

MARCH / APRIL 2019

THE MAGAZINE OF THE  
**EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE**

# idea

# EA

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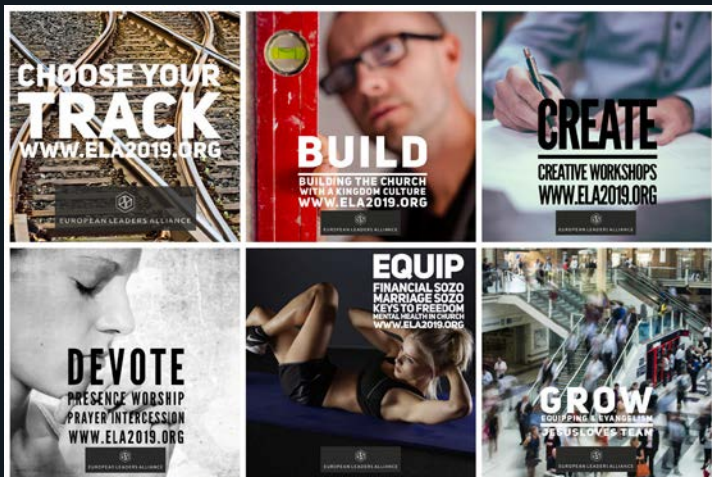
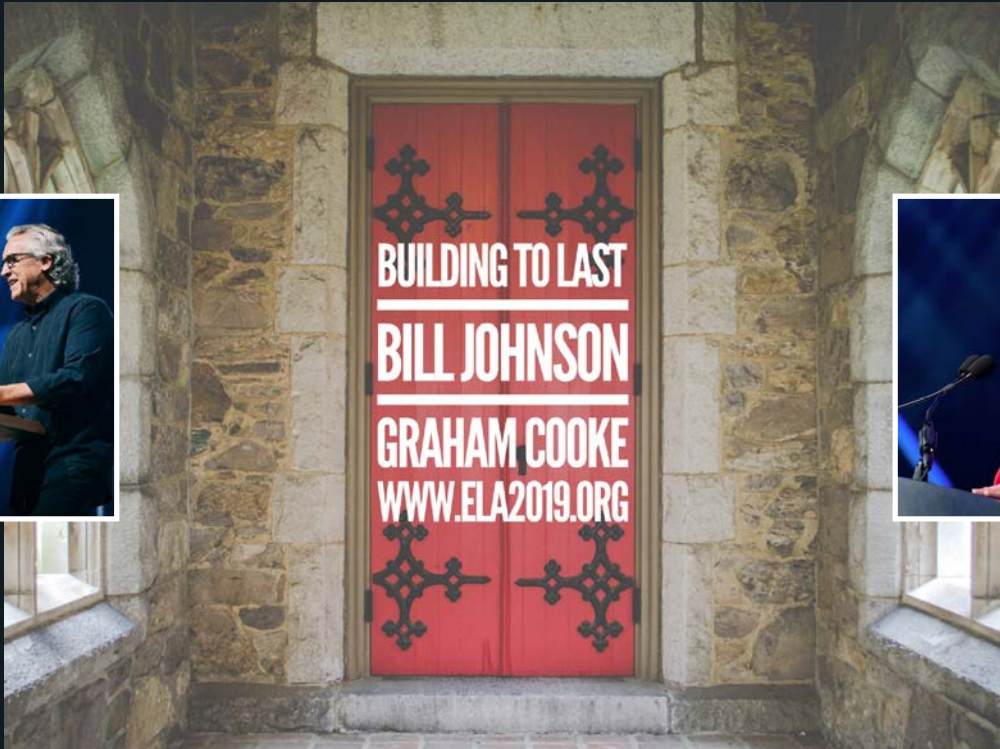
LEARNING TO LIVE WITH  
'THE OTHER'





# EUROPEAN LEADERS ALLIANCE 2019

Keynote Speakers: Bill Johnson & Graham Cooke



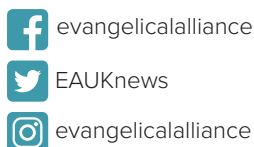
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# WELCOME

## As He does

It has been an absolute pleasure to work on this edition of *idea* magazine. With each new article that I received from a contributor, and person I spoke with for the pieces I wrote, I grew more and more excited about what the Evangelical Alliance is able to share with its members this month.

Dr Andrew Smith, director of Interfaith Relations for the Bishop of Birmingham, talks about his personal and professional journey from growing up and working in areas that were predominantly white British to becoming a confident disciple of Jesus as he builds meaningful relationships with people of other faiths (p. 18).

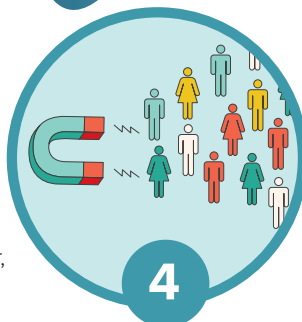
Then, our very own Dawn McAvoy, who co-founded the pro-life campaign Both Lives Matter, speaks with vulnerability and openness about what life is like for her, daughter of a police officer, in Northern Ireland, as she learns to hold fast to her faith in Jesus and realises that He draws people together in a way that no one else ever can (p. 14).

Among the other incredible stories that moved me was that of London-based pastor Rev Alex Gyasi, who took the love of Jesus to the streets and ended up offering the floor of his church's auditorium every night to 40-50 rough sleepers who have nowhere else to go (p. 20).

I pray that, like me, you will be encouraged and spurred on by what you read here. And let's get even better at fulfilling God's commandment to love our neighbour as we love ourselves (Mark 12:31).

Yours truly,

**Naomi Osinnowo**  
Editor



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# Me and *the other*

Our God-given instinct is to connect with one another, and as we do, we'll see lives renewed, says missionary and cross-cultural mission consultant **Usha Reifsnider**.

**C**oming from a Hindu background, the message of the gospel, the good news of Jesus for all humankind, brought me the sought-after relationship of oneness with God.

By being born again, I became part of the body of Christ. I didn't need to go through multiple incarnations to appease God. Unity with God Himself was granted to me through grace. I had found Jesus! Relating to God without fear of wrath became my new normal. As I experienced acceptance from new friends at church, I came to understand the truth of Hebrews 4:16, to "... approach the throne of God's grace with confidence..."

*"To be a follower of Jesus means our beliefs can never be completely private."*

As Christians, we have a particular way of talking that shows our belonging to God and each other. There is such a comfort in that assurance of the presence of God through the companionship of the Holy Spirit that we recognise in each other. My difficulty was negotiating my relationship with God along

with those outside of the church context. It seemed that in order for me to experience God's grace, I applied to myself conditions based on an interpretation of 2 Corinthians 6:14-16a: "Do not be unequally yoked to unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols?"

These scriptures challenged me then and also now, but not in the same way. Much of the concern back then was that I would 'lose' or 'not deserve' my salvation by keeping my ties with anything and anyone that might be 'un-Christian'. This sadly led me to break away from my own dear family,

community and culture. Looking back, I see how much damage this actually did when I could have been salt and light to their understanding of the Christian faith.

These days, more people, including indigenous white British Christians, find themselves in situations where they can feel like the minority, even within their own families and communities. Being recognised as a Christian, especially evangelical, can be seen as narrow minded, racist or perhaps boring and outdated. So, how do we 'do life' with those around us to whom we think our faith is an obstruction to deep or easy relationships? Do we keep our religious beliefs private? Is the church our only place of support and likeminded companionship?

To be a follower of Jesus means our faith can never be completely private. Our beliefs inform our practices; not just our religious practices, but also our day-to-day behaviour. Sometimes blatantly, and at other times more subtly, the Jesus in us shows. All around us human beings accompany others on some level. We are all created in the image of God. I think in some way each human is seeking to connect to the image of God in 'the other'.

My goal as a missionary is to use every possible opportunity to preach the gospel. Though, I sometimes fail to acknowledge that living inside of me is God Himself: Jesus is the head and we are the body (Colossians 1:18); our very own body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps we can see the companion nature of God through the Holy Spirit.

In some ways we cannot help but testify to the presence of God in our lives. It is there

*I think in some way each human is seeking to connect to the image of God in the 'other'.*

all the time. The real you, the genuine you, is who God uses to show Himself to those around you. As you look for the image of God in 'the other', people will look for the image of God in you. You will never look into the eyes of someone God does not love. And we can allow people to look into our life and find Jesus at work, as we are yoked with Jesus; He goes where we go.

I pray my day-to-day life shows that Jesus is in me. My interactions with 'unbelievers' are not veiled attempts at conversion but a genuine interest in where they are now and how I can be part of their lives. The light of Jesus in my life cannot be overtaken by darkness (John 1:5). Light can remove darkness, but darkness does not remove light. Perhaps some perspectives will be changed by a little glimmer of light that might lead to further conversation and life-sharing.

Some years ago, I joined a gym where I became friendly with a small group of women. I was praying that they would see Jesus in me without me telling them that I was a Christian or a missionary. We would meet in the early hours of the morning to go for long runs. As we became companions, we would meet at other times to share meals or go shopping. At times, difficult situations

were discussed, not just in their lives but also in my own. Their daily encouragement and advice from their own experiences helped me sometimes as much as mine helped theirs.

Before long it became apparent to them that the guiding principle, the yoke, of my life was Jesus. I was not what they had expected a Christian to be. Within two years each would ask me to pray with them during our runs. Eventually each made an individual commitment to Christ, all while we were on our early morning runs. There was no altar call, no religious language, just heartfelt conversation with each other and God, interspersed with gasps for breath and sips of water. Although they had been around church people their whole lives, they gradually discovered their own need of a personal connection with Jesus.

Life amongst a wide variety of people is normal, to some degree, for all of us. Sadly, our assumptions of people may be less informed by our experiences through relationship and more informed by stereotypes. We have often lived our faith based on the 'us versus them' mentality. Unfortunately, this has affected our ability to build honest, loving, mutually beneficial relationships.

The Holy Spirit is our companion. The word 'companion' is from the Latin word 'panis' for bread. The prefix 'com' means with. A companion is one who comes with bread. I am committed to bring the Bread of Life as I 'do life'. Life without bread, without sustenance, without companions, leaves us all hungry.

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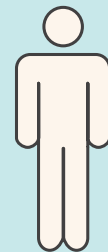
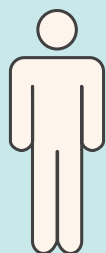
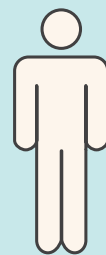
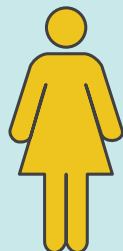
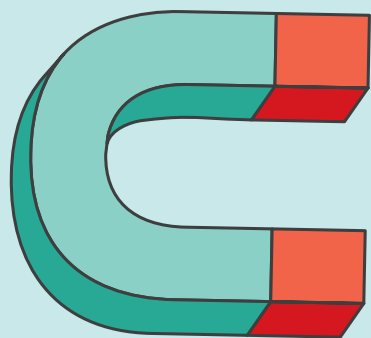


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How do we deepen the beautiful, intimate mystery of prayer, as we pray for and with others? asks **Fred Drummond**, director of prayer and Scotland, Evangelical Alliance.



# A magnet of BLESSING

**P**rayer is both privilege and passion, which ultimately leads to power. It is a privilege because we had no right or way into the presence of the holy God. However, through the finished work of Jesus, we can now commune with our loving heavenly Father and grow in understanding and adoration. We have free access to the King of glory.

While prayer is not always easy, and while we may still find tons of other things to do, I am convinced that opening ourselves up to being in the presence of God ignites our passion, both for God and for others. Here are a few things I have found helpful in praying for and with others.

## PRAYING FOR OTHERS

### 1. Praying from a God-centred attitude

I always try to begin from a place of adoration and praise, not from the point of a person's need or from the situations in the world, no matter how tragic they may be.

Mercy, love, grace and power flow from God. I cannot manufacture it. I can only submit myself to it and be overwhelmed in a tsunami of goodness. Then I know that I must align myself, as best I can, with the will of God. True intercession must flow from abandoned adoration.

### 2. Praying with the compassion of Jesus

I follow the One who wept over both individuals and cities. To pray for others, I need the Spirit to soften my heart. I am prone to be self-centred and hard hearted – not a great combination. I need to continually ask that I may be filled with something of the compassion of Jesus. Softness of heart is more important than success of ministry.

### 3. Pray intelligently

So often I pray in ignorance. I have no idea about the situations I am praying into and not much about individuals I pray for. It is important to use our intellects; sometimes we need to ask questions, find out a bit more, keep informed.

### 4. Pray with a plan

Sometimes my prayer can be a bit like Facebook, an interesting post that gets my attention for a least 30 seconds. I think about praying for something then quickly move on to something else. I have found that it helps me to have a plan. There are some folks I pray for every day, and others I pray about weekly. I always leave time to ask God to put situations and individuals into my mind that I pray for just in that time.

I review these and move names around. However, I also love spontaneous prayer, for the waitress bringing the coffee, the guy selling *The Big Issue*, the chance to pray for healing for folks I have never met before. The openness to the Holy Spirit is crucial, but I also need a bit of structure and planning to cover the things and people God has laid on my heart.

## PRAYING WITH OTHERS

If we don't like worshipping and praying with others, then heaven is going to be a real challenge. We are saved to be in community. Partnering in calling upon God is part of the privilege we have as His children.

## 1. Get some prayer partners

The number is unimportant, however, to have a community of accountability that pray with and for you is vital; we travel the road as disciples together. My experience shows that togetherness needs to be intentional. Set a time and a place and ask a couple of friends whether they would be willing to come and pray regularly. Go on – take the initiative, start a wee prayer group.

## 2. Get involved

If you are part of a church that comes together to pray, then get involved. Prayer meetings can be a bit scary: we can think they're only for the 'super spiritual'—the ones who have all the right language. We can be intimidated. However, in the book of Acts, there is mention of prayer around 21 times, and the clear majority are about corporate prayer. There is power in a church that spends a lot of time on its knees.

Our prayers may seem awkward or terrible. We might get the words mixed up. We might have just got an idea of what to pray for and then someone else prays for it. However, remember that the power of prayer lies with God who prompts it and hears it rather than with those who say it. It is not our correct language but our submitted heart that God cares about.

“  
.....  
Some of the most  
empowering prayer  
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part of were not  
planned.  
”

## 3. Be open to the Spirit

Some of the most empowering prayer times I have been part of were not planned. For example, a few people who wanted to pray at the end of a church service just turned around and invited others, including me, to pray too. More recently, I was in a café and had been part of a brilliant two-hour conversation about Jesus. At the end, before we left, someone said she felt we needed to tell Jesus how special He was. This led to about 15 minutes of quiet prayer in the group, and a wonderful sense of peace and a tangible presence of God.

I wonder if there was that same sense, perhaps magnified, when Paul and Silas were praying and worshipping in prison? “About midnight, Paul and Silas were at prayer and singing a robust hymn to God, the other prisoners couldn't believe their ears.

Then without warning a huge earthquake!” (Acts 16:25 – The Message). The openness to informal, spontaneous prayer is both countercultural and powerful. I encourage us to do it, in our homes, on the street, and wherever we are sent.

## 4. Think of prayer as a magnet

When I was at Bible college, I lived in the same accommodation as a Korean, Nigerian and some Europeans. Sometimes, when we were together, we would enjoy prayer and worship, and the styles of prayer would be very different. Occasionally, people would pray in their original languages, yet there was a sense of unity that is difficult to articulate.

We were part of one family encountering our God together, seeking His presence among us. Our backgrounds were different, but our faith was the same. Prayer united us in ways most other things can't. It also blessed us as we learned to appreciate one another.

There is something powerful about a people who come together with Jesus in the centre; it leads to blessing beyond our expectation. The temptation is to only pray with those who are like us, but I would encourage you to see prayer as a magnet that can bring people together.

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UNITY

We're getting better at living as God's family, but what more can we do to strengthen our relationship and witness to the world? asks **Roger Sutton**, director of Gather and Movement Day UK.

# WE ARE *Family*



**It wasn't a great meeting, but to be honest I wasn't expecting it to be. The first hint I had was the email saying the venue was in a local church hall, known for its shabby decor (not the chic kind) and its intermittent heating system. About 15 of us sat in the middle of a depressing hall on hard seats with our coats and scarves wrapped around us. It was Lent, so the leader of the church told us we wouldn't be having coffee and biscuits this morning.**

We were there, as some of the leaders of the church in the town, to have fellowship. I'm not sure what that means, but it didn't seem to really qualify as the biblical definition of being part of the same family on the same mission. There was no major bust up or heated theological arguments; in fact, it was all a bit polite, safe and predictable, perhaps it would have had more life if someone had said something controversial or confessed to some juicy hidden sin.

People talked about their ministries without really sharing any personal information. They either spoke about their stress and lack of resources, or they related how well they were doing, which made others feel a bit more depressed. We sung a bit, and prayed a little, and we all went our way not really knowing each other any better.

Some left the meeting confirmed in their negative mindsets and others thought it was a complete waste of time and went back to their 'successful' churches. So, whatever was going on in that depressing place, the kingdom of God certainly hadn't been extended much.

Maybe you have experienced similar, underwhelming, moments of the gathered body of Christ? Is this really what Christ envisaged for His body across an area? It all seems very individualistic and a bit lonely. Outside of our own church communities, how much do we express the vision of being one family, a cohesive interrelated city within a city, a light shining out to the world, revealing how relationships should be lived and experienced? With the mission set before us to work for the transformation of the places God has sent us to, can this really be achieved in this way? Have we settled into an individualistic, passively competitive mindset that creates a siloed, fragmented church?

Relationship within the whole body of Christ across a town or city is not an optional extra to the work of growing effective disciple-

*This move of relational unity is producing some very effective mission across the UK.*



making churches. It isn't something to be endured or ignored; it is something that is meant to be the foundation, the core of the fire that creates the heat, the base from which all other mission flows.

Contrast the depressing narrative I just outlined with the incredible move of the Spirit happening across many cities and towns in the UK, and across the world. Let me take you to a town in the north of England, where the church leaders meet every week to pray

with each other in a safe, warm and loving environment that creates a context for mutual support and lifelong friendships. Let's journey down south, where in many towns and cities leaders have been meeting and praying regularly for more than 20 years.

This has created a shared story, a coordinated and strategic approach to mission. They are known in their areas as One Church, serving together for the good of the city. They build strong relationships with their civic authorities serving their places as best they can, by helping reduce homelessness, getting kids out of care and into families, setting up foodbanks, and reducing social isolation.

Individual churches, however large, are not able to impact a town the way all the churches can if they are in strong relationship with each other. Some cities are now taking this to another level and hosting Movement Day conversations ([www.movementday.uk](http://www.movementday.uk)), where they are setting a 15-year vision for the spiritual, cultural and social transformation of their places. This incredible move of the Spirit isn't only confined to our country, but it's being discovered in places all over the world, from Dubai to Dallas, Berlin to Pretoria, Mumbai to Ottawa, in more than 300 cities across the globe. Obviously, this unity is expressed in very different ways, but the core values of prayer, relationship and love for the town or city are exactly the same.

## We're getting there

This exciting move of God is all about relationships, firstly with God as He transforms and deepens our love for Him, then this love is deepened with each other and then overflows towards the place He has called us to reach. I remember meeting a pastor in one of these towns with a vibrant unity movement at its core. He said to me, "My week begins on a Wednesday morning when we meet for prayer with the other leaders; I see them as my team. I then go back to my congregation empowered and supported to serve God." He went on to say, "I would not be in ministry if it were not for the prayer and support of the wider church in this city."

This move of relational unity is producing some very effective mission across the UK: we are seeing more coordinated and strategic work in social action and evangelism, and we are seeing unity movements engage with civic

authorities like never before. However, at the core of all this activity is trusting relationships, in other words, friendship. Pastors are becoming friends, congregations are sharing resources, and the family of God in an area is being formed. This is a far cry from a group of polite, distant strangers who meet in a dingy cold hall.

This incredible move of the Spirit around the UK and the world is highlighting for us the deficiency of our understanding of the body of Christ as displayed in the Bible. The magisterial passages that describe the interrelated, mutually supportive, organic body of Christ under His leadership (1 Corinthians 12) are in sharp contrast to what we often see lived out. The cry of Jesus in the garden for the same level of intense, relational, trusting unity that He has with the Father is often expressed in shallow, stilted and lifeless institutional frameworks.

My wife Lesley and I have a large family which is full of life, excitement and fun, and during the hard times it is supportive and compassionate. It is not perfect—sometimes we bring out the best in each other, and at other times the worst. We can sometimes disagree about politics, football, approaches to life and generational challenges; and we can be selfish and at times inconsiderate. But, we are still a family, and we love each other. And, as the Pope recently said, “The family is the school of love,” so we are still learning and sometimes passing the exams. It can be messy and at times chaotic; but, at its core, there is a deep love, appreciation, respect and understanding that if we can’t work this out in this context, where can we work it out?

Is it any different in the body of Christ, within individual churches or across denominations in a town, or even across national organisations? We are family. We are one body whether we like that or not. We are all we have. We are called together, adopted as brothers and sisters into the eternal family of the Trinity. And the world is looking at us; it is waiting to see if those who profess the name of Christ can live out that love together. The Holy Spirit is waiting to bless us wherever He sees unity breaking out (Psalm 133). Jesus is waiting to see the fulfilment of His garden prayer (John 17:21). Cities and towns are waiting within the whole of creation to see the children of God (Roman 8:19) come into their own, to be a loving, reconciled body as a sign to the world for the glory of God.

## What can we do today to become part of God’s way of relating?

# 1

### Citywide prayer meetings

If you lead a church, find out if there is a relational-based prayer meeting for the town or the city already happening. If there is, get involved and be part of the whole body of Christ across the area.

# 2

### Small prayer groups

If there is no relationship-based meeting, take the initiative and find a couple of other leaders who want to meet regularly to pray for the area and build some trusting relationships. Make sure the meetings are about praying for the town/city and praying for each other’s ministries and families. Keep inviting other leaders into the meetings, and make sure they are not in cold halls but in people’s homes or cafés.

# 3

### Prayer events

Try and organise a regular joint prayer event for the churches you lead, to introduce your people to each other’s church members. Always keep focusing on the mission to the area, and sometimes invite senior civic leaders to the events to be interviewed as to how you can better serve the town/city. If you keep the town/city your focus, you will be able to avoid focusing only on people’s pet projects.

# 4

### Resources

Use the resources of the Gather network, [www.gather.global](http://www.gather.global), which links more than 130 town- and city-based unity movements. Apply to attend the national Gather summit being held in June 2019, and bring a team to tell your story and hear and learn from others. For an overview of this exciting move of God in the UK, get a copy of my book, *Gathering Momentum*.

# 5

### Respect and honour

Keep the values of this move of God in your prayers and your spiritual practice. Honour one another and make sure you speak well of each other and your ministries. Celebrate diversity: don’t expect everyone to be the same, and learn from each other’s traditions. Set a culture of vulnerability, where honesty and acceptance are valued, and don’t do too many projects in the early days; focus first on building the friendships through prayer.

# 6

### Long-term vision

If your unity and mission are developing together, then take the next step and start a Movement Day process that firstly extends the vision of unity to Christians in the spheres of life (health, education, arts, business, etc) and also develops a long-term vision for the town/city. Visit the Movement Day UK website for more information [www.movementday.uk](http://www.movementday.uk)

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# A FORCE FOR GOOD

If police and faith groups work together better, we'll be able to tackle some of the big problems that are devastating our communities, the Christian Police Association's **Marie Reavey** tells Naomi Osinnowo.

**T**he UK is facing some grave challenges, with homelessness, youth-related crime, drug addiction and, even, loneliness taking its toll on the individuals involved and communities up and down the country.

The police force is one section of society that is, perhaps, feeling the heat more than most, as it endeavours to respond to the increasing demands of the people it serves with fewer officers and support staff to share the workload.

In a bid to meet the needs of communities in spite of the obstacles, Evangelical Alliance member the Christian Police Association (CPA) helped to set up the Faith and Police Together project in autumn last year.

The aim of the initiative, as its project manager Marie explains, is to encourage police officers and faith groups to work together more closely, and strategically, in order to significantly reduce the number of cases that sit within these four priority areas.

With only 12 months to lay a foundation and get police officers and faith groups on board, Marie certainly has her work cut out.

### How did the Faith and Police Together project come about?

Paul Blakey MBE, chief executive of Christian Nightlife Initiatives, Debra Green OBE, national director and founder of ROC (Redeeming Our Communities) and Lee Russell, executive director of the CPA, could see the good work that faith groups were involved with to assist the police in tackling crises that are wrecking people's lives and our communities, as well as putting immense pressure on officers.

However, they felt that it was imperative to improve the way that these groups and the police work together. So, last year, on Monday, 16 April, in the Houses of Parliament, the Faith and Police Together (FPT) project was launched to encourage and facilitate closer working relationships. CPA president, deputy chief constable Paul Netherton, has supported the project throughout and was instrumental in helping arrange the year's secondment from my position as police sergeant with Norfolk Police to lead this project, get the momentum going and make this a national initiative.

*We only have one year to build the foundations and try to encourage faith communities.*

I started in my role of project manager in September and hope to inspire the police to start thinking about faith communities as an untapped resource. I'll also engage with faith communities so that they can support the police in tackling our four key priority areas: homelessness, youth-related crime, drug addiction, and loneliness.

### Twelve months to build links between local police and their local faith communities seems a huge undertaking. What's your strategy?

The key is to establish a network which sees local police around the UK build meaningful relationships with their local faith groups, and vice versa. So far, I've written to the national police chiefs and used my contacts within the service and the CPA to promote what I'm doing, connect with as many faith groups as possible and get the message out.

Christian organisations have played an important part in helping us to spread the word. Premier and Churches Together in England have already used their platforms to disseminate information about this initiative, and now we're featuring in the magazine of the Evangelical Alliance. One of the main challenges at this stage is ensuring police departments hear about the initiative and catch the vision. We need buy-in; if officers aren't sharing the message, then it's less likely to take hold.

*Since 2010 there has been a significant reduction in police funding.*

How each force area runs with this project will vary, because it'll reflect the needs of their communities and the resources and support available. Hitherto, several forces, including Essex, Yorkshire, Hertfordshire and my own force Norfolk, have said that they are keen to take part. They would like to explore the approach as outlined in the FPT project.

For the duration of this project and thereafter, we expect to share best practice examples to help communities tackle these priority areas. These approaches can be 'franchised', or groups can mix and match or come up with their own ideas.

### There were calls for the police to work more closely with faith groups following terrorist attacks in recent years. Is there any connection between that push and the FPT project?

What I'm doing with the FPT initiative is quite different and a separate operation all together, not least because we've got in place Prevent, which is part of the UK's counter terrorism strategy and through that officers are engaging with all faith communities to avert acts of terrorism.

However, there is a natural fallout of better connected communities, in that there'd be a flow of intelligence and information. So, there's potential to tie in with Prevent. But, ultimately, we're focusing on the four priority areas that I've mentioned. We only have one year to build the foundations and try to encourage faith communities to think about engaging with their police in a different way.

I'm the only person working on this project, so we've got our work cut out. But, who knows where we'll be by the end of the year and what can be achieved afterwards?

### What are some of the challenges that police forces in the UK are facing?

Since 2010 there has been a significant reduction in police funding, which has resulted in 20,000 police officers as well as support staff being let go. Consequently, it's even more challenging responding to all the needs of our communities. It's certainly a difficult and demanding job. The police have to prioritise, and we do this based on level

of vulnerability. Chief officers are speaking openly about priorities and how best to use the valuable resources that we have, and this is happening more and more. The challenges don't take away from wanting to protect our communities; all officers, of all faiths and none, want to do a good job.

### **Considering cuts and continued high demand from communities, is there capacity for police forces to get behind this project?**

It is certainly a challenging time and a tough period for the police, so getting behind this project might seem like extra work initially. But, if we spend time engaging with our faith communities to address these issues now, particularly addiction, there is real potential for significantly reduced demand in these areas in the long run.

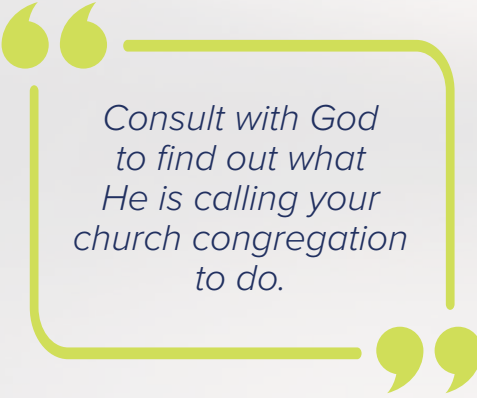
### **Why is it important for faith groups to work with the police to tackle some of the issues that are affecting communities around the UK?**

Faith groups have an incredibly high drive to do good and to see their communities transformed. This zeal is especially evident in the church. As Christians, we believe that Jesus is the answer and because God is involved things will happen. We need that faith and commitment!

Meanwhile, other faith groups will have approaches that work within their communities, so they will be able to deal with certain issues better than others would. Fundamentally, faith groups form a significant part of our community; if we don't engage them, we will be excluding them and missing out on the good that they do. We shouldn't do that.

### **Which other faith groups are involved in this initiative and do you think they can set aside differences for the sake of their communities?**

The FPT project is open to every faith group, and we are working with the National Association of Muslim Police, the Jewish Police Association, the National Police Pagan Association, among others, to see this



*Consult with God  
to find out what  
He is calling your  
church congregation  
to do.*

initiative move forward and succeed.

While there are examples of different faith groups failing to unite for a shared purpose, there are excellent examples of people from all faiths and none working together and bringing about change. So, it could be a challenge for some, but it doesn't have to be.

It's also important to bear in mind that each community is different and has unique needs that, as is often the case, only a specific faith group can understand and address – the Jewish and Islamic communities being prime examples. Faith groups would generally cater for their own communities and we need to leverage the advantages of that.

### **The FPT project focuses on four priority areas: addiction, homelessness, youth-related gang and knife crime, and loneliness. Loneliness may not have made my shortlist; why has it made the FPT project's?**

With drug addiction being one of the police service's largest demand generators, yes, it's expected that it would be 'top of the list'. Addiction feeds into homelessness and anti-social behaviour, in that these are often driven by the actions of both the supplier and user.

Loneliness is different. But we have found that people who are lonely, many of whom are elderly, but not exclusively, struggle to cope at home alone and become persistent callers. They may make frequent calls, often with odd requests, to the police and ambulance services, simply because they haven't got anyone else to talk to or they don't know what to do in a given situation.

One force had a persistent caller and would receive a very high number of calls in a week. The force organised for this person to receive the help they needed, and once

they did, they stopped calling.

Worse still, loneliness could end in suicide for some, which is a tragic loss of life and creates a significant amount of work for us. The more time police spend on these cases, the less time they'll have to tackle serious crime.

### **How can local churches support the FPT project?**

We urge the UK church to work with us to tackle homelessness, addiction, youth-related gang and knife crime, and loneliness. First and foremost, we need the church's prayers, so we implore congregations and individual Christians to bring these grave challenges before God.

We recognise and value the great work that local churches and Christian charities are already doing in these areas. But, as people around the UK remain trapped in vicious cycles, which unsettles communities and puts significant pressure on stretched police resources, it's essential that we continue to petition God for help.

We also encourage local churches to connect with their local police departments and establish a relationship with officers. By doing so, congregations can find out the specific issues their force is dealing with, as these change every two or four weeks. Then, congregants can pray into these particular areas as well as the broader priorities.

Churches want to see their communities transformed, and are keen to help, but as they don't have access to the information that police departments do, they are not fully informed and, therefore, will unlikely be able to channel their resources where they are most desperately needed. So, building a relationship and maintaining contact are so important.

Finally, consult with God to find out what He is calling your church congregation to do specifically. It may be laid on the heart of some local churches, for example, to provide a service for people who are lonely. Other gathered communities may sense a pull to pray into these areas during meetings. While others might be drawn to support financially an existing project which is led by a church or Christian charity. In the meantime, though, visit [www.faithandpolicetogether.org.uk](http://www.faithandpolicetogether.org.uk) to find out more.

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**South** Sun 24 March 4pm  
Kennet Valley Free Church, Reading

**West** Sat 30 March 2pm  
Creech St Michael Baptist, Taunton

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# love THY NEIGHBOUR

I'm from a country that has been fraught with deep divides, so thank God Jesus shows us how to love 'the other', says **Dawn McAvoy**, co-founder of Both Lives Matter.

**“**Who is my neighbour?” Why did the lawyer ask Jesus that question? Perhaps, partly, to justify his own attitudes and actions? Jesus responded, as always, with an eye on the eternal picture and with a truth which applies to all people, in any time, place or culture.

Loving the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength is one challenge; the command to love our neighbour who, in the story of the good Samaritan told by Jesus, is the person who is our enemy (or, if you'd never use that word, substitute it with 'the other') also requires serious thought.

Coming from Northern Ireland, the concepts of enemy and 'other' aren't that difficult to grasp. But, in case anyone who

**“***But, we still lived with locked doors, a loaded gun, and checked for bombs before we turned the car on.***”**

isn't from here is subconsciously slipping into a mindset of putting us into that particular box labelled 'sectarian and bigot', let me attempt to explain—not 'the Irish problem' nor The Troubles, but from an individual perspective, my own journey into living out my identity as a Christ-follower in a broken, hurting place. A place at war.

My childhood was lived through and,

in many ways defined by, a particular set of circumstances. My family were Unionist in their politics. The 'other side' were those who sought an overthrow of British rule, for a united Ireland, and some were using violence to achieve their aims. I was also born into a police family. For security reasons, we lived in one part of Northern Ireland and didn't really travel outside of a certain area.

My parents lived where they did because we were safe; to put it bluntly, it wasn't likely we'd have a gunman at the door or a bomb under the car. But, we still lived with locked doors, a loaded gun, and checked for bombs before we turned on the car. My friends, school and clubs were in 'safe areas'.

The border wasn't approached, never mind crossed, and holidays were spent on 'the mainland', so I was more familiar with Scotland and England than most of the island





of Ireland. I didn't have friends who were from 'the other' community. I didn't even know anyone who was 'the other'. It was just safer not to; Northern Ireland is a small place and people talk. Names are said, and details could be dangerous. I was also a protestant.

I know that often the conflict here is framed as a religious issue, and I do appreciate that the roots of our 'troubles' go back hundreds of years, to a time when the whole of Europe was torn apart by religious wars and power struggles. The consequences of the colonisation of Catholic Ireland by protestant England, and the subsequent planting of a loyal protestant community, predominantly in the north-east of the island, have brought us to where we are today.

### Overcoming differences

But, I'm thankful to my parents, that I never saw my faith community as the reason for our insecurity, rather it was my dad's job. And, therefore, I never saw any threat coming from someone simply because they were Roman Catholic. It was just that, generally speaking, protestants were Unionists and Catholics weren't. And we were at war. It wasn't a perceived threat; it was real, so everyone was careful about who they knew.

My parents modelled Christ to me. Despite their particular constrained environment, they lived lives marked by hospitality and generosity. They were mission-minded and showed us a world and a church that was broader and more culturally diverse than our own. They bred in us a desire to see and know and experience more than was possible in our home, at that time.

Fast forward to a time of relative peace and security, but many people are left with the very real problem of not knowing 'the other'. They're no longer the enemy, but they're not physically neighbours either.

“  
*It disturbs me when people blame religion for the brokenness in Northern Ireland.*  
 ”

I am ashamed to admit that I was in my forties before I had my first 'Catholic friend', as I laughingly refer to her. I can reason with myself and explain to others why she's the first, but I also find it so very sad, and I know that people who didn't live where I did and as I did simply don't get it.

We met through social media and over another contentious political and topical issue: abortion. What can be a divisive subject was, instead, a bridge that connected us. Together, we have journeyed into a place of relationship; and now there is community and relationships between our families, around our kitchen tables.

Together with others, we co-founded Both Lives Matter, a cross community movement, based in Northern Ireland. The campaign stands with women facing pregnancy crises and their unborn children, advocating for life-affirming laws and policies and practical services. Together we are creating a hope-filled future for them, inclusive of their children.

Those involved in the campaign come from different political and religious, or non-religious, backgrounds. We cross the deep divides that run through this place. Some of us, a wee while ago, would have been 'enemies' and the trust and relationships we have built wouldn't have been possible. But now, motivated by concern for the tiniest and most vulnerable of our human family, we come together united in a common aim.

Lifelong Republicans have spoken to MPs at Westminster. Unionists are acknowledging that we do not, and cannot, stand alone. Only together, can we succeed in providing a society which values, protects and enables both the lives of women and the unborn.

Some of us, myself included, are motivated by our Christian faith – our belief in a creator God who made humankind uniquely in His image for relationship with Him, giving us all an inherent value, regardless of physical or mental ability. But, for me, a genuine faith, as described in scripture, also brings about a new identity in Christ. Our identity can no longer be solely found in or bound to one political position or any country's flag.

It disturbs me when people blame religion for the brokenness in Northern Ireland—religion that God accepts as pure and faultless, that looks after 'the other', particularly the vulnerable and the oppressed (James 1:27). It angers me when people claim religion but instead subvert it to create and maintain division, in order to gain or retain a human power base.

God revealed Himself to us in His son Jesus. Jesus reflects to us God's glory and, in His own life, modelled perfect humanity. Out of His grace-filled and sacrificial love for us, we are brought into relationship with God. Through our relationship with God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, we are shown what the perfect relationship looks like.

A political peace process has provided me with the opportunity to sit around the table, united in a common good. However, it is the living God who breaks down the walls of hurt which divide us. Only He shines the light that reveals the lies which keep us bound in fear; and it is His sacrificial love, not just for us, but for all mankind, which demands that we, like Him love, even, 'the other'.

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# LOVE. GO. TEACH.

Being a follower of Jesus sometimes requires us to share our lives and faith with people who have other religious beliefs, says **Canon Dr Andrew Smith**, director of Interfaith Relations for the Bishop of Birmingham.

I was 28 before I met anyone of another faith. I'd grown up and worked in areas that were predominantly white British and just never gave any serious consideration to what others believed or how I might relate to them. I thought it was an issue for someone else.

In the mid-1990s I got a job with Evangelical Alliance member Scripture Union in Birmingham as a schools' worker and I started to meet many Muslim young people. I didn't feel a sense of great calling to work amongst Muslims; I found myself having to relate to the Muslim pupils I was meeting. For some this story will be familiar: people of other faiths aren't people we

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*It was this Trinitarian understanding of God that I found in no other belief system.*  
 ”

meet regularly until things change and we are living amongst neighbours who believe and practice things different to us; this might be due to moving to a new house or job,

starting university or people moving into our neighbourhoods.

As I got to know Muslims, I found that many of my presumptions and prejudices were challenged. They were overwhelmingly friendly, interested in what I believed, committed to their own faith and found within it both fulfilment and hope. This challenged my own ideas and beliefs, causing me to question what was it that made the gospel unique and potentially attractive to people committed to another faith?

Through studying scripture and prayer, I found that wrestling with these questions deepened my faith. I looked again at the uniqueness of Christ, the Father's offer

of salvation by grace, and the infilling of the Holy Spirit. It was this Trinitarian understanding of God that I found in no other belief system and that held me close when things were (and continue to be) confusing or challenging.

### It starts with love

Being confident and sure in my faith was one thing, but I was still working out how to relate that to the Muslims I was meeting and working amongst. I was sure that proclaiming truth would be the way to convince them of the validity of Christianity. However, I, like so many others, found that truth claims just fell on deaf ears or quickly descended into fruitless debates going over arguments we'd heard elsewhere and leading nowhere.

Whilst I believe in the truth of the gospel and am happy to share it, I realised that proclaiming it wasn't always the best starting point. Once again, I went back to scripture to see how Jesus related to people who were different to Him? Although He is fully human, He is also fully divine, so, in one sense, all humanity is different to Him. His approach was staring at me from, possibly the most famous verse in the Bible, John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him may not perish but have eternal life" (version as remembered from Sunday school).

His starting point was to love humanity, then to come and be with us, then to reveal Himself so that we might believe. The pattern was love, go, teach. I figured that I ought to try and model that, then as I sought further clarification through the Bible, my eyes were opened to just how much the Bible focuses on love: God's love for us, our love for others, and in the very being of God: "God is Love" – 1 John 4:8b.

Since those first, stumbling attempts to share my faith with Muslims, I have got to know, and become friends with, many people of all faiths. I have visited more mosques, temples, synagogues and gurdwaras than I can count. I also know many people who have come to faith in Christ from different faith backgrounds. I have sat and listened to their stories, which are often painful, and many have paid a far higher price to follow Jesus than I ever have.

In all this, the one thing that has been consistent is that the best way to build a

*I was sure that  
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convince them of the  
validity of Christianity.*

relationship with people of different faiths and to share our love of Jesus with them is to start by learning to love them unconditionally, to see them as friends and neighbours rather than a threat or a challenge. In my recent book *Vibrant Christianity in Multifaith Britain*, I look at how the great commandments to love God and neighbour have no preconditions or time limits on them; we are just commanded to love both our neighbour and God at the same time all the time.

The reason I used the phrase 'vibrant Christianity' in the title, is that I firmly believe that we can have a confident, vibrant, faithful Christian life in and amongst friends and neighbours of different faiths. I've lived and worked amongst people of no faith and people from different faiths, and with all people there are tremendous possibilities, joys and challenges in living as Christians. In many ways I find it easier amongst my friends of different faiths—almost without exception they respect and appreciate the fact that I'm a Christian. They are open to talking about faith and are pleased when I offer to pray for them and will often offer to pray for me if I'm going through a tough time. Having said that, overall, they are not looking to convert to Christianity and some would have serious reservations if a friend or family member chose to convert—in the same way many

*Loving our  
neighbours of  
different faiths  
doesn't mean shying  
away from sharing  
our faith.*

of us would struggle if someone close to us rejected Jesus in order to follow another religion, and for some of you reading this, that will be your reality.

### A multi-faith context

As I've sought to encourage Christians to live and witness in a multi-faith context, some people are concerned that their own faith might be watered down or that they might be led astray. One of the themes I looked at in my book is Jesus' pattern of discipleship. In the early chapters of Matthew, He takes the disciples into some seriously challenging situations. Following Jesus doesn't mean avoiding new and uncertain situations, but following Him there, knowing He will be faithful and trustworthy. My experience has been that if we follow Jesus closely into these places, far from being watered down, our faith will be enriched and strengthened.

Finally, we are called to go and make disciples of all nations. I'm very open with my friends that I would love everyone to find the hope that I have in Jesus, but I strive to share the gospel in a way that is still deeply loving of the person I'm talking to. Loving our neighbours of different faiths doesn't mean shying away from sharing our faith, but it might mean thinking differently about how we do it, going slowly and gently, listening to their ideas, stories and experiences, and walking with them on, what might be, a long and challenging path.

I would encourage us to pray for an opportunity to make, or deepen, a friendship with someone from a different faith and to express our faith in a way that connects with them. I'd also urge us to find ways to get to know more about the different faith communities we have in Britain. This might mean talking to a friend or colleague, visiting another place of worship, or reading articles or books. Then think about how we could share our faith through words and deeds with those people.

Consider getting a copy of Canon Dr Andrew Smith's book *Vibrant Christianity in Multifaith Britain* and/or *The World on our Doorstep*, which was published by the Evangelical Alliance, to enhance your understanding of how to relate with people of other faiths.

behind  
church

# DOORS

We've given up our auditorium, Sunday school classroom and one of our toilets to keep rough sleepers off the streets, senior pastor **Rev Alex Gyasi** tells Naomi Osinnowo.

Isn't it inspiring when we meet Christians who step out of their comfort zones and into someone else's despair, even if it comes at a cost? I met a Christian just like that recently, as I sought to find out more about a church whose founder allows around 50 rough sleepers to bed down in the auditorium every night.

Considering the invaluable service that Highway of Holiness Church (HHC) offers, I was surprised to find that the church is somewhat buried in an industrial part of north London, occupying a warehouse on a back street that houses mechanics, other tradespeople and two more church congregations that, in all likelihood, are, similar to HHC, making the most of their current accommodation until they can afford something better.

The church's caretaker, Sammy, who senior pastor Rev Alex Gyasi later told me converted to Christianity from Hinduism after congregants prayed away his physical illness when he was homeless and sleeping at the church, swung open the door and invited me in. He showed me upstairs to Alex's office, confirming en route that the man who I observed shuffling out of the building, wearing a puffer jacket that looked like a mini sleeping bag, is one of the many homeless men who frequent the church from 4pm for a hot meal and place to sleep.

"Around nine years ago, the church went into the local community to evangelise. My wife witnessed to two homeless men who said they needed our help, so she gave them a leaflet and urged them to come to meet me at our church," Alex told me once I had settled down to find out why his church functions like a hostel. "In all honesty, I didn't expect them to come, but one day they did, absolutely drunk, with an awful stench.

"They explained that they moved to London from Poland for construction work ahead of the Olympics and ended up destitute, suppressing their suffering with alcohol, when the industry contracted due to the recession, which did away with their jobs and savings. They had no money for rent and couldn't even scrape together enough cash to buy a plane ticket home."

Alex, who's originally from Ghana, explained that he and his wife, Dorcas, had very little to offer these men at the time, but what they did have, they gave. They asked the men to come to the church for regular meals cooked by Dorcas; and while members of the church

*Caring for the vulnerable is a corporate assignment, and we can all chip in.*

held prayer meetings downstairs, the homeless men would enjoy a warm, homecooked meal upstairs.

Over the subsequent days, weeks and months, in order to meet some of the basic needs of the growing number of homeless men who were going to the church, Alex replaced one of the church's toilets with a shower so they could wash, believing, and seeing, that "small things can make a big difference in their lives".

The 'game-changer', however, as Alex explained, was when God warned him not to allow a suicidal homeless man to leave the church one night. "He came into my office with tears in his eyes, wanting to kill himself. With his mother terminally ill in Poland and years of no contact with his children following divorce, he felt hopeless," Alex said. "That's when God said to me, 'If you let him go, that will be the last time you will see him.'

"So, that night, to stop the guy taking his life, two church leaders and I slept in the church with him and 12 other homeless men. We didn't know what to expect, as many had alcohol and drug problems – we knew anything could happen. But, we slept here; we didn't go home for two days. This is how our homeless shelter began."

### Off the streets

For a number of years now, HHC has been allowing between 40-50 homeless men to sleep in the belly of the church every night. More than two dozen mattresses, which have become tired and worn, are stored in the room that used to host the Sunday school; and in that same room, there are several cubbyholes, where the men put their possessions. A kitchen area, with a table for people to eat at, is located next door to the storeroom; and the shower next door to that.

Of an evening, the homeless men grab a mattress, bedding and/or sleeping bag and take them downstairs into the auditorium, where they claim a spot for the night. Six years ago, the BBC One Show featured HHC on its programme and showed what a typical night at

the church is like: rows of men taking up much-needed refuge in the medium-sized hall.

"The only time we unstack the chairs in the auditorium is for our Sunday service; every other day and time they have to be packed away so that these vulnerable men have somewhere to sleep. Rough sleeping can drive people to desperate measures, and we want to avoid that," said Alex, who came to London in the 1980s to study banking and find related work. "We meet their essential needs – a place to sleep, eat and wash – and we offer counselling and connect them with the relevant agencies and public services where possible.

"So far, our project has helped more than 900 people from 60 countries, and not only by meeting their physical needs. People have come to know Jesus, because they've seen the love of God, and have gone on to be baptised in water and the Holy Spirit. Others have integrated into the church here and elsewhere."

Yet, HHC's work with homeless people remains mainly funded by congregants and other donations from churches and individuals, which is quite astonishing as many homeless people who have physical infirmities and/or issues surrounding their immigration status have been referred to the church by major charities, including the British Red Cross and Crisis, as well as regional hospitals and local Labour MP David Lammy.

"Sammy came here from Croydon hospital; he was discharged with a spinal problem that they couldn't cure. He has no recourse to public funds and they sent him to this church. He couldn't sleep properly. During intercessory prayer, he was healed of his spinal problem instantly," Alex said as he pulled out from his files referral letters from charities and public services that one would expect to be able to offer more support than a local church on a back street in Tottenham.

As Alex looked ahead into 2019, when the lease on the church building that has been housing rough sleepers for almost a decade will expire, he said, "Our greatest need now is a building, because we need to secure a place so that the guys don't end up on the streets. We urge the wider church to get behind these people and do what they can to help, whether it's pray or provide food, bedding or a place. Caring for the vulnerable is a corporate assignment, and we can all chip in, using what God has provided, and become partners with our Saviour."

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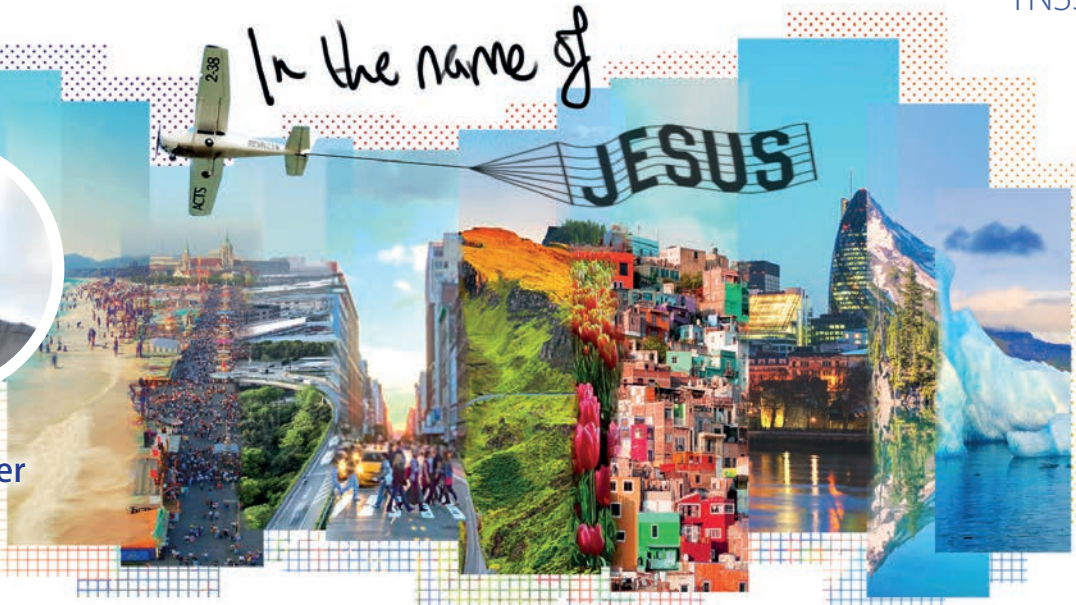


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There are five things we might want to consider doing in order to disagree well, says **Jo Frost**, director of communications, Evangelical Alliance.



# disAGREEING WELL

**T**he very notion of disagreeing well feels like an oxymoron. To be described as disagreeable seems an insult. We do all we can to avoid and sooth conflict and argument, and yet conflict is an ever-present reality in our lives.

Ever since the garden, as God declared “it is not good”, conflict has been part of our story and has driven us forward. Without opposition, there can be no momentum, no dynamism. God acknowledged the problem of Adam’s loneliness, which led to the creation of Eve, and the diversity of God’s nature was revealed.

But conflict can also be a cruel disrupter and destroyer of relationships. We all disagree. Whether it’s as simple as what to have for tea or centuries-old intractable geopolitical conflicts, we have a propensity for opposing opinions. And when we voice opposing opinions, it often results in greater problems and broken relationships. So, how can we get better at disagreeing well?

## 1. Recognise the personhood of the other

It is easy to forget there is a person at the other end of an argument. Every person you encounter is loved by God, made in His likeness and bears His image. When we disagree, it can often become a matter of who’s right, or how can I get what I want? When seeking to honour the other person, Jesus reminds us to move towards them with compassion. Ask God to help you remember this person is beloved and cherished by God.

—“  
*Conflict can also be a cruel disrupter and destroyer of relationships.*  
 —”

## 2. Establish what you are disagreeing about

Many disagreements escalate because neither party fully realises what the other is proposing. Ever since Babel (Genesis 11) our ability to communicate clearly and understand each other’s perspective and meaning has been confused.

A conflict, in its simplest form, occurs when two or more parties want different and incompatible things. But, finding out what the other person wants, or needs, can help you discover solutions where everyone gets what they want, but in ways they hadn’t considered.

Therefore, listening is the spiritual discipline practiced when dealing with disagreements—listening to the other, God and to one’s motivations, with honesty.

## 3. Ask better questions

Questions can shut down or open up a disagreement. A good question pushes conflict forward, uncovering previously unrealised solutions. According to author Martin Copenhaver, Jesus asked more than 300 questions. He used questions to lead

people to a place of discovery and honesty.

But questions can be fickle things. Asking ‘how’ or a ‘why’ puts the responder in a defensive place, forced to justify or account for their position. Whereas ‘what’ allows them to articulate and expand their position without the pressure of scrutiny. Consider beforehand what questions you might ask to clarify what is being discussed and which paths could be explored to arrive at a solution.

## 4. Never underestimate the power of an apology

Apologies can be disarming and restorative. They needn’t be a sign of weakness, but often can be a sign of bridled strength that recognises our need for grace. Apologies are difficult, and we can be poor at apologising; “I’m sorry, but...” is not an apology, neither is “I am sorry if...”. Thanks to the composition of the English language, it’s easy to confuse an apology with the offer of condolences. “I am sorry that I...” is a good place to start when making an apology.

## 5. Welcome the Prince of peace

Philippians 4:6 reads: “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” Peace is a gift from God. It is the hallmark of His kingdom and comes by His grace. Whenever you are facing a disagreement, pray for God to flood the situation with His presence and His peace. And do not worry, our God is faithful.

Can Christians share the good news of Jesus in their everyday interactions with people they don't know? asks the Evangelical Alliance.

FROM SMALL TALK TO

# GOD *talk*

**Sam Pritchard**, the Evangelical Alliance's public policy officer for Wales, says it's not uncommon for people in his nation to engage in casual chitchat with folk they don't know. He wonders if this can create a natural opening for Christians to talk about Jesus.

**T**here is no stranger experience for a Welshman than sitting in the thick fog of silence on a London tube packed with people who won't make eye contact with one another, let alone talk. Oddly, even friends sitting together, at times, exchange only a few words.

This is so alien to me. Growing up in Wales, I have found people there are inherently relational, and, by that, I mean talkative. In Wales, conversations are not things that are only initiated among friends or acquaintances, but they also often erupt in the company of people who don't know each other.

For example, it's not uncommon for me to be walking past a stranger and for them to declare: "It's a cold one today, isn't it?" Moreover, I cannot recall a time that I

haven't spoken to someone while waiting at a bus stop, even if our chat is just about the weather forecast being wrong or the punctuality of the bus.

I'm not sure what the reason is, but there is most definitely something in the air over Wales, which encourages people to connect with each other, even if it's only fleetingly. As a Christian, I believe that these types of interaction can be excellent opportunities to build friendships, gain another perspective and, even, share Jesus.

The challenge with a talkative culture, however, is that so often people make conversation, but very rarely do they progress to anything significant or meaningful. It could just be me, but we in Wales seem to have the same superficial conversation with a different person time and time again.

I've found that friendly people, always willing to engage in conversations, even with strangers, are some of the most difficult people to talk to about anything deep or consequential. Perhaps there's an unwritten rule somewhere, that you are only allowed to talk to strangers if the subject of the conversation is common or trivial? Therefore, when we are happily passing pleasantries, there is the temptation to keep the conversation continuing in that vein.

I must admit, I participate in these conversations all the time. It's not atypical for a polite stranger to ask me: "Get up to much this weekend?", and me not mention that I went to church, blurting out instead: "I enjoyed it, thanks. I spent most of it watching



*"I cannot recall a time that I haven't spoken to someone while waiting at a bus stop."*

TV." Here, I have kept the conversation alive, but I've missed an opportunity to talk to someone about my local church in our community and identify myself as a Christian.

I reckon this isn't limited to passersby and many of us relate to our work colleagues, who we talk to and see every day, in a similar way. What stops us from advancing the conversation beyond the pleasantries? Do we avoid talking about anything to do with our faith because we want to be liked and fit in? How do we talk about Jesus with a stranger as casually as we might discuss a delayed bus?



**Eve Paterson**, Great Commission coordinator at the Evangelical Alliance, sheds some light on some techniques that we can all employ to get better at being open and conversational about our faith in Jesus, even with those with whom we're not well acquainted.

**F**rom where we were born, to our culture, personality, age, income, education, hobbies or family life, no two lives look the same, and the way we share Jesus is no different. While the call to evangelism is the same for all believers, the context for evangelism is different for everyone.

Jesus Himself was always aware of the setting in which He shared His message,

as shown in the gospels. Whether it was the woman at the well, the tax collector up the tree, the centurion on the street, or the Pharisee in the night, every encounter with Jesus was unique to the context and how that person could best understand His message.

With this in mind, here are a few ways we can have fruitful conversations that reach beyond the superficial, and, dare I say it, even happen with strangers in public places.

#### ● Ask questions

One of the distinct ways that Jesus carried out His ministry – in contrast to many politicians and celebrities – was that He was often the one asking questions. Even though Jesus intricately knew and loved the people He was speaking to, it was so important that they fully felt that He was interested in them through the way He interacted with them.

When we strike up a conversation, we might first break the ice with an observation about the rain or the tardiness of the train – because this is still Britain, after all. But from there, it's crucial we ask questions, creating space for the other person to share some of their story. Our end goal is always that people would come to have a personal relationship with Jesus, but our primary concern is that each person first feels the same love and interest that Jesus Himself shows them.

#### ● Remain calm

As we take and make those opportunities to start a conversation, and hopefully share Jesus, ask God for His peace and comfort. It may be outside of your comfort zone, but God has been sharing Himself since the beginning of humanity, so ask for some of His guidance and wisdom in doing so yourself. When we lean into God's Holy Spirit, asking Him to calm our nerves, I believe other

“  
*God has been sharing Himself since the beginning of humanity.*  
”

people can sense that tangible presence of God and it rubs off on them too.

#### ● Recommend to a friend

It can be hard to know how to first mention Jesus, but just as you'd recommend a movie you recently saw or a gym class you just joined, don't hesitate to mention your church or small group. Not only that, but also share how much you enjoy it or what you do there. Many people have little idea what church really looks like, so explaining that we're actually quite normal, the music can be lively, the preacher is engaging, and that we're there because we love Jesus, not because we have to be, could totally change their view.

#### ● Practice makes permanent

Ultimately, as with all things, the best way to find it easier is through practice. If you find it hard to talk about Jesus, then start by making Him a normal topic of conversation with fellow believers. The more confident we get with sharing our encounters with Jesus in familiar spaces, the more freely we'll be able to share them when out and about.

Whether it's a bus stop, tube, café, or local park, we know that God is at work across the UK, drawing people to Himself. Let's make the most of the incredible opportunity to be part of His mission by plucking up our courage and boldly starting conversations, knowing we have a message of hope, love and salvation that is well worth sharing.

Christian community groups have long had the potential to foster meaningful relationships with God and people and, obstacles aside, they should do well into the future, says **Catherine Burt**, assistant director of Girls' Brigade Ministries.

# RESTORATION THROUGH RELATIONSHIP

**W**hen I was about four years old I was very shy and my playschool leader suggested to my mother that it would be good for me to join a club of some sort. Pinned to the noticeboard was a flyer for a local Girls' Brigade community group and so shortly afterwards I was taken along.

At first, I was still very shy: I didn't like to join in the games or activities and was much more content to sit and watch. But, as time went by, I did start to join in and found my voice... and my confidence. I made friends, I experienced new things, I learnt new skills and, as some of my friends and family now joke, it obviously worked a little too well as I'm a very chatty person.

Thanks to Girls' Brigade (GB) I discovered not only who I am but who God says I am. I discovered and entered into relationship with Him, was taught to explore the Bible and the Christian faith and apply it to my life, and also made lifelong friendships with the girls, young women and leaders I've met along the way.

We, at Girls' Brigade Ministries (GBM), firmly believe that God uses our work to form much-needed relationships. Take our weekly

community groups as an example: there are around 500 in England and Wales, made up of around 10,000 girls and young women (primarily) and 2,000 volunteer leaders. We want each of our members to find their GB group a safe environment where they can relate to one another and discover more of how relationship with Jesus Christ makes a difference to life in their 'mid-week' church.

Now, as a volunteer leader at a local GB community group, it's a real blessing to be able to come alongside girls and young women and help them experience the same as I did. I'm passionate about relating to people, and meeting them and caring for them just where they are.

I've been thinking recently about the vast range of topics that came up in conversation with the 11-18s that I'd been working with one evening. We'd started off talking about risk-taking – the actual theme for the night – but also covered the dangers of eating raw chicken, what they'd done at the weekend, clickbait, celebrities, school, pets, and so much more. What a privilege it was to be able to feed into so many conversations, build meaningful relationships with these teenage girls, and to be able to do this while sharing

God's light and hope with them.

I know of one example where a girl had to make a choice between another activity and GB because they changed their evening to the same as ours. Her Dad said we cared for her in a way that no-one else had. It's good to know we're recognised as being different.

Another key strength of our community groups is that they enable girls and young women to mix socially with those who are different from them. We contributed to a study on social integration within uniformed youth groups – launched last July by ComRes and commissioned by the Youth United Foundation. Highlights from the study found:

- Uniformed youth groups, such as GB, are an effective way of encouraging young people to mix socially with those who are different from them – 84 per cent of uniformed youth report that at least some of the members of their group are different from them in some way (i.e. they're part of a diverse group).
- Uniformed young people are more likely than non-uniformed youth to say that the contact they have had with people who are different to them was positive.



## PLEASE PRAY

for us and our work, particularly the challenges I mentioned, as we continue to help girls, young women and women live life to the full.

- Uniformed youth groups help to foster a sense of social responsibility and connection to British society and British values – members are twice as likely as their non-uniformed counterparts to say they take part in social action at least once a week (58 per cent vs 30 per cent).

GB group 1st Huncote, near Leicester, was chosen as a location for some of the 52 qualitative interviews conducted among uniformed youth, their parents/guardians, and volunteer group leaders. One GB parent said: 'The girls need to learn to interact with different people of different ages from different backgrounds and that's what the group provides; that's invaluable.'

These findings are good news for all uniformed youth groups, not just GB, in showing some of the positive impacts we have on young people and how diverse our groups are, comprising young people from all backgrounds. This social-mixing study was a great piece of work to celebrate in 2018, our 125th birthday, and following our appearance on BBC1's Songs of Praise.

Our groups have a community approach, often engaging in social action where they

*We're all created to be in relationship with God and those around us.*

live, from fundraising for local causes to doing a litter-pick. It's so important to equip and empower girls and young women to make a difference in their communities and the lives of others.

Helping people build a relationship with God, developing intergenerational relationships, and having lots of fun and opportunities along the way, is GB Ministries' foundation. With loneliness becoming an increasing issue in society, so much so that the government has appointed a minister for loneliness to act upon this 'silent epidemic',

our retreats offer women of all ages the chance to connect with one another and to connect with God. "This is a good opportunity to get to know other women, have fun and experience things outside of your comfort zone, which is challenging and rewarding," says Julia, who attended a previous retreat.

We're all created to be in relationship with God and with those around us. We're people of God: His church in and part of local and online communities, signposting and revealing God's restoring love. We see time and time again in scripture how Jesus was relational to those He met, how He was relevant and responsive to their needs, and therefore brought about restoration in their lives. What an example for us all to follow.

Of course, our ministry is not without its challenges – be that the challenge of funding or of maintaining volunteer leadership. But we trust that God is constantly preparing and equipping us to be able to respond and relate to generations of girls, young women and women in the years to come.

Why not pray today for an opportunity to build a better relationship with someone you know? What practical thing could you do today to encourage them?

**"Open my eyes, that I may see wonderful things."**

- Psalm 119:18



**Theo has spent his childhood in darkness, but you can help children like him. Give before 14<sup>th</sup> May 2019 and every £1 you donate to our See the Way appeal will be doubled by the UK government.**

Dear Idea Magazine reader,

As a fellow Christian, I want to share with you how incredibly powerful it is to witness a child seeing for the first time, after eye surgery.

As we carry out our work at Christian Blind Mission, we are constantly moved by the astonishment and wonder on the faces of children when the bandages are removed and they get their first clear look at their smiling loved ones.

You can help this happen for more children. Until 14th May 2019, your donations to our **See the Way** appeal will be doubled by the UK government. So your gift could help twice the number of children **See the Way** to a brighter future.

The photo to the right shows 2-year-old Theo from Rwanda, East Africa, who has cataracts that leave him barely able to see. But cataracts are straightforward to treat. Surgery taking just 45 minutes could restore his sight.

Just think, in this short time his entire life can be transformed. Instead of living with darkness and confusion he could have light, colour and a future filled with opportunity. He could go to school and one day find employment that would allow him to **See the Way** out of poverty.

Cataract removal surgery costs £95, but families like Theo's can barely afford even basic necessities, so I am turning to you in the hope that you can help.

You could open a child's eyes to the beauty of God's creation. And we'll send you an update on Theo's surgery.

God bless you,

*Rebecca*

Rebecca Molyneux  
CBM Programme Manager



Theo has been living his life in darkness, due to his cataracts



When he tries to walk or run, he bumps into things



Your gift could help children see and transform lives

Every day, people in the world's poorest places become needlessly blind because of conditions that can be easily treated. Donate today and your gift is multiplied x2.

**Until 14th May 2019, the UK government will match all public donations to our See the Way appeal.**



**Yes, I will give £95 to help a blind child see the wonder of God's creation.**

**I will give:**  £95  My choice amount of: \_\_\_\_\_

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We will send you an update on Theo's surgery.

We'd love to keep you informed about our life-changing work and how you can support it by making a donation. By giving your email address or phone number below you give CBM UK consent to contact you using these methods:

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Public donations will support CBM's work preventing blindness and transforming lives wherever the need is greatest. Match funding from the UK government will improve access to sight-saving eye-health services in Rwanda.



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**If you are a UK taxpayer and if you tick the Gift Aid box when you make a donation, HMRC will add an extra 25p for every pound you donate.**

I want to Gift Aid my donation and any donations I make in the future or have made in the past 4 years to Christian Blind Mission. I am a UK taxpayer and understand that if I pay less Income Tax or Capitals Gains Tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations in that tax year it is my responsibility to pay any difference.

**We will need your name and address to claim the additional 25% of your donation from Gift Aid.**

**Call 0800 567 7000 to make your donation today. THANK YOU.**

Together we can make Jesus known for generations to come. Will you join with us and consider leaving a legacy gift to the Evangelical Alliance today?

# LEGACY APPEAL

In this edition of *idea*, we have been exploring relationships. Not only has God created us for a relationship with Him, but He calls us into this relationship time and time again. It is this God, our relational Father, who should be reflected in our own relationships with one another.

This is why, at the Evangelical Alliance, we are passionate about unity. We believe that Jesus has called us to come together as a church, as He prays about in John 17: "...that they might be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

We love bringing individuals, churches and organisations together, and believe that, in doing so, we are able to strengthen the voice of the church in our communities and throughout society. All of us – cheering each other on – are working hard to make Jesus known throughout the UK.

Through exciting initiatives such as the online Great Commission hub, our mission to young adults work, and the Public Leadership initiative, alongside our public policy work in the parliaments and assemblies of the UK, we are building confidence in the gospel and encouraging the church in its mission. The amazing news is that, because of this, people around the country are coming to know Jesus and developing their faith every single day.

Toby Watts, one of our Public Leader: England participants, told us that our Public Leadership course is an "incredible opportunity to explore the nature and scope of your God-given leadership gifts". He said that meeting a group of aspiring Christian leaders "seeking discernment in how to use their God-given leadership gifts and follow their calling" was "an amazing blessing", and summed up his experience as "inspiring, challenging and empowering".

*People are coming to know Jesus and developing their faith every single day.*

At the Evangelical Alliance, this is our focus. We want to inspire, encourage and empower, not just young Christian leaders, but all Christians around the UK, to share and live out their faith with courage, grace and integrity. And we don't just want to see this happen in the here and now, but well into the future.

To make this happen, however, we need your help; and by leaving a legacy gift to the Evangelical Alliance today, you can ensure that vital work like this continues well into the future. Will you help us to continue uniting Christians so that, together, we can strengthen the voice of the church, making Jesus known throughout the UK for generations to come?

We spoke to long-standing members, Trevor and Celia Bartlett, about why they have decided to leave a legacy gift to the Evangelical Alliance. Living in the South West, far away from our country's decision makers in Westminster, Trevor and Celia have always felt comforted and reassured to know that a Christian organisation has such an influential voice in the corridors of power. In their own words: "We want to put our money where their mouth is – we trust the Evangelical Alliance to speak on our behalf!"

So, will you join members like Trevor and Celia and think about leaving a legacy gift to the Evangelical Alliance today?

## LEGACY AFTERNOON TEA

We would like to invite you to a Legacy Afternoon Tea on Wednesday, 8 May at our resource centre in central London. Come along to learn more about leaving a legacy gift to the Evangelical Alliance, hear from Steve and Ann Clifford on why they are committed to supporting the longevity of our work, and find out how you can give to help make Jesus known. If you're interested in coming along or wish to find out more, please contact Lizzie Thomson at [l.thomson@eauk.org](mailto:l.thomson@eauk.org) or on 020 7520 3856.

It's our godly mandate to assume the leadership positions to which we've been called and expand God's kingdom, says **Abi Jarvis**, Public Leadership coordinator, Evangelical Alliance.

# The **HEAD** not the *tail*

**O**ne of my favourite Bible verses is Micah 6:8 – “He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”

I love these verses not only because of their focus on justice, mercy and humility, but because they are active, intentional actions that effect our relationships with each other and with God. We are instructed not to simply approve of the theoretical concepts but to embody justice, mercy and humility as we act, love and walk.

When we act in godly ways, we reflect the One who made us. As many involved in justice and mercy ministries can testify, such public demonstrations of our faith are a powerful witness to others. They build relationships with the people who engage with them and help bring people into relationship with God.

But actions of justice, mercy and humility are not limited to social justice, just as the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22) is not limited to our personal relationships with friends and family. They are attributes that should be applied to everything we do, including our leadership responsibilities. God has given us

“*How we act in leadership roles will reflect upon the God who sent us to those places.*”

the gift of delegated authority in this world: Adam cares for creation by naming the animals (Genesis 2:19-20); Daniel and Joseph served in foreign governments; and the early church included a member of the Areopagus (Acts 17:34), a government official (Acts 2:37), a business woman (Acts 16:14), and many others who had influence in their workplaces and communities.

Today, there are Christians in every sector of society, and how we act in leadership roles will reflect upon the God who sent us to those places. But leading in our workplaces and communities can be difficult. Increasingly, in the UK it is challenging to hold – let alone speak out – alternative views to the

majority (or the vocal minority). Public faith is acceptable if it's limited to doing nice things that serve your community, otherwise it should be kept for private activities such as going to church and reading your Bible before bedtime. The moment your faith affects your social, moral or political views – or even your behaviour – opposition arises.

The temptation in such circumstances is to stay quiet, to flee from the conversation and adopt the attitudes of the group. Why stand firm when it will only damage your reputation and friendships? It's much easier to leave the difficult conversations to others. Unfortunately for those who would prefer a quiet life, Jesus didn't really give us that option. He is pretty clear that our faith should be public: “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:14-16).

Last year, the Evangelical Alliance released *What kind of society?*, a report that encourages Christians to think about their vision for the society they would like to live



## SENT

Our Public Leadership initiative has launched a new course, SENT, which will help churches support and equip public leaders in their congregations to be a voice for good and a voice for God in the places to which they are called.

Find out more at [eauk.org/sent](http://eauk.org/sent)

*“Our churches are full of people leading and influencing the people around them.”*

in. But for such a vision to become reality, we need Christians to step up, speak out, and be intentional in making a difference. This doesn't just apply to people in national positions of power. In a community or workplace where it is normal to swear, criticise and gossip, simply acting and speaking with gentleness, self-control and forbearance (Galatians 5:22) is a counter-cultural act of leadership. And we need to be open about our God who asks us to step out in faith and leadership, so that we are a light to others, and bring glory to Him. Such leadership is incredibly effective relationship building, and key to the church fulfilling its mission to make Jesus known.

Our churches are full of people leading and influencing the people around them: trustees, businesspeople, stay-at-home parents, bloggers, teachers, shop owners, shift managers and campaigners. When everyone is intentional in leading in accordance with God's instructions, collectively they can shift the culture of their town, village or borough. Leaders cannot operate in a vacuum but must work with others and support them in their leadership as well. It is important to have a support network, people who can pray in difficult times, offer guidance from their own

experiences, understand when you fall short of your expectations, and encourage you to take a risk and step out in faith.

Often, Christians do not recognise the leadership roles they have, or the leadership gifts God has given them. The Evangelical Alliance's Public Leadership initiative exists to take people on a journey beyond themselves and towards the public good. Part of what we do is to support churches by creating resources to disciple the public leaders in our congregations and connect them with others who are making a difference.

So, we're excited to launch SENT, a new four-month course designed to both develop individual leaders and create a network of leaders in a local area who can support each other in their leadership roles. It is designed for use in local churches or Christian networks so that leaders can think about the context that unites them (such as a

geographic area, workplace or sector) as well as their individual roles.

In regular meetings, groups come together to watch a leadership talk, discuss the themes and pray together, building relationships and learning from each other as well as receiving the teaching. In between each meeting, there are two activities for each participant to complete relating to their individual leadership, which gives opportunity for each participant to think about how the material relates to their specific context. This includes activities to discern leadership opportunities and identify – and pray about – the leadership gifts and skills God has given participants.

The course is a great opportunity to show public leaders in church that the roles they play in God's kingdom are valued and understood. The course can be used as a formal part of your church's discipleship programme or informally with a couple of friends, or even with an online community.

We hope that churches throughout the UK will find SENT to be an invaluable resource as Christians work hard to offer an alternative vision of society – one that places God's values at its very heart.

You can find out more about the resource at [eauk.org/sent](http://eauk.org/sent)

By **Steve Clifford**, general director, Evangelical Alliance

# Uncertainty, but **NO FEAR**

**A**s I write this last word, there remains enormous uncertainty around the UK's relationship with our nearest neighbours.

As I know from numerous conversations I've had with fellow Christians over the last few years, we, together with the rest of the UK population, are not in agreement as to how our relationship with the EU should be framed for the future, with some passionate 'remainers', others convinced 'leavers', and many just confused.

However, we all voted on 23 June 2016 as part of the EU Referendum, very few of us anticipated the level of confusion and uncertainty that would envelop the UK over the following months. So, how do we, as a Christian community, respond to all that's going on around us, whatever our views might be on the our country's relationship with the political institution we know as the European Union?

Let me make a couple of suggestions. Firstly, let's recognise our responsibility to love our European neighbours. We might be leaving the EU, but the UK will not drift away from Europe, out into the Atlantic Ocean. We will still have a land border on the island of Ireland and Paris is still closer to where I live than Glasgow or Penzance. As we seek to love our neighbours, we can also recognise our shared mission, alongside brothers and

“*The Trinity is not seated on the throne of heaven, biting nails, nervously discussing the outcome of the Brexit debate.*”

sisters in Christ, who are part of our church family in Europe. We want the hundreds of millions of people who make up the nations of Europe to have the opportunity to encounter Jesus and come into a relationship with Him.

Sadly, in many European nations, the evangelical church is fragile and looks to Christians within the UK to provide resources, encouragement and support. Whatever political decisions are made in the coming months and years, this responsibility will not diminish – in fact, it could increase.

Secondly, this is a time for us to respond with faith, not fear. Thank God, His governance is not like ours. The Trinity is not seated on the throne of heaven, biting nails, nervously discussing the outcome of the Brexit debate. God will work His purposes out, whatever our politicians may decide. For God's people, at times of uncertainty, the words of the prophet Isaiah echo in our ears:

“So, do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God” (Isaiah 41:10).

Thank God that in the midst of uncertainty and insecurity, we find confidence in our God, who promises that, whatever is going on around us, He is with us. Indeed, a God who makes the habit of turning times of uncertainty into opportunities. A recent survey conducted by YouGov (commissioned by *The Times*) discovered that the proportion of atheists in the UK was in decline: 38 per cent in 2016, 36 per cent in 2017, down to 33 per cent in 2018. This seems to back up numerous conversations I have had over the last few months with Christian leaders from across the spectrum of the Evangelical church.

There seems to be a common theme as we have spoken of the spiritual atmosphere across the UK: “There is a greater openness to spiritual issues”; “There is an openness to the gospel”; “People are becoming Christians.” Perhaps God is using the uncertainty and insecurity that many are experiencing to cause them to consider issues of eternity.

So, as the next few months unfold, let's embrace them with faith and let's pray that in some inspiring way, God will cause His mission to be outworked in the lives of millions – not simply just for us here in the United Kingdom, but also for our neighbours across Europe.

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## IN YOUR CHURCH

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We explain the significance of the Passover, how it is celebrated in Jewish Culture and how Christ fulfils the Passover as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

We also show how Jesus the Passover in the Upper Room with the disciples to point to his own death and resurrection. He instituted Communion.

**This presentation has helped hundreds of churches around the world to deepen their Communion experience and to enhance their Easter celebration**

Please contact Julie Wilkinson on 0207 2675597 or email [julie.wilkinson@jewsforjesus.org.uk](mailto:julie.wilkinson@jewsforjesus.org.uk) if you would like to come to your church in 2020 and lead a Passover Presentation or Passover Seder meal\*. If you would like to attend a Passover Presentation or Passover Seder in 2019, then you are invited to visit the following churches. Please contact them beforehand to check there is still space.

DATE	TIME	CHURCH	SPEAKER	CONTACT
Tuesday 9 April	<b>19:30</b>	Carey Baptist Hemel Hempstead Hertfordshire	<b>Julia Pascoe</b>	(01442) 256433
Thursday 11 April	<b>20:00</b>	Churches Together Redbourn St Albans Hertfordshire	<b>Julia Pascoe</b>	(01582) 793743
Monday 15 April	<b>19:00</b>	Long Eaton Prayer Groups Long Eaton Nottinghamshire	<b>Kata Tar</b>	(01159) 720459
Monday 15 April	<b>18:30</b>	St George's Chesham Buckinghamshire	<b>Julia Pascoe</b>	profhazelrymer@
Tuesday 16 April	<b>19:30</b>	New Life Baptist Northallerton North Yorkshire	<b>Ferenc Kozma</b>	(01609) 775396
Wednesday 17 April	<b>19:00</b>	Churches Together in Keynsham & Salford Bristol	<b>Ziggy Rogoff</b>	m_dscotty@hot
Wednesday 17 April	<b>19:00</b>	Five Towns Christian Fellowship Castleford West Yorkshire	<b>Ferenc Kozma</b>	(01977) 517652
Thursday 18 April	<b>18:30</b>	St Stephens C of E Upper Basildon Berkshire	<b>Richard Harvey</b>	(01491) 671714
Thursday 18 April	<b>19:00</b>	St Laurence Birmingham Worcestershire	<b>Kata Tar</b>	0121 4451087
Thursday 18 April	<b>19:00</b>	Upminster Baptist Upminster Essex	<b>Julia Pascoe</b>	(01708) 221116
Thursday 18 April	<b>19:00</b>	West Bridgford Baptist Nottinghamshire	<b>Ferenc Kozma</b>	0115 9810690 (mo
Friday 19 April	<b>12:00</b>	St Paul's Stonehouse Plymouth Devon	<b>Ziggy Rogoff</b>	01752 221 241
Friday 19 April	<b>19:00</b>	Shefford Baptist Shefford Bedfordshire	<b>Julia Pascoe</b>	07941 307228
Sunday 21 April	<b>10:30</b>	Malvern Evangelical Malvern Worcestershire	<b>Kata Tar</b>	(01684) 560277

\*Please note spaces fill up fast so we take bookings up to a year in advance

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