

SUMMER 2023

# IGNITE

SPARKING PASSION FOR THE GOSPEL  
ACROSS THE UK



## TWO CHURCHES ONE VISION

REAPING THE HARVEST, AS CHURCH OUTREACH INTO THE  
COMMUNITY BECOMES THE BEDROCK FOR EVANGELISM.

**ALSO** "EVEN WHEN I AM AT MY LOWEST, I AM REACHING OUT  
TO PEOPLE WHO NEED ME."

GOD'S FAITHFULNESS THROUGH ONE WOMAN'S  
JOURNEY OF SUFFERING.

REMEMBERING COUNTIES EVANGELIST, IVOR COOPER.



# 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.



It is great to have extra space in Ignite to share good news stories from local churches. Glebe Chapel in Newent is my commending church and was my home church for 18 months when I trained with Counties. It is great to be able to share their story of growth and vision on these pages. (8-11)

Andy Hodson has been a 'serial church planter.' I hope the story of Windmill Community Church, Wolverhampton will inspire you. Planted by Terry Wilkes, the church is now stepping out into a new plant at Compton. (12-15)

Finally, our growing desire and commitment is to see young people raised up, equipped and sent out to serve the Lord in the harvest field. What a joy to read how God is calling Peter Allin (26-27).

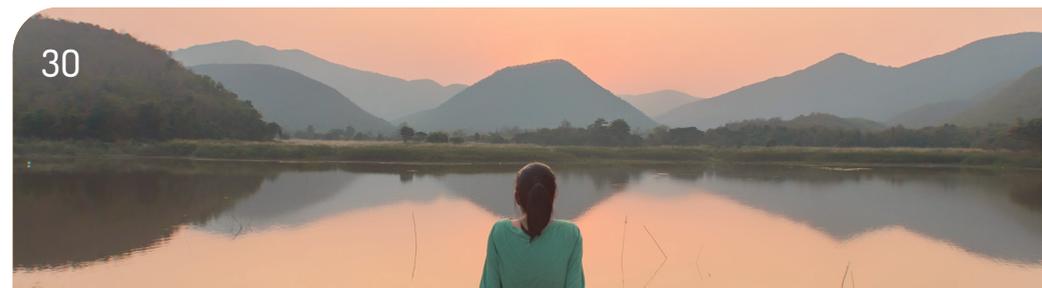
I hope these pages inspire you. If they do, please get in touch. We'd love to explore how we may bless and partner with you in being equipped and prepared for service.

Love in Jesus

**Martin**

## Making Jesus known: inspiring and equipping local churches

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# NEWS IN BRIEF

## COUNTIES CONNECT CONFERENCE 2023

### TICKET PRICES AND MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE WEEKEND NOW AVAILABLE

Counties exists to 'make Jesus known, inspiring and equipping local churches', and the Connect Conference 2023 will be a key conference for Christians and Church leaders as we seek to take the Great Commission seriously in our generation. Book now for our Counties Connect 2023 conference at Staverton Park Hotel, Daventry from 27-29 October.

- With streams and workshops for church leaders, youth workers, community outreach and much more
- Bible Teaching and times of worship
- One2Lead stream for teens
- Programme for Children

Visit the website to sign up:  
[countiesuk.org/conct23](https://countiesuk.org/conct23)



## SALTMINE PASSION PLAY

**Thanks, in part, to a £2000 grant given from Counties Evangelistic Grants initiative, in December 2022, the Saltmine Passion Play took place in Stafford over the Easter week.**

The Saltmine Theatre Company's Passion Play was a unique contemporary retelling of the last days, death and resurrection of Jesus. It took place across the city streets and was watched by over 2000 people.

## "GOD LOVES YOU" TOUR

**Neighbourhood Chaplains are working alongside the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association on their 2023 'God Loves You' tour.**

It will be in the ExCel centre in London on 26 and 27 August 2023. Free bus travel for churches within a 50 to 80-mile radius from London is being offered.

The buses can be arranged through the 'Group bookings' page on the website.

They are also looking for helpers for the event. Also, via the website:  
[www.godlovesyoutour.org.uk](http://www.godlovesyoutour.org.uk)

## YOUR LETTERS AND COMMENTS

Dear Counties,

Thank you for once again producing such an interesting and informative Ignite magazine.

The article about Jonathan Brain's connection with 'not-yet-Christian' Jerry Shirazian was 'right up my street'.

So often Christians set out on a mission to 'make Christians', when actually we should be wanting to relate to, and make friends with, those who are looking for the meaning of life, and trusting God to change them.

Jonathan obviously is a kind and patient man who values Jerry as a person and so a friendship has developed.

As evangelists we trust God to bring about encounters with people whom He is drawing to Himself. It will be so rewarding when we get to Heaven to meet people with whom we have connected on 'God assignments' and who have gone on to become Christians.

Exciting stuff.

God Bless

Jean Ward, Lancashire

### NEXT STEPS

We'd love to know your thoughts about this edition. Write to us at:  
[communications@countiesuk.org](mailto:communications@countiesuk.org)



Dear Counties,

We thought that the spring 2023 edition of Ignite was a great read, and very inspiring. And that's not just because there was a great article by our friend Andrew Mugford!

We enjoyed your own article on Key to Life, especially at the point where you felt that the Holy Spirit was there working in the hearts of those young children.

The regional coordinators' article was great too, especially reading about various initiatives the coordinators were using.

Thank you so much for creating the magazine and for sending it to us; we really appreciated it.

May God bless you and your colleagues, and the work Counties does.

With Best wishes,

Stephen Illingworth  
 Peterborough

# IVOR COOPER COUNTIES TRIBUTE

Ivor Cooper had been in full-time ministry since 1980, including a year at The Haven Centre in Pembroke and became a Counties Evangelist on the 1 January 1987, serving God based in Warwickshire. Much of his time was committed to work in Leamington, including the church plant that he led with others at Lillington for a number of years.



My first memory of Ivor Cooper was when, as a 23-year-old, I arrived at the outreach tent at the Three Counties Agricultural Show in Malvern in June 1991. There Bob Telford and Ivor led a team for a number of years before handing it on to me. That work continues today in the hands of others! Ivor was wearing some rough clothes, maybe overalls, as with brush in hand, he painted some of the display boards with images and verses that would be seen by many hundreds over the days of the Agricultural show.

Ivor's handiwork at the Show gives a clue to one of his major gifts, something that he used to great effect for God's glory – his creativity!

Ivor played a major part in the creation and development of all of Counties current school's resources – GSUS Live, Key to Life, and the Life exhibition. He was trialling the new Key to Life resource in Leamington at the local school in 2016 when I popped up to see him. "Who is the new CEO?" he asked. I hoped he wasn't disappointed when I sheepishly told him it was me.

Ivor was a champion of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He was steady, often referring to himself as a plodder. But Ivor always got the job done, and like the tortoise in the famous story, he has won the race, kept the faith and received the crown. We are grateful for his example and pray that many will honour him by following in his footsteps.

## IGNITE'S EDITOR, RACHEL ROUNDS

Unlike so many at Counties, I never had the privilege of meeting Ivor Cooper, in person.

In September, I had heard he was becoming increasingly ill with brain cancer, and I felt led by the Lord to ask him for an interview, for Ignite, to talk about the nature of suffering.

He graciously agreed, even though I could hear, over the phone, that he was tired, and his memory was not what it had been.

I feel so blessed to have had that opportunity because his words live on through these pages. God is there in our suffering – bringing us closer to Him – as Ivor beautifully articulates in his last Ignite interview:

*"I haven't got any answers here yet. I still find this whole thing a work in progress – not just with me but with people in general. And why God allows certain things. But I have never said: 'Oh God, why has this happened to me?' Because why shouldn't it happen to me? It could happen to anyone."*

*"Many of us in the evangelical world, tend to put so much emphasis on what they are 'doing' for the Lord and how busy we are for God. But that's not the criteria God wants. To get over that is hard."*

*"It's just you and Him. Not the work you have been involved in for Him. If I need to talk to the Lord, it's for today not what I am 'doing' for today."*



*"Perhaps these are some of the lessons I have to learn. Deepening my relationship with Him is what I can do with whatever years I have left. This is part of the work in progress – that He just wants me to concentrate on Him a little bit more than I ever used to. Maybe that's the answer."*

*"There's a hurting world that I like talking with people about and trying to make sense of it. But in the end, God still loves us even though He allows bad things to happen. Fundamentally, God is good, and I still believe that despite everything that's happening in the world."*

# TWO CHURCHES ONE VISION

**IGNITE HEARS HOW TWO CHURCHES  
ARE MOVING INTO THE HEART OF THEIR  
COMMUNITY TO SPREAD THE GOOD NEWS.**

*“The building is a blessing from God but it’s not the church. The people are.”*



It’s taken many years for the congregation of Glebe Chapel, in Gloucestershire – a Counties supporting church - to move to the newly refurbished Newent Community Centre – but they are now fulfilling the bold vision of putting the community first not the congregation.

Pastor Paul Parker – who moved to Newent from Colorado with his family at the end of October 2022 - and Elders Stephen and Ian Cracknell, share the story:

**Stephen it’s taken many years to get this far – tell us how you got here?**

*“In the early 2000s, Glebe Chapel started to look at enlarging their building or finding a new site. This proved to be difficult. So, in 2006, we moved our main Sunday service into the local community school and were there until 2016.*

*In 2013, we became aware that Newent Community Centre (NCC) was likely to close and be sold. Glebe agreed to underwrite the cost for a period so that*

*we could run a feasibility study, which resulted in the purchase of the building in early 2016.*

*“People don’t come to church easily anymore. We wanted to be part of the community and wanted people to be able to come into a building they naturally thought of as ‘theirs’. It was a way of ‘doing church’ alongside the community – especially in our current environment of such scepticism. I know other churches have done it, but it was a new concept for us.*

**Paul:** *“In 2013 God began opening doors. They had already moved to a school but that wasn’t a permanent solution. God was almost saying: ‘Where’s the next place going to be?’*

**Stephen:** *“Being in the school gave us an opportunity to think more about the community. It’s not been an easy process and it takes time. We’re still trying to work out the challenge of how we do church in a*

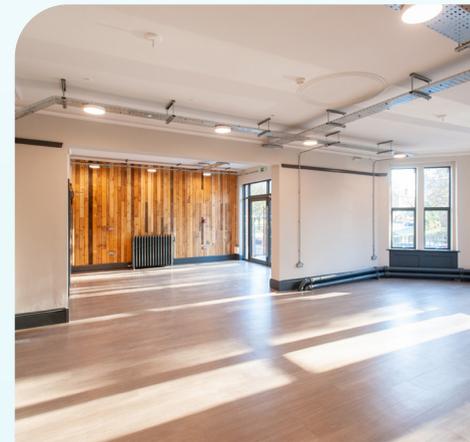
*community centre.*

*“The NCC had a lot of potential, but bits had been built on ad-hoc, so it needed work. We sold the old Chapel site and in 2021 received the money from this, which was then used to refurbish the community centre.”*

**Ian:** *“It’s taken a lot longer than we thought and I think if any of us had known this at the beginning we would have said: ‘Is it worth the effort?’. But it’s been about God bringing the right people into the church at the right time. Don’t rush it – is what I would say. You have to wait for God’s timing.”*

**Paul, in many ways you’ve come in late to the project, but you seem like you’ve been here from the beginning.**

*“I did see a lot of this happening from afar, but I saw that the Elders intentionally wanted to start refurbishing the part of building that would bless the community the most. It’s always been about what the community may need and then about*





what the church may need. It's about the love of Jesus to the world and even in the building remodel we tried to mimic that.

"This is about the love of Jesus and the community comes first. Once their needs are met, then we will work on upgrading what the church needs. This sends out a really strong message."

### So how are you supporting the community?

**Ian:** "There were many groups using the building when we took it on: cubs, scouts, a line dancing group and so on. If we had built our own separate church, getting those groups to come in would have been a huge hurdle but by moving to where they already were – we crossed that barrier instantly."

**Stephen:** "We recently had an open afternoon and there was such a lot of interest in the building because it's so nicely refurbished."

**Paul:** "There are vulnerable adults, musicians,

artists, an orchestra that comes every Saturday and dog training group. Every age group and social demographic of the community is beginning to use the building. You always pray that the church begins to look like the community and our prayer is: 'How do we create the pathways for these groups to go on a spiritual journey?'"

### You've talked a lot about the community but what about the congregation?

**Ian:** "We are almost at capacity with about 140 people each Sunday. On Easter Sunday we had forty people in an overflow room watching the service on TV screens because we couldn't fit them in the church room. In order to make an upstairs room bigger we need to knock down a supporting wall and we haven't had the chance to do that yet."

### What are your plans for the future?

**Ian:** "What we long to see is new conversions. God has brought one or two new people into the area, and we are gearing up for a new phase of mission."

**Paul:** "Historically, the church usually says: 'Come to us – our church, our doors, and our ministries'. I think Glebe says: 'How are we engaging and going to them?' It's about shifting the mindset of the church and thankfully as a centre, naturally people will do that."

"That's what Jesus models for us; He incarnated himself to come into our world and be with us on His own missionary journey into our world. To me that gives us a purpose to be missionaries."

"So, we are working out how we scatter ourselves into all these different things that are going on from music to dancing to art."

**Ian:** "It's better to be relational than have 'signage'. Some people might want more texts and banners up around the place but we're being quite clear in saying: 'It's better for you to be in relationships with people. So, what group can you get involved with?'"

**Paul:** "It's interesting that Jesus often said quite firmly what needed to be said to His church family and He showed the love of God to the stranger and the outsider in the community. Sometimes, as Christians we've been too nice on our family and too harsh on the community and Jesus shows us it was the other way round."

**Paul:** "There are hundreds of new homes being planned for the Newent area in the next five years. We are discussing new church plants and ways of seeing church ministry replicated that could be a reality here. We have to ask: 'What are the new doors God is opening for us here?'"

"I think we always need to remember that the building is a blessing from God, but the building is not the church, the people are, and Glebe has embodied that because it's been in a church, then a school and now a community centre. This is the season where we are helping people to see and understand that better."



## 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](https://counties-training.org/church-revitalisation)



# “IT’S NEVER BEEN ABOUT PLANTING A CHURCH. IT’S ABOUT PLANTING A CHURCH, THAT PLANTS A CHURCH, THAT PLANTS A CHURCH”.

**West Midlands Evangelist, Andy Hodson, tells Ignite how their intentional commitment to evangelism in the community is preparing them for their new church plant.**

Windmill Community Church, in Finchfield, Wolverhampton, is full. They can't fit any more people in on a Sunday morning.

So, ten years after praying and believing that God would give them a particular building, just a mile down the road and three times the size, He did.

Today, Windmill Community Church have an new Hub, in Compton – led by them.

Counties Evangelist, Andy Hodson, leads Windmill Community Church and calls this growth: “A new season of evangelism built on the good work that has already been laid down.

*“It sounds obvious but sometimes we are in seasons of preparation and sometimes we are in seasons of harvest.*

*The encouragement for people is to keep believing and keep praying.”*

Ten years ago, Andy met Terry Wilkes - who planted and then led Windmill Community Church – and they developed their vision to see churches grow, as Andy introduced Terry to the Church Planting Initiative, which has now become Counties Planting Network:

*“It’s about multiplication,” says Andrew. “It’s never been about planting a church. It’s about planting a church, that plants a church, that plants a church.*

*“That was the vision Terry had which I was passionate about too. It’s always been the DNA to plant again. Terry’s legacy has carried on and we are building on good foundations.”*



Andy has also completed the M4 Church Planting Training and Windmill Church is now half way through the programme.

*“When my last church took part in M4, the Spirit of God really spoke to us together, in unity, as a leadership team. I would really recommend it to people. It’s more than a course. It’s a learning community.”*

Andy is taking these experiences and helping the whole congregation develop its approach to evangelism and outreach.

*“I joined the church to assist Terry in August 2022 and then took over the leadership in January and from April 2023, I have been full time. Terry retired at 75, before this we were probably two-thirds full. Covid had hit which meant that obviously we had lost people – as naturally you do.”*

Since then, the church has put on three

evangelistic events. Each time someone became a Christian. The first event was a children’s holiday club at which a 10-year-old Asian girl got saved. Andy says: *“It’s a little bit sensitive”*, but he asked the girl’s parents if they could place her on a postal Bible college course, because she loves the Bible, and they gave their permission. This whole situation came about, because a church member invited her neighbour’s daughter to come to the club.

*“Her faith has massively grown. She rarely misses a service. She was recently unwell and phoned the church and said: ‘I can’t make church, but I wondered if you could put the service on Zoom?’” Andy chuckles, “I mean, what 10-year-old does that?”*

Late last year, God also worked in the life of Steven. He visited the church’s coffee hub and shared a vision he’d recently had of Jesus standing in front of him with his arms open. He asked Andy what he thought the picture meant. Andy says:

*“I could sense straight away what God was saying because Jesus’ arms weren’t out to the side, they were in front of Him, almost beckoning Steven to come to Him. So, I said: ‘Well, ask God to speak to you again, because if it is Jesus, He will speak to you again. Then, come back again in a couple of days and tell me what Jesus says’.*

*“Steven came back a few days later and said: ‘I think Jesus wants me to come to Him, doesn’t He?’ We, shared the Gospel together and he gave his life to the Lord and got baptised in February.”*

Finally, on Pancake Day, the church hosted an event where Andy was talking about being shriven. And one lady listened; the following Sunday she came to church and gave her life to the Lord.

*"Two weeks after she become a Christian," Andy adds, "this lady was on holiday with non-Christian friends, and they were looking for red squirrels. This lady said to her friends: 'I've got a new faith in Jesus. So, why don't we just pray?'"*

*"And they did. Not only did they immediately find a red squirrel, but they bumped into the ranger who took them to see all the red squirrels in the area. Her friends were quite blown away by the simple answer to prayer."*

For Andy it's not just the salvation of these three very diverse people but the evidence of salvation: A young girl who's saved and then become fervent about church;

a Chinese man who's been saved, then asked to be baptised soon afterwards; and finally, a very new Christian who wants to share her faith with friends and pray.

Andy sees what's happening as part of a training and anticipation exercise.

*"We want to be ready so that the new group of people will move from the existing church to the new church – taking the gift of evangelism with them."*

*"There's a real excitement about what God will do. We've already had some great conversations about the future, with people walking past the building."*

*"We're opening a community garden and using it as tool for the Gospel. So many people want to be involved: local people, a dementia group, the River Canal Trust and BBC Wildlife has been in touch. There's momentum building already."*



Andy also says that the church has been very intentional to disciple and find the gift of discipleship within the church. It's spent a lot of time in prayer and had specific 'prayer weeks' focused on their evangelistic work and how they go about reaching people.

*"A lot of churches put their energy into Sunday mornings, and they may get one or two non-Christians – I don't know, I'm just speculating – but then they are not meeting people where they are at."*

*"We don't make Sunday the main event. We spend most of our energy in the week meeting people. In that way you have more contact with them and get to know them, and there's more opportunity for salvation."*

*"It's also about encouraging our congregation to bring people to events. It's also the intentionality of getting people who have friends or family who aren't Christians to pray for them and getting them to come along. There's no point putting on an afternoon tea if it's full of people from church."*

For Andy, the bottom line is about how we all are as Christians: are we cosy or are we challenged? What does Jesus mean to us, and how do we share that with our colleagues, friends, and family?

As Andy says: *"The harvest is plentiful, and the labourers are few; so, let's raise up the workers and the harvest will come in."*

## NEXT STEPS

To find out more about the M4 church plant programme visit our website:

[counties-training.org/counties-church-planting](https://counties-training.org/counties-church-planting)

Or call the office on 01373 823013



# AFTER A CHILDHOOD PLAGUED BY VIOLENCE, HOMELESSNESS, DRUGS, AND SUICIDE ATTEMPTS, COUNTIES EVANGELIST LEE MARSLAND, FOUND JESUS. TODAY, HE'S USING HIS TESTIMONY TO REACH THOSE WHO HAVE NOTHING.



Lee was bought up in Oldham, by his alcoholic father after his mum walked out when Lee was four years old. His dad was violent and at just 11, Lee ran away from home. He lived on the streets, was in and out of prison, foster care and children's homes. He spent Christmas sleeping under Kwik Save supermarket air vents and had started using Class A drugs by the time he was 13.

*"I was really angry all the time, getting into fights. I think I ran away in the first place because I wanted someone, especially my dad, to come and look for me but nobody did."*

Lee tried to commit suicide five times. His final attempt at suicide happened after Lee took crack cocaine and had a huge row with his ex-girlfriend about their baby daughter. The police were called, and he ran away and ended up dangling from a bridge above the M62 motorway.

*"I thought, 'Just jump, no one will miss you.' I was crying and I was scared but I couldn't handle living the way I was anymore. I was only 21."*

A year earlier, Lee's best friend had nearly died of a drug's overdose but became a Christian. He told Lee: "Jesus loves you Mars," (short for Marsland) which just made Lee furious, so he walked away.

Then, on that motorway bridge, hanging on with one hand, Lee heard the voice of his friend saying: "Jesus loves you Mars".

*"My heart just broke and then I heard it again. Something started to happen. All these emotions came flooding through me and I got off the bridge and started walking. I ended up at my friend's house."*

*"When he opened the door, at two o'clock in the morning, I felt the peace of God. And I fell to my knees and started crying. I said: 'Is this Jesus guy real? Will he save me? I can't live like this anymore.'*



*"He took me into the living room and his mum, who I always thought hated me, was standing there crying out to God: 'Mars needs a miracle' and then she turned round and saw me and shouted: 'Praise God!'"*

Lee went to church with them the next day gave his life to Jesus.

*"The Holy Spirit came upon me in such an amazing way and delivered me instantly from drugs. I could just feel God removing all that hurt, anger and pain. I couldn't believe it but I knew then that God was calling me to be an evangelist because all I wanted to do was tell people what Jesus had done."*

Lee now runs Encounter Ministries with his wife Lesley. Its aim is to partner with churches and help them with evangelism.

*"We've got a real heart for working with churches, to get them mobilised into their own communities. We also do outreach. So, on Tuesday nights we work with the homeless and the vulnerable. We've been doing that for three years. We've seen*

*salvation and baptisms in that time. God's really been there.*

Every Tuesday these guys get a three course, sit-down meal, donations of clothes, toiletries, they get help filling in forms, phoning the Council and, most importantly, they get the Gospel. We've already seen people getting saved and three people are attending church on a Sunday.

*"These are guys, just like I was – so full of chaos. They are almost begging us to pray before they leave. They come expecting to hear the Gospel and to be offered prayer. It's really, really taking off. It's a great hub for the Gospel. God is moving in so many ways."*

Encounter Ministries calls the people they serve 'VIPs' because, according to Lee, they are, but it's just that they have forgotten that anybody loves them.

*"We are made up of real people, who have made a real decision, for a real God, who want to make a real change. And these people come because they feel loved."*

**“IN YOUR LOWEST POINT, GOD USES YOUR BAD SITUATION TO HELP SOMEBODY ELSE WHO IS GOING THROUGH THEIRS. HAD I NOT HAD CANCER I WOULD NOT HAVE HAD THE CHANCE TO MEET THE PEOPLE I AM NOW.”**

Colleen Rhoden is an evangelist with Lee Marsland at Encounters Ministries. She’s survived cancer five times and now has the disease in both her lungs.

Following her husband from their homeland of Jamaica to England, in 1988 Colleen Rhoden packed five pieces of clothes, as she thought she was coming for a week’s holiday. It was only when she tried to come home that she discovered her husband had different ideas – he told her this was now home, and they were staying for life.

Colleen went on to have four children – and was semi-paralysed after each birth due to complications with her spine. Then in 2010, she fell out of a window and fractured her thigh which meant she was paralysed for six months.

*“But my faith stayed strong in the Lord. And every time things like this happened, I prayed.”*

But some of her prayer partners said God hadn’t healed her because her faith isn’t strong enough. Colleen says: *“I prayed and said: ‘Lord what am I doing? Have I not trusted you enough?’ And God told me it wasn’t about what other people said but that He would heal me when He was good and ready.”*



Early one morning, Colleen says the Lord woke her and told her to go to travel to a church in Bradford from where she lived in Oldham:

*“I’ve got an Aunty to who lives there. I have never driven there. I didn’t know where exactly I was supposed to be going. But what I didn’t realise was that my body had started changing without me even realising it.*

*“So, I got into the car with my Zimmer frame. Somehow, I drove there and got to this church and saw my Aunty. She couldn’t believe it when she saw me. She’d only come because she heard there was a women’s meeting and she wanted to help. Then I got out of the car without my Zimmer frame, and I helped with all the preparation – including climbing stairs.”*

However, before the meeting started, the speaker said they couldn’t begin until one lady came forward and told the group what the Lord had done for her that morning. She then pointed at Colleen and said: *“You come and tell them”.*

*“I told the women how I had been paralysed that morning and that here I was totally healed because God had carried on being there for me every second of the way.”*

And God has. Colleen has now survived cancer five times. When she was first diagnosed with

cancer in her left breast, she says:

*“I asked God: ‘Why have you allowed this to happen to me?’ I felt nobody understood me. I felt embarrassed, ashamed and wanted to cover up. I felt so alone. I felt like I didn’t want to be here anymore.”*

But Colleen became involved in a support group which became her lifeline; and also became close friends with Lee Marsland’s wife Lesley: *“She is my angel. I don’t have the words to describe what she has done for me and my family. When I wanted to give up, she wouldn’t let me.*

*“With the help of them and praying to God I became alive again. And the Lord gave me the opportunity to reach out to others.”*

Two years later Colleen was diagnosed and subsequently survived cancer in her armpit, her right breast and her chest wall and her left shoulder. She now has it in both her lungs.

*“In your lowest point, God uses your bad situation to help somebody else who is going through theirs. Had I not had cancer I would not have had the chance to meet the people I am now helping and supporting on their journey and walk - as well as my own. Even when I am at my lowest, I am reaching out to people who need me.”*



## COUNTIES EVANGELIST, MARK BINGHAM HOPES A NEW GROUP FOR FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN WITH LEARNING, DEVELOPMENTAL OR BEHAVIOURAL CONDITIONS, WILL SPREAD THE GOOD NEWS AND INSPIRE CHURCHES TO THINK CREATIVELY.

**Setting up the bi-monthly group 'Boom' in their church, has been a very personal experience for Mark and Amanda Bingham. They have five children, aged between 10 and 28. Three of them have autism and two of the three also have select mutism – an anxiety disorder which causes a fear of speaking.**

They set up Boom in May 2022, by emailing all the schools in the Maidstone area, to give other parents with non-neurotypical children a safe area to play together.

It also gives the parents somewhere to go for, what Mark calls, "a listening ear" and, if they agree, a chance to pray with Mark or Amanda.

*"We started it because we knew there was a place for families so the children could mix with other children. Most of the kids who come, couldn't go to a youth group or places for young people without their parents being there. There are currently*

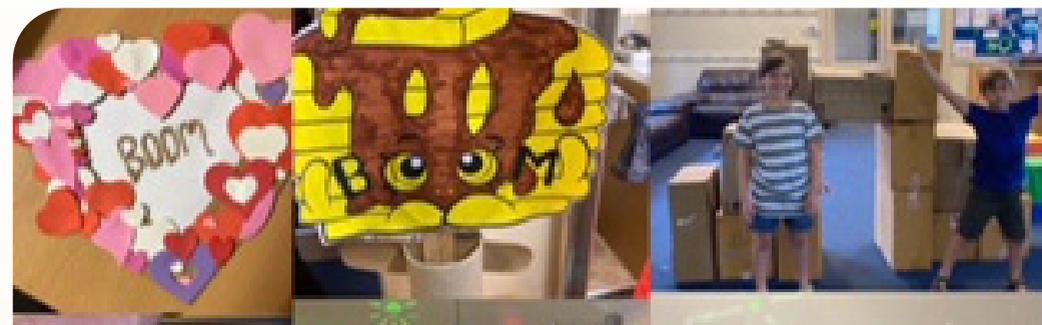
*nine families attending Boom and none of them are Christians, yet.*

*"We have lots of different activities. We do crafts. We've got board games. We've got space hoppers and large games that go on the floor – kids can just go from one to another. We do snack times, and we get alongside the parents and get to know them."*

Although the primary purpose of Boom is to help struggling families it also gives Mark and Amanda a chance to evangelise in a way that doesn't seem 'forced'.

*"Sometimes people will come and say: 'This is a nice church. I have never been here.' This naturally leads on to a conversation about why they don't go to church and often the answer is because their children couldn't cope with it.*

*"We did invite one family because we explained that we had children with specialist needs and that we could help to provide things for their family during the*



*service – so they came along, and they are still coming."*

The father in this family still tells Mark he doesn't believe in God or the Bible, but he likes how Christians behave and treat others. They have regular conversations about faith by "Getting to know each other every time he comes to Boom, with his family, and having those shared experiences".

Mark also says that they offer to pray with parents who may be having a hard time. He finds it's a really powerful way of connecting with them because if their issue gets sorted, and they see that their prayers have been answered, this can start them on a journey.

At the moment there is just the one family with children with specialist needs coming to Mark's church, but the experiences of the Bingham family, and others like them, has made Mark think very differently about how churches could be inspired to be more creative.

*"When churches share the Gospel and one of these families decides to come to church, it's getting that church to think about how they will cater for them; so, there's a place*

*they can go during the service and chill out and still be part of it if a child has a meltdown or it's too noisy.*

*"In our Boom group we have a little Sensory area where we have LED lights that shine onto the roof, and we play really soft, instrumental, Christian music that calms down a child or could put you to sleep, it is so relaxing."*

His vision is to see other churches in the area become more inclusive and "share the vision of how to welcome and engage families with these children".

*"I would like every church to understand that Sunday services don't necessarily need to be as structured. I think church should be about the whole family worshipping together with children of all ages and abilities included."*

### NEXT STEPS

Would you like to explore Mark's ideas about helping families with specialist needs? His email is [mark.bingham@countiesuk.org](mailto:mark.bingham@countiesuk.org)

## COULD YOUR CHURCH USE A HEALTH CHECK? THE CHURCH REVITALISATION PROJECT IS ALREADY HELPING CHURCHES CHANGE FOR THE BETTER.



## WHY NOT FIND OUT IF IT COULD HELP YOUR CHURCH FLOURISH?

In our last edition of Ignite we met our new Regional Coordinators who work to develop and strengthen church growth, revitalisation and mission.

One of the areas in which they are involved is the Church Revitalisation Project (CRP), or "Growing Churches". It was set up six years ago and included the organisation Partnership.

It has already engaged with 60 churches and is now a thriving collaboration between Counties, Church Growth Trust (CGT) and GLO.

In this transition, it's been exciting to see the way that concerns for church growth and revitalisation, that were core to Partnership's ministry, are being continued in this joint project.

The goal is to put local churches and key workers – including those from Counties – together to support congregations who are struggling to develop or move forward.

Giles Arnold, Chief Executive at CGT and Chairman of the CRP Operations Team says:

*"Some people only think about 'revitalisation' when it's too late and they have already become too small and weak to be revitalised. They require resuscitation or resurrection! We think it's better to encourage churches to engage with the project at an earlier stage. We want to speak to them when they have problems but can still see a way through them."*

*"These issues often include elderly leaders, a dwindling and ageing congregation and a lack of younger members and leaders. If left unchecked, this will lead to the church having to close."*

Part of what the CRP offers is called the Church Health Check which requires each church to ask tough questions about its strategy, leadership, congregation and mission.

The Church Health Check involves churches completing a profile which gives our team a basic background and an outline of the present situation. A team member will then arrange a meeting with the church leaders where



we will chat about the process and how it might work.

Everything is tailored towards a church's individual needs. Crucially, in most cases, the entire congregation is invited to complete a questionnaire, asking about various aspects of church life. This is incredibly fruitful, as everyone feels that they are part of the revitalisation journey. Once church leaders have completed a more detailed questionnaire, each church makes decisions about where it is going and how it is getting there.

Martin Erwin, Counties CEO, says:

*"Many churches are fearful of change, and of course, not all change is good. Some of those fears revolve around a concern that any changes required may be unbiblical, or simply be trying to appeal to culture."*

*"The Church Health Check is a simple tool, led by godly leaders who share the same concerns. It helps local leaders to hold up a mirror to the church so they can see in black and white what perhaps they already knew but were uncertain how to address."*

The health check opens the possibility of considering options and potential ways forward. An adviser can work with the local leadership team, and we have seen the blessing of this process being followed in several places.

*"Decline does not have to be terminal, but we must be prepared to allow God to lead us through painful processes*

*that will lead to growth. In personal spiritual life we know that pruning leads to greater fruitfulness, and we should not expect anything different in the life of the local church."*

Mark Davies is an Elder at Highgate International Church (HIC), the Regional Training Director for GLO and part of the Growing Churches (Church Revitalisation Project) Team. He has had first-hand experience of how the project works and is currently engaged in two other Church Health Checks.

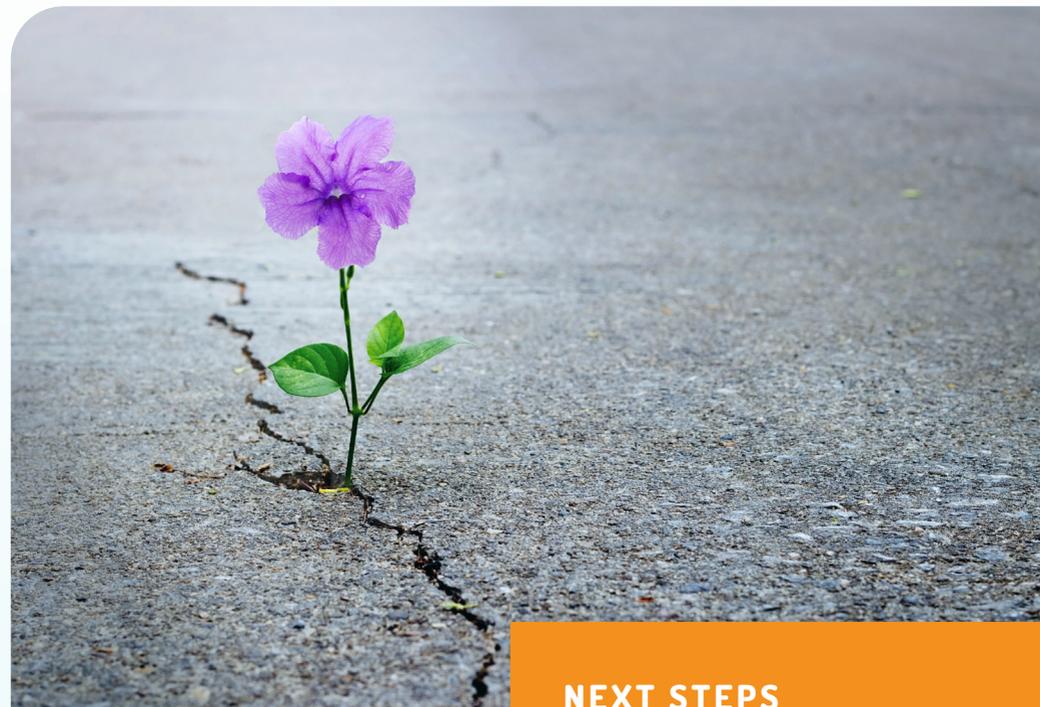
*"In a sense, HIC had lost its core, a very London phenomenon. Highgate is quite central, and we do see a lot of people passing through before moving to the suburbs."*

*"So, we began focusing on arresting the decline, stabilising the church, looking for some key giftings and regrowing a central core of committed workers."*

*"In September, we welcomed a new pastor team leader as an addition to a community evangelist and we have been blessed with new key volunteers to the team."*

*"Two of the long-term community activities, the twice-weekly toddler group and the Thursday afternoon community café, have been revitalised and in the last five years we have seen a number of people come to know Jesus as their Saviour."*

*"For us, it is not so much about starting new things, as building a team for the future, futureproofing our church against what was a dwindling and ageing congregation."*



## NEXT STEPS

Would your church benefit from a Church Health Check?

Go to our website to find out more and receive your free e-book to help you assess what kind of revitalisation you may need and what to do about it.

[counties-training.org/church-revitalisation](https://counties-training.org/church-revitalisation)



*"Without the clarity that a health check brings, the mentoring and, in HIC's case, the hands-on support from the project, our future would not be looking so positive."*

Martin Erwin adds: *"It has been great to partner with what Highgate are doing, with Pete Barker serving there as the community evangelist, whilst on the Counties Evangelist's Training Programme."*

## HAVING TAKEN PART IN ONE2LEAD WEEKEND IN CORNWALL IN 2022, PETER ALLIN HAS SPENT THIS LAST YEAR ON THE ONE2LEAD TEAM GAP YEAR.

TEAM is an internship programme, primarily for the 18-30s, with an emphasis on practical engagement, mission training and discipleship.

### Peter, tell us about yourself.

I'm 26 and live in Dolton in Devon. I was raised in a Christian home but my understanding of God and passion for the gospel was ignited during my time at University. I completed my Maths degree at Bath University in 2019 and am currently working as a delivery driver for Tesco. I went on One2Lead in March 2022 and really enjoyed the training and the teaching.

During one of the breaks, I chatted with Beverley Bedford, Training Officer for Counties, and she asked what I wanted to do in the future. I said that I loved listening to sermons and teaching in church and that I'd often thought I would love to be able to stand up and talk about God and the Bible in ways that helped people to understand both. She suggested I join TEAM. So, I started in September.

### Tell us about the programme and how you are finding it.

Almost all the training sessions are on Zoom which suits me because of my job and location. You can pick and choose the modules that interest you the most – I am interested in preaching and teaching. I ended up picking almost all the modules anyway, so I am doing all of them.

The first few sessions were about why we evangelise, the history of evangelism and apologetics. We also learned more practical things, like how to evangelise to Muslims, children's work, and how to preach the Gospel.

We've been given lots of books to read. 'Know and Tell the Gospel' by John Chapman is a great resource for reminding us of what the Gospel is and why we believe it. I have used it in one of my sermons.

Through Counties, I was also able to join an online course with Tilsley Bible College, in Scotland where I've been studying hermeneutics.

# TEAM

Training | Evangelism | Mission

### What about the practical side of TEAM training?

I have been going with the Counties Evangelist, Dave Symons and Trainee evangelist Alex Symons to a couple of Gospel Halls in North Devon where I have given my testimony and spoken for 10-15 minutes to help lead the service. That's where I preached about: "What is the Gospel?". I have been booked to go back later in the year to lead on my own which is really encouraging.

### What have you really appreciated about TEAM?

Because the sessions are run by Counties Evangelists, I am getting to know the Counties family and it's opening doors for me. It's giving me more confidence when I am talking about the Gospel whether that's when I am talking at a church or with people at work.

### And you've been back to the last couple of One2Lead weekends in Cornwall – but this time as a teacher. How was that?

I led some morning devotional times, last September, and then, in March, I helped with teaching. We split the session on 'God the Son'. I helped prepare the notes and deliver the talk in front of a group of about 10 young people. I really enjoyed it.

### What do you think your next steps might be?

I would like to stay involved with Counties, One2Lead in particular, but also get some 'life experience' in another job. I would like

to carry on preaching and see where God leads me.

### How have you found Counties as an organisation?

It's very professional. It's got a great heritage. It has contacts across the country and is involved in so many different areas. It's a great organisation to be involved with.

### Would you recommend TEAM to others?

Yes, I would. It's given me so much more confidence and boldness to talk about Jesus. It's also given me also given me much more general and factual knowledge about the Bible and why we need to evangelise and share the Gospel. We are the bearers of good news!

## NEXT STEPS

Find out more about TEAM and One2Lead on our website: [counties-training.org/one2lead](https://counties-training.org/one2lead)

Or email [beverley.bedford@countiesuk.org](mailto:beverley.bedford@countiesuk.org)



# WHEN THE DOORS ARE SHUT

SENIOR EVANGELIST, ROGER CHILVERS EXAMINES WHAT THE EARLY CHURCH CAN TEACH US ABOUT EVANGELISTIC OPPORTUNITIES.

Almost every church and surely every evangelist knows that one of the more difficult discernments to be made is where to, and how to invest our effort, time and resources in new evangelistic enterprises. We certainly want to preach the gospel and, "go and make disciples of all nations," (Matthew 28:19, NIV) but finding the wisdom about where and how, is without doubt, getting increasingly challenging.

A superficial, casual, and certainly inadequate reading of the early Church might wrongly suggest it was easy for the Apostles.

*"The disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it."* (Mark 16:20).

Of course, we know threats and persecutions arose but, "those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went" (Acts 8:4), and in town after town churches were established. Even internal stresses that accompanied the early church, such as the Council at

Jerusalem in Acts 15, seem to read like an adventure. We could surely put up with painful opposition if only we were given the Apostles success, confidence and joy.

But today? The network of restrictions, opposition, lack of success and downright apathy, crush our enthusiasm so that decision making about evangelism is sporadic and blurred at best. So, how were the Apostles apparently led so clearly?

The tensions of the Council in Acts 15 conclude with Paul and Barnabas – men who had "handed over (lit.) their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v.26) – being sent out to the churches (v 41) with the result, "the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers" (Acts 15:26). It all seems so easy! They were exciting times of blessing.

Amazingly, Paul and Barnabas went straight to Derbe and Lystra; unquestionably a daring decision because the first time they were there they were arrested and stoned almost to death. No wonder their focus in later follow-up was aimed at, "strengthening the disciples and



*encouraging them to remain true to the faith. 'We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God', they said"* (Acts 14:22).

Yet the Apostles appear to have a remarkable assurance and clarity of thought about where they were going. Paul apparently had few misgivings about which locations to visit in Galatia.

But digging a little deeper into Luke's account and Paul's later comments, we find clues that suggest guidance was not always a crystal-clear divine revelation!

Luke tells us in Acts 16 while in Galatia, they wanted to preach the Gospel in Asia, but were "kept by the Holy Spirit" (v.6) from doing so. God said: "No!".

Next, they chose Bithynia, but "the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to" (v.7). Again, God said, "No!".

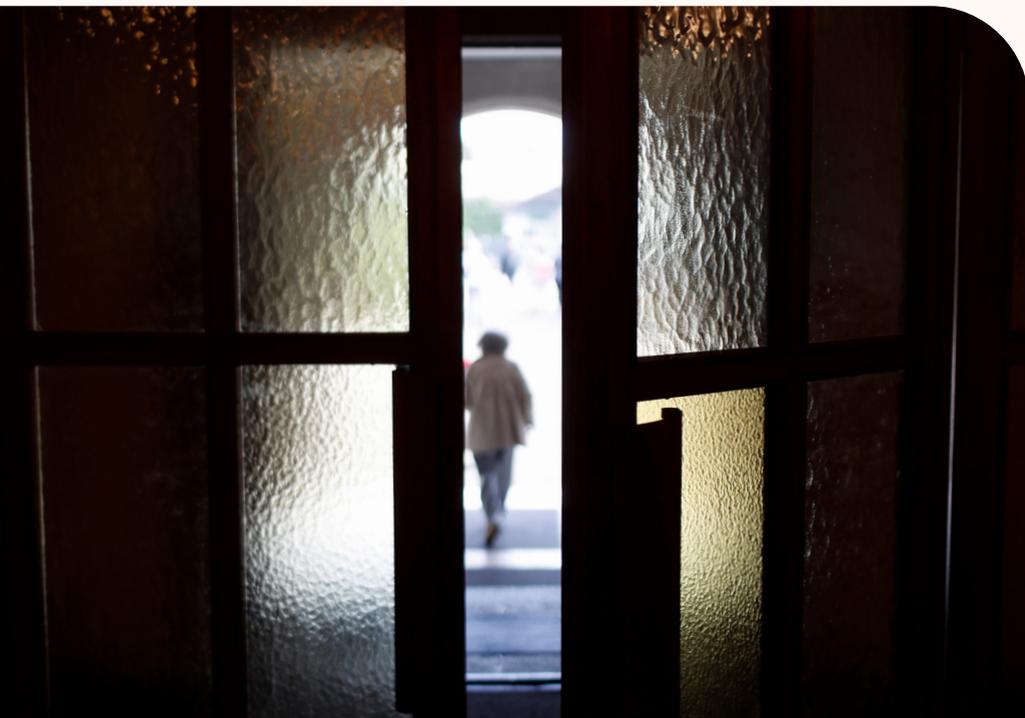
So, how did God speak to stop them? Did Paul possess a super-spiritual sensitivity? Did he have dreams and visions or audible voices from heaven? Evidently, from time to time, he did. (See Acts 18:9/10 or Acts 27:23/25). But it is also clear that other times, such as here in Acts 16, q hard

to bear hinderances opposed him. Yet, remarkably, though they were against his initial wishes, Paul was able to accept even these as the voice of God. When God closed the doors and said "No" in Galatia, it was through ordinary, painful, but unwanted situations that He spoke.

One of the subtle pieces of evidence Luke uses help explain this is in Acts 16: 6 and 9. Both tell what "Paul and companions" did amongst these Galatian churches. Then Luke continues by using the third person pronouns "they/them" several times in verses 7/8. But by the time he gets to verse 10 and onwards his narrative changes to

"we". He starts with "he" and "they" and then introduces "we" and "us". Obviously, somewhere during these verses Luke joined the group.

Recalling this some years later Paul reminds the Galatians of something Luke did not say in Acts: "...it was because of an illness that I preached the gospel to you.' (Galatians 4:13/14). And, though we do not know all the details, we do know Paul's illness greatly affected his eyesight in Galatia. He writes, 'I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me.' (v.16)



Epidemics in those early centuries such as measles or malaria often damaged eyesight. Whatever the illness Paul suffered from it was the very means by which God said, "No", to his plans. *God had bigger ideas. The illness must have been severe, as Paul was the least likely person to easily give in to personal sickness or pain or even submit to advice from others with whom he disagreed. A later incident makes this clear when he would not listen to the prophet Agabus or fellow disciples who tried to stop him from going to Jerusalem even though they told him that the Holy Spirit himself indicated what would happen to him if he did! Luke says of Paul, "He would not be dissuaded" (Acts 21:14).*

So, it is almost certain it was Paul's sickness that God used to shut the doors. He was ill. Maybe that was the reason the services of Doctor Luke were needed, perhaps over an extended period. Undoubtedly it would have been painful for a stubborn Apostle like Paul. Yet through it all he saw it was the voice of God saying, "No!".

So, what do these verses teach us when we are left with the challenge of knowing God's leading in our evangelism?

Firstly, when we are not too sure how or where to evangelise, "Just do it!" as Nike adverts use to say. "Now is the favourable time", "... now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2). Don't wait! There is a world to be reached, and towns that still do not have a witnessing fellowship. If we constantly make our evangelistic planning decisions by

looking for special signs or sufficient resources or adequately skilled people, the less the work will be done. But if we seek guidance and insight, and we just 'go', we can trust that God can easily shut one door here or there to guide our intentions to things far greater than we had dreamed possible.

Secondly, when sometimes we find a door shut to what we long to do or where to go with the Gospel, we should not be too surprised to find ourselves metaphorically standing on a beach looking to a completely new, previously unthought of, mission field, listening to the call of God, just as Paul did at Troas when a man from Macedonia came to him in a vision. We may think the enemy is shutting the door on our enthusiasm and what we thought was God's plan, but it can turn out to be the Unseen Guide opening the door to a new adventure we would have never dreamed possible.

Initially, Paul may well have questioned what God was saying. But perhaps above all people we should be the most thankful that his weakness led to the Gospel coming to Europe and the door eventually being opened to us!

## NEXT STEPS

How did Roger's article speak to you? We'd love to hear. Write to: [communications@countiesuk.org](mailto:communications@countiesuk.org)



## COUNTIES EVANGELIST, PAUL WILLMOTT TALKS ABOUT TOGETHER FESTIVAL 23.

**Paul's overseeing the Family Zone at the Christian 'Together Festival', in the Black Country, which attracted 4000 visitors last year.**

This year churches are being encouraged to invite families from outside the church.

**Paul, tell us about the Together Festival.**

It's organised by a network of churches called 'Love Black Country'. Last year the festival was very much about gathering the Black Country churches together. But we fast realised that lots of families with no church connection were booking into the event.

There were about 4000 people at the event last year and we expect about the same this year.

So, this year we are being more targeted and we're encouraging churches to buy tickets for those people and families who may be on the margins of church.

**What aims does the festival have for Christians who are attending?**

There are three parts:

- To Gather – to get churches from the region together;

- To Celebrate – all that God is doing;
- To Imagine – what God can do when we are united.

**What will people be able to do once they are there?**

There are different zones: Food; Celebration – worship bands and singers; Creative – there'll be a Christian blacksmith who'll be creating a sculpture on the day; Youth -with Guvna B and the Messages bus. And not forgetting the Family Zone; where there will be craft games, a Gospel magician; the OM puppet team; I will be there with Twist – of course; and there will be a fair with lots of rides.

**What's the theme for the Family Zone?**

The armour of God. We will have a suit of armour in one of the tents. The artists have been given pretty free reign, as I didn't want to restrict people. So, it should be interesting.

**What's your direct involvement?**

My job, in the run up to the day, is overseeing all the activities in the family zone. We've got a multi-sports area; family competitions like archery and tug-of-war; a soft-play area; and local Christian church workers and evangelists presenting Gospel based shows for families.

On the day I will be engaging people in conversation along with other volunteers. We believe churches will have been inspired and equipped to encourage families who are on the fringe of church or connected in some way to come along to

Together Festival  
8 July 2023  
Himley Hall & Park  
Himley Road  
Himley  
DY3 4DF

For more information:  
[loveblackcountryFestival.com/](http://loveblackcountryFestival.com/)

a Christian event. So, on the day it's about engaging them in conversation.

**It's not always easy to engage strangers at a Festival in a conversation about faith – so how will you and the volunteers do that?**

I am hosting the family stage – introducing the entertainers and speakers and I will be rounding it up. So, it will give me the opportunity to offer people the chance to come and talk to me or any of the volunteers or even pray with people if that's what they would like to do.

In terms of the volunteers, we will have about 20 volunteers at any one time, all wearing T-shirts, so they are easily identifiable.

I am also running a training event for the volunteers to give them ideas and inspiration as to how they can share the Gospel in simple conversations with families, whilst the children are doing crafts or having their face painted. So, we really believe and pray we'll see God at work.

## JUST A MINUTE WITH...

### JOHN HARDWICK



**John Hardwick has been a Counties Evangelist since 1998. He has 2 grown-up children, Chloe and Ben. He is based in Cambridge and works in children's and family ministry.**

#### How did you get involved in Counties?

I had just finished working with the theatre group, Saltmine, moved to Cambridge and didn't really know anybody. But Ivor Cooper, who so many of us remember, suggested I contact Counties. I didn't think they would want me as I was a juggling clown, unicycling storyteller and musician, but not a serious Bible teacher, in that way. But Ivor said that Counties were always on the look out for people with different kinds of ministry. So, I joined.

#### What are your highlights of times at Counties?

It was actually the first thing I ever did at Counties. I was asked to appear on stage at a Counties Conference family fun night. I have this act where I come in unicycling as a grandma. It had recently gone down great at Spring Harvest but unfortunately,

I got a very different response at Counties as I don't think the audience had experienced anything like it - there was just a stunned silence. But I wasn't sacked, and people still remember it!

#### What does being part of Counties mean to you?

Not being alone and being part of a family. When you are in a church, people understand the role of the minister, but they often don't get what people do when they work outside the church. Being able to support each other through good times and difficult times is really important to me.

#### What is your favourite Bible verse?

I am going to go back to the very simple one.

*"For God so loved the world."* John 3:16

It's not just that part of the verse but the whole chapter. Because despite the mess humans have made of His amazing world, God loves the world. He didn't just abandon us - Jesus the rescuer came. Presenting the simple Gospel message is the whole approach to my ministry.

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

## MIDLANDS

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

## SOUTH EAST

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

## SOUTH WEST

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

## SOUTH CENTRAL

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

## WALES

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Paul & Laura Davies  
Phil & Sheila Davies  
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Mike & Jan Thomas (AE)  
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Grace Anderson (Senior)

## EVANGELIST TRAINING PROGRAMME

Peter & Victoria Barker  
Steve & Debra Cowles  
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Stevie & Natalie Walker

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

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## NEXT STEPS

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