

SUMMER 2021

IGNITE

SPARKING PASSION FOR THE GOSPEL
ACROSS THE UK



EX-OFFENDER'S LIFE CHANGED BY GOD

COUNTIES EVANGELIST AND FORMER
CONVICT SHARE THE STORY



ALSO WHAT IS 'HUG IN A MUG'?
VENTRILOQUISM TURNED INTO AN EVANGELISTIC OPPORTUNITY.
WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO 'LIVE BY FAITH' IN THE 21ST CENTURY?

WELCOME TO IGNITE



Welcome to Ignite

I love nothing more than hearing the stories of those people coming to Christ and having their lives transformed by the Gospel. Ray's story (page 12) is one to read and share. Ray reminds us that the Gospel is still the power of God to save everyone who believes (Romans 1:16).

Sometimes too we can spend much time sowing, and reaping seems a distant hope. But one sows and another reaps (John 4:37). Evangelists are engaged in reaping, but sowing the good seed of the Gospel is a lifelong work. Neighbourhood Chaplains is one such way that God is blessing to train and equip churches to sow in love, and seek to bring forth a harvest. Our Chaplaincy schemes are inventive and creative and 'Hug in a mug' (page 6) is one way that some have been reaching into their communities.

Counties evangelists are not salaried by us. They look to God in faith to meet their needs, and we are privileged to support them through a regular Counties gift. Mike Strange has written a lovely article on the joy of trusting God in this way, as Counties evangelists have now done for 122 years.

Thanks for your prayers and support

Martin
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 6-WEEK LEADERSHIP COURSE RECEIVES AMAZING FEEDBACK.



Throughout March and April, Martin Erwin (Counties CEO), Tim Cracknell (Church Planting Officer), James Hyde (M4 Coordinator) and Beverley Bedford (Counties Training Officer), led a six week Zoom leadership course based on the book 'Learning to Lead' by Stephen McQuoid and David Clarkson.

Its aim was to explore what makes a good leader; how to build a team; leading teams through crisis; change and conflict; the importance of integrity; and being a leader of influence for the next generation.

Each weekly session included group discussions in 'break out rooms' and helped those attending understand how to underpin and implement the more theoretical aspects of the talks.

The final practical session was delivered through a Q & A with an experienced interview panel to equip future leaders with 'tried and tested' tools and techniques.

One attendee said: "It was such an amazing opportunity to learn from great leaders and have the chance to ask questions and get real answers".

Another called it: "Inspirational".

The results empowered local church leaders to be more reflective, resilient, and ready for the next season of leadership.

We were delighted that Mark Davies (GLO Europe Training Director) and Andy Hodson (Counties evangelist and church planter) who joined us as guests on the interview panel.

'TIME2SERVE' RUNS FOUR SESSIONS

Counties Training Officer, Beverley Bedford, and Counties evangelist, Dave Symons, also ran a Zoom evangelism training course, 'Time2Serve'.

Fourteen people attend the course from ten different churches across the South West.

The course was designed over four sessions to equip, encourage and inspire people to

evangelise with non-Christian friends as well as help with evangelistic outreach in their churches.

Dave says: "They were such a great group, and we pray that they will all go on to share their faith with many in the coming weeks and months."

COUNTIES CONNECT

CHURCH IN A POST COVID WORLD, FRIDAY 25 JUNE 2021



Additional guest speaker Nicky Gumbel will discuss the value of online and video Alpha, reflecting on the wider lessons for us as we move from pandemic lockdown church, into a new season in sharing the Gospel across our nation.

Other speakers, at this video conferencing event, will include CEO, Martin Erwin; Trustee, Aderyn Taylor-Roberts; and organiser and Church Planting Officer, Tim Cracknell, along with many Counties evangelists.

A reminder to book for the online one-day Counties conferences which is taking place on Friday 25 June – afternoon and evening. Our focus for this year's conference is "moving our churches from maintenance to multiplication in a post Covid world".

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.

They will lead seminars and bring us keynote sessions. Big group teaching and worship times will be blended with small discussion breakout rooms, Q & A with the speakers, relaxed virtual coffee times in which people can reconnect with friends and make new connections and so much more.

Make sure to book and see all the latest information on the conference please email connect-conference@countiesuk.org or bookmark the website www.connect-conference.org



WHAT'S 'HUG IN A MUG'?

Neighbourhood Chaplains, Steve and Elaine Richardson, tell Ignite about the success of 'Hug in a Mug' Steve and Elaine live near Barnstaple, North Devon, and have been Neighbourhood Chaplains for two years.

So, Elaine, what is 'Hug in a Mug'?

"We put sachets of tea and coffee, hot chocolate, cake bars, biscuits, and marshmallows into mugs along with a gift tag and a laminated verse of encouragement.

"The verses we sent out at Easter were: 'Do not be afraid, little flock, for your father has been pleased to give you the kingdom'. Luke 12: 32

"Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.' Psalm 23:4"

How did you get involved?

As family group leaders at our church, we had a message asking if we knew of people in our group who are going



through difficult times and who would be encouraged by receiving a 'Hug in a Mug' and we knew people who were isolating or going through very difficult times, so we jumped at the chance of using them. We were a bit cheeky, and we extended beyond our church, as there were people living near us who, we knew, would also appreciate them.

When did you start giving them away?

"We gave the first lot out on Valentine's Day – just a small number; but it became so popular that at Easter we gave out another 120 mugs." Elaine adds: "Because of its popularity, we couldn't fund it all, so we asked those giving them out to buy a mug and for a fee of £1.50 we filled the mugs and put them in little gift bags."

How did that work during lockdown?

"We have a large church building so we filled the mugs and put them on separate tables to give them to other church members whilst remaining socially distanced. Those people then rang on doorbells and left them on doorsteps – a bit like the postman," Steve laughs. "People did have conversations on the doorstep or in front gardens though too."

Elaine, it sounds obvious but what is the purpose of 'Hug in a Mug'?

"It's really an outreach approach to encourage people in the church, neighbours, front line workers and those in need. We want to show Christian love, concern, care and to try and evangelise, if possible. Although lockdown made in-depth conversations difficult, we saw it as planting a seed."

What kind of response did you get Steve?

"One of the people who received a mug said: 'The timing must have been from God as I had just been reading the doctor's report following my mother's recent death and I was feeling very low'.

"Another neighbour had only just moved in and was really grateful for being made to feel welcome. The gesture prompted a half hour conversation about faith that wouldn't have happened without it."

Are you going to continue doing 'Hug in a Mug' Steve?

"Yes, we would love to give some mugs out to Street Pastors. We were hoping to bless them for all they do as not all of the people who are involved in that scheme are necessarily Christians. We are hoping that will come about. We are constantly thinking about new ways we can reach out to new groups of people."

What has being involved in the scheme meant to you both?

"It's good to show Christian love to neighbours and people we come into contact with. A 'Hug in a Mug' is useful for displaying God's love and a recognition of offering a hand of friendship to somebody else."

Neighbourhood Chaplaincy is a connecting, befriending, and serving initiative within the community. So, faith 'looks' like something because Christians are living it out, in the context of the community.

Autumn's Ignite will feature a full article on how you and your church can get involved in Neighbourhood Chaplaincy.

Immediate information is available at:
[www.counties-training.org/
neighbourhood-chaplains](http://www.counties-training.org/neighbourhood-chaplains)

[https://www.facebook.com/
neighbourhoodchaplains](https://www.facebook.com/neighbourhoodchaplains)



SHOWING GOD'S LOVE TO EX-OFFENDERS

KIM AND JO HOBBS

Counties evangelist Kim Hobbs talks to Ignite about his work with ex-offenders.

As Kim Hobbs walked into Hemel Hempstead's biggest Tesco in 2014 with a huge, bodybuilding, ex-offender who had only left prison that day, the guy said: "Kim, I can't do this. There are too many people, and they are walking too fast".

Kim says: "It taught me very quickly that a huge proportion of people in the prison system have a sad life story and often have developed mental health conditions and a real vulnerability. We always offer them love, care and kindness and that's regardless of their response. We hope, though, to get an opportunity to share the Gospel; but we are patient waiting for their response, so they can tell us they want to receive Jesus."

By his own admission, Kim is not the most likely person to work with ex-offenders. He explains that he is white, middle class, is 5'9 tall and was the practice director of a law firm in Croydon. "Not the kind of person to impress an ex-offender," he laughs. But following God's calling, he quit his job.

He says: "It seemed necessary. It seemed inevitable. It was one of those things where I felt I didn't have a choice. When I left my career, I didn't know what I was going to do but I just knew that there were some vulnerable young people who are lost, lonely and isolated".

A former colleague who had heard that Kim had resigned, put him in touch with Counties, whom he credits with giving pastoral care during some very dark times, and a great deal of training and support. "I love the fact that we are all connected together."

It soon became clear where God wanted Kim to be. "I had worked in youth football and seen young people growing up out of real poverty and desperation. They were all putting on a hard, brave face but not going anywhere in their lives and my heart went out to them.

"It's costly to care but I don't think you can be authentic in this work unless you do care."

"So, I decided there was something I had to do. At my wife's insistent prompting, I phoned up the local prison and told them I wanted to volunteer. I was sent to talk to the prison manager, and she thought I worked for the Daily Mail! So, she was initially cautious but, eventually, she and I clicked, and she let on that she was a Christian.

"Then she put me in touch with the Prison Fellowship and their Sycamore Tree program. I learned a lot about human nature – that whilst we can be evil and nasty in the ways we behave, when God touches people's lives they melt."

Kim received a lot of experience in the prison, working with prisoners



directly, but also with ex-offenders in the community, helping them resettle after prison. In due course, he set up a charity called Cornergate Foundation – which continues to grow across Hemel Hempstead, Watford, and St Albans.

"We support prisoners and ex-offenders to resettle successfully after they have left prison. As a Christian I think everyone would benefit massively through knowing Jesus. We will not reduce our support or the way we respond to people because they say they don't want to know Jesus.

"Every time I meet a new person, I will sit down with them for an hour or so and ask them a series of questions in order to get them talking. I want to hear their story to understand their needs and any risks associated with working with them. Then as we end, I will say to them:

'It's been lovely chatting with you today and I am really grateful to you for being open with me and telling me all this stuff. It sounds challenging and I know life isn't easy and you have

now been to prison and I want to help. I think I can help but you must be wondering why I am doing this. I don't want any money; this is a free service.

'I am a Christian and I love God and I know He loves me, and He loves you too. That's why I do the work I do. As we go forward, I am not going to push my religion or faith on you. But if you ask me a straight question, I will give you a straight answer. I am not going to hide away from my faith. Are you happy to proceed on that basis?' "

Kim adds: *"They never say no".* Over the last 7½ years he has worked with Muslims, agnostics, and atheists because he says it is all about relationship. He wants to build a friendship, honesty and trust between himself and ex-offenders.

He says he has to be cautious: *"I can't be foolish with these people because they have a criminal past. They have already proved their ability to behave in bad ways. But at the same time, I look them in the eye, and I give honesty and expect honesty."*

Kim shares the story of one ex-offender, Ray, who was an alcoholic and drank heavily every day. He took him out for coffee: *"At that moment, I noticed tears began to fall down his face because he couldn't believe that anyone wanted to give him any time.*

"He has since found Jesus. He constantly teaches me about what it meant to be drinking heavily daily and what that journey was like. The honour and integrity of people when they come out of their addiction is beautiful to watch. It is so Godly. I love it. I know God wants me to serve amongst those who are often described as the Least, the Last and the Lost. And I pray our churches will be filled with these people because that's where God wants us to be 'fishing'."

Kim believes every church and every Christian should find a welcome for the ex-offenders, drug or alcohol addicts, the lonely and those suffering mental health conditions. For him, these are the people we should bring to church with pride and thrill.

"We must find a place for them. It's costly to care but I don't think you can be authentic in this work unless you do care."

Kim has also established the charity Cornergate Foundation, as a vehicle for the work.

If you would like to get involved in the work that he does, please contact him:

hobbs@countiesuk.org



Kim Hobbs (right) talking to someone on the streets



EX-OFFENDER'S LIFE TURNED AROUND BY JESUS

Growing up with a violent, alcoholic father - who once put a sword to Ray's throat, and threatened to set Ray's mum on fire, had a profound and lasting effect on his life.

"I was an incredibly angry person. The police were called to the house many times, as my dad battered me and my mum. But I was brought up not to cry and told 'I'll give you a reason to cry'. But when I was 16, I took my mum and dad to court and disowned them and put myself in foster care."

Still a teenager, Ray started doing work-experience in a local hotel and moved into the catering business. During this time, he began to drink heavily due to the trauma of his childhood and the death of his mother when he was 17.

"I made the mistake of carrying the coffin and that led to a nervous breakdown. I had no one around me and no support was offered. I started spending any money I got on drink."

"It all got too much and during my last job I passed out at work. I wasn't eating, my skin was yellow, and I was drinking all day long."

Ray then lost his job. After a court appearance, he ended up in prison for three months. When he came out,

he had lost all his friends and had no one. He was given a council flat, and benefits but he spent all the money on alcohol.

Finally, the job centre threatened to cut Ray's benefits if he didn't meet with Counties evangelist, Kim Hobbs. Ray reluctantly went along as he didn't want to lose his 'drink money'.

"At our first meeting, Kim was all prim and proper and I turned round and said: 'I don't know how you are going to help me.'

"Then I would always turn up drunk at our meetings over coffee, but slowly I began to open up to him. When he first told me he was a Christian I said to him: 'If I go into a church I'll combust'".



LIFE STORIES

But in 2016 Ray ended up going to Soul Survivor church in Watford.

Ray jokes:

"They tricked me. It was a fun day with food and bouncy castles, and I really enjoyed it. Then Kim told me it was his church. It was not how I expected a church to be."

Kim then invited Ray to a service and Ray says he was so nervous he downed cider before he went.

"Kim started introducing me to all these people and they were hugging me, and I was really uncomfortable as I am not used to this kind of thing. I don't do affection well. I had these three little old ladies giving me cuddles and I thought: 'This ain't right. They are usually the people who cross the road to avoid me when I'm out walking the dog'".

Ray kept on going to Soul Survivor even though he found himself struggling emotionally; but he joined a men's group where Ray felt he could share about his childhood.

Becoming a Christian was a gradual process, but a major turning point came when he discovered that his father had died alone, and Ray realised he didn't want to end up the same way.

Kim took him to the funeral parlour to say goodbye to his father.

"I had a moment. I have never kissed my dad in my entire life, but I gave him a kiss on the forehead, and I said: 'Forgiven but not forgotten,' which was a major thing for me."

Ray then began his journey of sobriety. *"Trust me it was hard. A lot of swearing, a lot of crying, a lot of tears"*

But at 11am, 29 April 2017, Ray had his last drink. He's been sober ever since.

"Kim prayed with me a lot. I was given a Bible with Matthew 6:23-24 highlighted: 'The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness.'"

"This verse spoke to me because obviously I was trying to change from darkness to light. I read it every day."

Ray is now the kitchen manager at the Liberty Tea Rooms & Community Hub in Hemel Hempstead – which is a Christian café. He credits those who helped him get the job, with turning his life around.

"I believe God changed my life but I had to lose everything to change."

"I had a sponsor who paid my wage one day a week. Then the trustees gave me a full-time job which meant I had a real opportunity."

Alongside Kim, Ray, now 41, helps others by spending time with them and talking to them. But he says he knows without God none of this would be possible.

"Through church I have got rid of a lot of anger. People want to talk to me and be with me. God changed me and my whole being. I was a very dangerous man but that all changed. I believe God changed my life. I had to lose everything to change."

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VENTRILOQUISM AND PUPPETS TEACHING THE BIBLE TO CHILDREN

Watching ventriloquists as a child turned into an opportunity for God for one Counties evangelist.

Since Paul Willmott was a child, he loved watching Variety Shows - comedians, magicians, and ventriloquists. He now uses puppets in primary schools and online to teach children about the Bible.

Paul has been working with Counties since the mid-1990s when he decided to step into full-time ministry with children and families.

Paul's ministry is in the Black Country and particularly the Dudley borough.

"There are two parts to my work: Connecting local churches with local primary schools, leading whole-school assemblies, and RE lessons. And being a general spiritual influence within the school by talking to the headteachers and staff and getting to know people.

I am also involved in church-based events for kids and families which includes mid-week clubs, holiday clubs, family services, Messy Church, and other outreach events."

Paul was involved with 28-30 schools whom he visited on behalf of many local churches of different denominations. Lockdown, however, has meant this has not been possible.

Far from stopping his ministry, however, lockdown has enabled Paul



to take his work to a much wider audience online, where he has created a school assembly video and a puppet video which he produces once a week.

Paul says the videos are being shown in classrooms in more schools than before lockdown. His YouTube videos generally get 100-150 views in the first week. But Paul says this could be a teacher showing a class of 30 children.

"Also, on other social media, like Facebook, the videos are being played all the way through up to 800 times. Some videos have had up to 10,000 views but this is not necessarily the whole video."

Paul's ministry began with a whispering monkey puppet 'a bit like Sooty' which was handmade by a lady at his church at the time.

"Since then, I've used different puppets, and about 18 years ago I decided to

EVANGELISM IN THE COMMUNITY

give one of my puppets a voice and try out some ventriloquism."

Paul has four puppets that he uses in primary schools and he says the response has been great:

"Lots of different children have their favourites and so do the teachers," Paul chuckles. "A teacher might say: 'Oh, I am really pleased because I know who is in the suitcase today'.

"I think there is a good response from children and adults alike because part of us wants the puppets to be alive. We want this world of fantasy to be real even though we know it isn't.

"In my videos, I try to put the puppets in places the children go like the skate park or the local shops. Hopefully, the next time the children visit that place they will remember the puppet routine and the Bible message I attach to it"

Paul always chooses one short simple scriptural message for the children to take home, so they are more likely to remember it.

Paul has also had a great response to his '2 Minute Twist' videos which are aimed at Christian families to give

them the opportunity for discipleship and discussion.

"Within the two-to-three-minute videos, the puppet Twist will have some fun based on something that has happened to him. It might be playing in the snow or a visit to the beach. Something funny has usually happened that will inspire Twist to ask a faith-based question.

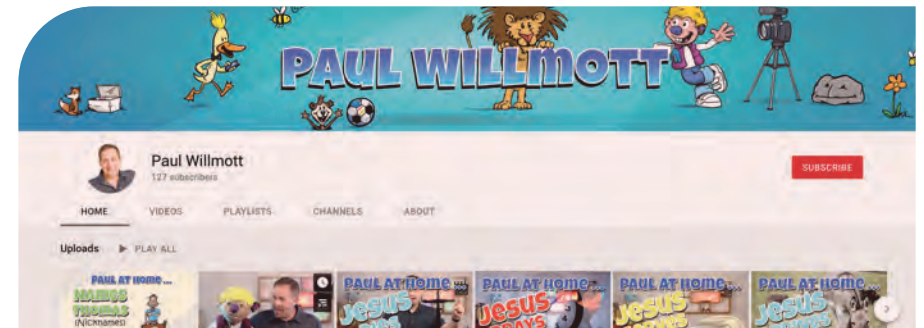
"It is intended to help the viewers ask questions after watching the video. I want to do that because I didn't have that as a kid."

Paul also wants to help Christian parents with the kind of questions children ask about Christianity and give them the confidence to feel they can talk about faith without feeling they have to be an 'expert'.

He also believes that parents shouldn't be afraid to say: 'I don't know but let's try and find the answer together'.

You can see Paul's videos online, search YouTube "Paul Willmott and Twist Online", or

www.youtube.com/channel/UCpRad5cjszImA_BY2Gwg6Lg



COUNTIES WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP REAPS REWARDS

Ignite talks with Counties evangelist, Caleb Matthewos and other Christian partners about the benefits of working together

Evangelism in a multi-cultural context is the mission Caleb Matthewos believes God put in his heart from an early age.

Caleb and his wife Adanesh are originally from Ethiopia. They left the country due to the political unrest in 2005 and were granted asylum here.

Six years' later, Caleb went on to plant an Ethiopian church, The Message of the Cross, in Elephant and Castle, in South London and completed a BA at Spurgeon's College in London.

Caleb believes in working with others and so got involved in what was then the Church Planting Initiative which supported church planters in the UK. John Jenkins - a regional co-ordinator at Partnership - who worked for Church Planting Initiative (CPI) at the time, explains:

"Caleb became a planter with CPI and we were supporting him financially, to a certain degree. We then approached Counties to get him accepted as a

trainee evangelist - which he became in 2017."

Caleb adds: "I believe in networking and working with like-minded people. I had started searching in the community and that's how I met John and CPI who has been an enormous help to me."

Caleb then began working with the M4 church planting training initiative. He has continued his relationship with John who now is now his coach with M4.

"Because I have an independent evangelical church" Caleb explains, "I need people to work with, help and support me, and to pray with me and Counties have done this. I am so happy to work with Counties."

Caleb grew up in a Christian home and went to Sunday school, Bible studies and sang at church. His father was a full-time evangelist.

"When I was growing up, my father told me that I needed Christ in person



and that I needed to make a personal decision. So, I made that decision when I was 13 years old. Soon after I got baptised and at the age of 19, I started serving God."

When they moved to London, Caleb began church planting.

"My wife and I were praying, and God really moved us and gave us this real vision to start church planting. I was reluctant at first but eventually we started a Bible study in our flat."

St Mary's in Kennington then gave us permission to use their building for worship services.

"People began to get saved after we went out on the streets and we have been doing some baptisms. God has also moved us to working more multi-culturally. I now disciple all kinds of nationalities from countries like Eritrea, the Dominican Republic, Portugal, and Jamaica."

As part of his desire to work with others, Caleb met Alex Brito whilst he was evangelising on the local streets. He is the Pastor of the Mosaic Multicultural Church, in the Elephant and Castle area. It is a Reformed Evangelical and Co-Mission church.

Alex and his team are also involved in church-planting and are a multi-cultural church and the two men now work in their local community together.

"We began to meet up and share and pray together. We also evangelised together. The Mosaic Multi-Cultural church is very likeminded, as they are mission focused and really believe in

church planting. So, we share the same vision."

Alex adds: *"Caleb and I often remind one another that in Elephant and Castle, there are people dying, every single day without Christ. There is no competition between our churches. On the contrary, we are both convinced that we can do much more together than we can do on our own. As a result, God is growing our churches in numbers and godliness for His glory and our delight."*

Caleb goes on to explain: *"We are so evangelistically centred at our church. Every third week of the month is 'Evangelism Week'. We go on the streets giving tracts and talking to people. We have hundreds of contacts. During lockdown we have been phoning them and many people have come to Christ."*

One lady gave her life to Jesus over the phone from Italy and Caleb went there to baptise her. Another woman who was given a tract outside Kennington station, gave the church her number and in a subsequent call, gave her life to Christ.

"She told us recently that before we met her, her life had been terrible," says Caleb. "She had decided to commit suicide, but God completely transformed her life, and she has now been baptised and is a regular member of the church."



WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO 'LIVE BY FAITH' IN THE 21ST CENTURY?

Counties evangelist, Mike Strange, explores what it has meant for him and his family, and how we can all deepen our own faith.



Jesus said to His disciples in Matthew 6:33: *"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well"*.

He was talking to people who were worried about the food on their plates and the clothes on their back. These were people who were thinking: "If we leave our jobs and follow you, where is the money coming from?"

It was my first day of Bible College and I was cycling from my rented house in a nearby village to get to the college for my first lecture. It was a beautiful sunny autumn morning and I stopped by the gate of a field to pray and admire the view.

I had left my teaching job and sold our house, using all the capital to pay the college course fees. I had a wife and two small children. Our Church Elders had told me: *"We can see why you feel God has called you to train for Christian Ministry, Mike, but two people have already left our little church to do the same thing and I am very sorry, we will not be able to do anything to support you."*

What would we live on? In all truthfulness, beyond this promise of Jesus in the Bible, at that moment, we had no idea. As I prayed, I said to Jesus: *"Lord, if this promise of yours in the Bible is not true, my family and I are in big trouble!"*

Two years later, as I completed the course, we had no money and no debts. We had learned first-hand that Almighty God keeps His promises. Every bill had been paid; every need had been met. It was the perfect preparation.

Life as a Counties evangelist

Counties evangelists do not receive a salary. I do not give anyone a bill for my services, and non-Christians are not usually queuing to pay an evangelist to tell them about Jesus. Instead, I look to God to meet my family's needs. And God looks to His people, because learning to live by faith is accompanied by learning to give by faith. That is how it works.

For a Christian there is only one question that really matters: "What does Jesus want?" To the child of Almighty God, everything else: Have we the money? Have we the resources? Is it humanly possible? These questions should be irrelevant. This is, of course, a disturbing thought for any church treasurer!

Of course, there are the bad times. Faith will be tested.

When I get to Glory, I would like to have a discussion with God about his idea of 'the last minute...'

Picture a wet, cold Monday morning. I am at the petrol pump. No money has come in for some weeks now. The bank overdraft has reached its limit. All my credit cards (which we clear every month) are close to their limit. What do I do? Give up and go home?

No. I fill up anyway and get on with what God has called me to do. The money is His problem, not mine. Our experience is that God is faithful to His promises. The money always comes right in the end.

In the same Bible passage where Jesus exhorts us to: "Seek first His Kingdom" and trust Him to meet our needs, Jesus also tells us three times not to worry. That is the hardest part. We may know this in our head, but – even with experiences of past miraculous provision - we can still struggle to know it in our hearts.

Back in 2008, the government had provided each UK classroom with an interactive whiteboard and it had dawned on my wife and I that teachers needed a DVD, to help deliver lessons about Christianity for RE lessons.

I was regularly visiting local primary schools to lead Collective Worship. The headteacher of one of them had asked me to help them deliver some lessons about what it is like to be a Christian. We developed a DVD of ten PowerPoint lessons. Over time, a second and then third DVD were

added until the resource had become a triple DVD of 34 lessons that covered every aspect of the Christian faith for use in primary school RE lessons.

It was then that I realised that, as a member of Somerset's SACRE (Local Authority RE committee), I could probably give a DVD to every single UK school via the local SACRE committee and transform teaching about Christianity across the whole country. Even as I thought it, I realised that this was what God wanted us to do. The money came. Every single SACRE committee and Religious Education advisor across the UK said: "Yes please," and it happened, as Tommy Cooper used to say: "Just like that!"

My only real moment of blind panic was when I first saw the lorry. I had not really visualised what 34,000 triple DVDs would look like. The lorry was huge, and I thought: "What have I done. What if they don't work?" But they did.

As a result of these steps of faith, every primary school across the UK was given a resource that explained what it really meant to live as a Christian.

A further DVD called 'Reflections' followed for use in all UK secondary schools. This explored a range of topics through interviews with a wide range of Christians with interesting jobs and testimonies: policemen, ex-convicts, prison chaplains, scientists,

doctors, Royal Marine Chaplains, peace activists and more.

One result was also the publication and increase in the use of our Religious Education website, RE:quest (<https://request.org.uk> which is now run by Youth for Christ). It became the most used RE website in UK schools.

Thoughts for Us All

Are you, like the disciples, asking: "Lord, increase our faith?"

Jesus says in Matthew 17:20: "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you".

How much faith is enough to start living by faith? Jesus talked about a mustard seed because it is tiny. Does that describe how you feel about your faith? Jesus is saying that faith grows from small beginnings. If your faith is in Him, even a tiny amount is enough because that faith does not depend on you, but Him. And yet, another parable reminds us that even that tiny mustard seed of faith will eventually grow into a substantial tree. But how does that faith grow?

How does a child learn to walk?

They usually start by pulling themselves to their feet and walking round the room by clinging to the

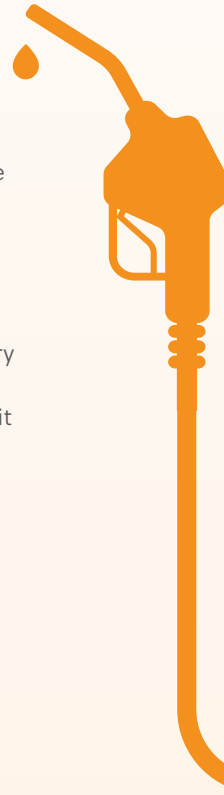
furniture. As confidence grows and their little legs strengthen, they progress to staggering across the smaller gaps between furniture. As children learn to become bolder, the gaps are gradually increased. Eventually, the children are walking for themselves.

In much the same way, as we trust God for smaller things, so our faith in Him grows and strengthens. We are emboldened to ask and expect for greater things. A crisis may force us to trust God for something bigger, until we are stepping out in faith in ever bolder ways for the sake of the Kingdom of God.

The promises in the Bible are still completely worthy of your trust and Almighty God has no limits to His power or love. Are you willing to raise your gaze to see and trust in His limitless possibilities?

If you would like to think about this more, Mike has written a book about his experiences of living by faith as a Counties evangelist. It is called 'Fire Eating Faith'. A hard copy can be purchased for £5 from mikepstrange123@gmail.com.

A digital version is also available from the [Amazon](#) website for only £2.





Counties evangelist David Brown outside GSUS Live

Schools are back, and so is GSUS Live. Since Easter, GSUS Live has toured secondary schools in The Black Country for six weeks, usually visiting one school for a week at a time. Counties schools' Resource Coordinator, Dave Thomas, says the response has been fantastic.

"We are starting to see schools welcome GSUS Live and local church volunteers back in. We started after Easter with only one unit in the Black Country, visiting towns including Dudley, Wolverhampton, and Stourbridge. There were approximately 500 pupils on board each week. So, by May half-term that meant 3000 students heard about the story of Jesus and why he is still relevant today".

Dudley and West Midlands Counties evangelist, David Brown, has been really thrilled to have GSUS Live back in the area as he's been involved with it for several years.

"The overwhelming response is very positive. Some of pupils love the music, some love the animations, some the videos.

"One year, we had a Year 10 pupil who refused to go in because she said she hated religion and moaned: 'It's

rubbish.' Her RE teacher persuaded her to give it five minutes and she became fully immersed in the programme, and at the end she was putting her hand up at the end answering questions. It was totally different from the antagonistic, aggressive attitude she'd first had."

Both Dave and David say teenagers are impressed by the technology and the way Jesus' life is taught as it's not what they had expected.

"It's a mobile classroom situated in the back of an artic lorry," says Dave Thomas. "The pupils sit behind desks where monitors rise up, providing interactive screens. They then explore one of three themes: fear, forgiveness and rejection."

Pupils interact with a character of the programme, and they are then invited to message them to help them navigate the situation they are going

through. Through this process they listen to Bible stories, Christian music and historical figures that build up a picture of what Christian faith is about.

Pupils then get to give the character advice. One scenario includes a boy Ben, who falls out with his brother, and they must give him advice about whether to forgive him, ignore him or hit him!

"Our vision is to equip volunteers, from local churches to work with schools in their area," says Dave Thomas. "At the end of every lesson the local volunteers have the opportunity to discuss the feedback from the students and how the topics of fear, forgiveness and rejection relate to the Christian faith. Volunteers explain that Christians believe, Jesus experienced all these things and that ultimately they could have a relationship with Him."

David Brown says that "teenagers are teenagers" and they tend to get a wide response. He admits there will always be a joker in the pack, but he believes that's a good thing because often it gets the rest of class talking more and opening up.

"In one lesson we had some fantastic questions and discussions about what forgiveness means. You will always get the kid who gives the advice to hit his brother but then you can talk about different ways of dealing with things.

"We don't really get any antagonistic attitudes. But often we are giving personal stories of our own fear, forgiveness, and rejection and teenagers respond really well to that."

David says that, on some occasions, he has been able to talk about the time he and his wife lost a premature baby, and he adds that even the rowdiest classes will sit quietly and listen. *"Those personal stories touch them because you can't argue with them".*

David Brown is keen that GSUS Live isn't seen as an event that happens in one place and moves on. He believes that follow up from local churches is crucial to help those teenagers who may have expressed an interest in faith.

"One of the challenges has been follow up in schools. So, we'd like to encourage churches to help us, after the GSUS Live has moved on by visiting schools.

"It's an amazing resource." Then David laughs: "One Head of RE said to me: 'This is fantastic, I feel like I can compete with geography field trips now because it was such a dynamic, multi-media experience compared to just the classroom'."

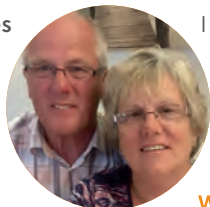


JUST A MINUTE

WITH TRUSTEE AND FORMER CEO OF COUNTIES

JOHN WILKES

Trustee and former CEO of Counties John Wilkes joined in 1983 as an evangelist. He is married to Brenda and they have three grown up children.



What made you join Counties all those years ago?

I was a teacher, and my wife was a nurse. But God made it clear that He wanted us to be evangelists in our local area. Then at a Counties event, the sermon was about Jesus saying: 'Follow me and I will make you fishers of men'. The idea of us offering ourselves and the Lord doing the equipping really spoke to me. We then approached Counties.

This month Ignite has an article about living by faith. How did you find that?

I was chomping at the bit to join, but Brenda said: 'Hang on' and reminded me we had two young children. However, when it came to writing my resignation letter as a teacher, I said: "I am not sure we can send this" and she said: "Yes, we can. We can trust God." I guess we felt that we were asking people to trust the Lord and so we needed to demonstrate it ourselves.

Have there been ups and downs?

There was a time when things were tricky and I said to the Lord that I would get a job stacking shelves, but I didn't get the job! Then one evening friends brought us a car because ours was falling apart. When the kids woke up in the morning they asked where it had come from and we said: "The Lord has provided it." It's been a privilege and a challenge.

So, what are you doing now you are not the CEO?

My wife says: "Too much!" I recently started working on the evangelist training program.

I chair the conference planning group for 'Living the Passion'. I am also chair of 'Church Support Network'. I also love to preach in some of the churches in South Wales.

What does being part of Counties mean to you?

It's a family and we try take care of one another and pray for each other seriously. Helping churches to keep evangelism at the forefront and not to lose sight of mission. Jesus calls us into a collective relationship with one another, so the local church is important for that. It's also important Counties evangelists don't feel isolated, the sense of belonging and mutual support is really important.

What's your favourite Bible verse or passage and why?

John 1:12 "...to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" that whole idea of being part of God's family is important.

Secondly, Hebrews 4:12 "Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" we depend on His mercy, but we also need His enabling grace. It's about our ongoing dependence on God that we mustn't lose sight of.

What have been the highlights?

Every time I've had the privilege, by the grace of God, of introducing someone to Jesus - and giving them a warm welcome into the family of God.

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
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

Jacquie & 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
Bhakiaraj (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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