

WINTER 2021

IGNITE

SPARKING PASSION FOR THE GOSPEL
ACROSS THE UK



SPREADING GOD'S WORD AFTER CHRISTIAN STABBED

COUNTIES EVANGELIST WITNESSES
KNIFE ATTACK BUT VOWS TO CONTINUE
HIS MISSION



ALSO NEW NEIGHBOURHOOD CHAPLAINS SHARE THEIR STORY
150 SCHOOL ASSEMBLIES TO TAKE PLACE ACROSS NORTH DORSET

WELCOME TO IGNITE



Twenty years ago, I welcomed the GSUS Live trailer to Hereford as part of its inaugural tour. This programme helped secondary school students to engage with the person of Jesus through the lens of fellow teenagers struggling with fear, rejection and forgiveness.

This remarkable tool was cutting edge, and with regular updates it remained relevant for all its life.

Before they were 'laid to rest' the two units had welcomed over 585,000 young people across the four nations of the UK.

GSUS Live was a partnership and would not have been possible but for the foresight and generosity of a faithful Christian Trust, the prayers of God's people, and the vision and hard work of Counties staff, evangelists and numerous Christian agencies across the UK.

The GSUS Live story is one of collaboration. It is Christian unity around Christ and the Gospel where God commands the blessing (Psalm 133). Thank you for being part of the great collaboration, where together we join with others to make Jesus known. Thank you for receiving and reading Ignite. May God use this magazine to stir your heart as you stand with us and others to preach the Gospel, make disciples and plant churches.

Martin

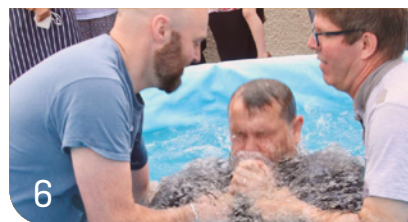
Counties exists to make Jesus known across the UK through our evangelists, exhibitions and resources, in biblically faithful and culturally relevant ways.

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COUNTIES M4 CONFERENCE



Over a September weekend, church planting teams from Kent to Kendall, and Cornwall to Cardiff, came together for the M4 Conference.

Having been restricted to Zoom gatherings for the last 18 months, organiser Tim Cracknell said:

"It was such a joy to meet together in Birmingham, with twelve teams of church planters; and to actually meet in person at last."

Kenno and Jana Leier joined the conference from the M4 Europe team in Finland, along with Counties CEO, Martin Erwin, and Tim, as part of the teaching team for the weekend.

"It was the first time any of the fifteen European countries have attempted



to hold an M4 gathering with three tracks going at the same time," Tim adds.

"Well done to James Hyde, Andy Hodson and the UK team, supported by Counties Trustee, Aderyn Taylor-Roberts, and former Counties TEAM participant, Lizzie Bell, for successfully pulling off this European first which was no mean feat."

Feedback comments included:

"Please may I say a very big thank you to all for another excellent M4 weekend."

"It served as a very timely and practical aid to our re-focusing our priorities and strategy together as a team."

"The teaching was excellent. We were all greatly helped and encouraged."

DR HAROLD ROWDON SERVICE OF THANKSGIVING

Dr Harold Rowdon passed away on 3 October, a week after his 95th birthday. Harold was a Counties Trustee from May 1977 – February 1997, as well as a key teacher at London Bible College (now LST).

He wrote many books and had a lifelong commitment to local churches, particularly those associated with the Brethren movement.

Praise God for his life and support of Counties and the Lord's work and rejoice that he is now at home with Christ.

COUNTIES TRAINEE EVANGELIST SPREADS THE GOOD NEWS OF JESUS



Gabriel Bennett, who lives in Ramsey in Cambridgeshire, near Huntingdon, has only just begun Counties evangelist training, but he sent Ignite an encouraging testimony.

One walked by with: RAISE HELL emblazoned on his T-shirt. I called out to him gently but earnestly: 'If you knew how bad Hell is, you would not say that. It's a serious matter'.

"He walked on but an hour later came back and asked for a New Testament. As I gave it to him, he announced: 'I'm going to read this!' Please pray that he will."

Gabriel added that 249 New Testaments were accepted in just two and a half hours.

"I was out in Cambridge in October, giving the new students New Testaments."

LIVING THE PASSION CONFERENCE – A GREAT SUCCESS



The latest Living the Passion conference took place on 22-24 October and Counties was delighted to be able to share in arranging a fully booked conference. The weekend was packed with solid Bible teaching, inspiring worship times, varied programme of inspirational seminars, activities for children, as well as encouraging times of warm fellowship together.

We hope to be able to share recordings from the main sessions soon, via the website livingthepassion.org

Living the Passion conferences are arranged by Counties, GLO, Partnership, Church Growth Trust and Echoes to fan the flames of passion for sharing the gospel in the UK.



“I HAVE ALWAYS FELT LIKE I HAD THE ‘READY BREK’ GLOW ON THE OUTSIDE; BUT NOW I HAVE IT ON THE INSIDE.”

John Wedley from Cinderford, Gloucestershire, tells how coming to faith has changed his life.

John, who is married to Emmy, and has two sons, is the first to admit that he has had a ‘steady and contented life’; but becoming a Christian has been nothing short of miraculous.

“I was baptised in August this year. I didn’t really feel anything before then but since then, I have received the Holy Spirit.”

“The difference is that I am a happy person, generally, and I have always felt like I had the ‘Ready Brek’ glow on the outside; but now I have it on the inside.”

A few days after his baptism John says he was driving home from work and his car felt like it didn’t have wheels and it was floating home.

“Most of journeys in the car now feel like that. And I can’t put it down to anything else. It just feels like I am floating. It’s the Holy Spirit – I can’t explain it any other way.”

John has been trying to practice the Fruit of the Spirit in his own life: for the last nine months he’s been working on: kindness, generosity and patience.

“Every time I go shopping, I always put food into the box that the supermarkets give to foodbanks – something I never used to do. I just wouldn’t give before.”

“I still can’t believe where I am. There was no magic moment but now I hear God talking to me.”

John’s journey to faith was a slow and steady one.

“I have a colleague, Tom, who is a Christian, and about three years ago we began to talk about his faith.”

“In February 2019, we went on a business trip. We spent a lot of time together. Over the course of the week, we talked a lot about Christianity.”

Tom pointed John to the online Alpha videos - which he watched. He then came across the App: ‘Bible in One Year’ and, in April 2020, he started it.

“I enjoyed it so much that I would go back to 1 January to catch up to 13 April. So, by the end of August, I had caught up with the year. Listening to it has become a habit ever since.”

John says he never put pressure on himself to ‘understand’ the harder passages. He simply said to himself:

“I will either understand it or I won’t.”

John’s interest was piqued by all he had watched and read and as he kept talking to Tom. His colleague suggested he reach out to his local church, Forest Community Church.

“I met up with Tim Cracknell a couple of times and he gave me Rick Warren’s book: ‘A Purpose Driven Life’.

“On 13 October, last year, John emailed Tim and said: I’m on day seven of the ‘Purpose Driven Life’ book and as result I wanted to share a couple of things.”

“In today’s passage Rick urges me to tell someone that I believe in Jesus and have received Jesus and I’m doing this with you, thank you.”

John now says that he still finds the Bible fascinating but he’s in “no hurry” to understand it all because he sees it as a wonderful life-long journey.

His new-found faith surprised not only John, who said: “I was more surprised than anyone else”; but also, his family.

John says he always lived by Christian principles, which were taught to him as a child; but events like going to church on Christmas Eve – which his family did – were not something he wanted to do.

“I was in a funny place where I didn’t believe, but I didn’t not believe. But going to church on Christmas Eve just didn’t feel right – even though my whole family went.”

John’s sons found it quite funny as they call him: ‘Old John’ and ‘New John’.

He adds that when he doesn’t always behave as he ‘should’, they say:

“Dad, you should be ‘New John’ not ‘Old John’ and we have a laugh together.”

But John points out that like all Christians, if we confess our sins, we are forgiven: “We are all a work in progress. It’s a journey”.



After a Christian polemicist is stabbed at Speakers' Corner in London, Counties evangelist, Gordon Curley, explains why he is carrying on his ministry there.

Earlier this year, a former Muslim and Christian convert, Hatun Tash, 39, who preaches weekly at Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park, Central London, was stabbed in the face by a Muslim.

The event received little coverage in the mainstream press but Counties evangelist, Gordon Curley saw it happen.

"Hatun is there every week and is a polemicist, whereas I am an apologist. I defend Christianity and give a hundred reasons why Jesus is our saviour, not Mohammed.

"When it happened, I thought she had been punched because I have seen that happen before, so I shouted: 'Stop, don't do it' and ran towards Hatun to pull the person back."

It was then Gordon realised the attacker had a knife and had stabbed Hatun in the head and arm.



The man then ran away before anyone could stop him. He still hasn't been apprehended by the police.

Though Hatun is still preaching there every week.

According to Gordon, Speaker's Corner is a "mish-mash of the good, the bad, the weird, and the wonderful".

Traditionally, it was political activists who populated the area. And although, today, anti-vaxxers, such as Jeremy Corbyn's brother regularly turn up; Gordon says it has largely been replaced by religious advocates – mainly Muslims and Christians.

Anyone can turn up unannounced at Speakers' Corner which is historically famous for allowing 'freedom of speech'.

People are allowed to talk about almost any subject if the police consider their speeches lawful.

Gordon first visited Speakers' Corner (SC) about eight years ago to hear the American Christian evangelist, Jay Smith, preach.

"He wasn't there that week, but I was very quickly targeted by Muslim evangelists. They have a group there called the Dawah team whose sole purpose is to convert people to Islam; and within ten minutes I had about eight to ten Muslims surrounding me to debate with me.

"So being a white, English, westerner, I was targeted as they tend to think we have a Christian background but won't know our Bibles."

Gordon says he: "Loved the experience"

Over the years, every time he visited London, Gordon visited SC. And during Covid, he realised that whilst churches were closed, SC was still open.

So, most Sunday afternoons, during the pandemic, Gordon would drive from his home in Hampshire to go there to talk to people for five hours.

Rather than stand up and preach, though, Gordon talks to people on a one-to-one basis.

"I tend to talk to people individually in the crowd. I let others stand and do the preaching whilst I engage in conversations.

"On an average Sunday afternoon, I would normally have four or five conversations, that are each about 45 minutes long. That can be with an Atheist, a Muslim, a Hindu. You just never know who you are going to speak to."

Gordon feels he's fulfilling God's calling: "Jesus said: 'Go into all the world and preach the Gospel', which is physically impossible; but at Hyde Park, the whole world comes to you because you get tourists coming from all over the world to watch it happen!

"Also, people want to talk. They come to SC to do that. When I go to my own town centre lethargy rules. People just



walk past and don't want to engage. For the one person who may want to talk, there will be one hundred who don't.

"At SC someone will engage in a conversation about Christianity within two minutes of me being there."

Gordon sees what he does as "very much first base". So, he doesn't necessarily see people give their lives to the Lord immediately, but they start to talk and think.

"It is hard for Muslims," he says, "because if someone leaves Islam, they could lose their families or face the threat of physical violence.

"You are there to challenge perceptions and help Muslims see that the Koran isn't perfectly preserved, and Mohammed had lots of faults and failings. But also, that the Bible can be trusted because many have been taught that it is corrupted.

"You are breaking down the wrong perceptions about Jesus and telling them that what they believe isn't actually clear cut and simple.

"I try to open up their minds and leaving them with literature."

Gordon adds that he goes with his "L plates on because I don't claim to have all the answers". He says that in the early days he did end up having the same arguments with the same group of people, then he realised that he was wasting his time; so, he specifically prayed and asked God to lead him into genuine conversations rather than arguments.

"The problem with arguments is that you can go away thinking; 'Oh, I won that one' but actually its water off a duck's back because nothing gets through.

"I am really looking for those people who are seeking. So, there was a guy

from Manchester, the other week, and I spoke to him for fifty minutes and he said: 'I've seen what happens in SC on YouTube and I wanted to experience it for myself because I am searching after God'. And those are the conversations I want to have."

Gordon admits that he sometimes thinks: "I made a right pig's ear out of that, my mind went blank, and I couldn't formulate an argument." But on most occasions, there will be one person he speaks to about whom he thinks, 'it was worth it just for that one person'.

"But when I think it went badly, I realise that it's my own pride. Because if God doesn't open someone's eyes spiritually, they will always be blind."

There are, for example, three or four Muslims to whom Gordon speaks to on a regular basis, and he is building up a friendship because he believes that questions will come up or their circumstances will change, and he can pick up on that and go somewhere private to talk with them, "but I can't do that if I am not friends with them" he adds.

Gordon knows that he may never see the effects his conversations have on the many people he talks with. But he believes that's in God's hands. Gordon is the farmer scattering the seeds.

You can get regular updates of Gordon's work at Speaker's Corner on his website: www.gcurley.info or on Facebook: www.facebook.com/Countieshants





MORE THAN 150 SCHOOL ASSEMBLIES TO TAKE PLACE IN NORTH DORSET

Counties Evangelist, Ian Carr, talks about the 150 plus school assemblies he's addressing in North Dorset.

Ian lives just outside Sturminster Newton with his wife Sally. They have two adult children.

School Assemblies were not possible during most of the pandemic. So how are things changing for you now?

Well, it's quite a shift from how things were in lockdown. So far, I've been able to plan and book over 150 assemblies for the coming year, in 16 schools. They're mainly in primary schools, with some middle schools plus the local high school, where I'm School Chaplain. I could probably lead double the number I am currently running, but I feel it's important to build relationships with the staff, the headteacher and, of course, the children.

When you go in once or twice a month you become a recognised face. Children are much more likely to listen, they look forward to you going, they remember what you did last time.

How do you run the assemblies?

I try to keep them relatively informal. We usually begin with a prayer, then I introduce a current-world experience or something that relates to me, and which connects directly to the issues raised in the chosen Bible story or passage. I usually use simple PowerPoint, each slide having a picture and possibly a caption. We conclude with a prayer connected to the points raised.

Going back into schools this term, I've been looking at the parable of 'The Lost Sheep'. I use a cartoon version with a modern, humorous twist in some of the pictures.

I relate it to a picture that was painted by my great-grandfather in 1909, which was sold and lost to the family. I finally found it in August last year after looking for years, and then had to travel 250 miles and pay quite a lot of money to 'redeem' it from the guy who owned it! The two stories fit really well together.

EVANGELISM IN THE COMMUNITY

As well as a 'life' lesson, there is always a direct gospel application at the end of the retelling of any Bible story in an assembly. You are not allowed to evangelise directly in schools, but you can say what Christians believe, what the Bible teaches and what you believe.

I just simply explain about Jesus being the Good Shepherd who came to rescue and save us, and who is always looking out for us, and that we are the sheep who have wandered astray from God. I add that the response required from us is to say 'thank you' to and welcome the Rescuer.

Do children ask you questions afterwards?

I often get surprised by what I am asked. Sometimes eight and nine-year-olds will ask you deep theological questions which might be about the deity of Christ, for example. One boy recently asked me: "Jesus died – so was He God?" And I often get asked: "Is Jesus coming back?" or "Did Jesus really die on the cross?"

Has it been hard to get things up and running again since Covid?

I have spent time recently visiting headteachers. It's been heartening because they really want me to come back; partly because it takes the pressure off them, but also because the children remember me and enjoy the assemblies.

I arrived at one school during break-time, and some of the children said: "Hey, Mr Carr, have you come to do Assembly?" And they were so excited when I said I would be putting some dates in the diary.

I was speaking to some Year 7 children at the local secondary school recently and they said: "Mr Carr, we remember your assemblies from primary school. We loved them. They were the best!"

I think this is because I don't use 'church' language. The assemblies are engaging and accessible - not formal or 'religious' in the worst sense of the word. They are also age appropriate but not patronising. I don't talk to the children like they're two-year-olds!

In our post-Christian world, have you come across any antagonism from parents?

I have been blessed in that respect. There is only one time I can think of when some parents complained that I had (supposedly) said that Father Christmas didn't exist, after an assembly titled 'Jesus is the Reason for the Season'.

I am always very mindful of my choice of words in any situation. What I actually said was: "Santa is fun, but Jesus is better". I unpacked why that is true in lots of ways, being careful to talk about the 'Santa of the stories and traditions we enjoy', but of the 'Jesus who lives today'.

The Head and the Governors were fully supportive, saying that in a Christian school it should be accepted that Jesus is first and foremost real, beyond any legendary additions involving Father Christmas!

What are your plans for the future?

I want to get things back on track and support staff in schools again. Renewed face-to-face conversations often lead to opportunities to pray with headteachers and others and provide opportunities for pastoral work in the context of an itinerant setting.

My main passion is Bible teaching and preaching. I will be taking services for a new 'embryonic' local church from Christmas onwards.

IGNITE SAYS FAREWELL TO GSUS LIVE TRAILERS

As the GSUS Live trailers come to an end, Ignite looks back at twenty years of GSUS Live, which 585,495 students have visited so far. And the exciting new format which will be used.

GSUS Live, which began in 2000 was initially only intended to be a five-year project, but it has lasted, so far, for over twenty years.

In that time secondary school students have explored the themes of fear, forgiveness and rejection as they learned about Jesus' teachings.

The two units travelled from Penzance to Hull and everywhere in between including Wales and Northern Ireland.

Both trailer units have now, unfortunately, had to be decommissioned, after the manufacturer and maintenance company said the trailers were beyond repair.

Dave Thomas, Counties Schools' Resource Coordinator, has been

working with GSUS live for the last three years:

"I have met so many people, in so many different places over the years and the one thing they have in common is wanting to share about Jesus and then follow it up when they are invited back to assemblies or classrooms."

The GSUS Live trailers coming to an end doesn't mean, though, that secondary school pupils won't be given the chance to hear the good news about Jesus.

A pilot scheme has now been launched, using electronic tablets, which will be taken into schools and allow pupils to access content about Jesus at their desks.

"I am excited about what is to come and to be able to continue to equip local churches with resources as we still get enquiries from teachers," Dave adds.

The stories of the young students whose lives have been impacted by GSUS Live stretch across the whole country.

In West Bromwich, a student placed their head in their hands to hide tears and was the last to leave the unit because she had been so impacted.

In Enniskillen and Belfast, pupils loved Hillsong's 'This is Living' song. One pupil even managed to dance and dab the entire way through their music video.

Many of the young people were struck by how the Bible is still relevant today and is applicable to the problems and issues life throws at them.

John Prockter is the Director of the Catalyst Youth Trust. He has been involved with GSUS live for over ten years in the Shropshire area.

He shared some of the feedback he received after the last GSUS Live visit in August 2019:

"The kids loved the material and even the autistic and attention deficit children were good as gold. There was

such a buzz about the school amongst both staff and pupils. A sixth form group gate-crashed a lesson because interest had reached fever pitch!"

Jeremy Bailey, a minister in Port Talbot, who has been a presenter on GSUS Live for the last twelve years, told Ignite:

"We visited Sandfields Comprehensive in Port Talbot in 2015. We felt that we had quite a disappointing week because Neil Tallamy, who is the Pastor of Baglan Community Church, and I, could not seem to get the youngsters engaged."

"We were quite disheartened as we had not experienced this before. Nevertheless, we committed the fruit to the Lord."

"Then Chloe, a Christian, who attended Baglan Church, had received a message from a friend, Aaron. He was asking her to explain what she believed, as the GSUS Live session had challenged him. He was reading his Bible."

"After several exchanges, he said to her, 'I believe that Jesus is God's Son and



that He died on the cross for my sins. Does that make me a Christian?’

“Aaron started attending our church and our Friday night youth group.

“I learnt an important lesson that day: don’t judge by appearances”, says Jeremy.

“The Lord may well be at work and using Christian pupils to evangelise to their classmates.”

Andrew Mungford was the GSUS Live co-ordinator and presenter in mid-Essex from February to March 2019.

“Pulling up the trailer in schools had a real ‘wow factor’ that consistently generated a positive and excited response from students. It was just the same anticipation as classes mounted the steps to go in.

“I was amazed by the response from one school in Chelmsford. After seeing the first session, the Head of RE booked in GCSE and A-level classes.

“Off the back of this visit the same teacher asked if I would come in to speak to classes about: ‘What is Christian ministry and why and how did I get involved?’ It was an amazing opportunity to build links with the school from that one week.

“It was a school I had previously taught at, making the link extra special for me.”

Glyn Davies, Counties’ GSUS Live coordinator, from 2015-2017, shared some of questions and quotes young people have asked over the years:

“In a tricky situation you should stay calm, and you ask God for help, and you should have faith.”

“Is there anything that Jesus doesn’t forgive?”

“If He is real – how can such bad things happen in the world?”

“Today I found it helpful learning about how when you feel rejected and upset, Jesus and others have gone through the same thing.”

“Pulling up the trailer in schools had a real ‘wow factor’ that consistently generated a positive and excited response from students.”

Steve Parry was Counties’ Project Co-ordinator for GSUS Live for nearly ten years. He remembers one particular story:

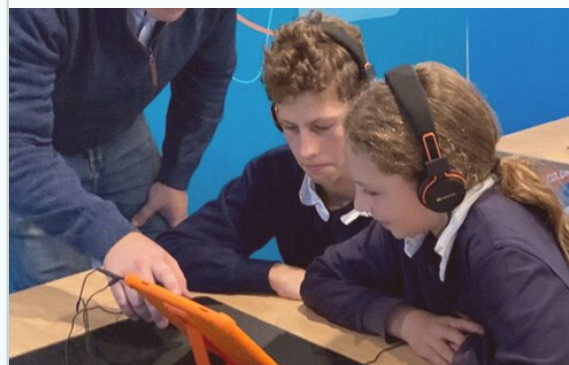
“Zoe (not her real name) was a student with personal difficulties; and Clare (not her real name) was a volunteer who worked on GSUS Live.

“I was attending a weekend conference in Cardiff, when four people shared a story. Three years earlier, GSUS Live held a special lesson for young people who had caused various problems for one school.

“These students were on the verge of being expelled. As a trained GSUS Live presenter, Clare noticed that one of the girls, Zoe, had taken no interest in



One of the decommissioned trailer units.



New tablets format being tested



the presentation and even less interest in following the lesson.

“Clare sat next to Zoe to encourage her, but Zoe was just not interested at all.

“The Head of the school then met with the presenters to say how impressed the faculty was. The presenters were invited back to work with the students.

“Over the next few months Clare had the opportunity to meet with Zoe. Their friendship within school grew. However, Zoe continued to display a negative attitude to life in general and still wasn’t in a good place. But because this friendship had developed, Clare was able to reach out and ask some difficult questions.

“Zoe was the victim of years of sexual abuse from within the family.

“Following the intervention of the Social Services, Zoe ended up living with Clare and her family. Over the next few years, she became a different person - living with people who cared for and loved her unreservedly.

The people telling me this story were so excited as they finally told me: ‘Zoe was baptised three weeks ago’ ”.

It’s been an amazing journey – thank you to everyone who has been a part of it and please pray the next phase will continue to bring Jesus alive to a new generation of young students.



NEW NEIGHBOURHOOD CHAPLAINS TEAMS

It is great news to have new Neighbourhood Chaplains on board who heard about the scheme on the M4 church planting training programme.

Wola Akwenuke and her husband Ernest have planted New Life Church, Emerson Park, in Hornchurch. But they have recently also started a Neighbourhood Chaplains team.

A local church building has been here for many years and closed in 2011.

A few of us were praying for several years about setting up a church, as we were just a group of people without a 'home'. In 2014, God made the building available to us even though a lot of others applied to buy it.

We then joined Counties Planting Network and did the M4 church planting programme. Counties helped us get on our feet and begin to minister in the area.

During the M4 programme there was a presentation by Neighbourhood Chaplains. I thought to myself: "This is exactly what we need" because it is a befriending service,

and it helps Christians connect with people in the neighbourhood who need Jesus.

So, we've been prayer-walking and taking out Neighbourhood Chaplains greeting cards. We now want to personalise them with people's names from the voting register.

The first set we took out was at Easter this year and by the time we took out the next batch, we had a great response, as people said to us: "Oh yeah, I remember that card." That was a real blessing and encouragement for us.

There's been a lot of prayer around it. We meet every week to pray.

There's a couple who live next door to the church. We met Chris who lives there, and he miraculously got saved.

One of our team, Joel, had been at the church and he saw Chris in his car. He felt prompted to speak to him because he didn't look right.

So, he stuck his head through the car window and said: "Hi, are you Okay?"

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Chris said he'd had a really bad day and so Joel asked him if he could bless him. Chris said "yes", and Joel went into their home and blessed Chris and his wife, and the rest is history - as they gave their lives to Jesus.

As for the future, we discovered that a lot of children are eligible for free school meals, so we are looking at how we can connect with local schools and help. We want to make ourselves available and visible to our community.

Neighbourhood Chaplains works because it's a vehicle that gives you authenticity - we wear our uniforms. It also helps with the legal framework, so we know what the law requires. We have materials to help us evangelise and people to bounce off when we need help. It's lovely to be part of Counties. It's like having a new family.

We are doing: "God Things not just Good Things".

Lacy Armstrong and her husband Jordan have also begun planting the Church in the Community, in Wollaston, in the West Midlands. They too have joined the Neighbourhood Chaplains team.

I found out about Neighbourhood Chaplains on the M4 programme. The idea of reaching out into the community really appealed to me and my husband Jordan. So, we embarked on the training programme in January this year and are now fully qualified Neighbourhood Chaplains.

Neighbourhood Chaplains has really helped us to know what kinds of things to say initially to people. We also appreciated the guidance we were given about various policies the things that need to be done that we may not have thought about.

We started slowly - there are about six of us. Initially, we did leaflet drops in our local area and then we started knocking on doors and asking if we could help people.

We found a lot of people are lonely and just want someone to talk with.

Knocking on a stranger's door can be daunting at times but many of my team are really outgoing but I find that initial step can be intimidating. And sometimes I fret about it beforehand, but I get over it because I know that Jesus is present in that conversation.



Church in the Community also offers free tea and coffee with tables and chairs for people to sit and chat; and some of their Neighbourhood Chaplains will be there.

Our record was one lady who talked for six hours! That's not the norm but most people just have something on their mind and will sit there for about 45 minutes.

Sometimes we hardly get a word in, but it's being available to listen to people that also matters.

If you would like to train with Counties contact: beverley.bedford@countiesuk.org



COUNTIES EVANGELIST BOB TELFORD REMINDS US TO “ACCENTUATE THE POSITIVE”

Not everyone shares my enthusiasm for the music of the 40's and 50's, I get that. After all, like the Bible (almost!) says, "Not all men have taste!"

One of the great 'Crooners' of that era, perhaps the greatest of them all, was Bing Crosby.

In 1944 he and the Andrews Sisters recorded the Johnny Mercer song, "You've got to accentuate the positive"

With many months of fighting and hardship still ahead for the USA and its allies, Mercer's upbeat lyrics, urging people to focus on positives rather than negatives were timely.

**'You've got to accentuate the positive
Eliminate the negative
Latch onto the affirmative'**

The writers of the New Testament understood the need to help believers to find grounds for encouragement and optimism, to 'latch onto the affirmative' in even the most difficult of circumstances.

That's why 'Encouraging' and 'Encouragement' are mentioned over 60 times in the New Testament – seven times in Acts alone.

Just like the believers of the 1st century, we today need to be encouraged – to hear 'words of encouragement' from time to time.

Words can be very powerful.

Friedrich Nietzsche knew this, he wrote:

"All I need is a sheet of paper and something with which to write on it and I can turn the world upside down"

Someone has said that: *"Words are containers for power. We who speak and write them decide what kind of power our words contain"*

Winston Churchill knew the power contained in words and how that power could be released to effect change. US President Kennedy said of Churchill: *"He weaponised the English language and sent it into battle"*

Without ignoring or worse still, denying the presence of difficulty, we need to get better at speaking encouraging words to one another. Words that will heal rather than wound, build up rather than break down.

Encouragement in Acts

The first mention of encouragement in Acts of the Apostles comes in chapter 9:31.

"Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened and encouraged by the Holy Spirit; it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord"

The conversion of Saul and his immediate and outspoken advocacy for the cause of Christ astonished and angered Christianity's enemies. The risk to Saul's life, and the hostility unleashed by his conversion, made it necessary for Saul to be sent away. With Saul gone the temperature of resentment and unrest cooled and the "church enjoyed a time of peace".

The "peace" was fragile and would prove to be short lived, but at that time the Holy Spirit gave encouragement to the believers.

His encouragement was, and can still be, a 'spiritual' thing i.e. something which He brings to us inwardly, and which doesn't depend on any external factors.

As an old hymn puts it: *"He comes sweet influence to impart – His that gentle voice we hear, soft as the breath of even, that checks each fault, that calms each fear, and speaks of heaven"*

Sometimes, however, the Holy Spirit's encouragement comes to us as He helps us to see the positives in even an apparently negative circumstance.

Three amazing things that God was doing

There were three things that the believers in Judea, Galilee and Samaria could have reflected upon and drawn encouragement from.

1. Saul, the most violent, vociferous and vigorous opponent of The Church had been converted!

This must surely have been a huge encouragement to the believers. Their prayers (for Saul) had been answered. From being adamant in his opposition, he had been turned into an ardent proponent for the faith. Humbled by the resurrected Jesus, instead of riding proudly into Damascus clutching the credentials which validated his cruel mission, he had been led into the city clutching the hand of a sighted guide.

The encouragement for the Church was that if Saul could be saved, anybody could be. If God could convert the Church's most implacable enemy, He could convert anyone.

This must have encouraged Christians to pray for the 'hard cases', the stubbornly unrepentant and unbelieving, the indifferent and the seemingly unreachable.

Writing years later to Timothy Paul himself would cite his own conversion as evidence of both the patience of God and the power of the Gospel.

Are we praying for people in our lives that have so far remained unshakeable in their scepticism and unrelenting in

their determination to stay untouched and unchanged by the Gospel?

Let's be encouraged by the conversion of Saul.

2. They could have been encouraged by the "window of opportunity" – the "time of peace" that God had given them.

Seeing it, I suspect, not as a time to 'take their foot off the pedal' in the face of danger "*rebukes our slothful ease*".

3. The third encouragement in the text was in the fact that the Church was getting bigger: "The church grew in numbers". It was also getting better. The believers were, "Living in the fear of the Lord".

The growth was not lopsided. Growing in numbers and growing in Godliness are not, or at any rate, ought not to be mutually exclusive.

We have probably all heard it said that we ought not to be too concerned about growing in numbers. After all, it is wryly remarked: "*The Lord told us to feed his sheep, not count them*".

It sounds clever the first time we hear it, but is it really? It would be a poor shepherd who didn't count his sheep. Indeed, if sheep are to be properly fed it is important for the shepherd to know the size of his flock.

It is God's general will that churches should grow, and that they should grow by conversion. It is also His will that those who are converted should

be, "*Living in the fear of the Lord*" or as Eugene Peterson in his Message version puts it, "*Permeated with a deep sense of reverence for God*".

Setting up numerical growth and spiritual growth as being somehow opposed to each other is unhelpful and unscriptural. Let's all do all we can to see local churches getting bigger and getting better.

The man with the biggest heart in The Church

Barnabas 'the encourager' appears in the 2nd reference to encouragement in Acts. In chapter 11:23 we read:

"When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts".

A new and very significant congregation had begun in Antioch. It was the first predominantly non-Jewish Christian congregation. The news of the founding and growth of the Antioch church was a cause for celebration for some, but of concern and suspicion for others. Barnabas was despatched to "*check it out*".

What an inspired choice of investigator. Barnabas has been called: "*The man with the biggest heart in the Church*".

Just the man to visit the fledgling fellowship. A man instinctively inclined to bring comfort rather than censure.

On arriving in Antioch, he saw what F F Bruce called, "*The grace of God in action*".

His encouraging message to the new believers was to, "*Remain true to the Lord with all your hearts*" i.e. don't turn back, don't turn away, don't embrace or follow any other God. You have made a good beginning, don't quit - now or ever! Don't be half-hearted about following Christ.

Our decision to follow Christ is the decision of our lives. In its importance it dwarfs any and every other decision we have ever or will ever make. But it is not only the biggest decision of our lives it is also a decision for the whole of our lives!

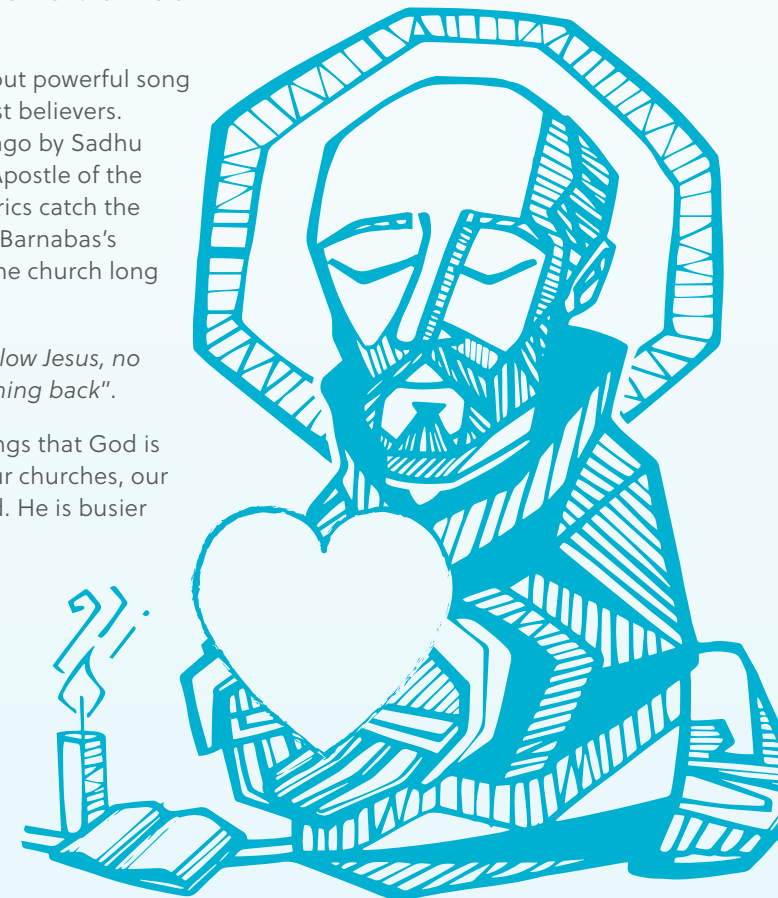
Years ago, a simple but powerful song was popular amongst believers. Written many years ago by Sadhu Sundar Singh, (the Apostle of the bleeding feet) the lyrics catch the tone and content of Barnabas's encouragement to the church long ago:

"I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back, no turning back".

Let's look for the things that God is doing in our lives, our churches, our nation and our world. He is busier than we may think.

He has not been slowed down by Covid or by its collateral damage. His plans and purposes have not been sabotaged or short circuited by the pandemic. The virus has not chained up God's Word or blocked the prayers of God's people.

There is still plenty for us to be encouraged about and let's make a point of being quicker to 'Latch on to the affirmative'.





NEW COUNTIES EVANGELIST SHARES HOW GOD IS MOVING IN KENT

Mark is married to Amanda, and they have five children. They live in Maidstone.

Despite only becoming a Counties evangelist in Kent in March, this year, Mark Bingham is raring to go and full of future plans.

"I see my future ministry as getting alongside churches to preach and help equip churches to reach out into their community. Especially now, as many churches are struggling to know where to turn to next.

"It's about building a connection with that church. There are a lot of little churches with older people who don't know how to reach the younger generation and a lot of them, unfortunately, give up.

"I also want to help churches think about evangelism and to train, encourage and support them."

Mark's passion for evangelism is a complete turnaround from how he saw the church in his youth.

He became a Christian, aged 30, after a long journey of discovery.

"I lived in Northern Ireland at the time, and I had no interest in becoming

a Christian. My experience of Christians was that they were quite judgemental and hard. They said one thing, but their lives reflected something completely different.

"I heard the gospel preached many times in churches as I was growing up but the experience of some of those groups pushed me away.

"I also grew up in 'the Troubles' and got involved in some of that, and also drinking. I just lived for the weekend, and it was all about me."

Mark became curious when the minister who married him and his wife didn't try and force him to come to church – which he had expected.

For the next few years, he drifted in and out of church every few months. His attendance then became more frequent until he found himself going every week and found: "A desire to give my life to Jesus".

"I actually just went home and prayed in my room and gave my life to Jesus. It took me a while to tell anyone because I didn't know if I was saved and what it all meant. So, I went through a six-month journey of trying to work it all out.

"When I left school all those years before, I couldn't read. But Jesus gave me the desire; but when my church minister asked me if I wanted to read the Bible, I was petrified.

"So, he used to give me a passage on a Monday, and I used to read over it lots of times every day until it got to the following Sunday."

Mark got more and more involved in Christian life and uncovered the desire to do outreach.

After three years of being a Christian, Mark and his family moved to England and got involved with an organisation called the 'Church Army'.

Mark was asked to do a foundation degree in evangelism, and he had to learn how to write and put assignments together.

He says: "God just gave me what I needed at each time".

Mark says he still struggles with grammar and writing long articles or sermons, so he uses bullet points and Bible verses which he believes allows God to work:

"I try and bring it from the heart. God might lead me in a different direction as I get up to speak."

After spending time at a small Baptist church in Maulden, in Bedfordshire, where he was already training with Counties, Mark and the family moved to Maidstone, Kent in March this year.

He now works for Maidstone Family Church part-time and is active as a Counties evangelist across Kent during the rest of his week.

During the pandemic, like many Counties evangelists, Mark found it hard to get out and meet people, but he believed "God will provide" and so began prayer-walking with a few other people from his church.

"When we were out, we met this young man, with learning difficulties, who asked us to go into an off-licence and buy him a bottle of cider. I am not sure why he asked us, but we said 'No'. However, we offered to buy him a can of cola.

"After that, we kept on bumping into him and prayed with him that God would release him from his addiction to drink. A week later we bumped into him, and he said: 'I've been off the drink for the last seven days'.

"Then a week later he said he'd not been drinking for 14 days. He also opened up about his family struggles and shared his story with confidence. We've now shared the gospel with him and, although, he hasn't given his life to the Lord yet, he seems different.

"Also, last week, a man who was having real marital difficulties phoned the church wanting help. After we talked about Jesus with him, he gave his life to Christ.

"These are ways in which we are seeing God is starting to open doors here in Kent and it's amazing."

Please continue to pray for the work here, that God will open many doors here in Kent and many will come to know Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.

JUST A MINUTE

WITH
KEVIN & ANITA BALDWIN



Kevin and Anita were Counties Evangelists. Now Kevin is Life exhibition coordinator and lives in King's Lynn, Norfolk.

When did you become Christians?

Kevin: I became a Christian when I was 11-years-old, at a Dick Saunders crusade. I didn't realise, at the time, that he was a Counties evangelist.

I grew up in a Christian home, so, I automatically assumed I was a Christian, so when I was asked: 'Are you sure you are saved?' I realised I couldn't rely on other people's declarations of faith but had to make one myself.

Anita: I became a Christian in 1970, when I was seven years old at a tent meeting with Geoff Carr – who I also didn't realise was a Counties evangelist.

Kevin what do you do at Counties?

In 1999, we both became Counties evangelists, but I became a staff member in 2016. As the Life exhibition coordinator, I liaise with churches across the country who want the Life exhibition taken into their local primary schools.

For those who don't know, what is Life exhibition?

It is an interactive, multi-media experience about the life of Jesus using interactive tablets, graphic panels, films and songs to help primary school children learn all about Jesus' birth, teaching, miracles, death and resurrection.

What's the best part of your job?

Being out on the road and meeting people. Then seeing up to 200 children turn-up.

I get to talk to the teachers about who Jesus is and how fantastic He is. It's a real privilege, particularly seeing Jesus 'coming alive' to younger children and witnessing them learn about Him.

What does being part of the Counties family mean to you?

There are lots of people to whom I can pick up the phone and chat. There may be people you don't see from one year to the next and, for example, you might go to the Counties conference but it's as if you have known them all your life. That's a real blessing.

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

Kevin: It really depends on where I am in the year or my state of mind, but I always seem to come back to Galatians 2:20:

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

It is one of those verses that I learned through a song. It had a great catchy tune to it when I learned it and it helped me remember because I learn through engaging in things rather than reading them.

Anita: My favourite verse is Psalm 139:1-2:

*You have searched me, Lord,
and you know me.
You know when I sit and when I rise; you
perceive my thoughts from afar.*

YOUR LOCAL EVANGELISTS

NORTH OF ENGLAND

Tim & Charissa Cooke
Julian & Ella Gutteridge
Martin & Angie Korchinsky
Lee & Lesley Marsland
Matt & Nicola Rich
Aaron & Rachel Shah (AE)
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)
Ray & Carol Dadswell (Seniors)
Wendy Iliffe (Senior)
Victor Jack (Senior)

AE – Associate Evangelist
ETP – Evangelists' Training Programme

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

EVANGELIST TRAINING PROGRAMME

Keith & Sarah Baker
Gabriel Bennett
Stevie & Natalie Walker

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Address
Postcode
Telephone
Email

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