

SUMMER 2022

IGNITE

SPARKING PASSION FOR THE GOSPEL
ACROSS THE UK



“COME AS YOU ARE”

OR HAVE WE BECOME A MIDDLE-CLASS
CHURCH? A COUNTIES EVANGELIST
SHARES HIS EXPERIENCES

ALSO ON THE PLATINUM JUBILEE YEAR WE HEAR FROM
NEIGHBOURHOOD CHAPLAINS ACROSS THE UK
ONE2LEAD'S LEADERS TALK ABOUT ITS FUTURE
VISION AFTER THEIR RECENT SUCCESSFUL EVENTS



WELCOME TO IGNITE



I have the joy of reading Ignite in its early stages as we draft, amend and tweak it. I write this introduction inspired and thrilled by what I have just read.

From Neighbourhood Chaplains teams now demonstrating the love of God in all four corners of the United Kingdom, to the launch of a new One2Lead training weekend for young people in Cornwall. Counties people always inspire me. God is still in the business of changing lives – and along the way we discover that He is changing our lives too!

Maybe God is calling you to plant a church, or to partner with Counties in some way?

Read about M4 Church plant training on page 12, and then put yourself in Clive Cornish's shoes on page 16, as he leads the plant at Reflect Community Church in Ely, Cardiff and watches as communion takes an unexpected turn! What would you do? What would Jesus do?

Evangelism is the most exciting calling in the world. I hope you are inspired to make Jesus known where you are today.

Martin

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

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COUNTIES FUTURE DIRECTION DISCUSSED AT RETREAT

CEO MARTIN ERWIN WRITES:

Counties Trustees recently met together at Regent Theological College, in Malvern, for a 36-hour strategy retreat. This normally happens every three years, but due to Covid, this was the first such event since 2017.

There were presentations from CEO, Martin Erwin, as well as Training Officer, Beverley Bedford, who joined via Zoom. 'Making Jesus known' has

been Counties mission statement for some time and together, the Trustees reflected on the role of the evangelist in equipping the church (Ephesians 4) as well as being engaged in direct evangelism. God willing, Counties is excited to pursue this growing burden to more fully engage with local churches to make Jesus known in the days to come.

ACTS OF SERVICE FOR THE PLATINUM JUBILEE

How about engaging in this great way to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee by serving others?

HOPE Together has listed 70 Acts of Service to make a difference in your community - but you might have lots of other ideas - and it would be great to encourage your friends, family and church to get involved too.

countiesuk.org/neighbourhood-chaplains

M4 CONFERENCE HELD IN ROSS ON WYE



During March, Counties took part in the latest Church Planters Learning Community in Ross-On-Wye. Teams came from the North, South Wales, the West Country and London.

Kenno and Jana Leier, from M4 Europe, augmented the teaching team, travelling from Finland to be with there. They were joined by John Townley, National Leader of the Free Methodist Church, and the Counties team: Martin Erwin, Aderyn Taylor-

Roberts, James and Debbie Hyde and Tim Cracknell.

For some of the teams, it completed a full cycle of the four Learning Communities which is spread over two and a half years.

Now the hard work begins, as they seek to put into practice all they have learned and trust God to grow these new churches.

HETTIE HALL PASSES AWAY

Hettie Hall went to be with the Lord on 14 April. Hettie was married to John, and they joined Counties in December 1967. John had passed away December 2014.

Former Counties Trustee, Brian Chapman, recalls:

"Hattie was one of life's characters who certainly made an impression on you when you met her. She was devoted to the Lord and formed a unique partnership with John. They were as one in the service of the Lord especially in the gospel."

For many years they were key members of the Way to Life Crusades with Dick Saunders. Please pray for those who were close to her.





AS WE CELEBRATE THE QUEEN'S PLATINUM JUBILEE, IGNITE HEARS FROM NEIGHBOURHOOD CHAPLAINS ACROSS THE UNITED KINGDOM.

Northern Ireland

- seeing doors open at their first event



With their first Neighbourhood Chaplains event held just two days before this interview, the team in Ballymena really are the new kids on the block.

Emma Veal is part of a core team of seven, along with a few others who help on an occasional basis, from Hillside Community Church, which is right beside one of the biggest housing estates in the area.



Emma was a teacher. She decided not to go back to work after the birth of her two children but found herself with time on her hands.

"I guess going to church every week and just looking at all the houses on this estate made me realise the potential of reaching out to all these people and sharing the gospel with them. I really had a heart to do that. So, I got involved with a community lunch, a food bank, a primary school on the estate.

"It's a really deprived area with so many people who are struggling financially or with addictions. When I heard about Neighbourhood Chaplains it seemed like a great way to widen that and do something more official. And God had also laid it on the heart of other people in the church.

NEIGHBOURHOOD CHAPLAINS

"Jesus spoke to people who were rejected and on the margins of society and had no hope. But He was so compassionate. He spent time with people and preached the Good News. His example is one we should follow. People aren't just going to come to church – we need to go out to them and show Jesus' love."

Emma and the team did just that at their first event, where they set up tables outside the local shops on the estate and gave out Easter cards and chocolate bars donated by the Spar shop. Emma says the team had some great conversations:

"I spoke to an older guy who studied some theology at University and had lots of questions about what faith is and what Christians believe. So, we are praying for him, that he will get in touch with us."

Wales

- small but mighty



Stephanie Young and Cecilia Sims may be a small Neighbourhood Chaplains team, but they pack a punch from Nant Coch Church in Newport, Wales.

"Instead of trying to lure people into our church building," says Steph, "we should be going out there as ambassadors for Christ and showing people God's love in our neighbourhood."

Cecilia agrees: *"That's why I felt called to get involved with Neighbourhood Chaplains in the first place! It is a privilege to meet people in the street on their doorsteps and sometimes in their homes.*

"To do some practical things to help, from chatting, praying, sharing joys, sorrows and challenges, accompanying them when trying new things. All part of using what God has given us to share his love for them".

Stephanie produces a church newsletter which she and Cecilia deliver to some of the houses in the neighbourhood. One lady they visit attends the church bible study. She lives on her own and has mobility problems.

She was struggling to get through to Age UK to get help with her house cleaning, so Stephanie and Cecilia helped her with window cleaning and managed to also organise cleaning through Age UK for her.

Cecilia and Stephanie visit a couple who both suffer from health and mobility problems.

"It doesn't seem a lot," says Stephanie, "but they are always pleased to see us. It helps them feel less isolated."

"For me, it's not so much about trying to evangelise people by just telling them about Jesus. It is about getting to know people in your area, their needs, walking alongside them and being God's hands and mouth. It's about letting people know they are not alone."

England

- planning to impact the community



Launching Neighbourhood Chaplains in Stockport, near Manchester, began with Easter cards dropped through letters boxes followed by Neighbourhood Chaplain calling cards.

That's the plan for Hayley Wall and her team of seven from 360 Life Church.

"We're not far off now. I think the team should grow as we go. That's what we are hoping for."

The team is currently planning a big splash with a Platinum Jubilee street party.

"The idea is to have a tea party with sandwiches, cakes, bunting, face-painting for the kids, a song from each decade of her reign, a photo booth with props, and maybe we will get someone to teach swing dancing."

The church building is an old working men's club in the middle of a housing estate and Hayley says the intention was always to impact the community but so far, she says, they haven't done as much as they had wanted to after nearly ten years.

"One of the main drivers is to make an impact in the community and develop long term relationships. But at the end of the day, we want people to come to know Jesus."

"Our job as the church is to move people in the direction of God because everyone is on a journey. We want to be disciples who make disciples."



Scotland

- through the pandemic and beyond



local community practitioner, who works out of the local health centre, to help vulnerable people in the community.

During the pandemic, because the church also had a chaplaincy team, they were linked in with the local council and classed as key workers.

This meant they could send letters round the neighbourhood and check up on people in need.

For Alan, like Stephanie in Wales, it's about getting out of a church building and into the neighbourhood:

"It gives me a sense of doing God's work. Door-to-door is something that people often don't look forward to doing. But you feel afterward that you were doing something that Jesus was doing by engaging people where they are. It's stretched me as a Christian - it stretches my faith and my prayers as I head out to talk about the Gospel in public. You can't hide in your uniform!"

Alan became a Neighbourhood Chaplain because he wanted to follow Christ's lead:

"I just think of how often Jesus engaged with people and met people where they were in their lives."

"Neighbourhood Chaplains is a way to show and share the Gospel and allow people to speak about faith on their own terms."

The team does a variety of work including going door-to-door, where they share the Bible as conversations develop and meet new people in the heart of the community.

They have also done various 'Helping Hands' work in the area. Including helping with a house clearing. They've also been asked for assistance by a



For more information about how Neighbour Chaplains can help you visit

www.neighbourhoodchaplains.org



ONE2LEAD'S LEADERS TALK ABOUT ITS FUTURE VISION AFTER THEIR RECENT SUCCESSFUL EVENTS.

South Wales & Borders leader, Phil Davies, and Southwest leader, Beverley Bedford, share their plans.



Phil, you have been involved in One2Lead for 16 years, for those readers who don't know, what is One2Lead?

It's a course which runs for six weekends held over two years. It was developed to train young leaders and has been adapted over the years, in Chepstow. Four years ago, we began to talk about taking it wider and further – hence the event in Cornwall. We also decided to look at the content we were teaching. It was very much leadership-based, which we still have, but we now take young people from the age of sixteen and so it's also about developing their faith and helping them to grow.

So how has the syllabus changed?

In Chepstow, we have started the new syllabus – whereas Cornwall was a 'taster weekend'. For part of our weekends, we look at theological topics: the nature of God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; the Church – and the New and Old Testaments. Then we look at topics around Spiritual growth – for young people as individuals, but also as disciples of Jesus. Examples would

be: 'Knowing Myself', 'Sharing My Faith', and 'Discipleship'.

Has the structure of the weekend changed?

There are two sessions of biblical studies and personal growth, but we will get someone from Counties to share their testimony or do a more practical session. We will take them out on activities that take them out of their comfort zone, like caving, high ropes, canoeing, or more fun-based like ten-pin bowling or speed-boating.

What kind of reaction have you had?

The best reaction is that they all want to come back in September! I also felt they were more engaged in the content. There was far less cognitive teaching, and it was far more interactive. We did two types of questionnaires where they had to discover their passion – so they were encouraged to come up with a personal passion statement at the end.

What are some of the organic things you have learned?

We used to have a teaching session on

ONE2LEAD

a Friday night, but we now have a time of welcome, worship and a challenge for the weekend. This last time, we ended up eating at the end of the night (we usually eat first) but that worked out brilliantly because everyone stayed up chatting and really getting to know one another. It was great to see the second One2Lead launch with its taster session in Cornwall and now we are working to replicate this in other areas so young people don't have to travel so far.

What have some students for the past 16 years gone on to do?

Some have gone on to lead Christian Unions at universities. One girl is at Moorlands Bible College at present. Some have joined the Counties TEAM programme. Others have gone on to become Interns in churches. We have taken groups of them on mission teams to Hungary and help on church teams and teams at Agricultural shows - all kinds of different things really.

Beverley what was the purpose of the taster weekend in Cornwall?

It was to get young people from various churches together to experience in-depth teaching. The aim to offer a taster weekend of One2Lead in Cornwall asking young people: "Would you like to be part of the two-year course?" It was really to put our flag in the ground and say: "We are here".

Did their questions surprise you?

Yes, the maturity of the questions submitted blew me away. We had a whole session on answering tricky questions and 'suffering', as frequently does, came up. We took each question,

pulled it apart and put it back together. When they weren't satisfied, they kept drilling down. But there is a point where there is a mystery, we can't know everything, only God can.

You had a former One2Lead pupil teaching too, didn't you?

Yes, Zac Whitehouse, who has completed the two-year, six-weekend course in Chepstow, joined us in Cornwall for a teaching session. We thought it was such a good example for his peers to see how they too could aspire to lead. Zac also completed the TEAM programme and remains a valuable leader in his local church. So, Zac was an example of the end goal, for all who attended One2Lead, in becoming the next generation of leaders.

How do you recruit and reach out to the local church?

We always talk to the youth leaders at the application stage, and they are asked to recommend the young people. The aim is to follow up after each event with the church leaders and join in championing our young people within the local church. It's very much a collaboration and it is all about growing relationally.

So, it was a success?

They were a very special group, there was a lot of fun and laughter, hunger for the word of God, an intentional focus on our lovely Saviour and an awful lot of cake! I can't wait for our next gathering on the 30 September - 2 October.

Booking counties-training.org/one2lead



MANY CHURCHES ARE CONSIDERING PLANTING OR REVITALISING BUT LACKING LEAD PLANTERS

James Hyde, the Counties Planting Network Consultant, shares his vision for how your church could make this a reality.

James, firstly, remind us how M4 is connected to Counties and why?

Counties has brought M4 – an established, successful, European programme – here and is helping to lead it in the UK. As John Townley, National Leader of Free Methodist Church UK & Ireland says:

“I am excited by the prospect of a strong relationship with M4 as we need a vehicle for training church planters and their teams. M4 resonates deeply with me as I love the method of training the church planter and the team together, formulating the action plan and a coach holding them accountable to their own action plan.”

Why are M4 and the Counties Planting Network (CPN) needed?

A 2021 National Ministry survey recently found that 62% of church leaders are preparing to send out a church plant or open to the prospect in the next

three to five years. The survey also found that the most common blockers to church planting or revitalising weren't financing (it didn't make the top ten) but not having the right person to lead the church plant - the most significant issues were being too small to risk losing a significant number of people and not having a big enough launch team.

TOP THREE PERCEIVED BARRIERS TO STARTING A CHURCH PLANT

- 48%** Not having the right person to lead a church plant
- 47%** Being too small or fragile to afford losing a significant number of good people
- 47%** Not having a launch team of 20+ people

source: nationalministrysurvey.org

However, we do know that post-lockdown, many churches are looking to make the most of new opportunities and are thinking about what they want to do in the next three to five years and that's where we come in.

The M4 process will get your church ready to be able to plant or revitalise a church in the coming years.

CHURCH PLANTING

How do you find the right person to lead a church plant?

Preparing the right people to lead the church plant or revitalisation is a lengthy process and we're here to give churches help, support, training and we also offer the invaluable input of others who have gone before, who can assess your church's candidates to make sure you recognise the right people.

The training content has been developed from 30 years of church planting experience. For example, we help lead planters to cast a vision, recruit, manage and gather a launch team during the process. We don't expect your church to join the process with everything sorted. Counties can also help your church to train up new leaders, so churches aren't losing their own to the new plant.

How much commitment does it require? What if a church can't afford to lose a significant number of good people?

It requires a lot because it's all about preparing and readying your church for a big change that's going to happen in a few years down the road. Over a two to three-year gap, we offer assessment of potential lead planters, online access to courses, facilitation in small groups, church leadership mentoring, consultancy and coaching.

Some of the people who started the process a couple of years ago haven't even held a public service yet. One church planter said to me:

“There are only seven of us and we are ready to start calling others to join our launch team now after two years”.

Another office member said after a few years with us: “We now feel ready to go public with our first worship service”.

Do most churches who start M4 already have a building ready to move into?

It depends. Some do and some don't. One team has been meeting in a pub car park or at a pub quiz night. That's the best bit of advertising they've done because everyone in the pub in this village is really intrigued. Then there are planters who are given a church to revitalise, who may have spent lockdown doing up the building and who are now moving into the building.

If churches are interested in joining the M4 process, what should they do?

We are encouraging church leaders to come to a Zoom webinar called: ‘Come and See’. It's trying to answer the question: “Do you want to find out more about getting ready to start a new church or revitalise a church in your area?” So ‘come and see’ what other churches have done to get themselves ready to start a new church.

Since launching the UK M4 process in 2019 we have assessed 14 church planters, with 10 churches currently active on the process, and 85 church members registered for online learning, lovingly supported by our M4 team.

To find out more:

counties-training.org/counties-church-planting



PEOPLE ARE OFTEN FAR MORE OPEN TO THE GOSPEL THAN YOU MAY THINK - PARTICULARLY THE YOUNG. DAVE SYMONS TELLS IGNITE READERS

'BE ENCOURAGED'

Counties Evangelist, Dave Symons, is married to Katie. They live in Bideford and have two girls. He has been with Counties for 15 years.

At a time when many churches are seeing numbers falling and Christians often feel disheartened, particularly about young people and faith, Grosvenor Church, Bideford, which Dave Symons helped plant, with a team, four years ago, is thriving.

They set up the church plant because there were about forty people who were constantly travelling to and from Bideford to Barnstaple, every Sunday, which is about 10 miles.

"So, we prayed and set up action groups – Messy Church and also coffee on a Sunday morning once a month. That grew, and more people started coming."

Dave and the team knew, however, that they needed a church planter to lead the pastoral side of things.

"It was amazing how God just drew the right family who were already praying about finding a church themselves. That was four years ago."

Dave says the church was blessed from the outset as they had sixty people including kids straight away and that quickly grew as there hadn't been much for families in Bideford.

"We attracted people on the fringe of church, people who hadn't been for a long time, people who had drifted away and people invited their friends. We were also blessed with good musicians. We have had over 20 baptisms over the four years, people in their teens, in their twenties and we even had someone who was 92."

Every Thursday Dave and a team from local churches go out and do street evangelism or door-to-door work. They often visit Barnstaple and surrounding towns and villages working with local chapels.

'BE ENCOURAGED'

They take small copies of John's gospel to give to people who may be sitting down and don't look like they are too busy and may have time for a chat.

"When offering people a Gospel you normally get 50/50 'yes' or 'no'. It's such a privilege and a blessing to be able to offer God's word to people. The booklet also explains what it means to be a Christians as well. It opens up conversations. We've had great opportunities to pray with people and chat with them. Younger people are particularly open."

When asked if his church is doing something different or if there is something different about Bideford, Dave responds:

"I did some research into the twenties and thirties age range and how churches reach them. I visited some churches in the South-West. There were some interesting points which came out, but to be honest, the message never changes, and the services never really change. It's about the style in which it's done."

Dave says that a lot of churches have lovely worship services, but it is not relevant to younger people. In terms of music, he believes a non-Christian should be able to come and say: *"That music was quite cool."* Even if they don't believe.

"Without being overly spiritual, I think it is just the presence of God. When people come, if they don't sense God,

we are doing something wrong. I also think people attract people who are like them. So, if you already have young people who are passionate about their faith you will inevitably attract others."

Dave wholeheartedly believes that as churches, we need to invest in our young people and disciple them and then they will go on to do the same.

He is also a strong believer in relationship and a sense of community. People will respect you and your beliefs once they get to know you.

"Bible teaching is so important, you can have one sermon that is the same as another sermon, but when God is at work, then even hard-hearted people are affected and that's the whole spiritual element. We have some amazing people who pray before the service which is so important."

"I really don't think it matters how we do church if we are seeking God and seeking His word and there is a real sense of God's presence when we meet. Young people are still craving community and relationship and coming together, and church is such an exciting opportunity for that."

Dave would love to help plant other churches in the area as he believes the younger generation are desperate for something, they are looking for spirituality and for hope. He adds: *"We have the answer, and the answer is Jesus."*



HAVE WE BECOME A MIDDLE-CLASS CHURCH?

Clive has been a Counties Evangelist for 20 years. He is married to Fiona, and they have three grown-up children. They lead Reflect Community Church in Ely, Cardiff which is one of the biggest council estates in Europe.

Clive Cornish isn't a man to mince his words. Within the first ten minutes of our interview, he's told me that he was in prison for three and a half years and was sexually abused. He also candidly admits:

"Reflect Community Church really is more like a hospital than a middle-

class church. In fact, I said to God recently: 'Lord, please give us some new normal people,' and He said: 'Look at yourself.' I laughed and said: 'Fair play.'"

Clive admits that the catchment area doesn't really lend itself to the kind of church he envisaged at the start.

"People don't want to move to Ely, it's like the Bronx of Cardiff. It's a brilliant place to live but it's also got a lot of baggage from the past that's been held onto.

"We all know, or have been in churches that are all about themselves, not looking after their community. So, I knew that God wanted a church in Ely that was going to look after the community, as well as taking care of its own people."

"But the people who started coming were people with problems like schizophrenia and those with great needs."

Clive and his wife Fiona also found there was a lot of distrust where churches were concerned, so they are slowly trying to win people round on the estate.

Just after Christmas in 2021, a couple called Lynn and Tony came to Reflect, when they were given a hamper by the church. Lynn cried and said: *"In our thirty years of marriage nobody has ever given us anything for free"*.

However, they only agreed to come to church if they could bring their Shih Tzu dog, Sandy, who Lynn carries everywhere and is like one of their family - so Clive agreed.

In the meantime, Reflect was preparing to have the church's monthly Communion and so Clive explained to newcomers what Communion means to Christians, how important it is to believers, and what the bread and wine represent.

On the Sunday of Communion, Lynn came up to the front with Sandy and returned to her seat where she



Reflect church members taking part in Easter 'reach out'

proceeded to give the bread and the cup to Sandy to lick out the juice.

Clive says: *"I was flabbergasted. I couldn't believe it. And I could see another couple watching who weren't looking very happy at all. So, I thought that I was going to have to say something, but I didn't want to hurt their feelings as Sandy is obviously very precious to them"*.

Before the next Communion, Clive approached Lynn and explained that some Christians might get offended if she gave Sandy the bread and wine because it is so important to them. So, Clive told her he had wrapped a treat up and put it on the Communion

table for Sandy, and Lynn could have Communion if she felt she knew Jesus.

"You could see the joy in her face when I said that, and she took the treat at the next Communion."

The following week was Sandy's birthday and Lynn told Clive she was bringing cake and presents for the kids to give him, as they all love him.

Clive adds: *"So, there I am at the front of the church with Sandy in my arms singing 'Happy Birthday' and then I read out a birthday card. The cake had eight candles on it. You couldn't make it up."*

"But there was one guy whose face was like stone. So, when I prayed, I said: 'Lord we are meeting people where they are'. And I saw the realization dawn on this guy's face that this is what we should be about."

"It's interesting that we want people to be how we are. We want people to meet us where we are. And they can't do that. Life is difficult enough. And we want to give them a book of rules and say: 'This is how we do it here and if you can't be how we are, then don't come.'"

"But the reality is we should be saying: 'No, we will meet you where you are, and we will love you where you are unconditionally. Just come. And they do."

"Last week Lynn was out there making the coffees and bringing people in. That's a huge, massive step for her, to feel that she belongs."

Clive then cites the story of the woman at the well and how Jesus spoke to her. *"That story really moves me. He told her, her sin; but she never felt condemned, unwanted or rejected by it. In fact, she went and told everybody what had happened. Why can't we be like that? And do the same."*

Clive also tells the story of Gareth who 'loves his drink' and attends Reflect. He told Clive one week that he might not be there on Sunday morning because he occasionally goes out singing with a choir on a Saturday night and they get very drunk, so he would be too hungover. Clive adds:

"But on the many Sundays he is here, his arms are in the air, he is worshipping God. He obviously loves the Lord."

"At Christmas time, I was singing Cliff Richard's 'Mistletoe and Wine' and Gareth had obviously had a few. So, he ran up the aisle and got on the stage and was swaying back and forth, singing this song."

"It is so easy to start judging people like this when we don't know where they are. But we must accept that God and the Holy Spirit are going to convict them as we love them unconditionally."

When it comes to churches changing their approach to how they welcome people who lead lifestyles we don't agree with, who may make us feel uncomfortable or even judgmental, Clive admits it can be hard, but he says we all must start with simply being honest about the people we really are:

"If you've been sexually abused, like I have, you are damaged. If you have been beaten, you are damaged. All of us are damaged but people refuse to be who they are. And we really need to get to that place where we can be who we are, faults and all, to not be ashamed of who we are, be open about what has taken place in our lives – to be authentic with one another. That's when God can really start to work amongst us."



TOGETHER - SUSTAINING AND GROWING MISSION IN A FAST-CHANGING WORLD

Counties CEO, Martin Erwin, examines how the church carries out the Great Commission, in our post-Christian country.

Then Jesus came to them and said: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Matthew 28: 18-20

Chatting with church planters during lock-down, we were being asked: "What do we do now?"

As we revisited the Great Commission, we found that the question was not really "what?" but "how?"

This is the key question for local churches and church leaders today. How do we preach the Gospel in this new and emerging world? How do we genuinely make disciples who will be able to stand for Jesus in the coming days? How do we plant churches and raise up new leaders to lead God's people through these times?

I believe that a key tool given to us by God has been too long neglected. And it is the answer to the questions above.

Question: "How?"

Answer: "Together!"

The Church is weak

Whilst Britain was a 'sending' nation for many years, particularly at the zenith of the late 19th and early 20th century, the UK church has been in long and steady decline.

This has accelerated in recent years, and Covid has exacerbated the decline, leading to the closure of many local churches.

The Covid pandemic has created change on a dramatic scale in all areas of our lives. These changes are being felt in the local church too. According to a recent survey carried out by the EA and Stewardship, in-person attendance has dropped from an average of 124 attendees before Covid to 85 in autumn 2021, with the mean dropping from 80 to 60. ([Changing-Church-Autumn-2021-Research-Report.pdf](#), eauk.org).

Britain is now a post-Christian mission field, which is lost without Jesus.

The multiplication of organisations versus the decline of the church

The successful work of God involves both people who are called to pioneer, and the team who are called to stand with them. That is a network, which was understood by the founders of Counties. Service groups and mission agencies were created and sustained by local churches. This enabled the pursuit and fulfilment of the Great Commission.

As the Evangelical Church grew across the UK, so the number of mission agencies multiplied.

However, the demise in the number of local churches versus the

continuation of the organisations they birthed, should make us think. Some institutions, like Barnardo's, have moved into the secular space, whilst others have diversified to sustain themselves and their perceived role.

But is our continued support of numerous agencies a worthwhile goal? Are we determined to save old wineskins long after the wine has gone and whose very fabric makes it unfit for new wine?

Local Churches are looking for help, but from where, and to whom should they turn?

Counties began as a collective of 'Regional Fellowships.' That is, groups of local churches, usually within a county, working together to evangelise their region. They called and commissioned evangelists to help lead them in this task. Missions were held, people were saved, disciples were formed, and new churches were planted. Counties was formed to sustain and strengthen local churches in their endeavour of making Jesus known.

Counties was established by local churches for local churches. If organisations like Counties are to survive and thrive well into the 21st century, it must be because we are still fulfilling the mission to which we have been called by God. It is a mission of partnership and collaboration, working together with local churches, other

agencies and a wonderful network of supporters and prayer warriors who believe both that: "The Gospel is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe" (Romans 1:16) and that Counties still has a vital role to play in that task.

The Gospel must be central to a renewed and sustainable future

For the last 18 months I have been privileged to chair a working group looking at this very question. "*How can we better cooperate for the sake of the Gospel and the strengthening of local churches?*" There are many reasons why local churches and organisations coalesce and cooperate regionally and nationally.

Reasons include legal and charitable law, care for workers, maintenance of buildings, and advice on other issues – the list is long. To succeed, a genuine network must help address these issues and by making tools accessible online and offline - in personal ways - to support local churches.

However, were any of the above to be the primary motivating factor, it would ultimately be a coalition around the lowest common denominator and only succeed in eking out the period of decline and certain demise. The driving factor in the growth of any movement of God is quite simply a passionate commitment to the Gospel and making disciples. The outcome of such a collaboration will be revitalisation and growth.

The Great Collaboration

At a recent seminar led by Exponential, a church planting movement, the speaker shared on the three key elements that should mark our ministries.

1 Our commitment to the Great Commission to 'go and make disciples of all nations' (Matthew 28:19)

2 To recognise and embrace the Great Commandment – to love God and to love our neighbour – (Matthew 22:37) as a practical demonstration of the Gospel

3 The call to the 'Great Collaboration' of John 17: 22-23 "I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

All too often, local churches, that once worked in close partnership with one another and with the agencies which they established, have grown apart, believing that the call to 'independence' is the watchword of the biblical local church. This independence has in reality undermined the call of Christ expressed in the Gospel and robbed us of the power that comes by demonstrating our love for one another to a lost world.

I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one - I in them and you in me - so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.



Networking for mission

- Do you believe that the Gospel is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe?
- Do you believe that Jesus promised to build His church?
- Do you believe in the Great Commission as the marching orders for the Church until Christ comes again?
- Do you believe that we are called to collaborate, partnering with likeminded people and local churches, and with all who love the Lord, to make disciples?

We must work together to make disciples, plant new churches, revitalise existing work, to raise up and train a new generation of leaders, evangelists, and missionaries – ultimately to make Jesus known.

Each local church does not have all the answers or even all the gifts.

We cannot stand alone to meet the challenges of the new generation. But together?

Our desire is, with others, to pursue a model of raising up and equipping a new generation of evangelists and church planters, to see a new wave of planting and mission in our day.

There is much work to be done, and our conviction is that this will bring greater glory to our Saviour and greater fruitfulness in the Gospel if we commit to a deeper collaboration in the coming days.

Will you stand with us? We would love you to be part of this movement together with us.

For further information on being part of these hopes and plans, please email ceo@countiesuk.org or visit us online at www.countiesuk.org



THE LIFE EXHIBITION IS BACK ON THE ROAD

The Life Exhibition is back on the road after spending 12 months as a virtual experience due to the pandemic.

Since January, the Life exhibition has visited churches in places such as Exeter, Wolverhampton, and Stockton-on-Tees.

The exhibition is an immersive experience, using interactive tablets, quizzes, films, songs, QR codes, graphics and a discussion café, which are contained in different pods, with lessons which usually last for about an hour.

It's aimed at Year 5 and 6 primary school pupils, who walk through different pods, as they are talked through how aspects of Jesus's life relate to the school's Local Agreed Syllabus.

For many schools it has been the first trip they have done outside of school

in two years and so the children have really enjoyed the experience, according to organiser, Kevin Baldwin.

"They have enjoyed the technology, they have enjoyed using the tablets, and understanding RE in new and exciting ways."

In Exeter, the Life exhibition was hosted by a local charity for a week, and they had 13 sessions. In Wolverhampton, there were 23 sessions over five days in one church, and 22 sessions in another church. Stockton-on-Tees held 32 sessions in total, in two churches.

Over 3,200 children will have engaged with the immersive experience by the end of the summer term.



"A fantastic, engaging session. All the children enjoyed learning in an engaging and exciting way. Thank you to the excellent staff."

Mr Fawden,
Preston Primary School, Stockton-on-Tees

"An extremely well organised event - from initial email to the café/quiz. The children loved the interactivity. Thank you!"

Headteacher
Newton Primary School, Exeter

"Wonderful immersive experience. All the children fully engaged and enjoyed the session. Accessible to all children from all abilities. Children enjoyed the songs and videos, staff are wonderful, very helpful and couldn't do more. Thank you".

Miss Cain
The Link Primary School, Stockton-on-Tees

"It has been a really good way to revise all that we have learnt about Jesus at school. The activities have been engaging and thought provoking for all the children. It has given them a chance to reflect on what they think and to develop their own spirituality."

Teacher
Woodbury Salterton Primary School, Exeter



"We love coming to the Life exhibition each year because it provides an interesting medium to learn about Jesus. Pupils really enjoy the interactive nature of devices and always enjoy the overall experience."

Teacher
Whipton Barton Federation, Wolverhampton

"A great interactive way for the children to deepen their understanding. Each zone gave a different focus building a fuller picture of the life of Christ. Thank you!"

Headteacher
Silverton Primary School, Wolverhampton



JUST A MINUTE

WITH
COUNTIES EVANGELIST BOB TELFORD



Bob has been a Counties Evangelist for 45 years. He is married to Rita. They live in Warwick and have two grown-up children. Their other son, David, died 26 years ago.

Bob, how did you become a Christian?

I became a Christian when I was 18. I was 'worn down' by the love and patience of some Christian friends. I argued with them about Christianity for about three years, but I couldn't argue with the love that they had in their lives. I finally admitted that Jesus was real and that I needed Him in my life.

How did you get involved with Counties?

In 1972, I went into Christian ministry with the Birmingham City Mission. In 1977, I joined Counties in order to focus on a ministry of preaching,

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

Rita and I have really appreciated the support that Counties have given to us and channelled to us over 45 years. Counties have been, helpfully, non-directive! I have been free to shape and develop my ministry in a way that was right for me, whilst still enjoying the benefits of being part of a fellowship and supportive network.

So, tell us the highlights?

There have been, and are, too many to mention. Every time someone comes to faith in Christ it is a highlight.

For an evangelist there isn't, and probably shouldn't be, any greater thrill than seeing people respond to the Gospel. The only thrill that comes close to matching it is seeing those who have been saved, growing in Christ and going on to reach others.

What do you and Rita and do to relax?

We eat out, we walk our dogs and spend time with our grandson. We enjoy training and working our spaniels and retrievers.

What are your favourite Bible passages or verses and why?

Isaiah 55: 10-11

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

This undergirds my confidence as a preacher. Assuring me that when I preach His word, God will be at work.

Psalms 37:4

Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

This verse meant a great deal to me when I started in ministry and became part of God's confirmation of my gifting and calling.

YOUR LOCAL EVANGELISTS

NORTH OF ENGLAND

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

MIDLANDS

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

SOUTH EAST

Charles & Elizabeth Addoco
Shaun & Livi Almond (AE)
Will & Lynne Andrews
Tim & Joy Ayrton
Mark & Amanda Bingham
John Hardwick
Kim & Jo Hobbs
Tony & Ruth Hood
Colin & Linda Johnson
Caleb & Adanesh Mathewos
Andrew & Rachel Mugford
Madelene Bathgate (Senior)
Lionel Clargo (Senior)
Ray & Carol Dadswell (Seniors)
Wendy Illiffe (Senior)
Victor Jack (Senior)

AE – Associate Evangelist
ETP – Evangelists' Training Programme

Andy & Miriam Jelfs (Seniors)
John & Jane Martin (Seniors)
Betty Saunders (Senior)
Gladys Whittern (Senior)

SOUTH WEST

Jacque & Tim Bodman
Steve Ellacott (AE)
Mike & Su Stange
David & Katie Symons
Jean Campbell (Senior)

SOUTH CENTRAL

Jonathan & Heather Brain
Jamie Broadey (AE)
Ian & Sally Carr
Gordon & Penny Curley
Steve & Dawn Loader
Stephen & Jean Gillham (Seniors)

WALES

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

EVANGELIST TRAINING PROGRAMME

Gabriel Bennett
Stevie & Natalie Walker

PARTNER WITH US AND THOSE WHO LIVE BY FAITH

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Email

Your details will be kept on our database and may be shared with a local Counties Evangelist, but with no other persons or organisations.

- Please remove me from your mailing list

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