospital, thank you Jesus!

I'm back to work and completely recovered, Tim is back to work (from home) but he was off for 28 days after first getting sick. He is lots better but still has to pace himself as he gets very tired and as soon as he does too much his voice becomes very raspy.

During this time the Lord led me to read Malachi chapters 1 and 2 at first. I felt Him show me that sometimes we can go through these times as a 'must do' rather than being in awe of what

an amazing privilege it is to be in God's will and His word. When we make this amazing privilege a 'must do', we make our offering and sacrifices blemished. I had to go on my knees as I repented of that, as I know as an individual, I have felt that at times.

We must remember in any context, spending time in the Lord's Word and in His will is an absolute blessing. The Lord then led me to read chapter 3, and what really struck me was verse 10, 'Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,' says the Lord Almighty, 'and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.' (NIV). I really felt the Lord was showing me that He was giving me an opportunity

to spend unlimited and unhurried time in His presence. That He wanted me to use this time to really dig deep in His Word and to just be with Him, to use this time to deeply understand what an amazing privilege it is to be used to share His Word and to completely throw myself into His will and leading at this time and just see what mighty blessings He will pour out.

Again, I felt this was for me as an individual, for our church and for the church as a whole. God has set us free from the church calendar and its building to really be available for Him and with Him. He is preparing us for something, which is very exciting."

Tim Bodman enjoys a local view after recovering from Covid-19



FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS - COPING WITH LIVING IN SOCIAL ISOLATION

BY COUNTIES WIDOW
WENDY ILIFFE

Have you, like me, been surprised how quickly as a nation and world we have adapted to the new normal? Being a child through the war I have witnessed huge changes in society over the decades, not to mention technological advances, and increase in general wealth. When change happens subtly many people move on without even noticing but a 'bolt out of the blue' such as this pandemic has caused everyone's focus to dramatically shift.

Two weeks before the Chinese news broke, unusually I felt I had a scripture to pass on to our church leader. It was the phrase from Esther 'for such a time as this'. It had little meaning at the



time. Likewise, I can see in hindsight how thrifty the Lord is with all our past experience, causing it to be very relevant in this present.

Although in the isolated elderly bracket, I am one of the blessed ones who, in the 1980s, spent years at a cumbersome computer, puzzling out the problems in order to support the visions and enterprises of an untiring Counties Evangelist husband David. We were married in 1960 and in 1966 moved to West Sussex in order to minister from May to September in marquee missions, living in a caravan alongside, followed by camps, and then indoor missions during the colder months.

Confidence with technology grew gradually as it was needed. I have just counted the various means of access I have to communication, information, business matters or entertainment apart from TV, radio and telephone. 28 apps are in reasonably regular use, some admittedly are the result of a determined effort to keep up

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ALTHOUGH IN THE ISOLATED ELDERLY BRACKET, I AM ONE OF THE BLESSED ONES WHO, IN THE 1980S, SPENT YEARS AT A CUMBERSOME COMPUTER, PUZZLING OUT THE PROBLEMS IN ORDER TO SUPPORT THE VISIONS AND ENTERPRISES OF AN UNTIRING COUNTIES EVANGELIST HUSBAND DAVID.



with grandchildren. At the press of a button I can see family the other side of the world and chat as long as I like at no cost. I can participate in a weekly church service, singing along with the help of words on the screen as familiar musicians lead, and I can see and talk to other members of the congregation over 'coffee' via Zoom.

I meet weekly with two other Christian groups where we encourage each other with Scripture, share news and pray. Neighbourhood groups also have emerged, not to mention my exercise class where I can see the leader demonstrating and she can tell me even when my knee is in the incorrect position. Extraordinary.

In addition, since 2013 on losing David, I have had much more opportunity

to relate to neighbours. I started a reading group for seven other near neighbours which still continues, now remotely, with younger leadership. Also, a weekly social group for three other bereaved folk who join me out in the close clapping for the NHS. I'm not a natural evangelist like David, so I offer in faith and friendship. Two neighbouring households shop for me.

However, I'm constantly reminded that many in my age group have a different experience and need to rely on the telephone or even post. They may find it much more difficult to feel close to family, friends or church. I tap on a neighbour's window every evening for that reason and find myself sending more cards than usual. In contrast



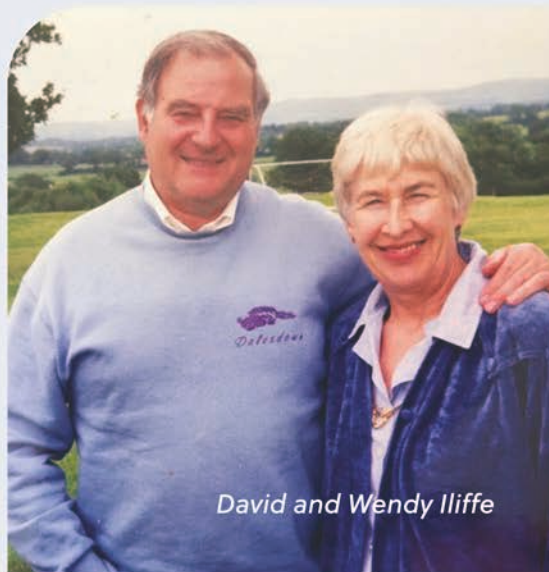


such folk are without temptation, by multiple attractive ways of hourly distraction. Sometimes for me, days can go by without doing the 'old fashioned' things I really enjoy such as sewing, painting, gardening, reading or even just sitting and looking. During 'examen' (prayerful reflections on the events of the day) at bedtime it is usually the simple things, especially in nature, that have provided most restful pleasure.

I have experienced isolation, particularly during the nearly four years when I was nursing at home with an uncommunicating David. There seemed no time for visitors apart from professionals. Living alone for the following three and a half years when David was in a nursing home in comparison was a happy time. I was able to take him out in the wheelchair

often and we were welcomed at Parkside Church where members, along with the nursing home staff and residents became my new community.

It seems that suffering in some form (which may be defined as situations in which we lose control) can be the means by which God causes us, in some measure, at last to surrender. It is deeply contrary to human nature, which is why I find myself with endless lists endeavouring to create a new weekly structure. A comfort to have the predictable in an unpredictable world. Our hope rises when virus cases fall, a vaccine looks possible, or other such encouragements. Looking externally to maintain our positivity is a normal recourse. As a believer there is a deeper desire that my sure and certain hope should come from the One whose Presence has the ability to calm the inner turmoil of any storm.



David and Wendy Iliffe

PEOPLE WORRIED ABOUT PANDEMIC CAN CHAT ONLINE TO CHRISTIANS

A new Christian website has been set up to help people concerned about the pandemic and looking for hope.

The online Christian website 'Chatnow', run by Counties evangelist Matt Rich in Cumbria, has seen a huge increase in the number of people seeking help over the last few weeks. So much so, that Matt decided to create a new specific website - www.CoronavirusSupport.uk - to attract those looking for help, hope and 'live chat' with the Coronavirus situation in mind.

The most popular topics people are reading on the websites have been 'relationships and family issues', 'afraid of dying', 'where is God' 'general anxiety' and 'feeling alone.'

Matt said: "I chatted recently with a young lady via the website. She was anxious about the Coronavirus situation and it turned out that her grandparents go to church and ten years ago she used to go with them to Sunday School.

"Since lockdown began, she has been thinking about what she heard back then and wanted to chat with someone about it, she has now

downloaded our 'meet!' app and has started to learn more about Jesus each day on it."

Christian volunteers can help out on the websites by providing a listening ear and hope to chatters. Matt explained: "People need to have love and compassion for the genuine questions and struggles of those they chat with, they are real people to be concerned for who have genuine real life concerns or questions or struggles. But the volunteers need to be more than just a listening ear, they need to care enough to talk to people about Jesus and explain what He came to do and why this is important and relevant to the person's situation.

"We like volunteers to give at least two hours each week - but some give as much as two days!"

Visit the websites:

Coronavirussupport.uk as well as chatnow.org

MATT'S TOP TIPS FOR EVANGELISING PEOPLE ONLINE

1. Don't argue with people in online public places.
2. Show genuine interest in them and what they are interested in and talk about online.
3. Imagine you are wearing a big hat with the words 'Follower of Jesus' on it.
4. Realise that because you are wearing that imaginary big hat people already think you are a bit weird for what you believe (they can't miss what it says on your imaginary hat!) but now that means there's no reason to bother hiding that you follow Jesus but also you don't need to force Him unnaturally into conversations! Just be open and honest and include comments about Jesus, church, prayer, Bible, God etc where they should naturally be said.
5. The more natural your faith is to you and in what people get used to hearing from you - the more normal and natural it will be for others to not feel awkward around you and ask you about it.
6. Know what you believe about Jesus and how to explain about him in normal everyday language that makes sense to someone that doesn't know anything about church or the Bible, and work out how to explain it in a way that is as short and succinct as possible. The more confident and competent you are in this the more you can relax and be led by God about what or how much to share.
7. Trust that God is taking people along a journey and it's fine to simply be one part of that journey, in which case we don't always need to explain everything in one go but always be prepared to.
8. Realise from points 1-7 that online evangelism isn't really different to offline evangelism.

VOLUNTEERING WITH CHATNOW

Counties associate and schools worker Janet Hawking is used to sharing the Christian faith in person but has found herself stepping out of her comfort zone to find new ways to continue her mission during lockdown.

Janet, from West Wales, shares:

"As I am isolated as a widow, with the schools uncertain when they will open again, I decided to look at training as a volunteer with the Christian online chatroom Chatnow.

"It was outside my comfort zone and I wasn't sure I could do it. My Bible

reading that week was about the Queen of Sheba coming to ask questions and to see Solomon's wisdom! I chuckled as He has a sense of humour.

"So I decided to give it a go and have already had two beneficial chats with people who seemed to have been helped. It's been great to add another arrow and grow my confidence in an evangelistic/pastoral role."



WHAT IS GOD SAYING TO US THROUGH THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC?

A STUDY OF 2 CHRONICLES 20:1-30
BY WARWICKSHIRE EVANGELIST BOB TELFORD



Trouble Loves Company!

"When sorrows come, they come not single spies, but in battalions!"
Hamlet Act 4 Scene 5

Shakespeare's observation would have resonated with King Jehoshaphat of Judah. He faced a threat from three armies! Danger from any one of them would have been bad enough, but three nations in coalition would be an overwhelming force. He had over a million troops of his own but would still be outmatched by this 'vast army.'

Whose fault?

It's natural to look for someone to blame when things go wrong. People are or will be looking to apportion blame for the spread of Coronavirus and the havoc it has caused. Interestingly though, the people of Judah did not hold Jehoshaphat responsible for their problem.

The calamities that came upon God's (Old Testament) people were often seen

to be a direct result of their backsliding. Snakes, military defeats, thirst, hunger and exile could be tracked back to the rebellion / backsliding of the people. God's judgments often took the form of disasters! Disasters for which, the leaders were usually blamed!

But not all calamities and difficulties were indicators of God's displeasure or of his discipline. In the events recorded in the passage, the threat



posed by Judah's enemies was neither a consequence of Jehoshaphat's sin nor a punishment for national waywardness. The kings of Israel and Judah are categorised in Scripture as being either 'good' or 'bad'. A good king was one who, "*Did what was right in the sight of the Lord*" and a bad king was one who, "*did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.*"

Jehoshaphat was 'a good king' He was a king whose "*heart was devoted to the ways of the Lord*" Despite, however, his personal virtue and pious example he and his people were still in serious danger. We should not be hasty in deciding and declaring that a certain set of circumstances are a judgement directly from God. They may be, but it must not be assumed that such is always the case. Undeniably people, all people everywhere, need to repent. God's judgements often spurred people to do exactly that. Perhaps, as some have suggested, this pandemic is God's way of calling people to repentance?

In Acts 17:30 Paul tells us that God doesn't merely invite or encourage people to repent, but He "*commands*" that they do so! However, we must note that in the context of Acts 17 the stimulus to repentance was the proclamation of the reality of God, the certainty of judgement, and the resurrection of Christ!

The proclamation of the Gospel, not the spread of a virus, is still the chief means by which God calls people to repent.

To put it bluntly: This pandemic is not going to do the Church's work for her! Our responsibility to preach the Gospel and to call for a response of repentance and faith, is neither lessened nor increased by this present crisis.

The beginning of the end?

I was asked recently whether this pandemic signifies the near return of Christ. The world's condition in every regard will deteriorate as we get closer to the coming of Christ. International relationships will continue to breakdown. Natural disasters, famines and increasing spiritual confusion will continue to be the '*order of the day*' (Matt 24 + Mk 16)

This pandemic undoubtedly fits into that paradigm. But that is not to say that it is an immediate pre-cursor to the return of Christ.

Of course, the global health crisis is part of the build-up to the return of Christ – but then again, so is everything! With or without Covid-19 we are a day nearer to the imminent return of Christ than we were a day ago!

If the current pandemic sharpens our anticipation of the coming of Christ,



then that is all for the good but the crisis itself may or may not be part of the final countdown.

Getting back to Jehoshaphat - We can note three things:

1. The fear which he felt

On hearing of the threat, Jehoshaphat and his people were afraid (v3) It's natural to feel afraid when we are threatened. Faced with the prospect of losing everything, Jehoshaphat's anxiety was understandable. His fear, however, did not paralyse him, but provoked him to action.

2. The fast he proclaimed

This was not a call to a national exercise in self-discipline, it was a call to prayer. Fasting was a sign of earnestness and a willingness to prioritise prayer over other things – including eating. We think of prayer as a spiritual act and we often admire people who pray at times of adversity as being very spiritual people. In fact, to cry out to God when we are afraid or at risk, does not require great spiritual maturity! It is an instinctive thing for a believer to do. It is the act of a child to a parent. Anyone can cry out to God and everyone should.

The world derides prayer as being the resort of the weak. To many unbelievers praying is at best, a sentimental exercise in self-delusion from which weak people derive comfort. But praying is wielding one of "the weapons of our warfare" – "Weapons" which "have divine power to demolish strongholds." We thank God

for those who are combating the spread and the effect of Covid-19. We must do all we can to protect and aid them, but we must also do what we, as believers in Christ, are best placed to do – we must pray.

3. The focus of his prayer (v's 6-12)

In praying he took account of three truths:

The truth of God's position – v6 "are you not the God who is in heaven?"

Jehoshaphat was not suggesting that God was far above and removed from the plight of his people. He was saying that God was in the best position to see what was happening and to do something about it. With so much to think about and fret about 'down here' we can take heart from recalling an old song:

*God is still on the throne,
and He will remember his own;
though trials may press us
and burdens distress us,
He never will leave us alone;*

*God is still on the throne,
and He will remember his own;
His promise is true,
He will not forget you,
God is still on the throne.*

The truth of God's power – v6 "power and might are in your hand"

The power appeared to be with the "vast army", but Jehoshaphat had a different perspective! He understood, as Psalm 62 puts it that, "power belongs to the Lord!"

The truth of God's promise – v7-9

Jehoshaphat was unafraid to plead the covenant that God had made with Abraham and with his descendants. His confidence that God would hear and help was not based on a vague belief in the general benevolence of God. It was grounded in what God had promised. We are covenant people, in a relationship with God. We have His word that we can come confidently and in full expectation of finding *"mercy and grace to help us in our time of need"* (Heb 4:16)

A Prophet, Praise and Plunder! v14-28

God spoke and the people responded, not by shouting aggressive battle cries at the enemy, but by publicly celebrating the love of God. They thanked God for his enduring love. They, as Philippians 4:6 has it, presented *"their requests to God, with thanksgiving."* They fell down in worship, (v18) they stood up in praise, (v19) and they set out in faith. They also staggered home under the weight of riches. The eventual situation of God's people was actually improved once the crisis was over.

Currently believers are demonstrating levels of prayerfulness, care and pastoral concern such as many of us have not seen before. Innovative ways



of maintaining fellowship and doing outreach are being discovered. We must not forget these lessons once the threat has receded. We can and should be a stronger Church when this crisis is over. This too shall pass!

A Persian fable tells of a king who tasked wise men to create a ring for him to wear which would make him happy every time he looked at it. They gave the king a ring on which was inscribed the words, *"This too shall pass."* One day this problem, which is consuming all our attention will pass. We look forward to that! But we look way beyond that, to something even better - to the day when, *"God shall wipe away every tear and there shall be no more death or mourning or crying or pain."*

So we pray:

***Lord, haste the day when
my faith shall be sight
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll
The trump shall resound
and the Lord shall descend
Even so, it is well with my soul!***

ADAPTING TO A NEW WAY OF WORKING DURING SCHOOL CLOSURES

With Counties award-winning schools' resources not able to visit schools during the lockdown measures, GSUS Live coordinator has adapted and taken up a new role at Counties. Ignite talks to Dave Thomas to find out more.

What is a normal week in your role?

Every week for me is different, each week I can spend three days away and two days working from home on admin as well as giving phone support to the resources. At the start of every short term I will be delivering training days for the resources, following that I will be visiting different schools a term ahead for the resource arrival.

When did things start to change for the resources?

Key to Life was in Southampton due to visit four schools, when the Government announced the school closures. GSUS

Live was in mid Devon and Torbay and it was due to visit five schools in the tour, but in the week leading up to the lockdown both schools pulled out from hosting the units.

How many bookings did you have in place, which have now been cancelled?

GSUS Live was booked up in Leeds and the Black Country, we have been able to rearrange dates for these tours further into the year. We also had a week with Key to Life in Nailsea we will have to cancel. This will be rearranged. We have also had requests from Blackburn in June to postpone their Key to Life visit

for a year and Colchester in September to postpone a year.

What's happened to the resources now?

The units have all been moved to storage. Once the lockdown is lifted, we will be undertaking their annual summer maintenance ready for September.

What have you been doing in your day job since you could no longer go out to schools?

I have been working alongside the Neighbourhood Chaplains scheme to promote their cards resources. We have so far sent out over 1375 cards in 39 parcels.

We have also set up a Covid-19 crisis group and are looking at how we can continue to equip churches. I have virtually met with several Counties evangelists in the South West to talk about further opportunities to network, evangelise, church plant and in the early stages of a South West One2Lead.

As well as supporting other Counties ministries, I have started updating the training guides and resources for the units as well as updating the operation procedures to run the unit.

How has this whole experience made you feel?

At first it was a bit bizarre, I went from an action packed week of travelling, running a training day for Key to Life, running a support day to not doing any of it. It took a week or so to adjust to



Dave Thomas, far right, at a school with GSUS Live before the pandemic.

working from home full time as well as putting schools work on hold to prioritise how Counties can help resource the response ASAP.

Now for the time being it's the new norm, until we have any updates on schools returning.

What's the plan for getting the resources back to schools once lockdown is lifted?

As soon as schools start opening, we will be speaking with local organisers who lead the resource booking and establishing when we can get the resources back into the schools.

JUST A MINUTE

WITH COUNTIES PLANTING & REVITALISATION OFFICER

TIM CRACKNELL.

Can you explain your role at Counties?

This role releases me to strategically engage in fanning the flames of church planting and revitalising stuck or dying churches across the UK. I do this through a multitracked process. Primarily those interested in church planting to bring them into the Counties M4 process by assessing the key leaders, drawing together their team for training in learning communities and ongoing coaching. In revitalisation/replanting situations it is a longer process of working with resource churches, transition elders to bring a new team together to relaunch the church. Increasingly I am focusing on building a leadership pipeline as this is the biggest challenge we are facing.

How has this role changed since the Coronavirus?

It's changed completely! I am spending hours sitting at my laptop on Zoom calls. One day I was finishing my 5th Zoom call of the day at 11.30pm! It is a completely different rhythm of life to what I am used to and is taking some adjusting too. The good news is that I am not having to drive miles or sit in trains but being in front of a computer screen for hours is more tiring than one would imagine and I am having to make sure I get some good exercise in each day, as I end up with headaches.

Should churches be thinking of church planting right now?

Yes! I believe God is shaking our nation and many people are starting to reach out to God for the first time. We need to be ready for a harvest for the kingdom. We will need hundreds of new dynamic churches which are in tune with the Holy Spirit and understand our



culture to bring this harvest in. The lockdown gives us all the perfect opportunity to prepare for this by better engagement with our neighbours and the internet opens many new doors for us all in our evangelism.

How can churches train and connect during this time of social distancing?

Our M4 tools include a lot of short videos which are specifically designed to enable leaders to grow and develop their leadership skills. These are available to all our teams going through the M4 process and we are about to release a new tool called M4 Ready which will soon be making available to all who are interested in church planting and growing in their leadership ability. If you are interested in this email: tim.cracknell@countiesuk.org and I can keep you informed.

How has Coronavirus affected you as a family?

I have only been out in my car once in the last month! We have been looking after my elderly mother who lives next door to us. I have been even busier than usual with all the online work I have been doing for our church via Facebook Live most days. Katrina has been overseeing deliveries of prescriptions to elderly people and phone calls to isolated.

What Bible verses have encouraged you lately?

Jude verse 1: *"I am writing to all who have been called by God the Father, who loves you and keeps you safe in the care of Jesus."* What a joy it is to be called by our Father God and know we are loved by Him and kept safe in His care!

YOUR LOCAL EVANGELISTS

NORTH OF ENGLAND

Tim & Charissa Cooke
Julian & Ella Gutteridge
Martin & Angie Korchinsky
Lee & Lesley Marsland (ETP)
Matt & Nicola Rich
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)
Ruby Powell (Senior)
Bob & Rita Telford (Seniors)

SOUTH EAST

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

Lionel Clargo (Senior)
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 (ETP)
Mike & Su Stange
David & Katie Symons
Steve Ellacott (AE)
Jean Campbell (Senior)

SOUTH CENTRAL

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

WALES

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

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