

AUTUMN 2023

IGNITE

SPARKING PASSION FOR THE GOSPEL
ACROSS THE UK



FROM AVOWED
ATHEIST TO
BELIEVER

ONE MAN'S JOURNEY OF FAITH

ALSO COULD YOU SUPPORT A COUNTIES EVANGELIST, AS THEY LIVE BY FAITH?

IS TODAY'S CHURCH CLINGING ON TO THE 'MEANS' AT THE EXPENSE OF THE 'MISSION'?



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 am often amazed how easily a once great method for sharing the Gospel can become so ingrained in our psyche or church culture, that we get stuck in ineffective methodology rather than exploring how to keep our focus on the mission of making disciples. Simon Ladd, our East of England Regional Connector explores this theme in a great article on page 26.

It is always wonderful to hear of people coming to faith in Christ, and Rob's story on page 8 is no exception, as he shares his journey from atheism to Jesus.

Counties work exists because of the Lord's faithful support through his people – you! Rachel Rounds helpfully explores ways in which your support of God's amazing work might be multiplied through partnering with Counties on page 12.

Thank you for your prayers and support – and don't forget to 'drop us a wee line.'

In Jesus
Martin

Making Jesus known: inspiring and equipping local churches

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NEWS IN BRIEF

IS YOUR CHURCH LOOKING FOR WAYS TO REACH THE COMMUNITY?

Neighbourhood Chaplains aims to equip and encourage a church team to reach out to people in their local communities with the Gospel. We help tackle isolation and disconnect through befriending - meeting our neighbour's physical, emotional and spiritual needs.

Does your church want to find out more?

Register for the next "Inform and Inspire" Zoom event on 19 Oct

www.counties-training.org/event-details/inform-and-inspire-oct-2023



LONDON & SOUTH EAST REGIONAL MEETING FOR CHURCH LEADERS

18 October – The London Hub, South London Leaders' Cluster – 12:00 noon Heaton Road Church

15 November – The London Hub, West London Leaders' Cluster – 12:00 noon South Ruislip Christian Fellowship.

For London Hub information see: www.partnershipuk.org/welcome



GSUS LIVE - WILL CHURCHES IN YOUR AREA MAKE JESUS KNOWN IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS?

GSUS Live enables local churches or organisations to join together and connect with local secondary schools to share the good news with students in Key Stage 3 (ages 12-14). Classrooms are transformed to create a unique learning experience, as students journey alongside characters and reflect on fear, forgiveness, and rejection, not only with the character's situation but also their own lives and how they relate to Jesus' teachings.

- Standard bookings are available for 3 weeks, allowing 3-6 schools to be visited.
- Other bookings can be arranged.

www.countiesuk.org/gsuslive



FOREST & WYE COMMUNITY CHURCH IN CINDERFORD WITNESSED TWO YOUNG MEN BEING BAPTISED IN CINDERFORD

TIM CRACKNELL SHARES THE STORY

The men – recently saved - both gave incredibly powerful testimonies of God's grace as they came to faith in Jesus during lockdown. Adam trusted the Lord whilst in a prison cell for drug offences after being moved by letters Katrina (my wife) sent him, challenging him to depend on Jesus not drugs!

Jack came to faith from a non-churched background through a combination of searching on the internet for purpose and meaning and the faithful witness of a relative. You can watch the full service on our church YouTube channel.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=C5wQv3Eseug



Adam being baptised

YOUR LETTERS AND COMMENTS

Dear Counties,

Thank you for your recent 'Prayer and Praise' and Ignite magazine.

It is a good read and very encouraging to read of works of faith and outreach. Praise the Lord.

Jonathan and Pat Taylor
Essex



Dear Counties,

I just wanted to say thank you for the recent 'Ignite' magazine. It's always such a good read. This edition was particularly thought provoking and encouraging for me.

The articles reflected such variety in approach to mission and are food for thought – I've made a few additions to my ideas box!

I was thrilled to read Andy Hodson's comment that Sunday mornings were not for them 'the main event', but meeting people where they are, through the week is. That really resonated with me.

Thank you also for all the honesty. Being faithful is tough and reading that others are having their share of struggles and are continuing to be faithful is very strengthening – thank you Coleen Rhoden particularly.

A great magazine, well written, honest and faith building. Many thanks.

Rob Guinney
Fleetwood. Lancs

MEMO CHARITY – RUN BY COUNTIES EVANGELIST, MATT RICH – WITH THREE COUNTIES PERSONNEL ON THE BOARD – THANKS GOD FOR AMAZING WITNESS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

MEMO – which stands for 'Message on the Move' is thanking God for an amazing upturn in their social media presence.

In 2021 MEMO put new social media ads from the Bible in front of one million social media users. Then, in 2022 they decided to set a high aspirational target of how many people they wanted to reach and exceeded it by getting their posters in front three million users.

Matt Rich sets out the latest figures:

"Between January and May 2023, the posters were seen by 1,390,489 people. Total views

(including multiple views) were 4,742,375.

"This is a staggering number of people, and we want to thank those of you who partnered with us to make this a possibility. Some of these people will have seen our online posters featuring God's Word multiple times - on Facebook, on Instagram and others while playing Meta's games."



But it's not just seeing the posters that's making a difference. In the same period, clicks from the posters to Chatnow.org – a partner of MEMO, to find out more, and potentially chat with a Christian were 11,723. This is in addition to the 50,000 who did so in 2022.

MEMO Trustee chair, and Counties COO, Jonathan Brooks-Martin says:

"We don't know how long we have before social media companies decide they will no longer allow the Christian message of hope to be proclaimed. We are therefore keen to do as much as we can now, and to take the opportunity available to spread the Gospel in a very cost-effective way.

"We'd love to think that 1 in 10 of those scrolling through Facebook next year would come across God's Word, His hope and

the encouragement to find out more and chat with a Christian. Please pray for us and maybe partner with us as we point people online to Jesus seeking to make the most of this great opportunity. Thank you for your prayers and support."



SOCIAL MEDIA RESPONSES (1 JAN TO 31 JULY)

Posters seen by **1,629,271** people

5,215,500
Total views (incl multiple views)

11,373
Reactions

1,799
Comments

840
Shares

18,230
Clicks to chatnow.org

NEXT STEPS To find out more about MEMO and Chatnow visit: <https://me-mo.org/>



FROM AVOWED ATHEIST TO BELIEVER

ROB NICHOLAS, WHO LIVES IN ELY, CARDIFF, SHARES HIS JOURNEY OF FINDING FAITH.

Rob now attends Reflect Community Church (led by Counties Evangelist, Clive Cornish) with his wife Michelle and son Asher. It's a far cry from his teenage years when Rob actively went out of his way to mock Christians and their faith:

"I was quite naughty when I was younger. Growing up in Llandaff North, me and my mates used to throw stones at our local church and when we saw families and kids leaving on a Sunday we used to shout out and call them 'Bible Bashers'. We had no respect for people who went to church that's why it's a bit mad that I am where I am now.

"I had no time for religion. There was no way I was going to believe in it or God. Another time some friends and I were walking past a church in Whitchurch, in Cardiff, and they invited us in. We went in just to take the mickey. We just sat there giggling the whole time and mocking it.

"Throughout my youth, I always thought I was right. Nobody could prove me wrong. I wasn't open to reasoned debate. I believed it was all fairy tales and that none of it could have happened."

Rob admits that he was quite young to have formed such staunch views about Christianity, but he says he'd heard stories about Adam and Eve, and Noah's Ark and he just thought there was no way that they were 'true'. He says he had an answer for everything and was happy to prove Christianity wrong with whatever arguments he could find.

As an adult Rob's views about religion didn't waver. He had no desire to read the Bible, attend church or find out anything more about Christianity. The little bits he'd learned at school, and from his Nan, who was a practising Christian, were more than enough to convince him that atheism was 'right', and Christianity was no more than a fairy tale: *"I just blanked it all out basically,"* Rob adds.



Rob, Michelle and Asher

That would have been the end of Rob's story of faith – but God had different ideas!

Reflect Community Church runs a Stage School (drama club) for kids, and in 2022 Rob began taking his son, Asher. The church also has a café which Rob started visiting regularly and it's there he met Clive Cornish.

"I'd basically interrogate Clive and he'd have all the answers," Rob laughs. *"Clive told me about his story and about how he came to God and other Christians would tell me their story. At the end of last year, I started to read the Bible and watch videos on YouTube. And from there I started going to church."*

Rob says that Clive's honesty and down-to-earth attitude really spoke to him: *"He*

was so understanding. He got where I was. He didn't try and push his views on me. He told me about how he'd been in prison and done bad things. He was just really relatable."

"When I used to think about church, I used to think of old people who were really strict. But at Clive's church, you can go dressed casually. You can be yourself and this changed my opinion of Christians and church."

Rob candidly admits that he even found answers to many of the questions he had regarding the Bible as Clive and other Christians took the time to address them.

When it came to the person of Jesus Rob used to think the stories surrounding him were made up.

"I used to think He probably was a good guy who did good things and maybe He was a magician who tricked people. But the more I started looking into it and the number of witnesses who had seen these things I realised that there is so much evidence that these things did actually happen."

Rob watched the film 'The Case for Christ' based on the book by Lee Strobel. Lee is a former 'Chicago Tribune' legal affairs reporter (and former avowed atheist) who embarked on a quest to disprove the 'truth of Jesus'. Using his expertise as a law-school graduate and long-time journalist, Strobel discovered, however, that the



Counties Evangelist, Clive Cornish, Josef and Rob

evidence for Jesus Christ—His existence, His divinity, His resurrection—was overwhelming and he became a Christian.

Rob also watched 'The Chosen' – a dramatic re-telling of the life of Christ – along with viewing an America Pastor called Cliffe Knechtle who makes YouTube videos, called 'Give Me an Answer,' where he debates people on matters relating to the Christian faith.

These three very different Christian genres helped answer many of Rob's questions, but he admits – like all Christians he's on a journey: *"I still don't completely understand. I am still learning, and I am still trying to find answers to things I'm not sure of."*

However, Rob now sees that Jesus was far more than a 'good guy': *"He's a guy that's never sinned. That performed real miracles. This really did happen. And at the start of this year, I opened my heart to God and started having faith."*

"When I watched 'The Case for Christ' I believed then that Jesus died for our sins. This started to become evident to me when Lee Strobel investigated the resurrection and talked to surgeons today who said there was no way he could have survived those wounds, so he

definitely died and was resurrected."

In terms of how his new-found faith has changed Rob he says he has a real desire to be a better person.

"I am more understanding and less angry. I used to swear a lot, for example, but now I don't want to because I don't like it. I've done crimes before, but now, knowing it's a sin I couldn't do those things."

Finally, Rob wrestles with the question of what 'Christian Rob' would say to 'Atheist Rob' if they were to meet on the street today, which is a perhaps a good lesson for all of us to learn when we are sharing our faith with Atheists.

"I would listen to what myself was saying. I would have patience and try to understand. I wouldn't push anything on myself. I would say 'go away and have a

look at this' rather than shove loads of information down my throat."

"Becoming a Christian was a journey of both head and heart for me. Meeting Clive helped me to open up my heart and start listening. The way he came across was so genuine. He wasn't trying to change my mind but was intent on listening. It stopped me from just shutting people down."

"After that the logic side kicked in and that's when I started watching documentaries and studying more."

Rob adds that one of the best things is that his wife, Michelle, who is already a Christian, was always wary of talking to him about faith because he would shut her down, but now they talk about faith together. They also do more things as a couple – like going to church.

"Because my son has been going to Stage School and has been taught about Christianity in school, he's always believed it. The great thing is it's brought us closer together as a family"



COULD YOU SUPPORT A COUNTIES EVANGELIST? IGNITE'S EDITOR, RACHEL ROUNDS, FINDS OUT WHY IT'S NEEDED.

Most of us with mortgages, utility bills, and families to feed, have a monthly wage or a pension. That regular income helps us avoid having to worry about 'where our next meal is coming from', even though times may be hard at the moment.

Counties Evangelists, however, 'live by faith' which is a very different means of existence. Since I started editing Ignite, I've been asked by people what this phrase means. I know it's a question that many Counties Evangelists are also asked.

Before joining Counties, **Andy Mugford**, Counties Evangelist and Evangelists Officer, had a job with regular monthly income but now he lives by faith and admits he knows what is going out every month, but doesn't know for certain what is coming in.

Evangelists aren't employed by Counties and so are self-employed. This means they must pay their own tax, N.I., pension contributions, office costs, and travel expenses.

Like every other Counties Evangelist, Andy, and his wife Rachel, receive a monthly gift from Counties which varies each month. (This money comes from donation from Counties supporters, Ignite readers, churches and Charitable Trusts).



Andy and Rachel Mugford

They also receive a gift from their local church for work they do with them; as well as regular gifts from friends, anonymous donors, gift aid, occasional unsolicited gifts, gifts from speaking commitments, Christian Trusts - this is common for Counties Evangelists.

"Living by faith never appears to add up, but it does." He adds: "But we, like many other evangelists, have stories of how the Lord has provided for us. When it comes out of the blue and it is anonymous, the only person we can give thanks to is God."

Counties Link Groups

Another way in which Counties helps its Evangelists is through Counties Link Groups (CLG). The smallest team will consist of a Chairperson, a Secretary and a Treasurer. Their main task is to support the Evangelist by meeting regularly with them (and, when appropriate, their spouse) sometimes to ask tough questions, with the expectation that they will not receive superficial answers. They are sounding boards who offer spiritual, emotional, practical and financial support.

Andy says: "They'll ask about ministry activities, how our spiritual lives are going, our general well-being, work/life balance, and how our marriages are coping."

"Evangelists may find themselves involved in a role that is not based on office hours which can lead to burn out, if they're not challenged. The CLG are really helpful in supporting us in managing this."

"Also, the life of an Evangelist can become lonely because they don't tend to be part of a large team. They also tend to work on the edge of churches because that's where people who need to hear about Jesus exist."

Gordon and Penny Curley have been Counties Evangelists since 1988. As Gordon explains, living by faith gives them amazing opportunities to make Jesus known.

We usually find that most people assume we are being employed by, or at least paid by 'someone else', depending on which context they encounter us in. When they learn that we are self-employed and not on the direct payroll of our local church, GSUS Live, or even Counties, they are surprised and invariably ask: "So, where do you get the money to live?" We both find this an amazing opportunity to begin a conversation about faith, as the simple answer to that question is... God!

As we begin to unpack that simple response it becomes clear that in living by faith we are not just talking about our



Gordon and Penny Curley

own faith, but the faithful commitment of others to support the work we do. We explain that our income reaches us through various sources, and this demonstrates how the whole family of God works together to achieve his aims and is a great witness in itself.

In practical terms, we can identify Christian Trusts that support our work with regular gifts and also Counties, individuals, and churches who know about the work we do and send us activity-related, occasional, or regular gifts.

When God called me into full-time ministry, I did a year of in-service training under the guidance of Counties Evangelists Bob Telford and Ivor Cooper. I joined them on the basis that they would supply lodgings and meals, but I would have to trust God to meet any other needs, this was a great way to develop faith in action and to see how God would provide.

There were some tough times in store for me, however, and I remember standing on a market stall in Leamington Spa on a few wet, winter days selling Christian books and Bibles with holes in the soles of my boots, unable to afford new ones.

There were also times when my car needed repairs and the bank account was empty! Panic? No! Prayer? Yes! I would then just wait and see what would happen. He always provided.

In the words of R.T. Kendall, *"God's timing is never too early, it's never too late, it's*



always just in time!" and this has been our repeated experience over the years. We have known times of plenty, when we have enjoyed having more than enough for our basic needs, and also times when it was far more difficult.

During the Covid lockdown, for example, there were no in-person opportunities, and we lost touch with many churches, schools, and individuals, but God is faithful, and He who calls also provides.

We are grateful particularly to our Counties Link Group, (formally Hampshire Regional Fellowship), who recognised our need during that time, along with the Counties Trustees, in organising extra support. A few individuals and churches were also faithfully responsive to God's prompting and sent us gifts for which we thank them and God.

Our CLG has been invaluable in many ways over our years as Counties Evangelists; providing finance, wisdom, and knowledge to help us replace not one, but four cars for Gordon in all, as well as helping us organise the activities we run, safely, lawfully and on budget. This group has

been a real blessing to us and to our family.

Over the years I have never charged a fee for my ministry, sometimes there is nothing given for preaching or running events and activities; other times a church will be very generous in their recognition of the time and effort involved.

Many of our own initiatives; Speakers Corner, schools work, men's work, the many Bible studies and events Penny has run for individuals and groups are run without any financial remuneration, but our motivation is to serve the Lord and He honours that, and the diesel and other things needed. He has always supplied.

We love this quote from James Hudson Taylor, the founder of the China Inland Mission (later OMF):

"God's work, done in God's Way will never lack God's Supply".

Quite simply, God is sovereign. If He calls you to this type of living, then He will provide. We, the Curleys, can testify to that provision, Praise His Holy Name.

NEXT STEPS

Could you become a Counties supporter?

If you'd like more information on ways to donate regularly or just give a one-off donation visit our website www.countiesuk.org/supporters/individuals



As a church we'd love to work with you:

www.countiesuk.org/supporters/churches

Or call the office on 01373 823013



AS COUNTIES CONTINUES TO ENCOURAGE CHURCHES TO PARTNER WITH COUNTIES PLANTING NETWORK, A UK DELEGATION JOINED THE M4 EUROPE NATIONAL LEADERS GATHERING IN NORWAY. JAMES HYDE, FROM COUNTIES PLANTING NETWORK, WAS THERE.

With the UK historic church in overall decline and less than three per cent of the population followers of Jesus, Counties believes that every person, in every county, should be within reach of a church that makes Jesus known to them.

The M4 Europe national leaders gathering is an annual event that brings together church plant movement leaders from across Europe to share ideas, learn from each other, and be encouraged in their work.

The highlight for our team was an inspiring Europe-wide prayer meeting.

On an enormous floor map of Europe, each of the national teams stood on their nation and worshipped and interceded for their people. As songs and prayers filled the air, teams walked across the map to pray over other nations.

As our earnest prayers raised the roof, we felt like our prayers joined those of Jesus who intercedes for His saints.

In the following days, many of us were still moved at the remembrance of this time together praying about His work.

Martin Erwin, Board Member of M4 Europe and Counties CEO says:

"We believe that church planting is God's initiative and that it's Christ himself who builds His church. The authority of the Bible is essential for the content and message of Counties church planting process.

"Counties works in four key areas: church planting; developing leaders; Gospel impact; and supporting network churches to become a church planting movement.

"We want to see a multiplying movement of missional churches, leaders with a Kingdom mentality who seek

relationships first and who are open to changes and improvement when they walk into the future together with God and His church."

The theme of the conference was: *"The Journey of Generosity."* It reflects the M4 Europe philosophy of church planting, which is based on their value of a Kingdom mindset.

Five of us from the UK attended: Martin Erwin, who leads M4 UK (in collaboration with John Townley who is the National Leader of Free Methodist Church (FM UK and Ireland). Becky Townley, his wife, who attended on behalf of FM. Debbie Hyde, James's wife, who was invited to assist the workshop for trainers. And finally, Andy Hodson who attended as a guest of Counties, himself a multiple church-planter.

The importance of teamwork was one of the most crucial elements the UK team took away from the conference.





Three lessons about teams

- **Join Jesus:** A church planting movement is not 'owned' by just one denomination or stream. We believe that as God sent Christ and the Holy Spirit, we also are sent. There is no pressure to join a denomination, but just to join God's mission.
- **Be passionate about unity:** It takes a team of people with different gifts and abilities to start a movement that is sustainable and fruitful. The M4 Team process was created to outline the core principles of planting Jesus-centred, Bible-based churches.
- **Be generous:** A national team works best as a collaboration of experienced church planters in the UK, investing into people who are pursuing the mission of God with a vision to begin new local churches. But we can also cooperate with other denominations and streams who share the same calling although pursuing separate tracks.

We also learned about the different stages of a church planting movement. From the initial vision to the launch of multiplying churches, there are a number of important steps that need to be taken.

Counties brought the successful M4 Europe training process to the UK. It grew out of M4 Europe's experience of church planting activity over the last 30 years. Since 2009, M4 Europe has helped initiate over 300 church plants and planting movements in 16 nations.

The UK team joined a cohort with Sweden and Estonia and learned how they have moved forward since they started their movements nine years ago. We learned from their mistakes, sought out and listened to the feedback of other nations.

The team was challenged in three ways about growing a movement. They are summed up in the phrase: "Start before you're ready!".

Focus on progress rather than perfection.

- **Long-term:** It takes time to plant a church in Europe and longer to see a church planting movement. Whilst 84 per cent of church plants using M4 are surviving, they can take 7-10 years to thrive.
- **Indigenous:** We must work hard to adapt and contextualise the church planting process to our nation. Counties' record of innovation has already seen us pioneer methods which other nations are now using.
- **Multiply:** Each nation should start helping other regions or nations. Counties is collaborating with FM to see church planting in Ireland within the next two years. And in 2023 we hope to collaborate with others to support a plant in Scotland.

Finally, we had the opportunity to connect with other church planters and leaders from across Europe. We learned from each other's experiences, shared ideas, and built relationships.

We even took part in a national volleyball tournament (the UK was knocked out by Moldova!) and delicious Norwegian fish soup and barbecue.

After just three days together, we travelled home with our hearts full of inspiration and lessons learned and a determination that over the next 12 months we will move from where we are, to where we feel God is calling us to.

What I love about M4 is that it's not really a formula, it's just a team, around a table, with the gospel of Jesus and an openness to the Holy Spirit.



NEXT STEPS

Learn how to recruit a leader, train your team, make gospel impact, and receive all of the training and resources from Counties Planting Network.

Visit: <https://www.countiesuk.org/counties-church-planting>



AS A FORETASTE OF COUNTIES CONNECT CONFERENCE IN OCTOBER, NEARLY 250 WORSHIPERS GATHERED FOR A CELEBRATION OF 'BEING IN GOD'S PRESENCE'. COUNTIES EVANGELIST, TIM CRACKNELL HELPED ORGANISE 'AN EVENING CELEBRATION' AT THEIR FARM, IN NEWENT, GLOUCESTERSHIRE.

Tim, what was the idea behind the gathering?

Covid did shake up a lot of people and churches, but God is doing some amazing things and we wanted to celebrate that and encourage others – Christian and non-Christian. People came from as far as Cardiff, Newport, and Derby, as well as local people from across Gloucestershire and Herefordshire.

How did the evening unfold?

We started the evening with a BBQ, followed by strawberries and cream. Then we had an extended time of worship, followed by testimonies from eight different people. One person, from a completely non-church background became a Christian during lockdown having taken part in church services online. When he got

baptised, it was only the third time he'd been inside a church.

A small church in Kidderminster felt God laid it upon their hearts to purchase a building next door. Without any special offerings or applying for grants, God supplied the money. They raised £150,000

Counties CEO, Martin Erwin, wrapped up the evening. It was all about being in the presence of God and being inspired, encouraged and enriched by hearing God's voice. There was such a great atmosphere and a sense of expectation.

What are your 'takeaways' from the evening'?

God is at work and is moving in and through His people. He hasn't lost His power. We can be encouraged. There

will be uncertainly around us, but we should have certainty that God has gone ahead of us.

The Church is meeting that challenge and people are wanting to move forward and work together across areas to see God's work accomplished. We hear all the negative stories about church so often, but people love the fellowship and the richness that it brings.



Feedback from the evening

"It was a special night for sure and the rain didn't stop the people, praise the Lord!" (Newent)

"It was amazing, we all really enjoyed it! Words from us to describe the evening... uplifting, refreshing, joyful, moving & encouraging! And our question is when is the next one ?!!!!" (Newent)

"Loved this gathering - encouraging, empowering, enriching, inspiring. I loved the rain too. I had a few things become very clear during the evening and I felt more focused and directed." (Newent)

"I'm still buzzing!" (2 days later) (Newent)

"Thank you for a wonderful evening. We left feeling truly blessed knowing that we have a Heavenly Father that is amazing in so many ways. It was so, so good to all be together worshipping God. Thank you!" (Gloucester)

WHY I HOPE TO SEE YOU AT CONNECT 23 – FROM COUNTIES CEO, MARTIN ERWIN



LET ME GIVE YOU THREE REASONS WHY I HOPE TO SEE YOU AT OUR COUNTIES CONNECT CONFERENCE THIS OCTOBER.

Reason #1: We need wisdom for a new season.

In February 2020, over 200 people joined us at Staverton Park for our first ever Counties Connect conference. Of course, within a month we were plunged into the global Covid crisis. It began a season of change and challenge for the local church, as many people left our churches and didn't return. Some churches questioned the inherited model of church and evangelism, and whilst often there was a desire and willingness for change, most churches that survived found the temptation simply to return to the 'old ways' almost too hard to resist.

Today, the challenges and obstacles of the new landscape are very real, but so too are the opportunities for the Gospel that this new world provides, as so many are looking for meaning and purpose.

Many conferences are geared up for us as believers – to be refreshed, encouraged, and renewed. Certainly, we hope that this will be true at Connect 23, but our hearts' desire and prayer is that local churches may be blessed, refreshed and that leaders will be inspired and equipped for a new season of opportunity.

Reason #2 Local churches are NOT independent but interdependent.

Local churches need one another. Whatever your church background or experience, we have in the West developed a deeply independent streak, both individually and as local churches. Those churches which have grown, often become self-sufficient, whilst those who have struggled find less external support,

whether from decreasing availability of guest speakers or reduced levels of additional pastoral support and advice.

The New Testament paints a different model where local churches had both local leadership teams, and additional support and fellowship from external teams and other churches.

The Connect conference will provide an environment where we can learn from one another. We will also explore being part of Counties Connect between conferences. What might it look like to be part of such a network of mutual support and encouragement that reflects the context we find ourselves in AND reflects the biblical values of the early church.



Reason #3 We need to meet with Jesus.

Through times of worship; Bible Teaching from Chris Sinkinson (Moorlands College), Stephen McQuoid (GLO Europe) and myself; and in seminars and workshops; our desire is that we will meet with Jesus. From both Scripture and experience, we know that large gatherings are often places where we hear the voice of God in a fresh way.

We experience His Holy Spirit moving us, and prompting us to step out in bold faith, and we return to our home situation with renewed vision and vigour to serve the risen Christ, to preach the Gospel, to make disciples and to see churches revitalised and new churches planted.

This is our prayer for Connect 23.

1. What can you do?
2. Book onto the conference online here.



3. Bring others with you, so that together, we may connect with Christ, connect with one another, and be equipped to connect our neighbours with the Good News of Jesus.
4. Pray for those preparing to speak and lead.

GUEST SPEAKER, CHRIS SINKINSON, FROM MOORLANDS COLLEGE, GIVES IGNITE A SNEAK PREVIEW OF WHAT HE'LL BE SHARING WITH CONFERENCE DELEGATES.



I'm really looking forward to joining you and in October and I will be speaking about themes relating to the message of the Cross and its relevance to the world we live in today, but my background and interest is really in the history of the Bible and what God has done historically.

I am going to be weaving that into my themes with you during my talks. I want to share how the world of archaeology demonstrates the Bible is real history; it deals with real people, in real places and with real events.

And that's helpful for us because when we share the Gospel today, we are not sharing devotionals only.



We are not sharing myths, legends and fairy tales. We are sharing real history. That's because we believe in a real God, a real story of redemption, a real saviour. And that means there is a real salvation and a real Heaven to come.

So that message of Redemption is going to be my theme – relating it to history and archaeology.

In the seminars I will focus more on archaeology. And in our main studies, I just want to share how the message of the Cross is the message for today.

So, I am really looking forward to joining you and if you know people who aren't part of the Counties family, please do think about inviting them.

I believe the work of Counties is really significant. It's not celebrity fireworks, it's not 'big stage' stuff. It's authentic evangelism. It's genuine men and women, who want to share their love for Jesus in our communities. I look forward to meeting many of you then.

Shalom.



“IS TODAY’S CHURCH CLINGING ON TO THE ‘MEANS’ AT THE EXPENSE OF THE ‘MISSION’ AND LOSING ITS VISION AS A RESULT?” ASKS COUNTIES REGIONAL CONNECTOR, SIMON LADD

During the pandemic we got used to seeing Chris Whitty giving his daily briefing, talking about R numbers and showing us graphs that tilted up like the launch ramp for Eddie the Eagle.

The R number was the “reproduction” number – and if it was above one – the pandemic was growing.

Dr John Hayward, a mathematician at the University of South Wales has analysed data from 13 church denominations to calculate their R-rate — a technique more usually associated with calculating the spread of disease. According to Dr Hayward: “*The Church of England faces extinction within 40 years because it is not ‘contagious’ enough.*”

“For churches,” says Dr Hayward, “I call it the ‘Reproduction Potential’. If this number is less than one, the church is dying out. If the reproduction potential is greater than one, additions are strong enough to counter losses, and the church is growing.”

His projections for most of the major denominations are rather gloomy, however, Dr Hayward points out that Elim Pentecostal Churches and the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches both have R numbers of between 1 and 1.1 and are growing.

There are four reasons why I’m not over troubled by these findings:

Firstly, they are only statistics. A statistician can show that a person with their head in the freezer and their feet in the fire, is, on average, perfectly comfortable. The accuracy of the data on which statistics are based is always up for debate and so is their interpretation.

When projecting into the future, models are a guess, at best. We have reasonable confidence in the weather forecast for tomorrow. The five-day forecast is usually a decent guide, but despite having the biggest computers and hugely complex models, the Met Office’s long-range forecasts are about as reliable as Mystic Meg.



Mission in Action

Secondly, few things have been predicted more frequently and more incorrectly than the death of the church. You can analyse virtually any century in the last 2000 years and find people saying that Christianity is only a generation or two away from extinction.

Thirdly, there is history. England, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, was in a moral quagmire and a spiritual desert. Deism was rampant, and a bland, philosophical morality was standard fare in the churches. Sir William Blackstone visited the church of every major clergyman in London, but “did not hear a single discourse which had more Christianity in it than the writings of Cicero”.

In most sermons he heard, he said: “*It would have been impossible to tell just from listening whether the preacher was a follower of Confucius, Mohammed, or Christ!*”

Morally, the country was becoming increasingly decadent. Drunkenness was rampant; there were 50,000 prostitutes in London. Gambling was so extensive that one historian described England as “one vast casino”. Bishop Berkeley wrote that morality and religion in Britain had collapsed “to a degree that was never known in any Christian country”.

And then came the Great Awakening. God broke through in revival. Under God, Whitefield and Wesley and many more,

took the clear Gospel message to the people where they were, in language they could understand.

In February 1739, parish priests in Bath and Bristol refused to allow Whitefield to preach in their churches on the grounds that he was a religious enthusiast. In response, he began open-air, field preaching, in the mining community of Kingswood, near Bristol.

Open-air preaching was common in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, but it was unheard of in England. Furthermore, Whitefield violated protocol by preaching in another priest's parish without permission. Within a week, he was preaching to crowds of 10,000. By May 1739, he was preaching in London, to crowds of 50,000.

Hundreds of thousands of people became Christians, thousands of churches were planted, society was transformed to the extent that secular historians argue it was this religious movement that spared England from the equivalent of the French Revolution.

Fourthly, Jesus says: *"I will build my church and the gates of hell will not hold out against it"*, Matthew 16:18. No word of Jesus has ever failed – and it never will. The church is Jesus' idea. It is his darling. It operates under his protection and his personal guarantee of ultimate success and victory. It is a huge privilege to be part of Christ's 'grand endeavour' and to know that our labours cannot be in vain.

However, if we are to know Christ's blessing, we must follow His instructions (Colossians 1:18). It is all too easy to think of 'our' church rather than 'His' church, and it is all too easy to organise church the way we like it, and how it feels comfortable to us.

It is also all too easy to operate the machinery of 'church' and run the programme without constantly referring to the great mission He has given us, not to settle and be comfortable – but to go and make disciples (Matthew 28:18-20).

In January 2012 the Kodak company filed for bankruptcy. Only 25 years before they were the biggest photographic company

in the world. Kodak failed because it stuck with the 'means' but forgot the 'mission.' The 'mission' of Kodak was to allow ordinary people to take and keep photographs.

Ironically, the founder of Kodak, George Eastman had avoided this mistake twice already. He gave up a profitable dry-plate business to move to film. And 30 years later he invested in colour film even though it was demonstrably inferior to black and white film which Kodak dominated. He did this because he was ready to leave a particular way of doing things – to stay true to the 'mission'.

Even more ironically, Steve Sasson, who developed the first digital camera in 1975, was a Kodak employee. But the executives were blind to it's potential. Kodak stuck with the old means of film, chemical developing and printing on photo sensitive paper – but the digital revolution and development of smart phones quickly made the old Kodak way irrelevant.

More photos are taken today than ever before. The mission is still the same – to allow ordinary people to take and keep their own images – but the means has changed.

Jesus' Great Commission does not mention the Authorised Bible, dark suits, pews, pulpits, or stained glass. Jesus did not say that church noticeboards had to headed with gothic script, and Jesus didn't say that we should meet at 11:00am and 6:30pm on a Sunday, only sing hymns over 100 years old and share communion every week.

Those things are the 'means' and we cannot hang onto them at the expense of the mission.

The mission is permanent, but many of the means are temporary. If we hang on to particular means too long - we inevitably compromise the mission.

The mission is to go to the people, to start where they are and explain the Gospel to them in words they can understand.

We don't need to be overly concerned with the bleak predictions of Dr Hayward. But we can try and make sure that we are not merely 'doing things the way we have always done them' and perpetuating a model of church that was relevant 50 years ago but isn't connecting with ordinary people today.

Instead, let the challenge of the R number be a stimulus for us to re-evaluate our means, remember our mission and rediscover our vision.



NEXT STEPS

To find out more about how Counties can help your church, you may be interested in the church revitalisation project call the office on: 01373 823013 or counties-training.org/church-revitalisation



COUNTIES TRAINEES HAVE BEEN PUTTING THEORY INTO PRACTICE AS THEY PARTNERED WITH K180 FOR THE 'BIG 3 MISSION' IN DEVON - WHERE THEY REACHED OUT TO YOUNG PEOPLE WITH GOOD NEWS OF JESUS.

Rachel Rounds reports:

Counties trainees took to the streets of Devon to make Jesus known in a way they'd never done before. Many of those who took part had never done street evangelism before and admitted they were nervous and were not sure what to expect. However, as always, God's in charge and many young people gave their lives to the Lord and trainees and volunteers came away renewed and invigorated to see God at work.

The trainees were working alongside K180 which is a Europe-wide evangelistic organisation that partners with Counties Evangelist Training Programme.

Counties Training Officer, Beverley Bedford, invited two teams from K180 to do their annual UK 'Big 3 Mission' in Paignton and Woolacombe. She and trainees from the Evangelist Trainee Programme (ETP), and members of her church – Calvary Chapel - were based in Woolacombe. And Stevie Walker (ETP trainee) and members of his church, were based on the streets in Paignton, along with a K180 team.

"I enjoyed the new challenge of ministering to people on and around the beach in Woolacombe with tracts, preaches, Gospel songs and illustrations. I started off the weekend feeling quite weak in the flesh but, by His Holy Spirit, God gave me the strength and boldness to engage people in deep conversation, one [conversation] in particular resulting in someone's salvation!"

Henry, Woolacombe Team Member



Woolacombe

Calvary Chapel has a skateboarding half-pipe at the back of the church and a thriving youth group that meets there on Friday evenings. The Counties and K180 team were able to be there and mix with some of the young people.

One of the team members, Stuart, shared his testimony and encouraged the young people to give their lives to Jesus. Several of the group indicated they wanted to speak to the team afterwards.

On Saturday morning K180 did some carried out training about how to do evangelism and how to share 'your story' on the streets. Then in the afternoon the teams did some were engaged in outreach near the beach and in the town, which was full of tourists. They gave out John's gospels and literature which many people happily took. The teams also painted using sketch boards – where people gathered around to listen.

They had lots of conversations with people and prayed with some.

Beverley Bedford chatted to one young woman who was struggling with her gender identity. She told Beverley that she had no idea she was loved by God when they started talking about identity. Beverley adds:

"She had tears in her eyes. It was just a revelation to her that she was significant to Him. That wherever she was, and whatever her thoughts were about herself, God valued her, and she was precious to Him."

On Sunday, teams headed to the beach again where two of the team shared the Gospel with a man who wanted to pray a prayer of commitment to Christ.

Jason Thorpe, Calvary Chapel pastor in Woolacombe, says:

"Friday nights, as usual, are always exciting when the kids rock up for youth club. The numbers vary quite a lot, depending on what is happening in the villages

surrounding Woolacombe. I remember the 'Big Three Mission' Friday night being busier than usual.

"The young people always arrive ready to skate and that's what they did. Many on the Mini ramp, a few on the floor in front of the ramp, and a couple playing pool. Two youth workers were doing their usual catch up with the regulars, finding out about their week, school, new skate tricks, home life etc.

"With K180 joining us along with Counties trainees, neither I, nor they, really knew what to expect at the youth club but we had simply arranged to hang out with the young people and that one of the team would share their testimony. We usually break the playtime up with a short Bible study.

"Stuart who joined the K180 team shared his life story and how Jesus had changed his life. These children have heard the gospel hundreds of times before and never really made any commitment. Some are, of course, already believers but I was truly blessed to see every hand go up as Stuart asked about whether they wanted to have Jesus in their lives.

"For the rest of the night there was a queue to chat more about it with him. I'm grateful so much to The Lord for using K180 to reach our youth and look forward to seeing what God does furthering these young lives."

Counties Training Officer, Beverley Bedford, says:

"What an exciting weekend to be involved in over the May Bank Holiday with K180 and Calvary Chapel Woolacombe. The weekend was a mix of sharing with young people who attended the local church

youth group and meeting holiday makers on the beach from all corners of the UK and beyond.

"Counties trainees were well resourced with Gospel literature and Bibles having just had a morning of evangelistic training from K180. It was fun as a team to gather together and use the tools of sketch board and sharing testimonial stories to a crowd that had gathered to listen and take Gospel literature.

"It is always super exciting to see local church members willing to step out in faith to 'have a go' at evangelism even if it is their first time and they are quite nervous. The team went off in pairs to initiate conversations and seek opportunities to pray for and with those who were willing to receive it. We don't ever know the impact one tract, one conversation, one Bible verse can have, we sow and trust God to bring the increase".



Paignton

ETP Trainee, Stevie Walker, says:

"We were blessed with great weather all weekend, the work I had planned was all outdoors.

"It was a privilege to host the four evangelists from K180. We are grateful for their help and to the Great Parks Chapel members who fed us and put the K180 evangelists up in their homes for the weekend.

"We had a busy weekend, seven of us started off with sea front walks where we were able to stop and talk to people who were out walking or taking in the views. Then we followed on with open air preaching for two hours in Paignton Town centre where people stopped to listen to us and spoke with us. We were able to share the Gospel with them.

"We then went to Totnes to do some more street evangelism. We had some good conversations with people who stopped to chat with us. And since then, I have been going out in Totnes regularly with help from members of the local Gospel Hall.

"Sunday was a busy time on Paignton Sea front, lots of bikers gathered to show their bikes so we went out to speak to people again. We had some very good conversations. Lots of tracts and John's Gospels were given out throughout the weekend. It was a very encouraging weekend. People were open to listen to the Gospel."



NEXT STEPS

Do you have heart for evangelism?

For further details of the ETP scheme:

www.counties-training.org/etp



JUST A MINUTE WITH...

CLIVE CORNISH



Clive has been a Counties Evangelist for 20 years. He is married to Fiona, and they have three grownup daughters. They lead Reflect Community Church in Ely, Cardiff.

How did you become a Christian?

A neighbour asked me to go to church in Merthyr Tydfil when I was 19. There were two seats left on the front row and I was laughing and giggling.

The minister, an American highway patrolman, stopped talking and said: "Do you know Jesus?" And I said: "No, do you?" He said: "Yes". Then he asked me if I would like to know Jesus, and I said: "If I could know Him, then of course I'd like to know Him".

So, he prayed with me, and I have never been the same. I felt clean, like He'd washed me out.

What are the highlights of your time at Counties?

Because I come from a very broken background, I always look back fondly at the time I spent with John Wilkes, Jonathan Brain, and Bob Telford when I first joined Counties full-time. What you put into a person lasts and what the positive things they put into me have lasted.

Clive, you are 'famous' amongst the Counties family, Ignite readers and many

people in Wales and beyond, for carrying your life-size cross, for many miles – why do you do it?

The cross is 12 feet high, has 6 feet span and weighs 60lbs. I do it because people come to me because of the size of the cross and the distances I travel (from Jerusalem to Rome, for example) – and they want to know why I am doing it. It gives me the opportunity to tell them what Jesus has done for them on the cross.

I do get people mocking and shouting obscenities but then I will get one amazing experience which is so emotional, and so God intended, that it wipes out all the bad experiences.

Also, I believe that carrying the cross has made the greatest difference to me. There is a time when it's just me and God and it's helped me understand people. I have to meet them where they are not where I am.

What is your favourite Bible passage and why?

"You will know the truth and the truth will set you free." John 8:32

I believe there is a double meaning in that. We know that Jesus is the truth but knowing the truth about yourself sets you free as well. Like the alcoholic – it's only when they admit they are an addict that they can be set free.

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
John & Jane Martin (Seniors)
Caleb & Adanesh Mathewos
Andrew & Rachel Mugford

SOUTH WEST

Jacquie & Tim Bodman
Jean Campbell (Senior)
Steve Ellacott (AE)
Mike & Su Strange (Seniors)
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

WALES

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

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

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