WINTER 2023 I G N I T E SDARKING RASSION FOR THE COSPEL

SPARKING PASSION FOR THE GOSPEL ACROSS THE UK

GOD AT WORK WITH MEN ON OPPOSITE SIDES OF LIFE.

COUNTIES EVANGELISTS SHARE HOW A POLICE OFFICER AND AN EX-OFFENDER – HARDENED BY LIFE – HAVE RECEIVED GOD'S LOVE.

ALSO Making Jesus Known Today and Tomorrow. Spreading the Gospel in Twenty-First Century Britain.

COUNTIES' NEW BOOK IS NOW AVAILABLE.

THE TRANSGENDER DEBATE AND A BIBLICAL APPROACH.



WELCOME ^{TO}IGNITE



QR codes

We are introducing 'QR codes' to Ignite to make it easier to access our website. Just open your mobile phone camera, point the camera at the QR code image, tap the link that appears on your mobile screen, follow any instructions which will take you to the Counties website.



I love reading Ignite. It arrives in my inbox in draft form, seeking proof reading and comments. But truth be told, I simply look forward to it coming.

Why? It inspires me. I'm inspired by the stories of new evangelists like Stevie Walker stepping out boldly to preach Jesus on the streets of South Devon. I'm inspired by the letter from a police officer sent to new Lancashire evangelist Steve Cowles, sharing how his life was impacted by Christian love and light shone into his dark world (page 16-18).

Again, these pages resound with stories of lives, communities and local churches, like Saffron Walden Community Church, (page 24) transformed and transforming through the Gospel of Jesus. May God bless you as you read it and share the stories with others.

Martin

Making Jesus known: inspiring and equipping local churches

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 6-7 Happy 125th anniversary, Counties. 2024 will see us celebrate all that God has done and continues to do.
- 8-9 Counties CEO Martin Erwin is visiting the regions to share how together, we might see local churches grow through sharing the Gospel and making disciples. He talks to Ignite.
- 10-11 270 people from across the country attended Counties Connect Conference in October. Kara Purdy, 21, from Belfast, Northern Ireland, shares her reflections.
- 12-13 Stevie Walker and Steve Cowles are Counties newest evangelists, having completed the Evangelist Training Programme (ETP). But their backgrounds couldn't be more different.
- 14–15 Sue Ashmole is Counties Neighbourhood Chaplains Coordinator. She took over the role at the start of 2023. Ignite caught up with her, amidst her busy schedule, to find out how she's been getting on.
- 16–19 Two Counties Evangelists share how God's love is at work in men on opposite sides of life who have been hardened by it.
- 20-23 The Great Commission is at the heart of Counties own mission making disciples. But what of baptism? Senior Evangelist, Roger Chilvers, takes a look.
- 24-25 How a prophetic picture of scattering seeds turned Saffron Walden Community Church into a packed, thriving congregation with a new café style hub.
- 26-29 Making Jesus Known Today and Tomorrow: Spreading the Gospel in Twenty-First Century Britain. If you haven't already read Counties new book. CEO Martin Erwin gives a flavour of its unmissable contents.
- **30–33** The transgender debate currently looms large in our society. As Christians, how do we approach this issue? Steve McQuoid looks at a biblical approach.
- 34 Just a Minute with Gordon Curley.

NEWS IN BRIEF

NEW COUNTIES BROCHURE

The new Counties brochure may have already popped through your letter box, if not, we're excited to tell you it's ready for you to hand out.

It packs a punch – because although it's forty pages long, it will fit in your back pocket, as it's the size of a regular mobile phone. It's also full of great pictures, quotes, and infographics.

The brochure explains who Counties is, what we do, and how people can get involved and support us. To get hold of copies please email office@countiesuk.org





KEY TO LIFE IS MOVING ON

After seven years on the road, Counties is saying 'goodbye' to Key to Life as it has reached the end of its natural life.

During its time on the road Key to Life shared the story of Jesus with around 46,000 primary school children through its unique and immersive lessons. It helped children see what Christians believe and understand how the story of Jesus is the key to Christianity. We'd like to take this opportunity to thank the thousands of volunteers and staff who have worked tirelessly over the years to make this possible. The focus for this academic year is now to launch a second Life exhibition so that Counties can meet the growing demand; potentially sharing the Gospel with 20,000 or more children a year (twice as many as in the last 15 years). Thanks to supporting grant making trusts, funds have been made available to purchase a second unit, including a van, inflatable pods and tech equipment, to realise our aims for a much-needed additional use of the exhibition.

M4 READY STUDY TRIP: FRUITFUL EUROPE

LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM 14-17 MARCH 2024

In March 2024, young leaders and participants of M4 Ready from across Europe will come together to hear and see how God is moving in Europe. They will learn together from best practice in planting and leading churches and have the opportunity to pray together for revival in Europe.

To apply: m4ready.com/london-2024

YOUR LETTERS AND COMMENTS

Dear Martin,

I'm taking up your invitation in the Autumn 2023 issue to drop you a "*wee line*" which has a special appeal to me a Scotsman!

Isobel and I could share many stories about living by faith or rather by God's faithfulness. One story I would like to share because of its 'Counties' context goes back to 1965 and our very first tent mission in Eastbourne, East Sussex with what was then 'Counties Evangelistic Work'. A young man who was a huge help to us then later went to study at the Bible Training Institute in Glasgow where I myself had been a student. It was there he met his wife with whom he went to serve the Lord abroad. Sometime later Isobel and I were going through one of those faith-testing experiences that work wonders for one's prayer life! The need was met when a financial gift came from a source who had no way of knowing our need. The gift came all the way from Thailand. Truly dear brother 'God IS faithful'



and He has been over all the years since 1965. To this day we are still in touch with the donor and appreciate him so much.

God bless you and thank you for another encouraging and stimulating issue of 'Ignite'.

Warmest greeting in the Lord to you and all the 'Counties' family especially to the Seniors. We have so many rich memories of fellowship with many of them all those years ago.

Clayton Dougan (former Counties Evangelist) Victoria, BC, Canada

HAPPY 125TH ANNIVERSARY, COUNTIES

2024 WILL SEE US CELEBRATE ALL THAT GOD HAS DONF AND CONTINUES TO DO

We begin by celebrating the work of Counties Evangelist, Dick Saunders and 'Way to Life'.

Some of you may remember Dick Saunders. He was perhaps one of Counties best-known evangelists. He passed away in 2018 at the age of 87.

Dick was a passionate evangelist who led thousands to Christ through his crusade meetings and was listened to by millions all around the world on his popular Gospel radio show 'Way to Life' on Trans World Radio which ran for over 50 years.

He and wife Betty joined Counties in 1960 after working with the Open-Air Mission for several years and he led many summer tent missions in Hampshire before leading national rallies in stadiums. Thousands came to Christ every year.

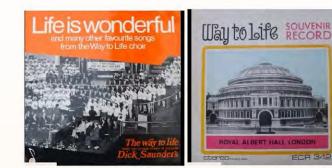
Many say he pioneered joint-church evangelism across the country in a way that prepared the ground for the large-scale missions led by Billy Graham during the 1980s.

Counties senior evangelist Victor Jack was one of those evangelists who knew Dick well:

"I first met Dick in June 1964, just after I had left Moorlands Bible College and joined Counties. We were both 'sons of the soil' so immediately felt a common bond. Dick was a passionate evangelist who lived to see people come to faith in Jesus. Nothing thrilled him more than seeing people respond to the call of God on their lives. He undergirded all that he did with prayer, and we had some great times together interceding before the throne of grace."

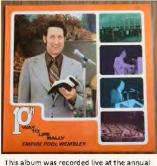
On the opposite page is a selection of his albums that show how popular his message of Christ was. If you take a look at the album, first left, on the second row down, you might recognise a very young looking Cliff Richard!

This album was recorded live at the annual 'Way To Life' London Rally in the Empire Pool, Wembley, in 1975. There were over 10,000 people present and over a 1.000 in the choir.



This album is a live recording of the Way To Life massed choir and the congregation of about 3000. It was recorded at the Way To Life annual London rally, in the Methodist Central Hall, London, in 1970. Life Is Wonderful Way To Life London Rally 1970

Uploaded on YouTube by Phillip Greensmith



Way To Life London Rally in the Empire Pool, Wembley, on Saturday 19th April 1975. It has what was then called the Empire Pool Wema 10,000 plus congregation and a 1,000 plus massed choir. The Empire Pool has been rethe Wembley Arena. Tracks 01A Let The Whole World Know (Choir)

This album was recorded live at the annual Way To Life London Rally in 1976. It was recorded in bley. It have since been renamed the Wembley Arena. This album has a 10,000 plus congreganamed since this event and it is now known as tion and a 1,000 plus massed choir. This album was uploaded by permission. Tracks 01A Let The Whole World Know (Choir)

This album was recorded live on Saturday 25th March 1972 at the Way To Life annual London Rally. On this album there is a 5000 plus congregation and a 1000 voice massed choir, Roval Albert Hall. This album was uploaded by permission. Way To Life Annual London Rally 1972

Uploaded on YouTube by Phillip Greensmith

MANA WHELLER

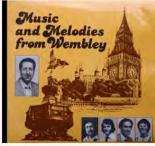
In 1973 the Way To life Ministry held a one

week London Crusade in the Methodist Central Hall, Westminster. Their annual London Rally was held as part of this crusade and was the final meeting which was held in the Royal Albert Hall. This album was recorded live on Saturday 17tl

Dick Saunders invites you to a

LONDON

March 1973 at the Royal Albert Hall. On it there is a 5000 plus congregation and a 1000 voice massed choir.



This album was recorded live at the annu al Way To Life London Rally in 1979. It was recorded in the Wembley Conference Centre. This album has a 450 voice choir and singing from a large congregation of several thousand. This album was uploaded by permission



NEXT STEPS

To find out more about how you can support the work of Counties:

www.countiesuk.org/supporters/individuals



equip encourage evangelise

COUNTIES CEO MARTIN ERWIN IS VISITING REGIONS ACROSS THE COUNTRY TO SHARE HOW TOGETHER, WE MIGHT SEE LOCAL CHURCHES GROW THROUGH SHARING THE GOSPEL AND MAKING DISCIPLES.

He tells Ignite about how he shared the vision of Counties Connect with church leaders in Devon.

For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes.

Romans 1:16

In late September I travelled with a little trepidation to Grosvenor Church in Barnstaple, North Devon, to meet with leaders from local churches. Counties, long the home of evangelists, is now growing in it's desire to better inspire and equip local churches, and the meeting was arranged with this in mind. However, I knew that each leader present would have sacrificed some other call on their time to be present, and I wanted their sacrifice to be worthwhile. We shared together from Romans 1:1-17. The apostle Paul, who had never visited Rome, but was planning to arrive soon, wanted the church there to be clear about the Gospel. So, in the early part of his letter, and then in more detail throughout it, Paul unpacks the content and impact of the Good News of Jesus. His desire for them was that, amid busy schedules and complicated demands, they would not lose sight of the power of the Gospel and would recommit their lives and energy to its spread.

We had a great time in Barnstaple, and I believe our meeting helped to clarify how Counties Connect as a network of local churches, may strengthen churches towards Gospel driven church growth.

Counties Regional Connector, Andrew Conlan, who attended the event, writes:

Having arrived late and a little frustrated due to delays en route with Devon tractors and two road closures, I was questioning whether this was going to be worth the trip.

However, the first positive was to walk into a room and find it full of local church leaders. As one of them said in a subsequent email:

"I was surprised by the numbers, which shows that they are open to unity, relationship and helping one another".

By the time it came to go home I was glad I had come for several reasons:

Watching and chatting with other leaders it was great to sense a real togetherness and a desire to meet again. As one said afterwards it was so helpful: "to get support in difficult times".

As well as talking and praying with one another, there was a focus on how we could support one another in mission in that area.

Craig, one of the leaders from Bideford itself a fairly recent church plant - said how the event had encouraged him further in their thinking about helping to resource another plant.

A good lunch was arranged by Grosvenor which provided an opportunity to chat.

It wasn't just me that felt encouraged; as all those I spoke to were positive about meeting and would recommend it to others.



Andrew Conlan

OUR AIMS ARE TO:

- **1.** Encourage local churches to:
- prioritise the Great Commission.
- grow through making disciples.
- 2. Develop Regional and national networking to:
- provide leadership training.
- support church revitalisatior
- raise and equip church planting teams.

3. Raise, train, and resource evangelists.

For more information visit our website: www.countiesuk.org/ counties-church-growth



So, we will look to do so and also plan to do something similar in other areas of the South West.

If you would welcome a local or regional visit or wish to know of any happening in your area, please get in touch.

270 PEOPLE FROM ACROSS THE COUNTRY ATTENDED COUNTIES CONNECT CONFERENCE AT THE END OF OCTOBER. THE FEEDBACK ON THE TEACHING, FELLOWSHIP AND WORSHIP SINCE THEN HAS BEEN INCREDIBLE.

Kara Purdy, 21, from Belfast, Northern Ireland, is currently on placement with Forest & Wye Community Church. She shares her reflections.

The inaugural Counties Connect Conference was not only a first for Counties but also for quite a few of us who had never been to a Counties event before. It was an incredible opportunity to meet other Christians who are seeking to grow in their faith with their eyes on the same goal – the Lord Jesus.

We were welcomed by a friendly and well organised team, who signed us in and gave us our very stylish identifying lanyards. Although I hardly knew anyone, there was plenty of mingling that allowed introductions to be made and it really felt relaxed. I got to know people from all over the UK and from all different backgrounds and walks of life. I loved the range of ages and stages - this wasn't just a youth conference, but neither was it an exclusive gathering for the super-spiritual theologians, it really was for everyone.

The conference was held in an excellent facility with helpful staff, great facilities

and of course, most importantly, excellent food. You can never go wrong with a cooked breakfast.

Speakers from across the UK shared the theme of looking at our confidence – confidence in our faith, confidence in the past, confidence in the future, and confidence in sharing our faith with others. I relished the incredible teaching, incorporating the biblical basis, as well as the practical applications of what it really means to live out this confidence in our everyday lives. Additional seminars included: the church's community connections, the historical reliability of the Bible, and an approach to mental health and wellbeing.

A range of children's and youth groups were going on across the weekend, including the One2Lead program – the aim of which is to equip and empower 16–21-year-olds for leadership roles in the church and ministry.



There were also groups for four to nine, and ten to fourteen-year-olds, and a creche for the under fours. I was involved in some of the work with the younger children and was delighted with how well the kids not only engaged with the stories and learning, answering questions with great enthusiasm, but also how much they seemed to enjoy the games and crafts. I also helped out in the creche, and I found that the parents got real peace of mind knowing that their children were being entertained, and they could really enjoy the sessions themselves.

Something which is always difficult with events like this is finding the balance between content and free time, but I think the schedule was sufficiently punctuated by coffee breaks and time for activities. I even managed time for a short nap! I might have worked too hard at duck, duck, goose...

We were led in lively and genuine worship by Clifford and his team, and they did an excellent job of magnifying Christ in our hearts, maintaining the focus on Him and His glory. It was such a privilege to sing and give praise to our God in such a large group of His family.







STEVIE WALKER AND STEVE COWLES ARE COUNTIES NEWEST EVANGELISTS HAVING COMPLETED THE EVANGELIST TRAINING PROGRAMME (ETP). BUT THEIR BACKGROUNDS COULDN'T BE MORE DIFFERENT – AS IGNITE FINDS OUT.

Steve Cowles is married to Debbie, and they have three adult children. Steve is originally from Arizona in the US. They now live near Garstang in Lancashire.

Steve joined ETP having already spent 37 years in full time faith ministry. He started as a construction manager for Wycliffe Bible Translators which eventually brought the family to England in 1993.

In 1997 they moved up to the north of England. He spent a year at Capernwray Bible College and then worked with an organisation called FEBV ('Fellowship for Evangelising of Britain's Villages' now 'Village Hope').

Then 19 years ago a Baptist church, in a small village near Blackpool, called Inskip, asked Steve and Debbie to work with their young people and couples.

It was here Steve got to know police officers through leading men's outreach meetings.

"I found out that Lancashire police was looking to start a Chaplaincy. I got involved as a volunteer. I have been the Lead Chaplain for 17 years."

Having stepped away from FEBV, Steve realised he needed to be with another



Steve and Debbie Cowles

organization and heard about Counties through his long-standing friendship with Counties Evangelist, Matt Rich.

"Even though I knew a lot of what was being taught I found so many things really helpful. Being required to write down what I had done every month was great for me because I would think: 'Wow God!' It's really helpful to look back and see how many people I have spoken to and what I have been able to do on any given month.

"It was also really helpful to meet in the Cluster groups with other Counties Evangelists. I was really longing to be in a group again. Most of the stuff I was doing was on my own, which was not what I wanted. "Being with Counties is great because we are a group of people encouraging and promoting evangelism.

"What I like the most is the broadness of evangelism; the fellowship of the groups and the yearly conference. They have been a real blessing."

Read more about Steve's work on page 16.

Stevie Walker is married to Natalie, and they have seven children. They live in Paignton, in Devon.

Stevie was a full-time lorry driver for 16 years but did outreach with his church in his spare time. He felt a real calling to do and learn more. So, he signed up for ETP two years ago.

He's now given up truck driving and – like all Counties Evangelists – is living by faith.

"It's scary but it's really encouraging. Since cutting down my working hours two years ago, He's proven He does look after us and He does provide."

ETP is a year-long course, but Stevie stayed on it for two years as he felt he didn't have enough churches to work with:

"As soon as I set up a Counties Link Group (CLG), though, that's when things started moving. They've been a massive support to me. They've put my name about, and people have got to know me."

Stevie says he's gained so much from ETP that it's difficult to say what's been the most important:

"I've built some really great relationships with people from within the Counties family.

The training has been great; especially learning the different ways people evangelise. I've loved conferences – being in the same room as other people who have the same excitement about sharing Jesus with people.

"I was a total amateur when I started so nearly everything I have learned has come from the Counties family."

Every Counties Evangelist has a different passion and Stevie loves one-to-one conversations with strangers, knocking on doors, talking to people on the streets, and open-air preaching.

"I am a quiet person and would never have thought it two years ago. I've gone from driving a lorry on my own all day to talking to people all the time. But I love it."



Steve and Natalie Walker



If you are interested in finding out more about the ETP. Go to our website: counties-training.org/etp

SUE ASHMOLE IS COUNTIES NEIGHBOURHOOD CHAPLAINS COORDINATOR. SHE TOOK OVER THE ROLE AT THE START OF THIS YEAR. IGNITE CAUGHT UP WITH HER, AMIDST HER BUSY SCHEDULE, TO FIND OUT HOW SHE'S BEEN GETTING ON.

Sue, you've been in the role for just under a year now. You're already so enthusiastic, why?

I was a Neighbourhood Chaplain in my church and thought: "Wow, this is such a great way of helping people in need". But then I realised it goes so much further. It's about creating relationships and through that, you get a chance to discuss your faith.

There are so many ways to bring God and faith into the conversation. I don't understand why people don't want God in their lives and that's where my passion comes from. It's my duty – it's our duty as Christians to share the hope that we have with others.

Why would you encourage churches to embrace the Neighbourhood Chaplains scheme?

There are lots of churches who fellowship together on a Sunday but don't seem to understand that reaching out to their neighbourhood and doing what Jesus told us to do: "GO OUT and spread my word" is a prerequisite of being a Christian. It can be really daunting; and some people want to do it but don't know how.

Neighbourhood Chaplains is a format that is tried and tested across the UK.

Interested churches can go and spend a day with existing teams. We also offer 'Inform and Inspire' – a short training course, and a new scheme called 'Run' and 'Connect'. We are now including training in prayer, evangelism and dementia care.

We are building a tool kit that gives competence and confidence in all these areas.

It's important to remember, however, that Neighbourhood Chaplains isn't just social action, it's an evangelistic tool to bring people to Jesus in a gentle way by building relationships, and we all want those.

You recently were asked to visit UCB (United Christian Broadcasters) How did that go?

I got in contact with a gentleman called Carl, who runs the prayer line at UCB and told him about the tool kit we are trying to build for our members. He invited me to UCB, and I spent three days with them meeting their team. I came away totally refreshed and feel like UCB is my spiritual home. The presence of the Lord was so apparent. I was really sad to leave!



Can you share some inspirational stories of Neighbourhood Chaplains that you've encountered since you started?

New Life Church in Hornchurch, Essex, is part of the Neighbourhood Chaplains scheme, and they are always coming up with new and inventive ways to attract people. So, they had a 'Summer Bumper' package. They built an ark and the kids had great fun. Then they had a 'Praiseathon' outside the church with posters and banners and they sang for hours on the streets.

At one point a double decker bus stopped. The driver put on his indicator lights, and he got out with a bus load of people and donated some money, saying: "You're amazing". I just love the randomness of that!

Bishop's Stortford church drop our calling cards through people's letter boxes which tell them Neighbourhood Chaplains will be coming the following week and if they don't want them to call they can put the card up in their window; otherwise, the Chaplains will knock.

If the people aren't there they come back for the following two weeks. Finally, they leave a card with the Neighbourhood Chaplains' contact numbers and, in the case of Bishop's Stortford, they run a weekly café, so they invite people to come and have coffee and cake.

As a result, attendance at the café has grown and grown just through those cards. And they are seeing real fruit as a result.

There are just so many ways of putting Neighbourhood Chaplains into practice whether you are in a rural or urban area.

It's not a quick fix – that's not the idea. It's about building relationships and through trust, people will see you leading your life and will want to have it in their life too.

> Want to find out more about Neighbourhood Chaplains then go to:

www.counties-training.org/ neighbourhood-chaplains



TWO COUNTIES EVANGELISTS SHARE HOW GOD'S LOVE IS AT WORK IN MEN ON OPPOSITE SIDES OF LIFE WHO HAVE BEEN HARDENED BY IT.

Kim Hobbs and Steve Cowles work with a multitude of different people covering various roles. Here Kim shares a recent encounter with an ex-offender and Steve Cowles with a police officer.

Kim Hobbs

My King is dead!

These are the anguished words a man said to me recently during a telephone conversation. He had earlier sent me a text saying:

"Hi, Kim, sorry to bother u on a Saturday but some think bad has happen".

This young man is an ex-offender - we will call him Ben - a referral from probation who I had been supporting for over a year. He is often angry, impetuous, and verbally spiteful. Yet under it all Ben is soft-hearted and loyal, seeking love and a sense of belonging. He and I meet in a café weekly. We simply chat. My hope is that he will eventually leave his anger behind, find love, purpose, and peace in himself and for others. My heart's desire is that Ben finds the love of God for himself too, but I don't lead with that, as my mission is to serve. But if/when the opportunity comes, I surely take it.



Kim Hobbs

I received the text after the father of Ben's one-time partner had committed suicide. Ben was already isolated, with few friends. He had no family. The man who died was his hero. The words he said to me then were quite startling and heartbreaking those four short words "My King is dead!"

I ask you to imagine what I felt in that moment.

I prayed.



"What do I say here Lord?"

I did not sense any special wisdom. I just breathed, paused and spoke.

I'm not even sure what I said but I offered comfort and spoke of my friend's qualities and character and that these would bring him through. And I prayed with him then and there.

Since that weekend I have met Ben many times. He has grieved and I have listened. He is emerging from the darkness of this time but there is a long journey ahead. I tell this story because I'm always thinking that just about anyone could do what we do. We simply respect, listen, befriend, encourage, support. Oh, and this cycle of respect, listen, etc. repeats many, many times. And yet, without knowing that we are loved by our Father, without His forgiveness and without the Holy Spirit in our thinking, emotions and behaviour, I believe that our efforts would be futile.

Sometimes we are exhausted and worn down. We are disappointed or seemingly defeated by circumstances. And yet with God's help we return to the fight, we keep on going as God exhorts us to.



Steve Cowles

Over 15 years ago I had a desire to do something special for police officers and their families.

In 2009, Capernwray Bible school asked me what they could do to help my ministry as a chaplain to the police. They have fantastic facilities.

I said it would be wonderful for police officers to enjoy a free day 'chilling out' - a day of fun with their kids in a Christian setting.



Could you support the work of an evangelist: www.countiesuk.org/ supporters/individuals Capernwray said "yes" and as time has gone on we have added more activities so there is face painting, swimming, zip lines. I also asked local churches to bake some amazing cakes and around 16 churches have joined in.

It has become such a blessing to show love to officers who keep our cities and streets safe. Last May 2023 we had over 1350 people through the doors – our largest attendance yet.

Families often take Bibles away with them. Every year we have some amazing conversations with these cynical officers. I love seeing what God has done over the years and we are praying for all these seeds of Christ's love to take root and grow.

Letter from a serving police officer who attended a fun day.

Dear Steve,

I wanted to write to you to pass on my thanks to you and to all of the people at Capernwray Hall for last Saturdays family day.

I must emphasise that I do enjoy doing what I do. I do it to the very best of my ability and I hope to offer the people who need it the very best of service. Each and every time I come into contact with someone they get a little piece of me, I have tried being detached but I just can't do it, but that leaves me vulnerable to the emotional baggage that comes home. I think it's a price worth paying.

I was never prepared for the slow drip, drip effect of years of exposure to some of the worst things that mankind can do. It changes you in a way that you don't realise. Did you see how my kids would not throw a ball at me on the dunking stool? For years I have guarded them against absolutely everyone. Unless I trust someone completely then I will never allow them to be out of my sight.

I have witnessed things too horrific to share, and don't take into account the fatal road accidents, thousands of domestic incidents, stabbings, burglaries, car thefts, assaults on me and colleagues the list is endless.

But enough of that, back to Capernwray Hall.

"Hello, are you here for the police day?" Whoever this young girl was melted my heart. In one sentence she showed me that people can be good and kind and loving, knowing that I am a police officer. From then on it just got better and better.

As I walked around Capernwray those tense stressful feelings began to melt away and I started to see the world from a very different perspective. It was like being in a different world, one I haven't seen for so long.

Are these people naive to what's going on around them or is my worldview just so mixed-up that I am naive to the real world? I haven't figured that out yet. What I do know is that I would like for you to pass on my most sincere and heartfelt thanks to every single person that was involved in that day.

Now I know that all sounds a little dramatic but the impact on me was profound. So, I have been thinking how do I ever repay Steve for this and everything else he has done? Again, that is another hard one for me to fathom, because you want for nothing.

You are not motivated by a selfish greed or material gain; you do what you do out of love and that is something more valuable than anything I have ever known.

Take care, hope to see you soon, (Name withheld)

THE GREAT COMMISSION IS AT THE HEART OF COUNTIES OWN MISSION – MAKING DISCIPLES. BUT WHAT OF BAPTISM?

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."

Matthew 28:19 - 20a (ESV)

Ignite has recently shared many stories about new Christians being baptised.

In Autmn's Ignite, Tim Cracknell shared how Forest and Wye Community Church in Cinderford, witnessed two young men being baptised.

In Summer's Ignite. West Midlands Evangelist, Andy Hodson, shared how a number of people from very diverse backgrounds had recently been baptised.

Then in their newsletters, three more of our evangelists shared:

David Symons (Devon) shares: "Praise God for five people being baptised from our home fellowship, Central Church Bideford, three of whom are from the youth group." Charles Addoco (Essex) writes: "Give thanks for two people signed up for baptism at Christ's Forgiveness Ministries in Barking."

Tony & Ruth Hood (Suffolk) report: "The baptisms of two of the ladies who attended the recent Alpha course took place in the sea at Sizewell during High Street Chapel, Hopton's family camping weekend."

The Great Commission asks three things of us: make disciples, baptise them, teach those people to be like Christ.

For some, baptism has become a rite of passage 'one of the things we do' and it has certainly divided churches over the centuries but for Jesus it was simple: once a person is saved, they are to be baptised.



So, we've asked Senior Evangelist, Roger Chilvers, to look at baptism in its wider context. As there's much to think about.

'Be Baptised!'

So, you want to be baptised? That's very good news, and here's why.

Baptism is an ORDER.

It's good news, not because others or friends think you should be baptised, but because Jesus himself said that's what you should do. "'Go and make disciples of all nations baptising them...', He said. It's for 'all nations' and, Jesus said, 'to the very end of the age." Matthew 28:19-20. The disciples did what Jesus said. When people reacted to Peter's first sermon he said: "*Repent and be baptised*", and they were! Later, even religious leaders were too. (Acts 18:8)

Sometimes called an 'ordinance' which really means, 'that's an order'.

Baptism is a PROMISE

In Jesus' day people often saw Roman soldiers proudly taking an oath of allegiance, pledging their loyalty to the emperor. That public promise was called 'the sacramentum'. Even today we call an especially holy and important commitment, 'a sacrament'. It is a serious, lifetime promise. Baptism is one of those sacraments.

In some places where Christians are persecuted, it is often only after people are baptised that trouble starts. They may be hated, imprisoned, sometimes even killed because baptism is a lifetime promise of allegiance.

But, though it is serious and solemn, baptism is also really joyful. You are cheerfully telling the world you are committed to Jesus. And it is not only happy for you, but also for your church. They rejoice with you.

Baptism is an AGREEMENT

In the Bible days, agreements were often made between people. For important things, there had to be a formal way to make clear who was involved and what the terms and conditions of the agreement were so that it was much more than just casual words. These were referred to as covenants, often legally certified. Even today we have covenants made like this in some legal documents.

When Jesus told His followers to baptise, He pointed out the two things of who and what was involved. People, from all nations were to be baptised "in (into) the Name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit". Matthew 28:19-20. In baptism, God is involved. Those being baptised are entering a permanent agreement with God himself.

Baptism is a **TESTIMONY**

Watching baptism must seem a strange event to those uninformed about church life and practice, when a seemingly normal adult steps fully clothed into a pool of water and, after a few words, is briefly submerged and lifted up again while everybody watches.

Here's where the way we practice baptism is relevant. It's a picture of becoming a Christian. The New Testament Greek word for 'baptise' means 'to immerse', which explains why many churches literally immerse people in water.

It demonstrates what has already taken place in that person's life. Human beings cannot live under water – at least not for long. So, when someone is immersed in the water it is a picture of leaving the world of the living, descending into the place of death, and then being raised to a completely new life. They are saying they have left one life. It is dead and buried and have started a completely new life.

"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come." 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NIV)

Here's how Paul put it:

"We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life." Romans 6:4

Perhaps you are now thinking: "Great, but I've got questions". If so, here are some things you might have in mind. What age should someone be? It's not the main issue, but it is relevant. Sometimes it is called 'Believers Baptism' because, in the New Testament, it is for those who have believed the gospel by putting their trust in Jesus. Paul says the picture of being buried and raised is: "through your faith" Colossians 2:12.

Also, it is a declaration of your lifelong commitment to Jesus. Very young children can't understand these things but, church leaders will know when the time is right so speak to them. Don't be upset if leaders suggest a short wait. It will be all the more meaningful when the time comes.

It is similar for new believers who are older, perhaps someone who has not been brought up with a Christian background. Many churches conduct a short series of baptismal classes of teaching for those being baptised. It's a great way to prepare so they fully understand the commitment being made. There are no rules about where baptism takes place. Often it will be in a church building, though not always, especially as today many churches do not have their own meeting place. In Bible days rivers, pools, desert oases were all used.

For us, it could be a swimming pool, the sea, or one of a variety of pools. However, it is good to remember that it's important and not just a fun occasion. Therefore, it should always be dignified as well as joyful. Church leaders have a responsible part to play wherever it is, and they will give you advice.

So, if you are a Christian and have not been baptised, now is the time to think about it. Speak to your church leaders who will be pleased at your obedience and commitment. You will be pleased. And most of all, God will be pleased.





HOW A PROPHETIC PICTURE OF SCATTERED SEEDS TURNED SAFFRON WALDEN COMMUNITY CHURCH INTO A PACKED, THRIVING CONGREGATION WITH A NEW CAFÉ STYLE HUB.

Ignite talks to Minister, Jonathan Burton and Rachel Sabates, Ministry Leader and the home church of the late Counties Evangelist John Martin, and still home to his wife Jane.

Jonathan Burton became the minister of Saffron Walden Community Church in 2006 with a congregation of around 50 people. After many years of searching for a bigger building, they heard that the local Methodist church was closing and they moved in, in 2015.

Just before moving they suddenly started to grow. Jonathan says:

"It's as if God just stepped in and said: 'Now you are taking me seriously.'"



Within two years of moving in, the congregation had nearly doubled, and the new building was getting full. Jonathan says:

"On my way to a retreat, in 2017, God just dropped into my mind:

'Multiplication. Do what you are doing but in more places.'"

"He was also saying it's not all about Sunday mornings. So, we encouraged more home groups and innovated with doing church a bit differently. We currently have about 70 per cent of people attached to small groups."

They also looked for a second minister and in 2019, Rachel, who had joined a couple of years earlier, felt called to work in ministry in the church.

At a church leadership retreat in 2019 they asked: "What are we missing in terms of outreach?"

Rachel adds: "We had a lot of great social work going on like coffee mornings, toddler groups, etc. What we lacked was intentional sharing about Jesus with people". Around this time, Rachel and Jonathan used to meet up with Paul Green, who had a prophetic ministry at New Wine. In May 2020, he brought a word that said:

"I have a vision of seeds flowering everywhere. Flowers blooming and dropping seeds everywhere and multiplying".

The church then had training sessions with the congregation about being led more by the Holy Spirit and getting 'out there.' This helped to influence the DNA of the church. A Saturday marketplace outreach initiative sprang from this.

Then in April 2021, God spoke again to Rachel about these seeds blooming within their own church community as well as in outreach.

In late 2022 the leadership received another vision of the church multiplying and leadership being distributed. The leadership reflected on this for months, and it led to the launch of a second, satellite service.

Jonathan and Rachel found out that a new council centre in town, called the Jubilee Hub, had just been renovated. They were able to hire it for a year. Rachel says:

"It is a flexible space where tables and chairs can be arranged as we wish. There is also a coffee bar. The café style is perfect for creating a welcoming environment."

The leadership shared the vision with the church and that very week Chris Duffett (a Christian painter) got in touch with a painting for sale and it is called 'multiplication' - a picture of dandelion seeds blowing in the wind.



"We immediately bought a copy for the church. The picture is about the breath of the spirit on His people," explains Jonathan.

"It shows that we are rooted in Christ and blown by the Spirit into places near and far. The dawn sky speaks of a new day, a promise of hope, that the breath of spirit is given to those who ask'."

Rachel adds: "About a month and a half ago we started holding a second Sunday morning service at the Hub, in parallel with our main service. A couple from our church have stepped up to oversee it and we have teams of four different people from church who host, manage and set up the Hub each week".

Attendance is based on a rota, with a group of people from the main church being there for one month. The preaching is screened from the main church, but apart from that everything else is flexible – how and when they do prayer, communion, discussion groups, and worship.

The Hub is now serving around 32-38 people and the main church has around 90 in weekly attendance. Rachel adds, "We are seeing, hoping, and praying that God is on the move."

MAKING JESUS KNOWN TODAY AND TOMORROW SPREADING THE GOSPEL IN TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY BRITAIN

If you haven't already read Counties new book. CEO Martin Erwin gives a flavour of its unmissable content.

MAKING JESUS KNOWN TODAY AND TOMORROW

Spreading the Gospel in Twenty-First Century Britain

Edited by Martin Erwin and Stephen McQuoid

In March 2020 when the global pandemic took hold, we all knew that the world had radically, and perhaps irreversibly, changed.

This book was conceived then, as together (and often alone) we grappled with the new reality, the new norm, without ever fully understanding what it was, what it would look like, or how it would change us.

Since the worldwide shock of Covid-19, Europe has seen a land war in the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and the cost-of-living crisis which has followed.

Politics feels broken and cynicism is reaching new heights (or depths) even for us notoriously cynical 'Brits'.

In this fast-changing landscape, two things have become more evident. The first may on the surface seem negative, while the second is more encouraging. Perhaps both can be seen together, as preparation for what God might do among us in the coming days. Firstly, the crisis of the decline and closure of many local churches has accelerated. In the case of local churches, if they were struggling in 2019, they might have lasted another ten years before apparently inevitable closure.

But Covid forced closure of some and accelerated the decline of others, and, like businesses, many of the latter will not recover.

Secondly, there has been a definite upturn of spiritual interest, even a growing hunger and thirst for purpose and meaning in the souls of British people.

During the first lockdown 1 in 4 British people accessed online Christian worship and other online Christian material. This number held up consistently from April to August 2020.

While, no doubt, these numbers will have dropped significantly once life got back to 'normal', this metric should not be overlooked quickly.

People are thirsty for water that satisfies. When everything that they depended upon to cover or soothe their aching souls, such as entertainment and shopping, were removed, the ache was exposed, and the search for God and community (a community which the church provided in remarkable ways during the pandemic) was unleashed in the heart of a hungry nation.

So, on the one hand, decline was hastened, yet, on the other, at one and

the same time, the very hunger for God that we have prayed for became quickly and vitally evident.

Stories that began to emerge during the pandemic, of God at work, saving and changing lives, have continued. Such stories are often told in our own Counties quarterly, Ignite.

Counties Evangelists were able to help discover and demonstrate how God was at work, and churches that were willing to adapt their methods to overcome the obstacles and grasp the opportunities saw seekers in growing numbers and droplets of blessing begin to dampen previously parched ground.

So, now, we believe, is the right time for a new book on evangelism. The world changes, so how do we navigate this changing landscape, identifying principles, and setting a course that will help us to share the unchanging Good News of Jesus?

This book looks forward at what we need to do now and in the future, and at how it can be done through stories and examples - with a mix of personal experience and rooted in biblical wisdom.

In our church culture, we often think of faith as something that relates to the past. For example, we ask at baptism: "Do you believe that Jesus died for your sins and rose again on the third day?", "Have you trusted him as your Lord and Saviour?". There, belief and trust are backward looking—to the cross and resurrection of Jesus in history, and to the day of conversion — 'yes, I HAVE trusted Jesus'.

But in the great chapter of faith in Hebrews 11, men and women inspired by what God was yet to do as he had promised, or by what they believed he would do, acted in faith: they left homes and nations behind, moved families, built boats, faced down dictators, founded cities, and looked hungry lions in the eye. All because they believed that God was going to do something amazing, something that he had promised—and they believed His promises.

"Faith is the substance of things hoped for." Hebrews: 11:1 (KJV)

This book has been written because we believe that God keeps His promises, and I believe that its readers believe that too!

Two promises in particular have driven the passion for this book.

1. The power and authority of the promise of the Great Commission in Matthew 28: 18-20.

Here Jesus gave us our marching orders. As we pursue this primary calling, we discover that His power and authority are evident and that, as Paul reflected, the gospel is the power of God saving all who believe! (Romans 1: 16)

Many believers lack a sense of the presence and power of God in their lives, but it seems to me that these very things that we crave—his power and presence are bound to His commandment.

"Go and make disciples, make that your goal and mission, and you will discover that my power and my presence are very real to you".

2. The power and authority in the hands of the church

"I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it." Matthew 16:18

We know that the power and authority belong to Jesus: He told us so in the Great Commission. But closely related is the commission that Christ gives to Peter in Matthew 16, where He promises to build His church, and then gives the keys to Peter. So, ultimately, the Church of Jesus Christ cannot and will not fail. Do we, do you, believe this?

Christ will fulfil His mission with a coalition of the willing. Are you willing? Will you commit with us to the fulfilment of the Great Commission?

Will you see the local church as a regional raiding party, set up to smash the gates of hell, and rescue and restore lost people, bringing them into the fellowship of His great Church?

If yes, then this book is written for you.

The simple last words of Jesus ring through this book calling us to 'go' and keep 'going' to reach all those the Father is calling.

Now is the time for us to 'Go' in the power of the Holy Spirit and discover that the harvest is plentiful.

Purchase your own copy of the book at: **www.globookshop.com**

PRAISE FOR THE BOOK

Rico Tice

Two days ago, I was with a very fine pastor in London. His church has reduced by a third since Covid. We were talking about evangelism in this new world of the C's: Covid, Climate Change, Economic Crisis, Conflict in Europe. I really did not know what to say, yet my job as an Evangelist is: "to prepare God's people for Works of service" in Evangelism (Ephesians 4:12). Then I read this book.

I found it incredibly timely with so much wisdom on the three great biblical themes of Evangelism: Integrity, Sovereignty and Creativity. At this moment in time as I try to work out Evangelism in a new world. It is a Godsend.

J. John

This is an excellent and helpful resource on sharing Jesus with our world. It is comprehensive in its scope, contemporary in its outlook and above all, challenging in its enthusiasm!

Rachel Jordan-Wolf

How wonderful to find a current book on evangelism written by those who are passionate evangelists and church planters.

We need their inspiration and practice to encourage the church of today back to making evangelism central.

The simple last words of Jesus ring through this book calling us to "go" and keep "going" to reach all those the Father is calling.

Now is the time for us to "Go" in the power of the Holy Spirit and discover that the harvest is plentiful.



Rico Tice



I. John



Rachel Jordan-Wolf

THE TRANSGENDER DEBATE CURRENTLY LOOMS LARGE IN OUR SOCIETY. AS CHRISTIANS, HOW DO WE APPROACH THIS ISSUE?

STEPHEN MCQUOID LOOKS AT A BIBLICAL APPROACH.

The transgender issue has become one of the defining issues of our age. Its prominence has led to substantial theological reflection within the Christian community and the majority of Evangelical Christians have come to a consensus in affirming the binary categories of male and female¹. It is also clear that in much of broader culture these binary categories have been negated².

This is a complex issue, and any pastoral response must take cognisance of the reality of Gender Dysphoria which can be a very distressing psychological condition. While it is true that many people who claim to be trans do not actually suffer from gender dysphoria, pastoral sensitivity is nevertheless essential.

Given not only the prominence of the issue culturally, but also the enormous spike in particularly young people presenting with gender confusion, it would be naïve to suggest that churches will not be confronted with this issue. We therefore need to think about what the Bible has to say and respond on the basis of biblical principle.

A Biblical Perspective

We start in Genesis 1 where we read that God made humans as male and female (v 27) and those categories are part of the creation order and to be maintained. However, our world is fallen (Genesis 3) and so we are not surprised when we see phenomena like gender dysphoria in our world.

Genesis 1:27 also states that the image of God is equally seen in both masculinity and femininity which gives these categories even greater weight. Jesus also upheld to these two genders (Matthew 19:4-5) giving us a fixed point from which we approach the issue.

As we look more widely at scripture, we see that the Psalmist reminds us we have a loving creator who constructs a child in its mother's womb (Psalm 139:13-16). Verse



14 declares that each child is "fearfully and wonderfully made", including their sex and their biological and chromosomal markers. The Psalmist also makes the remarkable claim (v 16) that God has a purpose for every human being even before they are born. Clearly, we are valued, including our physical bodies. Denying what our bodies say about us is therefore not good. Indeed, as 1 Corinthians 13:6 reminds us, love rejoices in the truth. God has made us who we are, and we should accept that truth.

Some have argued that the presence of intersex people challenges this view. Intersex is a situation where a person is born with 'mixed-up' sex organs, hormone levels and an unusual configuration of chromosomes. However, the extreme rarity of intersex and the fact that it is a combination of male and female rather than something completely different suggests this is simply not the case.

A biblical discussion of the gender debate should also take into consideration our wider cultural setting where both sex and gender are being questioned. Paul reminds us that as Christians we should follow God's plan and not allow culture to dictate our belief system (Romans 12:2).

Scripture also has something to say to people who suffer from Gender Dysphoria. We are reminded that cross bearing is an essential part of discipleship (Matthew 16:24) so while it is clearly difficult and distressing for a trans person to come to terms with who God made them to



be, the challenge of following Jesus demands sacrifice. This does not minimize the struggle and the church needs to be deeply compassionate and empathetic. Nevertheless, truth is not something that Christians can negotiate with.

The same principles apply to labels people use as they self-identify. These include terms such as genderqueer, non-binary, gender-fluid and cisgender. Each is designed to give the trans person a sense of where they belong on the gender spectrum. While these terms are only labels, they legitimize the philosophy that lies behind trans culture. This is especially true of 'cis gender' which refers to a person whose mental identity fits with their biological reality. This is a particularly pernicious term because it denies that there is a 'norm'. Such identifying labels are clearly contrary to scripture.

Love and welcome

The Bible also suggests how the church should respond to people who struggle with their gender identity. It should offer a warm welcome and unconditional love. An important verse here is Acts 9:17. Saul of Tarsus who was the biggest threat to the Christian church met the risen Christ and his life was transformed. However, his reputation was such that Christians did not want to embrace him because of fear. God spoke to Ananias and encouraged him to welcome Saul which he did³. This willingness to take a risk was hugely significant in Saul's journey of faith and it can enable the church to begin to make an impact with transgender people.

Scripture would also require us not to harbour any prejudice towards a trans person. The church has often been criticised for being intolerant and judgmental, sometimes with justification. One reason for this reputation is that, in practice, evangelicals have inadvertently developed a 'hierarchy' of sins⁴. At the top of the pile are sexual sins, especially homosexual activity and now transgenderism. We need to be careful about our exegesis. While 1 Corinthians 6:8-10 does say that the sexually immoral will miss out on eternal life, it also says the same about people who are greedy and slanderous.

A practical application of biblical teaching would also suggest that a trans person should, as part of their discipleship, endeavour to recognise their true given identity. One way of think about this is to reflect on our eternal state. When Jesus was resurrected from the dead He had a recognisable resurrection body, including His scars (John 20:25-28). We too will have recognisable resurrection bodies and given our masculinity and femininity were fully imbued with the image of God at the first creation (Genesis 1:27), there is no reason to doubt that the same will happen in our re-creation.

- Some noted detractors include Megan DeFranza www.megandefranza.com Steve Chalke and Jane Ozanne.
- 2. Kathleen Stock, Material Girls, p.11-43.
- 3. Keener makes the point that Ananias calling Saul 'brother' was not a mere courtesy, but rather it was a spiritually inspired welcome of a fellow believer who needs to hear this affirmation. *Craig Keener, Acts vol2, p.1665.*

We should not for a moment imagine that this will be easy for the individual or even a quick process for there is great pain in cross bearing. That notwithstanding, a willingness to carry one's cross, no matter how painful, is an essential part of Christian discipleship.

We also need to acknowledge the Bible provides us with a robust theology of suffering⁵. We have a role model in Jesus who can be trusted to know what is best for us even in these difficult and sensitive situations.

The Bible also reminds us of our redemptive future (Romans 8:22-24) which includes our renewed bodies. This is a hope that can be offered to everyone suffering from gender dysphoria that, in the future, in God's plan, they can be made whole. The work of the Cross not only saves us for eternal life but also offers full redemption in the world to come.

- 4. Many churches will not act if members engage in gossiping, lying, being greedy, bullying or being lazy and undisciplined even thought these things are condemned in scripture. However, any sexual sin is acted upon severely and immediately.
- 5. Rebecca Mclaughlin notes that a theology of suffering not only recognises that the resurrection gives hope, but also express empathetic grief in the meantime. In John 11, 'Jesus knows the resurrection is coming. And yet He cries out in His distress. Rebecca Mclaughlin, Confronting Christianity, p.201.

JUST A MINUTE WITH...

GORDON CURLEY

Gordon is married to Penny who is also a Counties Evangelist. They have two children and live in Southampton.

Gordon, when did you become a Christian?

In a wet and windy field on a Christian camp in Dyffryn, North Wales, when I was 17. Coming from a non-Christian background it was very black and white and life-changing for me.

How did you get involved with Counties?

I came across Bob Telford and Ivor Cooper who ran youth events in Warwickshire. I helped out with their tent crusades and summer youth camps. They then offered me a year of 'in-service training' with them. A bit like the Evangelist Training Programme (ETP) before it existed.

It meant leaving home. I had to trust the Lord for everything. During the week there was a structured programme of evangelism. I would shadow them or have my own projects: working on a market stall, a book shop and a kids' club – that kind of thing.

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



It's nice to have an identity with Counties. You are not just 'Joe Blogs' on your own. We also appreciate the fellowship and the support we get within Counties, and the wider Counties family - whether prayer support, financial support or pastoral support. You feel there are people there for you or with you. That really makes a difference.

What's a highlight of your time at Counties?

I don't have highlights as such, but a defining moment would be deciding which county to belong to when I joined Counties.

Warwickshire already had two Counties Evangelists, but I had a calling to go to Hampshire and we've been here for the last 34 years.

What's your favourite Bible passage and why?

I don't have a favourite verse or passage, but I have a favourite book, and it's John's gospel. The message of that book has impacted my life so much. I never get tired of reading it, I never get tired of sharing it or preaching about it. It's a book of life. It stands out and is unique in my life and in my ministry.

YOUR LOCAL EVANGELISTS

NORTH OF ENGLAND

Steve & Debra Cowles Julian & Ella Gutteridge Phyllis Jenkins (Senior) Martin & Angie Korchinsky Lee & Lesley Marsland Matt & Nicola Rich Rob & Sarah Watson

MIDLANDS

Jordan & Lacy Armstrong (CP) David & Lindsey Brown Roger & Hazel Chilvers (Seniors) Angela Cooper (Senior) Tim & Katrina Cracknell Andy & Isobel Hodson Bob & Rita Telford (Seniors) Paul & Vanessa Willmott

EAST OF ENGLAND

Charles & Elizabeth Addoco Will & Lynne Andrews Tim & Joy Ayrton Madelene Bathgate (Senior) Mark & Amanda Bingham Lionel & Katy Clargo (Seniors) John Hardwick Kim & Jo Hobbs Tony & Ruth Hood Victor Jack (Senior) Andy & Miriam Jelfs (Seniors) Colin & Linda Johnson Jane Martin (Senior) Caleb & Adanesh Mathewos Andrew & Rachel Mugford

AE – Associate Evangelist ETP– Evangelists' Training Programme CP – Church Planter

SOUTH WEST

Jacquie & Tim Bodman Jean Campbell (Senior) Steve Ellacott (AE) Mike & Su Strange (Seniors) Alex & Beth Symons (AE) David & Katie Symons Stevie & Natalie Walker

SOUTH CENTRAL

Jonathan & Heather Brain Ian & Sally Carr Gordon & Penny Curley Ray Dadswell (Senior) Stephen & Jean Gillham (Seniors) Wendy Iliffe (Senior) Steve & Dawn Loader

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