



# IGNiTE

SPARKING PASSION FOR THE GOSPEL ACROSS THE UK | SUMMER 2025



## SOMETHING'S STIRRING: STORIES OF FAITH, HOPE AND GEN Z

Why Gen Z is Opening Bibles and Asking Big Questions

"I'll Never Be a Christian..." – Levi's Story of Transformation

A Safe Space to Explore: How A Church-School Partnership Is Changing Lives



**QR codes:** *We have introduced '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.*

# WELCOME TO IGNITE

God is at work!

We know that to be true from Scripture. Jesus says, "My Father is always working, and so am I." (John 5:19 NIV).

However, as reported in this edition of Ignite, there is growing evidence of increased Bible sales and growing church attendance. Whilst buying a Bible, or attending church does not make you a Christian, it is evidence of a spiritual hunger and thirst in people's lives.

This is evidenced in wonderful story after story

in this edition. From the hunger of young people in South Wales, to the Barber with a Bible, and from Queensway Chapel in Melksham to Levi's story, you will read in these pages, that God is at work.

I hope that you will be inspired and encouraged as you read, to share the Good News of Christ in your community too.

In Jesus' Name

Martin Erwin, CEO

## Making Jesus known: inspiring and equipping local churches

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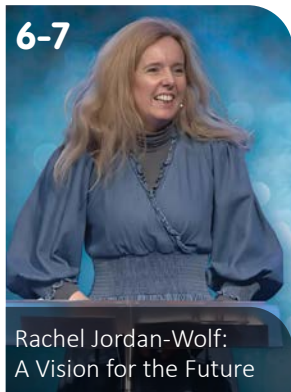
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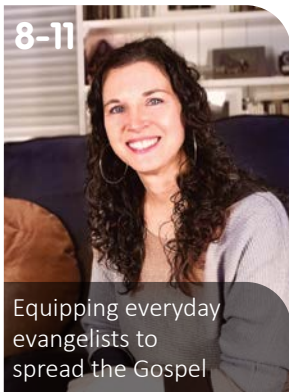
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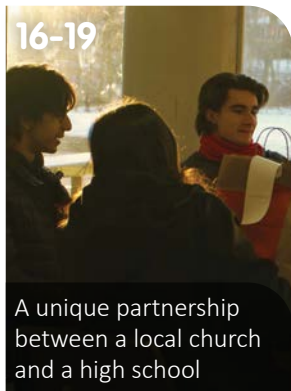
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# NEWS IN BRIEF

## LET'S GET TOGETHER!

### Get ready for the Connect Conference 2025



The Counties Connect Conference returns this October, gathering evangelists, church leaders, and everyday Christians with a heart for mission. The weekend promises powerful Bible teaching, practical workshops, and a chance to connect with others passionate about sharing Jesus.



This year's theme, **'Building on Jesus'**, invites us to explore how we can faithfully invest in others, raise up new leaders, and extend the reach of the Gospel across the UK.

Whether you're involved in local mission, leading a church, or simply wanting fresh encouragement, the Connect Conference offers something for everyone. There's a children's programme for all ages, plus a new space for 16-21 year-olds. With time for worship, fellowship, and prayer, it's an ideal opportunity to be inspired and equipped for what God is calling you to next.

### BOOK NOW

#### When?

Friday 24 – Sunday 26 October 2025

#### Where?

Staverton Park Hotel & Golf Club, Northamptonshire NN11 6JT

#### How do I book?

Visit [countiesuk.org/connect-conference](https://countiesuk.org/connect-conference)

Connect Conference 2025  
'Inspire, Equip, Engage'







## Join us at BarnFest 2025: A SUMMER WEEKEND OF FAITH AND FUN

BarnFest is a high-energy weekend set on a working farm in the heart of Gloucestershire, packed with worship, teaching, games, food, and loads of outdoor fun.

This year we're welcoming international speaker, J John, a fantastic communicator of the Christian faith.

The Saturday will be a great opportunity to invite friends who do not yet know Jesus, or who are searching for answers in life.

Expect engaging Bible talks, practical seminars, late-night campfires, and time to connect with others in a relaxed, rural setting. BarnFest is ideal for youth groups, families, or individuals looking



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**CONNECT+**  
presents  
**BARNFEST**  
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*Encountering Jesus*  
**5TH – 6TH JULY 2025**

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Inspiration, Encouragement & Challenge  
with mix of worship, conversations, BBQs, camping  
& much much more*

**WITH INTERNATIONAL  
SPEAKER, J JOHN**

*Venue: Lands End Farm  
Newent, Gloucestershire*

for a meaningful and memorable way to kick off the summer.

Whether it's your first time or you're a BarnFest regular, you won't want to miss it. Book in now!

### Barnfest

#### BOOK NOW

##### When?

Saturday 5 – Sunday 6 July 2025

##### Where?

Lands End Farm, Newent,  
Gloucestershire, GL18 1RJ

##### How do I book?

Visit [countiesuk.org/  
news/barnfest-2025](https://countiesuk.org/news/barnfest-2025)





# MEET OUR NEW BOARD MEMBER, RACHEL JORDAN-WOLF

Rachel has just joined the Counties board, and it “feels like coming home”.

Born and raised in Thundersley, Essex, Rachel grew up immersed in the vibrant life of Thundersley Gospel Hall, an Open Brethren church with a thriving children’s and youth ministry. Her parents, too, were brought up in Brethren churches; her mother, Dorreen, at Chomley Hall, and her

father at Thundersley Gospel Hall. From an early age, Counties and Counties evangelists were a familiar part of her life.

The Gospel Hall was a great place to grow up in faith. Rachel was actively involved in children’s and youth ministry, and also helped to lead her school’s

Christian Union, where several friends came to faith and joined the church youth group.

Her first experience of leadership came as a child, when she started a group called *Our Faith Club*, which met in a disused chicken shed at the bottom of her grandparents’ garden!

There, she gathered her friends and they ran a mini church for themselves.

After completing her A levels, Rachel's passion for evangelism led her to serve with Youth for Christ in Norwich, working on a double-decker bus that brought the message of Jesus to the streets. She then joined Youth With A Mission (YWAM), which took her to Amsterdam's red-light district to share Jesus with prostitutes, street people, and the marginalised.

On returning to the UK, Rachel began her studies, eventually earning a PhD in Church History from King's College London. Her research uncovered the lives and testimonies of female church planters in nonconformist churches across the UK from 1900 to 1959 – women whose powerful stories were deeply inspirational.

Rachel's passion for evangelism continued to grow. She served with the Church Pastoral Aid Society (CPAS), an Anglican mission agency, as an evangelism adviser, travelling the country

to work alongside C of E churches. She then joined the Church of England's central team as their National Mission and Evangelism Adviser, where she spent eleven years leading research, developing resources, and speaking across the country to encourage and equip the Church in outreach.

In 2021, Rachel became the Executive Director of Hope Together, expanding her work across denominations. She now regularly speaks to leaders from Elim, Baptist, Salvation Army, and many other traditions, continuing to build unity and collaboration in mission.

With a passion for research, Rachel initiated the *Talking Jesus* research project, first launched in 2015 and repeated in 2022. This groundbreaking work — originally a partnership between the Church of England, Hope Together, and the Evangelical Alliance — was designed to understand what people in the UK think of Jesus, Christians, and evangelism, and

to inform outreach strategies both locally and nationally. For Rachel, research is a vital tool to help the Church gain confidence and clarity in sharing the Gospel.

Rachel is married to Rev Darren Wolf, a church planter in East London, where she's actively involved in the life and mission of their local church. One of her greatest joys is seeing lives transformed by Jesus. Just recently, she had an encounter with a young man whilst handing out Bibles on the streets with her church evangelism team. He later came to a church service and gave his life to Christ.

Rachel is passionate that others would meet her best friend, Jesus — a desire that has never left her from her youngest age. And when she's not out speaking or researching, you might find her enjoying a bar of dark chocolate, treasure hunting in charity shops or on Vinted, or (most importantly) spending time with family and friends.

A photograph of two men in a modern office setting. In the foreground, a man with dreadlocks, wearing a red t-shirt and glasses, is seen from the side, pointing with a red pen at a glass wall covered in colorful sticky notes. In the background, another man with a beard and glasses, wearing a maroon t-shirt and jeans, is smiling and looking towards the first man. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a collaborative and creative work environment.

# RAISING A NEW GENERATION OF EVANGELISTS



Counties CEO Martin Erwin reflects on how the Connect Evangelist Training Programme (CETP) is going:

The recent data on growth in church attendance in the UK, particularly among a younger generation (see pages 16-26), along with a growing interest in Bible reading has strengthened our determination and excitement in raising a generation of people equipped and passionate about making Jesus known. Not only do Britain and Ireland still need Jesus, but there is growing evidence that this need is now being married to a spiritual awakening and hunger in the hearts of many people in our nations.

This shift began perhaps almost 20 years ago with the financial crisis, and at the time a Pastor in Hereford pointed out to me that God was shaking and removing things that people depended on, so that what remained – God’s Kingdom – was left as a place of refuge. Hebrews 12:26-27 (NIV) reads

*“Once again I will shake not only the earth but the heavens also.”*

This means that all of creation will be shaken and removed, so that only unshakable things will remain.

The shaking continued through the pandemic, war in Europe, and the Tariff/Trade crisis of today. The loss of temporal ‘certainties’ has left people searching for hope, foundations and spiritual reality.

As people begin to turn to God, read the Bible, or ask a Christian, the question for us is ‘are we ready?’

### What you can expect in CETP

- Engaging with the video content online, learning the Gospel and how to share it.
- Gathering on Zoom and in person to sharpen our edge.
- Mentoring, thereby connecting the trainee evangelists with their church leaders to access and apply the material together locally.
- Opportunity to join mission in the UK and elsewhere to share the Gospel of Christ.

God has been preparing our hearts at Counties, and CETP is ready to serve you and your church, helping to raise up evangelists and to prepare you personally, equipping you for the harvest field that God is preparing.

Polly’s story is a beautiful example of how God is using this programme, with its accessible online approach, mentoring support and Jesus focussed material. Please read what Polly has to share, and then why not sign up to join an army of workers to step into the coming harvest field.

## EVERYDAY EVANGELIST

### Polly’s journey through the Connect Evangelism Training Programme

When Polly left her teaching career to pursue music ministry with her friend

Sue, she had no idea how fully God would lead her into a life of mission.

Their band, Hopestream Worship, uses music and social media to encourage people to look to Jesus through hard times. But something deeper was stirring in Polly's heart – a growing urgency to share the Gospel with others. That's when she discovered the Counties CETP.

She had already heard of Counties, having met a couple of our Evangelists, but it was the taster Zoom call that sealed it. "It was brief training on sharing our testimony, and then information on the course and how it works," says Polly. "Even on the first Zoom call I couldn't wait to sign up."

## What Polly has learned so far

The CETP is "for normal people who want to get better at telling others about Jesus," Polly says. "It's affordable and down to earth and can fit round my life of work and kids. The book *Making Jesus Known Today and Tomorrow* arrived in the post, and there is so much wisdom in the book about mission in all walks of the Christian life."

From the very first session, Polly was struck by the clarity and power of the teaching. "The first session left me with the message: 'God is on mission,' and he invites us to join Him. The second session stuck with me – I know it's basic, but it really hit me anew: It's all about Jesus!"

Polly describes the format as "bite-sized chunks and powerful teaching." Each

Polly



video is around ten minutes long. “It’s not a huge amount of time required each week, but I give the video my full focus! Something always jumps out at me, which I then process and reflect on during the rest of the week.”

Certain sessions stood out even more. “Church leader Tim Cracknell shared his wisdom. Tim said, ‘The medium is the message,’ which reminded me to put effort into the way we share God’s love with people, for example when Sue and I produce our ‘Reasons to Worship’ videos for our YouTube channel.”

She also appreciated Martin’s teaching in session 4: “Martin’s talk on the church ministries listed in Ephesians 4:11 was the simplest and most relevant explanation of these that I’ve heard.”

As Polly has worked through the course, her sense of calling has deepened. “I have more belief that God can use me, even though I’m not called an Evangelist, to point others to Jesus. I have a heart to share Jesus with my town, my community and those I lead in worship.”

## CETP is changing Polly’s local ministry

CETP is already shaping Polly’s ministry. She says: “I recently shared my testimony with a small group at a Christians Against Poverty Life Skills course. I shared that I became a widow in my early 30s, and have since suffered with depression, yet through it all God is with me. He is my strength and hope, even when life goes wrong. I was able

to share the Gospel – that hope and life with Jesus is for everyone. It was a great opportunity.

“CETP has helped me see that these opportunities are also a training ground, and, at my request, the organisers gave me some valuable feedback for next time.”

Her personal life of faith and prayer has been transformed, too. “A year ago, I prayed, ‘What’s next, Lord?’ I felt like He said, ‘Pray for your town.’ So I wrote out every street name on a lolly stick and asked my home group to help me pray for each one, which we’re just about to finish this month.”

A year on, she’s seeing God at work. “We are about to launch a ministry for young adults in Street and Glastonbury. Also, local church leaders have newly started to meet regularly.”

Polly’s attitude now is simple: “I will keep praying for my community, keep looking to Jesus, and being available for Him. Doing this course is me saying to God, ‘Here I am, please use me in your mission.’ I don’t know what that is yet, but He does!”

## Sign Up

If you’re a ‘normal person’ like Polly in search of training, you can preview and sign up for the CETP now!



[countiesuk.org/training](https://countiesuk.org/training)

# ALL THIS TIME, HE HAS BEEN WITH ME

How Sandra and Ed came to trust Jesus





## Life can be difficult

Sandra had gone through a tough time growing up, losing all her family at a young age. It wasn't plain sailing as an adult either.

*"About 15 years ago, everything just got too much for me," she says. "One son was serving in Iraq, another was struggling with drug addiction, and I was having chemo for breast cancer."*

*"I walked into the local church and just broke down on Father Peter. He visited and had coffee with me every Friday after that, just offering a listening ear."*

They didn't talk about faith and it wasn't really on Sandra's radar. But something changed when her son went into rehab. He came to live with her afterwards and on Sunday, he announced, "I'm going to church, Mum. Why don't you come with me?"

A friend at rehab had told him something about Jesus. Sandra thought she would go along just to sit next to her son and support him – she

realised this faith was doing him good.

"But after a couple of weeks, I felt like I wasn't just there for my son," Sandra says. "I felt I was there for a reason. In fact, I felt that God was calling me and I started to feel completely different about everything that had happened in my life. I felt that God had been helping me through all the struggles, my whole life."

After about a month, Sandra became a Christian.

Counties Evangelist Victor Jack is at Sandra's church in Westley, and Sandra soon joined his homegroup. She found Victor so easy to talk to and learned lots from him about following Jesus.

## He's always there, all the time

*"My life has changed hugely," says Sandra. "I know how to deal with all my struggles now. I've always struggled with anxiety from 30 years of supporting my sons, and battling cancer."*

*"But now, when I start worrying, I can instantly*

*start praying to God, and say, 'please take this anxiety away from me, Lord,' and it goes. It's just knowing that there's somebody there all the time."*

## Now I have a family

The other wonderful thing for Sandra has been finding a family after losing her parents and siblings long ago.

*"I felt that God was calling me, and had been helping me through the struggles my whole life."*

"my husband Ed has a huge family," she says. "But one of the things I've always found hard is having no family whatsoever. But since I've come to faith, I never feel alone now. I have a Father, and a church family. I just know that in hard times there's always someone I can call on."

## I prayed for Ed for seven years

Someone who also made friends with Victor was

Sandra had prayed for Ed to know Jesus for seven years. His story of faith is a testament to her faithfulness and God's!

Sandra's husband, Ed. He asked some questions but at this point, wasn't really interested in knowing more.

But whenever they went on holiday together,

Sandra wanted to go to church. In Spain, Ed changed his plan to go for a coffee and went to the church with Sandra instead. To Sandra's surprise, he became very emotional and broke down in the service. Two church members spoke with him. But Ed didn't want to talk about it afterwards.

A year later, he went to church in Mexico, and broke down in tears once more. Again, he didn't want to talk about it.

Then, one night about 18 months ago, Ed woke up in the middle of the night, telling Sandra that something quite dramatic had happened to him. He asked what she thought was going on.

*"I said, I think God has been knocking on your door for a few years but you've taken no notice, so now He's given you a shock. Ed said, I need to talk to Victor! Early the next morning, he spent a while talking to Victor about his experiences.*



*And two weeks later, he gave his life to Christ."*

Ed was always a kind man but has only become kinder; he's now known in the area as someone who will always help you out. After coming to faith, he's always saying, "What will be will be – I don't worry about anything now."

Sandra had prayed for Ed to know Jesus for seven years. His story of faith is a testament to her faithfulness and God's!

Now Sandra and Ed are both learning to teach the Bible. Sandra helps to run a much-loved coffee morning for local people – it's a good way to get to know if anyone locally is struggling with anything and how the church can help.

## Having Victor there was instrumental

Sandra and Ed got so much help and encouragement from Victor, a Counties Evangelist, as they explored faith. Sandra says,

*"I go to him with any problem. We 100 per cent trust and value him."*



*Sandra's baptism*

*"Thank you for supporting people like Victor – he's the best evangelist I've ever heard and he's a brilliant encourager. He can answer all your questions in a way you can understand."*

Sandra and Ed got so much help and encouragement from Victor, a Counties Evangelist, as they explored faith.

A photograph of three young people sitting in front of a large window. The window looks out onto a snowy landscape with trees and a building. The interior is dimly lit, with warm light coming from the window. One person on the right is holding a large, wrapped gift in a red and white striped bag. The person in the center is seen from the back, and the person on the left is looking towards the gift. The overall mood is cozy and intimate.

# A SAFE SPACE, A CURIOUS FAITH

How a South Wales church is seeing young people rediscover Christianity

In a modest suburb of Cardiff South Wales, something quietly remarkable is happening. A local church has become more than just a building – it's becoming a haven, a bridge between generations, and, perhaps most surprisingly, a place where young people are starting to explore faith again.





Counties Evangelist, Mike Thomas, who leads a local church, has always believed that the church should be part of the everyday fabric of the local community. But over the past year, that belief has taken on a new dimension as the church stepped into an unexpected role: hosting a school intervention group for vulnerable pupils approaching their GCSEs.

The invitation came last summer, when the headteacher of a nearby secondary school approached Mike with a dilemma. Like many schools across the UK, this one had seen a significant rise in mental health challenges among its pupils in the wake

of the pandemic. Attendance was down, behavioural issues were up, and more and more students were finding it difficult to cope with the demands of school life.

“We were seeing kids falling through the cracks,” the headteacher explained. “We needed to try something different.”

What the school envisioned was an off-site intervention group – a space where struggling students could receive additional support, away from the pressures of the main school campus. They needed somewhere quiet, safe, and stable. Did Mike know of anywhere?

He did.

Upstairs in his church building were several underused meeting rooms, and Mike didn't hesitate. That simple offer of hospitality became the start of something profound.

## A church-school friendship

This wasn't the church's first connection to the school. The relationship had roots going back over two decades, when Mike and a colleague began spending lunchtimes in the school cafeteria – a space usually avoided by school staff. Week after week, they sat among the students, answering questions, offering a listening ear, and gently breaking down stereotypes of what it meant to be a Christian.

"Gen Z are exploring. They're reading the Bible, talking about prayer, asking deep questions."

In the years that followed, the partnership deepened. Mike and others from local churches were invited to lead assemblies, pray at staff meetings, run a weekly lunch club, and offer a regular early morning prayer space before school. The church became a quiet but consistent presence in school life – visible, reliable, and approachable.

But even with all that history, the events of the past eight months have been different.

## Creating space for healing

Since the autumn term, Mike's church has been hosting 15 pupils and four school

staff every week. The rooms upstairs have been transformed into a calm and welcoming environment – a soft landing place for young people facing hard days.

Mike's own office sits just next door to the rooms the pupils use, and their paths cross regularly. He often joins them for lunch, not with an agenda, but with availability. Over sandwiches and school chatter, conversations spark.

"They're curious," Mike says.

"They'll ask things like, 'Why do you guys care so much?'"

That's a golden moment – to share that it's because of Jesus, because of the Gospel."

For many of the students, it's the first time they've encountered a church not as an institution, but as a community of people who care.

One pupil was so intrigued he asked to take a Bible home. A few days later, he returned – not with polite thanks, but with questions!

## Gen Z and the quiet return to faith

That curiosity isn't isolated. Across the UK and further afield, there's been a surprising trend: Gen Z is showing an openness to Christianity that many assumed was long gone. From viral TikTok testimonies to packed student Alpha courses, today's teenagers and twenty-somethings are increasingly asking spiritual questions – often in places far removed from traditional church settings.

It's not that young people are rushing to fill pews. But they are exploring. They're reading the Bible, talking about prayer,

asking deep questions about meaning, identity, hope, and truth.

For churches like Mike's, this represents both a challenge and an opportunity: can we be places where those questions are welcomed and explored? Can we create spaces – physically and relationally – where Gen Z feels safe to investigate faith for themselves? At this South Wales church, the answer has been a quiet but emphatic 'yes'.

## From curiosity to connection

Since the group started meeting at the church, six of the pupils have begun attending the youth group – a vibrant community of around 45 young people who gather each week. One student has even said he plans to come along on a Sunday morning to see what a church service is really like.

Parents have noticed a difference, too. One mother called Mike personally to thank him, explaining the changes she had noticed in her child. Teachers are reporting similar stories: better behaviour, improved engagement, and a sense of hope for these kids.

Mike puts it down to God's presence – and the simple act of making room.

## A community-wide win

The partnership has been a win on every level. The school has found a supportive partner in the church. The pupils have found a safe space to learn and grow. Parents have found fresh hope. And the church has been reminded of its mission – to love its neighbours, especially the young and vulnerable.

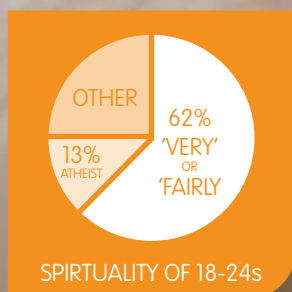
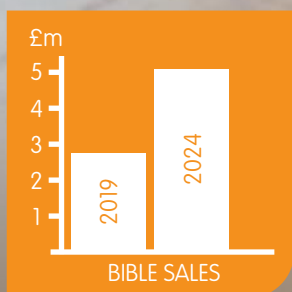


"Hosting the intervention group not only provides a safe haven for students during challenging times," Mike says, "but also opens doors for meaningful conversations about faith. It's been a blessing to answer questions from students about faith and see curiosity about Christianity grow among both the students and staff. This partnership embodies our mission to love and support others unconditionally, creating a really positive environment where faith and community intersect."

## Looking ahead

As the academic year winds down, plans are already in place to continue the partnership in the year ahead. The school wants to expand the group, and Mike is preparing the church building – and his team – for more students, more questions, and, God willing, more encounters with the Gospel.

While the church may never make headlines, what's happening in that quiet upstairs room is part of a much bigger story. Across the UK, Gen Z is asking new questions – and finding, sometimes to their own surprise, that Jesus might just have the answers they're looking for.



# GEN Z'S TRENDING BIBLE SALES

In a seismic cultural shift, Bible sales and church attendance are soaring among Gen Z, fuelled by an intense search for meaning.



We've all heard the same story – that faith is dying out among the young. But in the past six years, youngsters have been joining churches and buying Bibles at a surprising rate. The narrative of a church in decline is proving to be a myth, with more people identifying as Christian across almost every age bracket, with Gen Z leading the charge.

## Who are Gen Z?

Gen Z, or Generation Z, are the group born between 1997 and 2012, digital natives whose attitudes and ideas are making waves everywhere. For years, this has been the age group thought to have zero interest in faith – so what's changing?

## A seismic shift

Recent studies have come as a shock, with Christian publishing house SPCK characterising the last few years as the most striking cultural shift in over 327 years of publishing history. Their records show Bible sales leaping from £2.69 million in 2019, to £5.02 million in 2024 – coinciding with a dramatic change in how Gen Z engage with faith. According to

surveys, 62% of 18–24 year-olds identify as 'very' or 'fairly' spiritual, with just 13% calling themselves atheists, in stark contrast to 20% of millennials claiming atheism.

What's more, the recent report *The Quiet Revival* (The Bible Society/ YouGov) showed church attendance rising by 50% between 2018-2024, with the supposed faith desert of 18-24 year-olds leading the increase, followed by those aged 25-34. In just 6 years, the 18-24s had the biggest increase in church attendance, jumping from 4% to 16%.

Encouraging? Yes – but we can't just wait for Gen Z to show up at church doors asking to be let in. There's still a distrust of traditional religion among many Gen Z-ers, as well as a distrust of thought leaders – both atheist and Christian. According to SPCK, they want to come to their own conclusions. But why do they care?

## The search for meaning

Gen Z are all different – from the shy and retiring to the bold and outgoing.

But they have shared a collective cultural history which has resulted in some generational trends. One of the most poignant and pressing is the search for meaning.

Much of Gen Z has grown up in a post-Christian world. Their parents, teachers and role models were likely to be Gen X (born roughly 1965-1980), 25% of which describes itself as atheist. Gen Z was brought up with materialism, secularism and the legacy of New Atheism, but none of these have brought about an atheist utopia – in fact, numerous Gen Z are in a state of heightened anxiety about the state of the world, especially when it comes to climate change. Materialism does nothing to help these worries, and secularism has no answer for questions like "why am I here", "what's the point in anything", or "is the world doomed?"

## The internet and its influencers

The internet has fuelled the search for meaning. Distant relationships, lack of proper connection, and hours spent watching trivial or anxiety-inducing



content has driven a desire to find meaningful and fulfilling truth.

For good or ill, the internet has also given everyone the chance to share their story. And it's pointed many towards faith.

Generally speaking, Gen Z dislike being told what to believe by authority figures. They tend to favour authenticity and hearing from people like themselves. Authentic and personal stories proliferate online – and many are journeys of faith.

It might be one person in an online forum, or it might be a favourite influencer, sharing their experience of faith with striking vulnerability. There have been examples of successful

pranksters becoming Christian, and their previously light-hearted YouTube channels being given over to reflection and Bible study. Others delve into the scientific, historical and philosophical reasons for their becoming a Christian.

That isn't to say all Gen Z are gullible or rely on influencers to tell them complicated truths. But they can act as a window into exploring faith, with the backing of those they like and respect, instead of adult authority figures like family or teachers, against whom they might ordinarily rebel.

## Debates

Gen Z is hugely varied. Some prefer their

favourite influencers, and some follow online debates, which are widely available on social media and video sites. In this online world, Gen Z have access to debates featuring not just atheists and those of other faiths but also educated and intelligent Christian debaters, putting forth their side of the argument. Instead of a third-hand summary of *The God Delusion*, they can see Richard Dawkins in conversation with a whole selection of Christian academics, challenging each other and digging deep into the sticking-points between Christianity and atheism.

## Talking with Gen Z

So what does this new interest look like, away from the screen?

Stevie Walker, Counties Evangelist, shares his experience of talking with Gen Z on his local streets. As is his practice, he often sets up a free literature table and a large poster of 9 different true-or-false statements, from *"Life has no meaning"*, to *"Heaven is for good people"*.

Older teens have approached him, asking him questions about Christianity, the Bible and his own decision to become a Christian. They've also asked him why he chose Christianity over any other

religion, and they often comment that they find the evidence both for a creator and the Bible compelling.

Similarly, Counties Evangelist Dave Symons has spent 15 years working with the local college, beginning with a welcome stand at the beginning of the academic year – which this year turned out to be "one of the most encouraging I have ever experienced," with more than 35 scriptures and booklets taken by interested students – some even turning down free chocolate as they pick up Christian books!

With thousands of Gen Z combing the internet

for meaning, now is the perfect time to reach out,

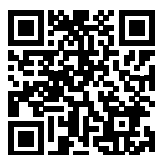
*"This academic year has been one of the most encouraging I have ever experienced"*

from conversations with colleagues to a personal invitation to church. Counties' One2Lead weekends are training young people to reach out to their peers, while events, street stalls and youth groups all have amazing potential to engage Gen Z with Jesus.

Be encouraged by Gen Z. The young church is alive!



One2Lead is a program that equips 16-25 year olds as disciples of Jesus and leaders wherever they find themselves. At six



Want to learn  
more?  
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weekends, over the course of two years, students will have interactive teaching on theology and personal growth.

# "I'LL NEVER BE A CHRISTIAN..."

Levi never guessed the transformation God would work in him – from unhappy, troublemaking teen determined never to become a Christian, to evangelist to Gen Z.

His story began a few years ago, as a teenager in North Devon with no exposure to faith.





"I never grew up a Christian, or around any concept of religion at all. I was taught A LOT of complete opposites; I was taught, 'If someone hits you, hit them 10 times harder!' That sort of attitude kind of made me who I was...

"I started going through a rough few years in my life, before coming to Christ. I was causing as much trouble in school as I possibly could, but this changed for a little bit when I met my best friend, Sam.

"Sam is a Christian, incredibly on fire for God! I always knew this, but never took any proper notice. He was just a normal guy who was a little bit odd to me at times. He pulled me away from the bad crowd that I was in and was always there for me.

"Eventually, we left school, and Sam thought it was a great time to invite me to a church youth group. VERY reluctantly I came along, after around four months of nagging. The moment I walked into the first room, I felt welcome. There was no bias towards me just because I was new. It was weird to me, people liking me just because I decided to show up.

"I remember the whole thing. I had an amazing time! We got into the car afterwards and Sam asked, "So did you enjoy that?" I always remember my reply. I love to think that God got a great laugh out of what I said: "Yeah, but I'll never be a Christian..." If I only knew the plan He had for me!

"I continued going to this youth group and eventually went along to a Sunday evening service called Elevate. I loved it! It wasn't something I was searching for, but something I needed that found me.

That's what God does – He finds the lost and brings them back to the place that they're supposed to be. However, this was not long lived, as I would eventually slip into a spiral that I saw no end to.

"I started drinking at every social thing I went to. I thought it was what was helping me cope, when in reality it was pushing me away from all that was good in life. I stopped going to Elevate, I stopped going to my youth group, I cut off my connections with Sam, my youth pastor and other friends I had made.

"I started going to more and more parties, smoking weed and some other stuff as well. I was a complete mess with no view of a way out – this was my life now, and I was nowhere near okay with it.

"This went on for months, and it was hard to even look at myself in the mirror. One week was so bad that I considered suicide – in my mind, that was my only way out. Instead, I decided to answer one of the messages I had been ignoring for what felt like a lifetime. I reached back out to Sam and my youth pastor and arranged a time to meet up with them, even though everything in me was telling me to shut them out.

"I was dreading it, I was expecting loads of questions. To my shock, there were none... They just seemed happy to see me. It was not what I was expecting but it was nice, and I was the most at peace I had felt in a long time.

"I went back to my old youth group and Elevate. It felt weird at times but I needed to go, and I started to enjoy it again. I had one especially bad week, and it was the first time

I asked for prayer. It worked for everyone else. Why couldn't it work for me?

"I asked for prayer, and about three people laid a hand on me and just started praying. I didn't quite know what was going on but just stood there and tried to open myself up to anything. Then I felt a fourth person come and lay a hand on me. I opened my eyes a little bit to see who that person was and there was no-one. This scared me a little, but something inside of me clicked and I just knew that Jesus was there and He was watching over me. This was a huge wake-up call; I knew there was something and that something loves me for who I am and not what I have done.

"something inside of me clicked and I just knew that Jesus was there and He was watching over me."

"There was a huge change in me. It didn't happen overnight, but over time I noticed I had no desire to drink or do anything that would harm me. I even started going along to the Sunday morning service, which I found inspiring – this was a place full of so many amazing people who had a real heart for others and God!

"These people coached me through so many rough parts of my life and have taught me so much about the Bible, and it's grown to be more than just words to me. It's a guide to life, a book full of hardships with the solution always being to rely on God and obey His commands, not because we are told to, but because we love Him!

"The Spirit nurtured that flame inside of me and turned it into this burning hot fire, a fire that burned for just one person – God! This led to me getting baptised. I knew that I was being called to this life, and there is someone, 'The Father,' that loves me – amazing stuff!"

## A hunger for God among Gen Z

Levi is a member of Gen Z, a generation made up of teens and young adults. As he's shared the gospel with other young people, he's discovered a deep curiosity for spiritual things harboured by many Gen Z-ers.

"I find there is a HUGE openness to anything spiritual, and there are now many who will listen out of curiosity. A lot of young people don't know what the Bible teaches about Christ. They are often shocked about what He can do, what he has done, and what He will continue to do until the end of time!

"I see such an interest in people when I specifically talk about how Jesus knows about every sin, and how He died not just for 'perfect' people – but He died for anyone who comes to Him and everyone that loves Him. Not many young people know this. A few are genuinely shocked and a lot end up digging deeper and want to know more!

"We are all incredibly blessed with the Spirit of God, and through His power we can witness to anyone that we can. We need to all prepare and go and make disciples of all nations, whether this is family or friends. There is no greater family than an eternal family in the greatest place in the universe, heaven. We should all aspire to be there, because with God, nothing is impossible!"



# THE BARBER WITH A BIBLE

Allan's experiences of God at work - at work!

Allan is a 65 year-old Scotsman whose life has been marked by transformation — not just in the barber's chair, but deep in the heart.

When Allan was just six, his father passed away. "My mum brought us all up single-handedly," he recalls. "It was tough." One of his brothers ended up in prison for beating up Allan's best friend — an event that left Allan deeply bitter.

He struggled at school and left without being able to read or write. But one of

his brothers showed him how to cut hair, and he immediately loved it.

When he was 19, Allan's brother became a Christian. Allan wanted nothing to do with it. "I was still bitter and unforgiving. I dismissed it entirely." But other family members started turning to Jesus too — first a sister, then another brother, then some family friends.

"I kept bumping into Christians," Allan says. One day, his motorbike broke down, and a

Christian friend of his brother stopped to help. She offered to pray. Allan refused. She prayed anyway — and the bike started.

*"I just wanted to know  
if God was real"*

Curiosity got the better of him. He looked up a church in the Yellow Pages and found one near the Barrowlands in Glasgow. Sitting at the back, he just wanted to ask God if He was real. But when the



pastor gave an invitation to come forward, Allan felt himself rise to his feet.

*“That’s when I was born again. I felt an overwhelming power of love fill me. And in that moment, I knew I could forgive my brother.”*

From that day, he was all in. He taught himself to read — so he could read the Bible — and

knew that he had to tell others about Jesus.

### Ministry in the barber’s chair

Allan and his wife Debbie now run a barber shop together in Somerset, and it’s become a place of ministry. Before they open each day, they pray for the clients who’ll walk through the door — that they’ll be

ready to hear the Gospel, and that Allan will be ready to share it.

“I always ask people to tell me something good and something bad that’s happened this week,” he explains. “It opens the door. I listen, and then I wait for the Holy Spirit.”

The stories that follow are not just touching — they’re life-changing.

One man came in shortly after losing his wife. Allan offered to pray, but the client replied, “I’m not a believer.” Allan prayed anyway: “I asked God to comfort his heart.”

A month later, the man returned and said he had felt an incredible peace. He had been turning to alcohol, and his family feared for him — but something had changed. Allan needed to practice a sermon for a friend’s wedding, so he asked this man to listen to it.

Allan used a visual illustration — a red piece of paper folded into corners for every sin, then crumpled into a ball. “Try flattening it out,” he said. “You can’t. That’s what sin does. But Jesus gives



us a clean sheet — white as snow.” Right there in the barber’s chair, the man handed over the red paper, took the white one, and gave his life to Jesus.

*“He cried on my shoulder and said, ‘This is amazing. You’ve filled me with hope.’”*

### **“We’ve got Jesus”**

There was a traveller who’d lost family members and admitted he was often depressed. Allan shared his testimony, gave him a Bible, and pointed him to verses about anxiety and hope. “He couldn’t leave halfway — I’d only cut half his hair!” Allan laughs. By the end of the cut, the man had taken not just one free Bible, but two — one for his wife — and asked about churches in the area.

And when a stranger, working illegally behind the shop next door, heard the laughter and joy coming from Allan’s shop, he came in and asked, “What have you got that I don’t?”

“We’ve got Jesus,” Allan replied. He ended up taking the man through the Alpha Express course

during lunch breaks.

At the end, he gave his life to Jesus and left the illegal job.

### **“Be bold. Be sensitive. Be ready.”**

Allan’s encouragement to other Christians is simple: don’t wait for the perfect environment. Ask God to open your eyes to the opportunities around you — even in the ordinary moments at work.

“Be bold,” he says. “Don’t worry about what people think. These are real people with real souls. Be serious. We’re talking about eternity here. Be sensitive. Ask God what that person needs and wait for the moment.”

One of Allan’s regulars was miserable every time he came in. Allan would rush the haircut just to get it over with. But one day, the Holy Spirit said: “Now’s the time.” So Allan slowed down, shared the Gospel — and the man responded. “He had never heard about Jesus. His heart was totally changed.”

The leading of the Holy Spirit is essential in Allan’s

*“This is amazing.  
You’ve filled me  
with hope.”*

everyday evangelism. “We need to know when to speak and when to wait. When it’s the right time to speak, the ministry of reconciliation rises in your heart and you just have to tell them. And if people are not ready, tell them a wee bit each time, or befriend them, sing with them, laugh with them, cry with them. Then, when it’s time, they’ll know you care.”



# FROM GRIEF TO GRACE: CHANGING LIVES IN PRISON

Counties Evangelist Kim Hobbs shares his reflections from 12 years of volunteering



I first became involved in prison work in 2013. My wife, Jo, encouraged me. We had both sensed the call of God on our lives that summer and I had given up my career and was 'waiting on God' for the next step. God has always seemed to point Jo and I to people who need care and friendship - to vulnerable youth and young men in particular. Jo suggested I approach the prison.

## A Life-Changing First Step

I attended an initial meeting with a prison manager. As I entered the prison building for the first time, I felt God tap me on the shoulder. He said to me very clearly (for me it was audible): *"Kim, get used to this. This will be home from home."* It was life-changing. Since that day I always say that there is no place I would rather be ministering than in that prison, sharing life with the men there.

## Healing through sharing grief

The course I now lead is for prisoners who have suffered a loss in their lives. It may

be a loved one who died or the loss of a relationship; a fellow offender who has been killed, or even the loss of their reputation or career. The significant issue is that it has affected the person's mental health or wellbeing. They may describe themselves as being 'stuck' in their grief. This is not an overtly religious course and is accessible to everyone. That said, we are free to express our Christian beliefs and offer to pray with prisoners.

The most remarkable thing about this course is the huge demand for it. If I go to meet a prisoner about the course, three, four or five others will hear and want to join in. You can see that a huge number of prisoners are carrying grief. In fact, men stuck in grief can often display foolish or even criminal behaviours that may have contributed to their imprisonment. This course can help them make changes to their lives that can open up a whole new future.

## Breakthrough moments

During the first course, a man suddenly realised that he had some vital work to

do on a family relationship that he had neglected for far too long. He blurted out: *"You lot, you've changed my life!"*

A week later he reported that he had contacted home and had arranged a reunion with that person, and had also sorted a mediator in case there was any discomfort. *Wow!* I love it when we can prompt a subtle but vital change in someone's outlook, responses and beliefs about themselves and others.

When prisoners open up to us, we often share a bit about our own faith. Just last week, I had the privilege of praying with a man who had suffered recent bereavement. He cried for his loss but was grateful for the opportunity to chat and pray.

Sometimes we arrange an informal 'celebration service' to remember a person who has died. Men open up on this course in ways that I haven't often seen in the prison environment. It's moving and humbling.

## God's love for prisons and prisoners

There are real challenges right now in the criminal justice system and prisons.

Please do pray for the huge variety of people who work with prisoners, from the prison officers to people who provide education, mental health support, advice, medical care, and the chaplaincy teams.

Personally, I love working with offenders. They are people who need our love and support. If you have been the victim of crime, then I understand that this might seem at the very least a difficult statement. But over the years I have listened to many men and women tell their story, and many times I have had to hold back tears. I remember well the simple words of Romans 3:23-24:

*"For ALL have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and ALL are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."*

It certainly is not an easy road to redemption for a prisoner. Saying sorry – being sorry even – is not enough. There is a challenging road to travel. It is our privilege to meet them on the way, point them to Jesus and the future, and cheer them on.



# MOLDOVA COMES TO MELKSHAM

Counties Evangelist Bob Telford tells us about a mission method that started in Moldova

For over 10 years, a few other Counties Evangelists and I have been going to Moldova every winter to preach at 'FRANKS' missions. FRANKS is an acronym for Friends, Relatives, Associates, Neighbours and Kids.

FRANKS missions were the idea of Mark McCormick (Director of Moldovan

Mission). He was a pastor for many years in Moldova and is deeply involved in ministry, evangelism and church planting. It has been a privilege to work alongside him and I'm grateful for his encouragement to try the FRANKS principles and programme in the UK.



The missions in Moldova have been very fruitful, with several thousands of people making an initial response to the Gospel and many hundreds going on to baptism and church membership.

## FRANKS – The way it works

FRANKS missions begin with the believers in participating churches asking the Lord to bring to their minds and lay on their hearts, the names of people for whom they should be praying.

Each believer then prays daily for their FRANKS for 12 weeks and meets weekly with other believers to pray for each others' FRANKS.

Then the FRANKS are invited to events over a ten-day to two-week period. These take place mainly in believers' homes. It is made clear to those who are invited that a brief explanation of the Gospel will be given by a visiting speaker and that time will be given for questions and discussion.

Many people have shown a readiness to accept the invitation, having undoubtedly been prepared by God over the preceding 'prayer soaked' twelve weeks. We make preparations for how we will follow up with interested people, and discipleship groups for those who will respond. No time is lost in encouraging responders into the discipleship groups. These groups are ready to start immediately once the FRANKS mission period is over. This promptness ensures that momentum is not lost.

## It's not rocket science!

The basic FRANKS paradigm is nothing new or desperately innovative! It is

built on prayerful preparation, a bit of faith and boldness, good hospitality, clear proclamation and a well-planned discipleship pathway for those who respond to the Gospel. These should, of course, be part and parcel of the life and outreach of every church – regardless of whether it has a FRANKS mission.

Perhaps the unusual feature of the FRANKS approach to mission is the underlying intentionality. When a church decides to have a FRANKS mission it is determinedly focussing its energies, funds, time and effort on prayerfully, unashamedly and clearly seeking to bring people to faith.

## Moldova > USA > UK > ?

After many years of doing FRANKS in Eastern Europe and helping with a FRANKS mission in the USA I was thrilled to be invited by the leaders of Queensway Chapel in Melksham to lead them in a FRANKS outreach.

Over two weeks in Spring 2025, events were organised. Some of these took the form of a FRANKS coffee morning or cream tea, and other FRANKS events were: A pub quiz evening, a South African Braai, a pudding evening and a 'Wine, Cheese and Jesus' event, largely in people's homes.

In addition to the FRANKS events, the church hosted an evening thinking about loss, grief and hope, and three special Sunday services.

As well as programming a few new activities for FRANKS people, the church decided to try and make more of the opportunities provided by its regular



activities. Consequently, the Gospel was explained directly and urgently to many people the church sees regularly, including adults with learning difficulties and their support workers, lunch club attendees, and children and parents at the midweek 'Family Church'.

Over the 2 weeks, people responded at every event, with 25-30 people asking for literature and / or conversation to help them find out more about Christ and how they could know him. Four people publicly said they had received Christ, and two others spoke to me privately to say that they had as well.

Applying the principles and programme of FRANKS in the USA and most recently in the UK has been, and continues to be, a learning experience. There are some significant cultural differences

between Moldova and the UK which need to be acknowledged. But the experience of recent weeks in Wiltshire has underlined once again that the Gospel, presented rationally and clearly to people for whom God's people have faithfully prayed, will be used by God to bring people to Christ.

Churches in Gloucestershire, the Midlands and London are thinking and praying about how the FRANKS approach to mission might be right for them. Pray for wisdom for me and for them as we explore the possibilities.

Martin Erwin, Counties CEO comments, "As a church leader at Queensway Chapel, Melksham, we were thrilled to have Bob with us to lead our FRANKS mission. We were preparing for almost a year, and in the three months leading up to the mission, our congregation members were praying for well over 100 people regularly. It was moving to project 100 names on the screen every Sunday too, as we paused to pray for those people to come to know Jesus. Having Bob make an appeal during our normal Sunday service, and seeing people come forward to indicate they wanted to follow Jesus was incredibly moving too. Our faith has been strengthened, and we would encourage anyone to consider the FRANKS approach to mission."

Find out how  
Counties can help  
your church reach  
out and grow



# EVANGELISTS

## NORTH OF ENGLAND

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

## MIDLANDS

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

## EAST OF ENGLAND

- Charles & Elizabeth Addoco
- Will & Lynne Andrews (Senior)
- Tim & Joy Ayrton
- Madelene Bathgate (Senior)
- Mark & Amanda Bingham
- Lionel & Katy Clargo (Seniors)
- John Hardwick
- Kim & Jo Hobbs
- Tony & Ruth Hood
- Victor Jack (Senior)
- Andy & Miriam Jelfs (Seniors)
- John Jenkins (RC)
- Colin & Linda Johnson

- Simon Ladd (RC)
- Caleb & Adanesh Mathewos (CP)
- Andrew & Rachel Mugford

## SOUTH WEST

- Jean Campbell (Senior)
- Andrew Conlan (RC)
- Steve Ellacott
- Mike & Su Strange (Seniors)
- Alex & Beth Symons
- David & Katie Symons
- Stevie & Natalie Walker

## SOUTH CENTRAL

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

## WALES

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

CP – Church Planter

RC – Regional Connector

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