

WINTER 2020

IGNITE

SPARKING PASSION FOR THE GOSPEL
ACROSS THE UK



THE WORD ON THE STREET

EVANGELISTS GO OUTDOORS
TO SHARE THE GOSPEL



ALSO SHARING FAITH WITH ETHNIC COMMUNITIES – CHURCH PLANTING GATHERING –
HOW TO DO A 'SLIMMED DOWN CHRISTMAS' THIS YEAR – WORSHIP ON THE STREETS

WELCOME TO IGNITE



What a strange year it has been! Last year, at the dawn of 2020, we had many plans for the year, most of which probably remained unfulfilled or unaccomplished. However, God reminds us in Isaiah 55 verse 11 that His Word *"will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."*

This edition of Ignite is a great reminder of that truth. It is a joy to read of what God has been doing during this season and before Covid-19 too, through Open-air work. It is great to read of this focus from some of our trainee evangelists. It has been interesting too to hear of the Prime Minister's plan to save Christmas, and Ivor Cooper gives a timely reminder that, in fact, God's plan was that Christmas might save us!

May God be with you during this winter season, and may He enable you to Make Jesus known with renewed passion, power and conviction.

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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REASONS FOR HOPE

More than 120 people gathered together online for what would have been Counties annual weekend conference in October.

The digital conference 'Reasons for Hope' featured worship, prayer and teaching from Graham Poland, lead elder of Grosvenor Church in Barnstaple.

Counties CEO Martin Erwin and Church Planting Officer Tim Cracknell also led a seminar on 'Hope for Struggling Churches.'



HIGHLIGHTS FROM LAST YEAR IN NEW REPORT

Thanks to the generous support of individuals, churches and trusts, Counties has been able to reach even more people across the UK with the Gospel this year.

A new Impact Report has been produced to share some highlights of how God has continued to use and bless the work of Counties.

Martin Erwin, Counties CEO, said: *"Like everyone else across the globe, Counties has faced the challenges of living with Covid-19. Our schools' resources were not able to visit schools and churches, preaching opportunities were restricted and cancelled and training programmes postponed.*

"However, there have been many opportunities, and the Counties team have met the needs head on, with online and internet ministry growing and having a great impact, and evangelists and Neighbourhood Chaplains finding creative and innovative ways to make Jesus known.

"This new report highlights some of the ways we continue – in partnership with our supporters - to reach people to make Jesus known."

Visit countiesuk.org 'Latest News' section to read the Impact Report.



CHURCH PLANTERS GATHER IN ONLINE CONFERENCE

Over 60 people from around the country gathered via Zoom for the next phase of training in church planting.

Counties Church Planting Officer Tim Cracknell said: *"This is really exciting as it means Counties Planting Network now has five church plants which started last year and another five new churches starting this autumn.*

"We also have a whole group of extra people who joined us for our recent event, who are preparing to plant next year and be part of Counties Planting Network M4 process too! God is at work in our nation!"



THE LIFE EXHIBITION GOES DIGITAL

Counties popular exhibition for primary school children – the Life exhibition - will be launched as a digital resource this winter to help churches stay connected to schools during lockdown and beyond.

The Virtual Life exhibition will feature all of the usual songs, quizzes and films and children and teachers will be able to navigate around the digital tents through a tablet or laptop.

The resource, which shares the story of Jesus, is designed to complement the current schools RE curriculum. Churches can make a donation to enable their local schools to access the virtual exhibition.

Life exhibition coordinator Kevin Baldwin said: *"In view of Covid-19 we have had to get creative! Just as we thought we would be back to visiting communities again, we have gone into lockdown two and Virtual Life seems to be the way forward.*

"This doesn't replace the physical Life exhibition but the possibilities that we have are going to be huge. It's a fantastic way for churches to connect with schools online during this season of Covid-19."

Miss Webb, a teacher from Clenchwarton Primary School, said:

"Thank you for the valuable experience! It's amazing what technology can do to keep us all connected. The children were really engaged!"

Find out more, email: lifexpo@countiesuk.org



STUDENT RUTH JOINS THE TEAM



21-year-old Ruth Chisholm from North Devon and Zac Whitehouse have joined Counties training programme for Gap year students – TEAM (Training in Evangelism and Mission). Ignite caught up with Ruth to find out why she joined the scheme.

Hello Ruth. What made you decide to join TEAM?

During lockdown I had the opportunity and time to focus on working on my relationship with God, which wasn't in the best place to be honest, and the fruit from that reconciliation was a passion to share the hope and joy I had found. I really want to share the best news I've come across and what I believe to be everyone's Saviour from their problems with anyone who wants to hear.

How do you think TEAM will help you achieve your goals?

I think TEAM will give me practical opportunities to learn how to share the good news I've found and put it into practice in events around the country. I will also learn new ways of sharing the

Gospel and make connections with many like-minded people, which I can learn, be encouraged and grow from.

Have you always been a Christian?

I grew up in Zimbabwe in a Christian family and with Christian relatives and friends. I've been going to church for as long as I can remember and went through Christian schools for both primary and secondary levels. Zimbabwe has a pretty strong Christian community, so a combination of all these things meant little to no persecution or ridicule for my faith. I became a Christian at a young age so can't actually remember a time when I wasn't a Christian or didn't know who Jesus was. Despite this, I've definitely had periods where I wasn't walking closely with Him and my faith has been

weak. but after a recent destructive period of not walking closely with God, I feel like I've fully found my faith and come to know God for real for myself, not just through my parents or family members. It's my faith now and this is where I've felt the most secure in it!

What challenges do young people face these days?

There's a lot of struggles with identity and figuring out who we are and what we're here for or what we are supposed to be doing.

How does being a young Christian help with these struggles?

I've struggled and been burdened by all the things mentioned above but God is the only answer I've got to all of them. He's gradually worked to answer and bring peace to my anxieties or conflicts or things I was finding difficult to

understand. He also has been gradually renewing my mind and heart to be more in line with His, encouraging me to be more like Jesus and follow Him.

I think remembering that seeking God in His fullness and striving daily to be more like Jesus is not always easy or perfect, I don't believe it's meant to be. Walking along the straight and narrow is a constant fight against our flesh and human nature. Being set apart from the dark world we live in isn't easy to navigate, but thankfully we have God's faithfulness and love for us to always be there for us in our times of need and to fulfil His promises to provide us with exactly what we need to get through.



“IT’S NEVER TOO LATE FOR GOD TO WELCOME YOU BACK”

60-year-old Tina Jones became a Christian when she was a teenager but says life events led her away from her faith. Now Tina, who works at a local Wetherspoons pub in Ross on Wye, is an active member of Wye Community Church and says her faith has never been stronger. Here she shares in her own words how God has remained faithful throughout her life.

We all are like sheep that have gone astray and now and then there is one who keeps doing it. That was me.

I first became a Christian in my mid-teens. We were at church camp in Scotland at the time. Our pastor ‘converted’ me then I went to the dormitory, where I told Ruth, one of the helpers. She was so pleased, and I felt a great happiness as I went to bed, excitedly wondering what would happen next. Nothing did happen, however, we weren’t taught about having a relationship with God. It appeared that all we had to do next was to be good and encourage our friends to come to Sunday School

so that they could then attend the thrice weekly games nights and Paul would wait, hoping to convert them. Mixing with other non-Christians was discouraged.

I strayed away from the fold in my late teens, caught up by the lure of pubs and discos and at 18, whilst I still knew everything, ran away from home with a young man I barely knew. We ended up in Ross-on-Wye.

As I explored the town, I came across Henry Street Evangelical Church, which is now called Wye Community Church. I attended a couple of services and was made very welcome and

I felt happier again. My husband didn’t like me finding happiness anywhere else but with him, so I stopped going and strayed from the fold again. Our marriage was over by 1987, by which time we had a son.

I remarried and had a second child. Both children attended the ‘6 o’clock Crew’ at Henry Street on Wednesdays which they enjoyed. I decided I needed to talk to Martin Erwin who ran ‘Crew’ about my faith. We met at the church and he prayed with me. Again, I felt this great happiness and began attending the services regularly and was baptized in 1996. Everybody could see the difference in me and though some laughed, other friends were pleased for me but...

Marriage number two was rapidly failing and a friendship I had made, turned into a relationship. We made

the elders aware of this and continued to attend church for a while but felt hypocritical going so our visits to Henry Street were rare. My work commitments also got in the way and so from His fold I strayed again. Not totally though, I always prayed and kept my faith but not having fellowship made being a Christian hard.

After coming to terms with my partner’s death in 2011 I turned again to Jesus. I began to attend church on Sundays when work allowed but mainly Wednesday evenings and I have grown so much. It feels like being born again, again.

I live alone but am not lonely. I feel His spirit with me now and I am back in His fold forever.

TOUCHED BY THE LOVE OF GOD

REACHING THE LOST IN THE ASIAN COMMUNITY

A former special needs teacher, with a heart for reaching people with the Gospel in the Asian community, has joined Counties as a trainee evangelist.

Liz David, Liz David, originally from Bangalore, South India, lives in Cardiff and supports adults and children with special needs, as well as women from ethnic backgrounds, asylum seekers and refugees.

She says: "I have generally had a positive response from people who I have supported and with whom I have shared the Gospel. Many of them have been through traumatic experiences and are touched by the love and care that is shown to them.

"I met an Afghani Sikh family last year with two teenage boys, both having special needs. They are asylum seekers. Over the last months, I have grown very close to this family and have had many opportunities to share the Gospel and to help in practical ways. I have given them various Christian



resources and they have been eager to discuss and ask questions. We have had some good conversations and continue to pray that God will work in them."

Reaching people in the Asian community is not without its challenges, with many seeing Christianity as a Western religion and finding it difficult to turn away from their own religion realising the shame that it would cause their families.

"Christianity is not a Western religion"

Liz explained: "There are challenges, but I see my role as helping people understand key Biblical doctrines, by explaining Bible stories - including the life of Jesus - that was deeply set in a Middle Eastern culture. I also help the seeker understand that the shame experienced is nothing in comparison to the honour that they will receive before the Father."

Liz was born in a Christian family, with both her parents working as missionaries. She made a personal commitment to follow Christ when she was in high school and attended Bible college in England and the Philippines. With a heart for people with special needs, Liz trained as a special educator and worked in schools in India, Oman and Cardiff.

She said: "From a very early age, I was blessed to receive good Bible

teaching, at home and at the Christian school that I attended. I heard about the need to receive Christ many times. I even remember asking God to forgive me on many occasions without a true conviction of sins.

"I began to read my Bible and spend time in prayer. I went through all the 'Christian motions' but it wasn't until I was in high school that I truly asked Christ to be Lord and Saviour of my life. God gives me meaning and purpose for each day as I seek to walk with Him. He is teaching me every day by His Spirit to walk in faith and obedience. I praise Him for His grace and mercy towards me. There are times when I fail but God is faithful and continues to work in my life."

Liz has now enrolled on Counties Evangelist Training Programme and hopes the training will help her transition to full-time Christian ministry: "I think Counties will help me gain knowledge and practical training in different ways of evangelism, and help give me a better understanding of the Word and how to effectively communicate it. I also will be prayerfully supported."



STREET PREACHING IS NOT DEAD!

The following open air features reflect a variety of forms of open-air evangelism, including some stories dated before Covid-19.

Is open air evangelism the best way for churches to reach the lost in this current climate?

Counties Oldham evangelist Lee Marsland certainly thinks so. He believes churches should invest their resources into going out on the streets to preach the Gospel and should seize the opportunity to be present out on the streets

Before the second lockdown and tighter restrictions, Lee and other members of Impact Community Church would go out on the streets of Manchester, Blackpool and parts of Wales at least once a week. They sing worship songs and share testimonies using a microphone, as well as preaching the Gospel and offering prayer.

Lee says: "I decided to do this type of evangelism as God clearly spoke to me to start a ministry that would strengthen God's wider church by partnering in the Gospel to do evangelism in open cities and towns (highways & byways).



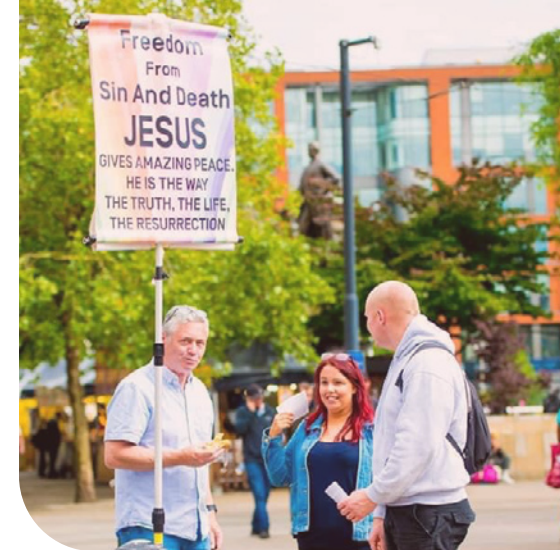
"We have had great reactions from people passing by. Lots of people have responded to the Gospel and become Christians, whilst some people have joined us to sing worship songs and dance, but we always gather a crowd and there is always lots of people wanting prayer and ministry."

People aren't always initially positive to the Christian message, Lee shares: "On one occasion an angry man got in my personal space shouting angry and inappropriate things about Jesus and was asking me to prove God is real. I shared my testimony and he just broke down, apologised, hugged me and went on his way blessed.

"We have seen people getting saved and baptised in the sea in Blackpool and Rhyl. It's been amazing and very

humbling to see God working in people's lives in such a great way. The church sometimes can get so caught up in our buildings where it's safe, that we get frightened of reaching out beyond our walls.

"The declaration of the Gospel is a key form of evangelism meeting people where they are, taking the word of God to them. By stepping out in faith you create an opportunity for God to move in power."



Lee's top eight tips for street preaching

1. Partner with other local churches (the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few).
2. Be consistent (it's so important that you build up a momentum with your team).
3. Create space for prayer either in person before you start or on Zoom/FaceTime.
4. Build up strong trustworthy relationships with the people you minister with (where there is unity God commands a blessing).
5. Make sure you are constantly encouraging each other and giving opportunities to team members to use their gifting.
6. Have regular briefings before an outreach starts, so people know what they are doing and to avoid unnecessary stress or confusion.
7. Do not use the microphone as an opportunity to condemn anybody but instead use God's model of loving people to speak the truth but always in love (a good exercise is personal reflection on where Jesus has brought you from personally in your life).
8. And finally don't be afraid to try new ways of reaching the lost for Jesus. If something is not working there's no use flogging a dead horse ... the Gospel will never change but the way in which we present it does - so be looking for creative ways to do this.



THE WORD IS ON THE STREET

Volunteers from a church in the Lake District have been using innovative ways to reach people in their community, whilst safely observing social distancing measures.

Counties trainee evangelist Jonny Gios and his fellow Neighbourhood Chaplains from Gateway Church have been busy out on the streets of Kendal. The dedicated team have carried out litter picks, prayer walks, delivered 'Bags of Blessings', and the church has sponsored the local football team and advertised their services through paid-for Facebook posts.

Jonny said: "We are getting self-referrals from this advert and God encounters of Christians moving into the area and seeing what we're doing. We've now had five couples contact us for church, it's like God has released them to us. It's simply amazing!"

Kendal, with a population of 30,000 people, is known as the Gateway to the Lakes. Jonny says it has a great community spirit which was evident in 2015/16 when the town was hit by Storm Desmond and more recently responding to Covid-19.

Jonny explains how the Neighbourhood Chaplains team has been reaching out to the community: "Before the second lockdown, we were walking on the streets, praying as we go for opportunities. We offer prayer to people on the streets and engage in whatever way we can with people.

"It's very important we are seen and active to build up trust. If people are open for prayer - they are people of peace and there we aim to share a Gospel presentation with them. The other week we engaged in conversation with a man who has mental health challenges and is currently working with the Government as a Covid-19 tester. He expressed a wish to come to church and was surprised to hear that we met in a pub!"

The volunteers have kept Covid-secure by wearing masks, socially distancing and using hand sanitiser regularly. Jonny continued: "I actually believe this is our time to shine - why

OPEN AIR SPECIAL FEATURE

wouldn't you get out and about? Too much energy and time can concentrate on a polished gathering or service. Where would Jesus be? Teaching in the Synagogue or on the streets healing and teaching?

"Many people just don't want to know about Jesus or when they hear CHURCH - they completely turn off. People are frightened and don't want to necessarily engage with others."

Ideas for churches to reach out

- Prayer walk your entire village/town/parish praying for God encounters.
- Run an online Alpha Course.
- Record a service on the phone for unbelievers with a Gospel message.
- Light a candle in your street - with a sign saying praying for my community.
- Sponsor a football team.
- Deliver soup and scripture to your neighbours.
- Do a litter pick in your community.
- Buy 300 Real Advent chocolate calendars for a local school.
- Deliver 'bags of blessings' to your neighbours.
- Show the nativity film on a big screen outdoors.
- Host a civic prayer breakfast online - post out croissants.
- Host a jobs club for those unemployed and pray for them to get a job.
- Place a sofa outside your church building, sit on it and engage in conversation.
- Take a hamper of goodies to your local GP surgery, hospital or police station, they love it!





WORSHIP ON THE STREETS

New trainee evangelist Aaron Shah from Newcastle aims to share God's love with people out on the streets through the power of worship. Passers-by have been drawn to the songs, with one man moved to tears saying the music was 'healing his heart'.

Aaron and wife Rachel currently belong to a Fresh Expressions Church called Beachcombers FX, which is a part of the local Methodist circuit and meets (or did before Covid-19) in various pubs around the North Tyneside coast. Ignite meets Aaron to find out more.

Tell us more about worship outreaches...

These are when Christians go out into public places to worship and to

allow their worship to be a witness to people who don't know Jesus. It could be through the people passing by experiencing something of God's love, presence and peace that often accompanies the worship or it could be through the words of the songs, conversations with team members or opportunities to be prayed for – all things that happen because the worship draws passers-by to engage with what we are doing.

However it happens, we have seen time and time again, when we go out to worship, people seem drawn to what we are doing and in doing so, we can point them to Jesus.

Where did the idea for 'Worship on the Streets' come from?

I sensed God was calling me into this area for many months. Although I had led worship in churches for years, the idea of leading worship out in public was a totally new idea to me and I didn't really have a framework or theology for it! And so I told God that if this is really where He was leading me with my ministry, then I needed to see it in the Bible. After a few months of studying the Scriptures and praying about it, I finally came across Psalm 40:3 which says,

"He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God.

Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord."

There it was - I had finally found a biblical example of where worship and evangelism went together! It was then that I knew it was what God was calling me to start Worship On The Streets.

What's the response from the public?

Some people are curious as it's quite unusual to hear worship songs out in

public, some people come over and as they know we are Christians they want to be prayed for, some people simply listen from afar. It has been a massive gift watching God grow the team so that we can now have people who worship alongside us who can also chat to passers-by and offer prayer and Gospels to those that want them.

Any particular stories of individuals who have responded?

There are two stories that come to mind that illustrate the heart of what we are aiming to do when we worship God in public. We led street worship in a small quiet village in Northumberland. Nevertheless, we found a spot to worship in a small patch of grass a couple of minutes' walk from the nearby cul-de-sac. As it was such a small village, hardly anyone was out walking around. Towards the end of our time however, a young man in his 20s came over to where we were worshipping - he had heard the music from his house and decided to come out. He wasn't a Christian but we got chatting and were able to share the Gospel with him and pray for him. He left with a copy of John's Gospel in hand, saying he would read it. Sometimes we worship in places where there are loads of people walking by, but sometimes, like on this occasion, we are reminded about the parable of the shepherd who left the 99 sheep to find the one (Luke



15:3-6). On occasions like this, it really feels like God sends us to worship in places where He is reaching out to just the one.

Music which heals hearts

Last year we were worshipping in Newcastle city centre when a man walked by and stood about 10 metres from where we were worshipping. He had been listening to us for a while when suddenly I realised he was crying. As we finished the song we had just been singing, he came over to us and the first words he said to us were, "Your music is healing my heart." He began to open up to us about some of the struggles he was facing and explained how when he was walking by, there was something about the music that he was drawn to and that was bringing a sense of healing from the pain he had been feeling. We explained that we were worshipping God and that He was using the worship to bring the healing he was looking for. We shared about God's love for him and were able to pray for more of God's healing in his life.

Why did you decide to join Counties?

I was at a point in the ministry where I felt I had done everything I could without extra help. I have a local team

who are amazing and who faithfully come out onto the streets with me, pray for me and provide pastoral care and accountability for me and the ministry. However, the vision for Worship On The Streets was always to lead street worship locally and encourage it nationally and so I felt that there was more to do at a national level.

When I came across Counties, I couldn't believe what a perfect fit it was – I'd never come across a Christian organisation that supported self-employed pioneer evangelists before! It was a massive gift to be accepted onto the Evangelist Training Programme and I'm looking forward to all that God will do through the year.

Find out more
about this ministry:
worshiponthestreets.co.uk



THE GREATEST SHOWMAN

SHARING JESUS THROUGH AN UNUSUAL STYLE

Dressing up as ice cream cone, the Greatest Showman or a giant lobster might not be everyone's style of evangelism but for new trainee evangelist Jackson Turner it's proved to be a great draw in sharing the Gospel.

Jackson, from Leeds, is passionate about sharing the good news with people out on the streets, cafes, pubs (pre-lockdown) – creatively engaging people in conversation which often lead to opportunities to pray.

Jackson explains: "My work out in the community is not based around street preaching but rather creatively engaging people in a conversation leading to the opportunity to pray. I will be dressed up (unless I am with my family or with my kids). Costumes vary hugely. I look ridiculous - however the Lord opens a way, and I pray for health issues, life issues, finance issues, business issues, whatever the person wants me to pray about.

"At the moment this seems to be the heart of my work. God moves, He heals, He brings peace, God encounters people and they have an experience. In just one month, I probably prayed for on average four different people each day. Each one a person, a story, valuable to God and I hope my prayer sows a seed, is a link in a chain and brings them into a relationship with Jesus, Father and Holy Spirit."

Over the summer, Jackson was involved in a multi-church project called The Ice Cream Revival. He dressed as an ice cream cone and as part of a team gave out free ice cream, whilst offering to pray for people. They witnessed healings,

accurate words of knowledge, prophetic words and salvations as the group of 20 volunteers boldly spoke about Jesus and prayed with faith.

On another occasion, Jackson met a man outside a burger van on an industrial estate. They started talking and the man revealed he had a painful shoulder. Jackson said:

"Jesus asks me to pour a bottle of water onto his shoulder. I ask the man if this is OK, he says yes. Jesus healed his shoulder to the amazement of me, the man healed and the woman running the burger van, which in turn led to further prayer for others. This was all done dressed as the Greatest Showman and with blue hair!"

Jackson accepts that not everyone will find his style of evangelism appealing or readily accept prayer from a Christian dressed up in costume. He says: "There are lots of times when people politely say no when I ask if I can pray for them or sometimes shout abuse across the streets. Sometimes we get asked to leave various public places. But I always take my inspiration from

Jesus. Not everyone loved him, but He kept going and really engaged with people.

"I think joy is what is needed in this time of lockdown and the current pandemic. I share the joy of heaven, which often leads to conversations, which in turn lead to prayer. Praise Jesus!"



"... AND CALL OFF CHRISTMAS!"

by Ivor Cooper, Counties Warwickshire evangelist



The cry of a petulant Sheriff of Nottingham (played by Alan Rickman) in the film *Robin Hood, Prince of Thieves*. Things hadn't been going the Sheriff's way, so as a punishment to the common people, along with a list of additional penalties, the cancellation of Christmas was to be his ultimate sanction.

Sounds familiar? With all that's been going on this year - the postponing of holidays, weddings and sporting events along with restrictions on gatherings of all kinds - the skipping of Christmas for 2020 has been, perhaps half jokingly, on the lips of some. Or at least a cut down, 'Christmas light', in place of the usual over-the-top festival that we're accustomed to! Well I mean, how can you really enjoy this time of year without the parties, family gatherings, nativity plays, carol services and general excess that the season brings?

Now, I don't want to call off Christmas. But maybe a 'thinner' Christmas would be good for everyone. How many of us are completely exhausted by the New Year? The preparation, organisation and delivering of our packed church programmes can cause even us, as believers, to take our eye off the ball. Amongst all the busyness we can miss the sheer wonder of what God has done for us through the incarnation.

So, here's "Christmas light" - a cut down, no frills Christmas that focuses on what it's really all about.

"The Father sent His Son to be the Saviour of the world." (1 John 4: 14)

This verse encapsulates the glory of the Christmas narrative. No mention of shepherds or wise men. No stable or star (which are of course, all part of the background); but also no reference to Santa, Christmas Trees, Nativity Plays, Carol or Christingle services and other unnecessary trimmings that often obscure our view of the genuine article.

We have:

1 "The Father" - the initiator of everything from creation to eternal glory! And what a fantastic way to describe God - Father. He's a loving, caring, reliable Father. And the sending of Jesus was His idea, His plan. When you think how little the world considers Him, it's

a wonder He has done anything good for us at all! But because He's a loving Father, He can't but act in a benevolent way towards His creation.

And what has the Father done?

2 "sent His Son". God has given us His very best. Generally we would give better gifts to those closest to us, and inferior ones (if any gift at all!) to those we rarely see or who are estranged from us. One of the wonders of Christmas is that the Father has sent His Son to a world who has turned its back on Him. Romans 5: 10 says "... while we were God's enemies ..." God set in motion the act of reconciliation.

*Hallelujah, my Father
For giving us Your Son.
Sending Him into the world
To be given up for men.
Knowing we would bruise Him
And smite Him from the earth.
Hallelujah, my Father
In His death is my birth.
Hallelujah, my Father
In His life is my life.*

And the gift of Jesus simply 'goes on giving!' *"He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all - how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?"* Romans 8: 32

What a giver, what a gift!

And why has the Father sent His Son?

3 "to be the Saviour of the world." The sending of Jesus into this world was not only a demonstration of God's love (which of course it is - John 3:16 tells us that!), but it had a specific purpose - to save, to rescue men and women. The Father not only sent a representation of His love, but He sent a Saviour. We are lost; estranged from our creator and tainted by sin which, unless dealt with, will result in separation from God forever. But, "The Father sent His Son to be the Saviour of the world!" God has done something about our condition. The birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus is God's solution to a lost, sinful and dying world.

And it's for the world - not just a select few. Every person, from every nation, no matter their background or situation can benefit from the gift that the Father sent at the first Christmas.

So, *"The Father sent His Son to be the Saviour of the world."* That's the Christmas story in a nutshell. No need for mince pies or tinsel. It's bigger and better than all the superfluous baggage we often add to it.

"Call off Christmas"? No way!, we might as well try to cancel the dawn. But strip away some of it's trimmings? Perhaps that is a good idea! Then we can simply rest in the wonder of what God has done for us in Jesus.



SHARING THE CHRISTMAS MESSAGE FROM HOME

When the Willmott family staged a 'stay-at-home' Christmas service back in 2005, little did they know it would be the forerunner to the current much greater 'stay-at-home' Covid challenge!

Back then, four-year-old Ben and two-year-old Lois had gone down with chicken pox and so mum and dad, Paul and Vanessa, converted the living room into 'church' for a Christmas morning service. This is what they got up to ... They sang carols together, Paul gave donkey rides to the children as they all acted through the Nativity story. They prayed and talked about Jesus being relevant in people's lives today.

Counties West Midlands evangelist Paul, normally visits 28 primary schools across the West Midlands, speaking to around 10,000 youngsters and staff each month. But since lockdown, he's only actually spoken in person to about 130 kids in a handful of settings. Christmas is probably his busiest time of the year and, having worked full-

time in the schools for almost half his life, has no intention of being silenced by lockdown! Paul will be making use of today's technology using video conferencing to present the message of Jesus birth 'live' in classrooms during December.

It's been his mission to share the real meaning of Christmas with children after his own realisation as a ten-year-old that he had *"to do something about the Bible messages as they were more than just stories"*. Paul therefore fully relates to children's enquiring minds. He recalls one occasion when he was asked if what he'd shared about the Wise Men was true *"when I answered 'yes', they said 'wow, that's amazing!'. Responses like this make it all worthwhile!"*

Paul remains totally optimistic that in this year of great challenges, kids will continue to be amazed at the message of Jesus. Along with live video calls, he will be exploring Christmas this year in a series of assembly videos, titled, "Through the eyes of ..." looking at how different people may have seen that first Christmas. All of this specially produced from his Stourbridge home. Take a look his YouTube channel: "Paul Willmott", search for "Paul at Home | thought the eyes of ..."

He has also prepared four puppet videos, on the theme of Advent, featuring his special puppet character, Twist. *"I miss the personal interaction with the children but although my numbers in persons are obviously low, in many ways they are up as online videos are available to anyone who wants to watch or use them,"* said Paul. Why not check out "Twist Online" on YouTube, search for "2 Minute Twist | Advent".

Meanwhile as a youngster himself Paul always homed in on the 'nice' things at Christmas such as presents...but then *"There was a gradual realisation that God was not only real but also wanted to be real in my life"*. He adds: *"After years of hearing about God, I realised that I could know God for myself, and I have continued to discover even more. It's an exciting daily walk with Him."*

Zooming into 2020, Paul's own children successfully passed exams - albeit, in these unprecedented times, based solely on teacher assessments. Ben is taking a gap year to do mission work after his A levels while Lois has just started her own A-levels. At 19 and 17, they're both now old enough to remember 'stay-at-home' festivities with a difference ... but the real meaning of Christmas never changes - the celebration of the birth of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ!



JUST A MINUTE

WITH COUNTIES COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER

HELEN RIMMER



Tell us a bit about yourself

I am married to Peter and we have three amazing children – Max, 18, Louis, 15 and Phoebe, 6. I work part-time for Counties and also part time in another communications role for a charity. We live in a lovely market town called Bishops Waltham in Hampshire, although we're originally from the Wirral in Merseyside, so I don't sound southern at all!

What is your role at Counties?

I have been at Counties for over eight years now, I write and edit this magazine, as well as social media, writing blogs, creating annual reports, flyers and updating the website. I love to share what God is doing through the art of storytelling. I'll be sadly moving on in the New Year to a full time role with another charity but I'll be following Counties on social media and watching with great interest.

What do you like best about working at Counties?

Counties is a wonderful place to work – the team are so encouraging, and it really does feel like a family. It's great to know the staff team pray every day and the whole work is covered in prayer.

Are there any stories from evangelists which encourage you in your own faith?

There have been times in my life where I have felt far from God or needed an encouraging word. On so many occasions, when I've been speaking to an evangelist about the work they are doing to share the Gospel, I have felt God has really spoken to me. Quite often a theme emerges in the magazine, which I didn't plan

for, but I know that God is in it!

When did you become a Christian, can you share your story?

I had always known about Jesus, with my grandparents reading Bible stories to me when I was young and praying with me when they babysat. But it wasn't until our second son Louis was christened in our local village church in Wiltshire, where we were living at the time, that I decided to find out more. A couple from the church ran an 'Exploring Christianity' course with a few local families and we decided to go along.

Around week three into the course, I thought 'this Jesus guy sounds amazing and he is really real' and I wanted to get to know Him better. I said the prayer asking Him to come into my life and I remember looking out of the window and seeing the most beautiful rainbow appear. That was 15 years ago and although at times I have not always felt so on fire in my faith, I know God is faithful, He loves me and is always there.

Favourite Bible verse and why?

I think we all need hope right now and one of the Bible verses I have been reading a lot lately is from Hebrews 6:18-19 'So God has given both his promise and his oath. These two things are unchangeable because it is impossible for God to lie. Therefore, we who have fled to him in refuge can have great confidence as we hold to the hope that lies before us. This hope is a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls. It leads us through the curtain into God's inner sanctuary.'

YOUR LOCAL EVANGELISTS

NORTH OF ENGLAND

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

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 (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
Mike & Su Stange
David & Katie Symons
Steve Ellacott (AE)
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
Paul & Laura Davies
Phil & Sheila Davies
Janet Hawking (AE)
Mike & Jan Thomas (AE)
Steve & Gwyn Treseder (AE)
Grace Anderson (Senior)
Liz David & David
Bhakiaraj (ETP)

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THANK YOU



STAY CONNECTED TO YOUR LOCAL SCHOOLS AND SHARE THE STORY OF JESUS

- Features all of the usual songs, quizzes and films from the Life exhibition
- Navigate virtually around the pods through a tablet or laptop
- Bring RE lessons alive in exciting interactive format
- Keep in touch during lockdown and beyond with local schools

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