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WELCOME

Missional living

Many of us will have come across reports published during the coronavirus pandemic which reveal churches around the UK are being a remarkable source of practical and spiritual help in this challenging season.

In *Changing church*, our own research, we mention that 88 per cent of church leaders say their churches are working to meet the needs of vulnerable people, many in partnership with others. We also report that there's been a rise in the number of people who are interested in finding out more about Jesus and the Christian faith. Richard Powney comments on the findings (p. 14), and a couple of local churches share how they have adapted their ministry and mission amid the crisis (p. 8 and p. 16).

As these churches and others look at the landscape ahead, All Nations Christian College, which recently hosted a series of webinars on the pandemic, church and mission, says, "The sobering reality of this is the need to rethink mission and church in such a way that we do not just speak prophetically but we live out the truth prophetically" (p. 10).

Other contributors say this "sobering reality" is true for the church tackling social division (p. 2 and p. 4) and being a bold witness in an increasingly post-truth and post-Christian culture (p. 12 and p. 24) as much as it is true for our post-COVID mission.

With other articles besides, we hope this edition encourages and supports you in your ministry.

Yours truly,

Naomi Osinnowo
Editor



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Gavin Calver: Our unity demonstrates the powerful message of the gospel to a divided world





ONE PURPOSE, ONE PEOPLE, ONE MISSION

Might this be how we, the church, demonstrate and share the gospel of reconciliation? asks **Jonathan Lamb**.

Social commentators tell us that we now live in a ‘world of walls’. This refers not simply to physical barriers but to a growing sense of social division which manifests itself in polarisation and tribalism of all kinds.

There are many social divisions associated with class, race, religion, gender, disability, age, sexuality, and politics. Despite legislation covering human rights, equality, discrimination and hate speech, we seem unable to resolve the destructive power of racism, sexism or ageism. We see communities riven by ugly divisions,

with social media platforms facilitating an appalling torrent of tribal invective.

In such a world, we face an urgent question: how can the Christian community both demonstrate and proclaim the gospel of reconciliation? First, let’s look at the foundations which prove that gospel unity is credible and attainable. There are four themes expressed in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians.

1. One purpose

We begin with a remarkable mission statement which declares God’s purpose to “bring unity to all things in heaven and on

earth under Christ” (Ephesians 1:10). It’s an extraordinary vision which tells us where everything is heading – all things will be summed up to find their unity and completion in Jesus Christ.

Paul uses a word from mathematics. When we add up, we place the total at the bottom, but the Greeks literally did add up – and they placed the total at the top. So God’s purpose is that everything will be “summed up” in Jesus Christ. It is totally certain: everything will find its unity in Him. It’s a wonderfully inspiring and motivating vision.

2. One people

Then in the next chapter Paul explains how that is achieved. Central to that restoration programme is the establishment of a new society, characterised not by ethnic division but declared to be “one new humanity”. This remarkable change has been brought about through Christ’s reconciling work. His purpose was to create in Himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which He put to death their hostility (Ephesians 2:15-16).

Christ has opened the way into God’s presence for everyone, Jew and Gentile alike, and this is unequivocal evidence of God’s great restoration project announced in Ephesians 1:10. Truly understanding the achievement of the cross will help us strive for gospel unity.

3. One mission

Ephesians 3 tells us that the church is to be a compelling witness to God’s purpose to reconcile all things. “His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities ... according to His eternal purpose” (Ephesians 3:10,11).

We believers are to model God’s purpose for the ultimate restoration of all things. It might be hard to believe, but our churches are God’s pilot project, showing the world what true unity should look like.

4. One God

Should we doubt that God’s purpose will succeed, or imagine that unity will be elusive, we come to Ephesians 4, with its celebration of seven unities. “There is one body and one Spirit, just as we were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Ephesians 4:4-6).

It’s clear that Paul is not asking us to create unity, but to maintain unity, a unity which arises from the nature of the Trinitarian God to whom we belong. It is built into the gospel which has saved us, and its varied expressions of unity are created by the one Spirit, the one Lord and the one Father. This is precisely why unity is possible.

In the light of these foundation truths, what are the implications for us, as those called to demonstrate gospel unity in this fractured world?

1. We must build community

If we say that the divisions of our world have been overcome within the family of God, then our community life as a local church must give credible witness to that claim. We know too well that division is one of Satan’s strategies for hindering the work of the gospel and paralysing the growth of the church.

Surely our response to the growing polarisation and tribalism in our society must be a commitment to obey the passionate appeal found in Ephesians 4: “Make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” I wonder if we are in danger of ignoring the strength and urgency of this appeal? Within our churches we need to make every effort to resolve conflicts, to heal divisions, to build a radically different community that exemplifies the new society Christ has created.

2. We must cross barriers

Now is the time to live by the counter-cultural manifesto which Paul declared to an equally fragmented culture in the first century: “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). Because of that shared identity in Christ, there is now a family unity with a radical inclusivity. Any advantages associated with race, class or gender are ruled out in this new humanity, for it is only faith in Christ that counts. Of course, racial, social or sexual distinctions are not eradicated and there is a rich diversity within the family. But, unlike the world in which we live, this diversity is to be expressed in terms of equality, unity and harmony.

Every church must ask how it can cross the barriers and welcome people from different social, racial, ethnic or class backgrounds. Like many places, my own city of Oxford has representatives of nearly 140 different nations working, studying or visiting. Not all are privileged international students or tourists. There are the stigmatised immigrant communities, asylum seekers, refugees and economic migrants. We need to cross frontiers of all kinds as we engage in the task of sharing the good news in our local communities.

Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship recently reported that Christian student groups, determined to be faithful to

“*We know too well that division is one of Satan’s strategies for hindering the work of the gospel.*”

the gospel and to biblical values of morality and sexuality, have extended a loving welcome to fellow students on campus. “Despite the challenges of LGBT issues, our Christian unions increasingly win a reputation for being the most inclusive, welcoming and loving societies on campus. The steady stream of commendations (and even awards) from student unions has been a recognition of this. The conditions for evangelism are as difficult as they have ever been, but there seems to be an appetite for a gospel that is demonstrated as being true, relevant and beautiful.”

3. We must strengthen partnerships

Whilst the New Testament speaks mostly of the local church, we also find multiple examples of gospel partnerships that unite believers across cities and regions – partnerships in prayer, in financial support, and in mission of all kinds. Now is the time for strengthening partnerships across our churches and agencies, and this is given greater force when we reflect on the challenge which confronts us as such a small minority within the country. The extraordinary need all around us underlines the urgency of cooperative effort among gospel people. We need to link arms, build partnerships across our churches, and share resources, as we lay aside our secondary concerns for the greater cause of gospel unity.

We are one people. We are part of that one purpose of God to restore all things. Together we have one mission: to declare and to demonstrate the gospel of reconciliation.

*Jonathan Lamb is an author and teacher, and minister-at-large for Keswick Ministries. His most recent book is *Essentially One: striving for the unity God loves* (IVP, 2020).*

Is it now time to have serious conversations about race and racism in the church? asks **Rev Israel Oluwole Olofinjana**, minister of Woolwich Central Baptist Church, London.

GOD'S MULTI-ETHNIC KINGDOM

I strongly believe that God is not the originator of COVID-19, but it appears that through this coronavirus season He is uncovering some centuries-old injustices that have not been dealt with properly or processed at all.

These social inequalities are present on both sides of the Atlantic. Here, in the UK, the disproportionate representation of Black Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) people in frontline services reveals that, for far too long, BAME people have been at the bottom of the social-economic scale. Take a look at the US and we see that the police demonisation of and brutality against African Americans, as expressed in the murder of George Floyd, exposes systemic and institutional racism.

As these events continue to gather momentum around the world, with people calling for structural changes, what is the role of the church, and what might God be challenging the church to change in order to speak relevantly and intelligently?

If the church, particularly in the UK, is going to be an agent of social change during this crisis moment, if the church is going to be prophetic, speaking truth to power, then it has to put its own house in order by addressing some of the race and racism issues within the church.

A good place to start on this journey is to understand God's vision of a multi-ethnic kingdom. John, in the book of Revelation, gives us a glimpse of this vision when he describes the liturgy sang in heaven by the four living creatures and the 24 elders: "They sing a new song, saying: 'You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on earth'" (5:9-10).

This heavenly liturgy describes God's kingdom in terms of tribes, language, people, and nations, signifying that His kingdom was never meant to be about one tribe, language, people or nation. In essence, God's kingdom is not designed to be mono-ethnic or monocultural – its DNA is multi-ethnic. I also find it fascinating that the heavenly liturgy did not blur the distinctions of the tribes, the languages, the people and the nations, meaning God is not colour blind.

God is not colour blind because He created people of colour in the first place. God created humanity in its diverse expressions. Paul put it this way: "From one ancestor He made all the nations to inhabit

the whole earth, and He allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live" (Acts 17:26). It seems Paul suggested that God created one human race but put us in different geographic parts of His earth for a reason.

I find it liberating that God created one human race in His image, but yet allowed humanity to be expressed in different geographic locations. God's idea of one human race in His image, though expressed in different parts of the world, is also what constituted the central worship of the Lamb by a great multitude drawn from every tribe, people and language in John's vision in Revelation (7:9-10). So, God created us differently, but because we are one humanity fashioned in His image, He wants us to worship Him together. This reflects the nature of the godhead itself, which is three distinct persons but one in essence. This is the theology that underpins a biblical unity in diversity that is expressed in God's multi-ethnic kingdom.

Putting in the work

But the idea of one human race has been distorted and corrupted through history, particularly the history of navigation, European expansion and empire. As Europeans began to travel the world as

merchants, navigators and explorers, they came in contact with people who look different from them. The question of how you define the other became an issue. This led to the idea of different races and racial categorisation that affirms the superiority of Caucasians and dehumanises Africans, Asians and indigenous people in the Americas and elsewhere. The consequence was racism of which we have seen the evil of it in the history of the slave trade, colonialism, indentured servitude, imperialism and neo-colonialism.

How can the church get back to God's vision of a multi-ethnic kingdom, or more specifically, how can the UK church express this vision in our church networks, mission agencies and theological colleges? Firstly, in order for our churches, mission agencies and theological colleges to become places where God's multi-ethnic kingdom is expressed, we have to be intentional in our thinking, strategies and action.

People often desire and want a multicultural or multi-ethnic church but are not prepared to do the hard work that it requires. Has your board of directors or trustees intentionally sought to have on the team people of Asian, African or Latin American backgrounds? Does your five-year strategy intentionally include engaging majority world Christians and churches? Does your national leadership team only have PLUS (People Like Us)? The early church was intentional in nominating and appointing Grecian Jews when they felt marginalised by the Hebraic Jews. A study of the names of the seven leaders selected demonstrates this intentionality (see Acts 6:1-7).

Secondly, we need to create safe spaces in our church streams, mission agencies and theological colleges to have conversations about race and racism. Churches too many times shy away from

having these conversations because it makes people feel guilty and uncomfortable. If we are going to move forward, we need to have these conversations. Can we talk about the issue of race and racism in the church at some of our church meetings? Do our theological colleges have compulsory modules on black theology, African theology or post-colonial theologies? Can our national conferences begin to address some of these issues as the main theme rather than relegating it to a seminar or track focusing on the subject?

Thirdly, our churches, mission organisations and theological colleges need to listen to majority world voices (Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and Latin America). This is partly to understand the pain and hurt that majority world Christians have been carrying or internalised. In a church context that already has a mixed congregation, it becomes imperative to listen to those marginal voices who are not normally heard or promoted.

Pastors and church leaders are to remember this comes under the remit of pastoral care because, as congregants begin to share, issues they have internalised will surface. Therefore, before creating those safe spaces to listen, ask yourself whether your church has support structures in place for those people. This process could also bring healing to the whole church if it is handled with transparency and honesty.

In the case of theological colleges, what sort of theological textbooks do we recommend on our reading lists? It is not enough to have majority world guest speakers teaching the occasional diaspora missiology or world Christianity module.

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It is my prayer that we will be willing to cooperate with God and fulfil this heavenly vision on earth.
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Efforts must be made to recruit as teaching staff majority world Christians. This will mean looking critically at our recruitment processes. This will also apply to mission agencies and para-church organisations.

Lastly, our churches and organisations need to learn the history of racism. Part of this will mean putting into perspective the history of the modern missionary movement in the light of its collusion with colonialism. A reorientation of history is also needed so that we not only see William Wilberforce as the champion of freedom, but the likes of ex-slaves such as Olaudah Equiano and Ottobah Cugoano. Part of our learning will also include knowing how European history has created people we now call African American, African Caribbean, African, and black British. Our journey towards a multi-ethnic congregation, mission agency or college requires understanding white hegemony (supremacy), and one way of doing that is to learn about black history.

It is important to stress that while God's vision is that of a multi-ethnic kingdom, which brings together different nationalities, ethnicities, social classes and age groups to worship Jesus, the journey towards this requires intentional hard work. It is my prayer that we will be willing to cooperate with God and fulfil this heavenly vision on earth.

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LEAVING FEAR AT THE DOOR

“What if I offend them?” Could you, like many others, be reluctant to engage in cross-cultural mission for fear of offending people? asks **Dayalan Mahesan**, national coordinator of the South Asian Forum.

Earlier this year at an event the South Asian Forum organised with mission partners, we asked attendees to jot down on post-it notes personal barriers that stop them reaching out to those of other cultures.

“Fear of offending” was the most common. I could relate, as I’ve had my own fair share of faux pas over the years as I’ve tried to connect with people of other cultures. Though, when I reflect on the people I’ve met as a Christian adult, and there are many, seldom has a prospective relationship been jeopardised because of a gaffe. I’m sure the same would be true for you.

You know, fear of offending others due to cultural differences is exactly that – a fear; and fear generally doesn’t become reality. As is commonly said, FEAR stands for ‘false evidence appearing real’.

Whilst we should try to be as culturally sensitive as we can, people are lot more

forgiving of our cultural faux pas than we think. Those moments are often the very thing that trigger conversation and a chuckle. Rapport established.

I spent most of the last decade in a multicultural church where it seemed everyone was originally from a different country. It made for great international celebrations, especially with the food involved. It had an atmosphere of encouragement to get to know other people’s cultures. I remember asking someone I just met where they were from, and I got a strange look back when they said, “Err... England.”

But I never worried that when I tried to break the ice in conversation I might ‘put my foot in it’. I always sensed grace from the other person. That’s the thing about crossing cultures, it’s a two-way interaction. Any conversation with someone of another culture is, by definition, the same for them. They can empathise with your fumbled attempts to build a conversation with them

by quoting a really-not-very-interesting stat you know about their country of origin, just as you can empathise with them if they ask you if you speak Indian.

Our mandate as Christians is to go and make disciples, which is in essence a simple job description. But in giving out our great commission in Matthew 28, Jesus didn’t acknowledge the difficulties we would have in engaging with people who are different. He did, however, give us the Holy Spirit to help us with the nuances of every single individual discipling journey we embark upon.

And, whether we realise it or not, we are crossing cultures every day: students talking to the elderly, second generation immigrant families talking to refugees, even men talking to women – it’s all crossing cultures, albeit in varying degrees. It’s simply relating to people who have been brought up differently to you. So these barriers that we may have in our minds are a lot lower than we think.



But let's go even further and see cross-cultural mission as exciting, not simply a not-so-daunting aspect of Christian ministry. During the formation of the early church, the believers would have had fascinating conversations (and strong disagreements) given their differing backgrounds, strongly held beliefs, and cultures. There were many varying cultural influences within the Greco-Roman times they lived in, let alone the amalgamation of Jewish and non-Jewish practices.

Reaching out

The Evangelical Alliance's South Asian Forum has been helping Christian individuals and church communities effectively engage with South Asians of other faiths for 10 years. Churches and individuals have long sensed the need to become more confident and equipped in reaching out to other cultures; and as we, the UK church, continue to work towards greater ethnic integration, building relationships with people of other cultures will become an increasingly important aspect of our mission. But there are steps each of us can take right now to help in our personal journeys to connect with people of different cultures.

Start with what's simple. The basics of conversation work across any culture – asking someone how they are, how their family are, how their week is going, for example. You don't need to be a multi-lingual, well-versed master communicator who builds a natural rapport with anyone within two minutes.

Share a meal together. It's amazing how quickly you can develop a friendship

with someone who you have only known as an acquaintance by having a meal together. There is something about eating together that breaks down inhibitions and opens up the floodgates of conversation (our book *Simply Eat*, which is available at www.eauk.org/simplyeat, goes into more detail).

The gospels recount Jesus regularly eating with people. I particularly love the story of Jesus meeting two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Their meal together was the point at which they went from travellers making routine conversation to friends discussing the deeper issues of life. In my own life, there are countless examples where I have experienced the breaking of barriers by 'breaking bread' together.

Find out what's important to them and why. In the seminal *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, Dale Carnegie encourages readers to talk in terms of other people's interests to help build a connection. It might sound common sense to many, but do we actively do it? What's important in their world? Maybe their national or religious holidays, or the rituals they have built into their daily life? People feel honoured when they get asked to explain a bit more about their culture.

Immerse yourself in new cultures. As a massive football fan, I have travelled to World Cups in Germany and South Africa. The uniqueness of being surrounded by such a variety of fans from around the world (often some of the most passionately patriotic), as well as the common denominator of a love of football, made for such an easy environment for me to practise my cross-cultural communication. Likewise,

there are lots of opportunities wherever you are to meet people from different cultures, whilst having a common strand of interest or hobby running through to help conversation be free-flowing.

At times, just look on your doorstep. When we look at the big picture of our mission to form disciples throughout the earth, we have been given a helping hand by having the nations of the world all around us in multicultural Britain. As we often say in the literature for our cross-cultural mission training events, the world really is on our doorstep.

Think long term. Learning about new cultures is a highly enriching process that doesn't come to an end. Be prepared to put in the time and work. Perhaps you will choose to learn new languages or learn how to cook people's traditional dishes to better engage with others. During this lockdown period I started to learn how to speak Tamil, which is spoken by people in India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Singapore. It's been both challenging and interesting, and I expect it'll help me to relate better to others for whom Tamil is their first language.

Making disciples of every nation is a mandate given to every Christian. A full realisation that anything and everything God asks us to do comes with a divine toolkit to do the job in hand really does free us to go out and reach the world on our doorstep, or further afield, with boldness, leaving all our previously held apprehensions at the door on the way out.

If you would like the South Asian Forum team to help you on your cross-cultural journey, visit www.eauk.org/saf to find out more and sign up for our e-newsletter.

A COMMUNITY BORN

Coronavirus rendered our church building closed, but St Dionis has been more alive than ever, says **Lauren Windle**, front of house manager.

It's not just on Sundays that St Dionis Church, London, is alive with activity. After a much anticipated, and much prayed for, refurbishment in 2019, this year's calendar was packed with community and missional events throughout the week.

We answered questions at Alpha on Wednesdays, put the kettle on for Thursday's afternoon tea, and broke out the grand piano for our newly formed Fulham community gospel choir once a month. As front of house manager, it took me a full day to upload our calendar for the spring term.

The reception, which was open in the day from 8.30am to 4.30pm Monday to Friday, would play host to elderly neighbours, members of the local AA meetings who had become friends, and

a rough sleeper who arrived for a cup of coffee and two biscuits at 3pm sharp every day.

In the time it took to set off the confetti-cannons at our relaunch party, everything changed. As coronavirus took hold and the country was plunged into a state of emergency, the church doors closed and all events were cancelled.

Faced with a new reality and no guidebook, our staff team went into overdrive trying to work out how we could continue to serve those already in our charge but also meet the needs of a groaning population, scared, desperate and stockpiling in the face of a pandemic.

Living rooms became stages for worship, gardens space for prayer, and vicar Tim Stilwell's home office, his new pulpit.

Our services migrated online and with it a whole host of ministries.

Early morning prayer had a new lease of life, with everyone unburdened by their normal commute. Men's and women's ministry events became fortnightly Zoom chats rather than monthly meetings. Families were offered Sunday school packs of crafts and fun to keep little ones occupied indoors.

With increasing reports of those in recovery from addictions finding maintaining their freedom a challenge in lockdown, we re-established our recovery course. Now in its thirteenth week, the online group has seen breakthrough after breakthrough with many establishing or maintaining their sobriety.

Alpha and now Beta courses have run online as well as a number of pub quiz socials and other prayer and ministry events. With no-one having to travel to attend, we've found not only more of our congregation in attendance but also people who live too far from the church able to join us for the first time.

In addition to adapting our usual offering, we established new systems to reach out to those who were isolated, vulnerable or lonely. We offered over the phone technology lessons to anyone daunted by Zoom, Skype, FaceTime or even Netflix.

A willing army

As a church, we are fortunate to have an established relationship with our local



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In the time it took to set off the confetti-cannons at our relaunch party, everything changed.

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NHS social prescribing officer, who works with GPs referring patients to community programmes where their need is more relational than medical.

We immediately reached out to the NHS to see how we could help, and within a week we were inundated with requests for assistance with shopping, prescriptions and other errands. Some people just wanted to hear a friendly voice on the end of the phone.

An SOS message was sent to our entire church, requesting that anyone who had stayed in London and was in good health consider volunteering to support others. What came back was a battle cry from a willing army.

My job became coordinator of a switchboard, fielding requests and distributing them to foot soldiers. Soon people came to us directly to ask for help and we even got referrals from Fulham Football Club for some of their vulnerable season ticket holders.

Stories began to come flooding back of new connections being built by the congregation's generosity. One elderly woman who suffers from MS but also loves her chocolate, got a surprise Easter hamper as a small consolation for not being able to see her family that weekend.

Another woman, 97 years old, cautious to check she wasn't speaking to the vicar first, was relieved when she realised she could add a small bottle of whisky to her regular shop. The same woman's husband was an officer in WWII and on VE Day our

volunteer sat with her for hours while she reminisced on the joy of VE Day 1945.

While another family, knowing the person in their care would spend the day sitting by the window, brought over herbs and flowers to plant in her window box. But the vegetation has been shared in both directions, as one elderly gentleman with respiratory problems has been teaching a couple from the church all about gardening. Their new tomato and lettuce plants are flourishing.

For others who just wanted some human contact, regular phone calls have proved the touchstone that they needed. In some cases, our volunteers are the only people they speak to other than healthcare professionals. Real, and at times unlikely, friendships have been formed, with everyone eager to invite their new companions for cups of tea and slices of cake when circumstances allow.

Many of the people in our care have said that they have found it a lifeline and essential during this time. We've had emails from patients' GPs saying that they've noticed a marked reduction in people's anxiety.

The cherry on top of the cake came when we got a call from the NHS clinic across the road, which was packing personal protective equipment (PPE) in their cramped doctor's surgery, putting volunteers at risk and inhibiting productivity. We gladly gave them use of our vast nave, and for months now the church has housed a production line, sending out vital

resources to hospitals but in a safe, socially distanced set up. We praise God that not one of our resources has gone to waste.

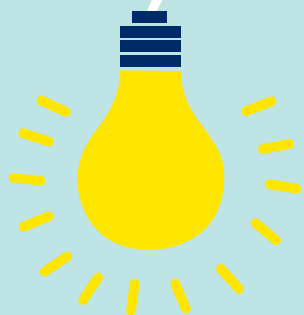
But aside from the great blessing to those in need, this has provided blessing and connection for our church too. Some of the congregation who were furloughed have reported that the outings and errands brought welcome structure to their week. The scheme has sparked conversations about how we can continue to be more present in the community as lockdown eases. We don't intend to let the friendships drop. When it is safe and legal to do so, every single person we've connected with will be invited for a huge celebration at the church. We'll answer those questions again, but now in person; the kettle will be on and the biscuit tin will be in constant circulation. We may even rope in the Fulham community gospel choir to serenade us.

For us at St Dionis the building was closed, but church has been more alive than ever.

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Many of the people in our care have said that they have found it a lifeline and essential during this time.

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REIMAGINING CHURCH & MISSION



All Nations Christian College hosted a significant series of webinars on the pandemic, church and mission. **Sheryl Haw** reports.

If we listened carefully, the first murmurings of an outbreak of a respiratory disease were reported from Wuhan, China, in December 2019. The World Health Organization (WHO) was on it, already publishing information about the new virus, and by mid-January 2020 we had a name, COVID-19.

However, despite initial alarm bells ringing, no consensus on how to respond was agreed. By the end of January more than 7,800 cases in China and close to 100 in a further 18 countries were reported. The Chinese New Year compounded the problem as it heralded a time of travel as many returned to their homes to celebrate. The WHO increasingly became concerned about the slowness of governmental responses and declared a pandemic on 11 March 2020. Churches in the UK were closed by 22 March and by 28 March the UK was in full lockdown. The daily stats

announced a growing spike in new cases, deaths and infection rates. The ignition of a dreaded pandemic was in full swing.

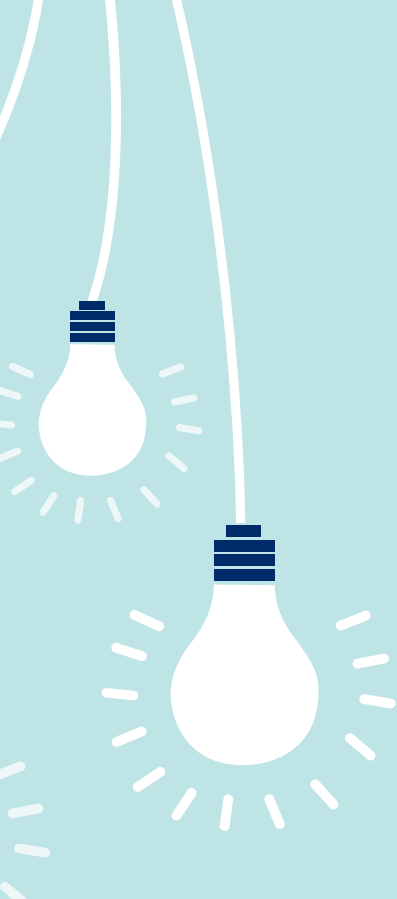
Initial reactions of churches revolved around how we conduct church services when we can't gather. First responses – let's care for our members. Many churches did not know who their members were, or at least how to contact them. Whilst technological challenges to get services online were being addressed, questions from members began pouring in, ranging from, "Please help" and "How can we help?" to "Are these the end times?"

Fear and courage surfaced. Selfish stockpiling and servant-hearted generosity revealed themselves. Domestic violence escalated and care of the vulnerable was prioritised. Innovation and creative responses evolved alongside rebellion and increased flytipping. Volunteerism soared; job losses skyrocketed.

Conversations

All around the world the virus jumped, leaving its mark. All of us were caught by surprise and conversations started in churches and missions, all wanting to explore together what was happening, discern what God was saying, reflect on how best to respond, hungry to listen and learn together. All Nations Christian College perceived the need to join in this discussion and convened a series of three webinars between 19 May and 2 June. The overarching theme was 'Reimagining church and mission: COVID-19 catalyses change'.

Drawing on the perceptions, experiences and insights of a wide range of contributors and panel members, the webinars sought to highlight the growing awareness of the immediate and short-term impact on church and mission, and to anticipate the challenges and opportunities this will bring in the longer term. At the heart



of these discussions was the desire to shine a light not only on the changes occurring in church and mission but also in our communities and nations, thereby enabling us to focus our energies on addressing the issues the crisis was illuminating.

We have discovered that each webinar exposed truths that need to be acted on, raised questions that need to be addressed, celebrated initiatives taken, and lamented the brokenness that is being revealed.

The awakening

The closing of church buildings had pushed believers into their neighbourhoods and back with their families. The cessation of travel meant people were present and began seeing the needs around them.

A key response noted was innovation. Churches and missions, having recovered from their initial surprise, began adapting creatively. An online revolution is occurring, with initiatives from the song 'The Blessing' to all sorts of artistic portrayals of gospel presentations and social action initiatives. Spikes in online attendance of church

services as well as increased questions and searches around life, identity, purpose, prayer – an awakening of one's own fragility and the need for assurance and purpose.

Recognition of the immense opportunities presenting themselves and the need to mobilise people to respond was noted as an urgent imperative. In all this flurry of excitement to engage was the grounding experience from Eritrean church lockdown – beware of distractions that take us away from what God wants us to do; keep Jesus central and keep meeting together.

The challenge

In the second webinar we saw that as good thrives in disasters – in that it brings out the best in people – evil also thrives. Alarming statistics were shared on the significant increases in gender-based violence, child abuse and exploitative behaviour. So much so that it was perceived as a shadow pandemic occurring behind closed doors. At national levels examples of power consolidation were explored, abuse of position and propaganda proliferation. The rise of myths and securities exacerbating stigmas and prejudices, resulting in hate crimes increasing. Gains in poverty reduction are being lost as inequalities increase. At least the environment was getting an opportunity to breathe cleaner air.

The sobering reality of this is the need to rethink mission and church in such a way that we do not just speak prophetically but we act / live out the truth prophetically. This requires us to know the story we are living, namely God's story. To understand our role in the story at this present time. There needs to be a united voice crying out for humanity and our planet. This is the age of networks that will help us to cooperate, learn and act together.

What scripture says

As we gathered for the third and final webinar, we explored what scripture had to say and were reminded that those of us who do not heed wisdom and the warning about pursuing our own ways will reap the fruit of our folly (Proverbs 1:20-22). The disaster we face together, in economics as well as health, will cause tremendous suffering, especially for the vulnerable.

We are at a critical crossroads for church and mission.

This calls us to lament and protest before God on behalf of our world, seeking the welfare of our nations and interceding for our communities.

The way ahead

There was so much that was shared, so much to consider – please do watch each webinar on 'catch-up' at youtube.com/allnationsuk, reflect and join in the ongoing conversations.

We are at a critical crossroads for church and mission. If this crisis simply leads us to be more innovative then, as great as that may seem, it is not enough. We need a prophetic imagination. To reimagine church and mission requires more than embracing modernising technologies; it requires a radical new way of thinking and living, recognising that acknowledging God's reign changes everything. We cannot go back to the 'old normal' as it was unjust and limiting. We need to learn to be missional in every situation, in every location and at all times. Contextualisation is a key learning, and we need to learn how to do ministry with what we have and with the people we have in the locality we are in.

Reimagining church and mission will require us to be willing to let go of all that has held us locked in buildings, held down by traditions, and limited by poor theology. To witness to a society that is hurting, fearful and unsure requires us to be present, to love, to address the real questions people are asking and, in solidarity with one another, to point to the hope we have in Christ.

There needs to be a united voice crying out for humanity and our planet.

Sheryl Haw has spent more than 20 years working together with communities around the world addressing relief, development and justice concerns. She is currently working as a hospital chaplain in Carlisle and as a guest lecturer at All Nations Christian College.

Our freedom to share the gospel has been tested in unexpected ways. More tests will come. How might we respond? asks **Danny Webster**, head of public policy, Evangelical Alliance.



OUR SURE FOUNDATION

The coronavirus lockdown meant that church gatherings couldn't take place, evangelistic missions were cancelled, and street preachers shut indoors. As restrictions have eased, some gatherings are able to take place again, but it will be many months before church activities return to normal.

At the start of 2020 there was significant attention given to the evangelistic efforts planned for the coming year by many organisations and the largescale events designed to share the good news of Jesus with as many people as possible. These have all been cancelled due to the pandemic and ongoing public health concerns about large gatherings.

While the freedom for Christians to practise their faith hasn't been stopped by the coronavirus lockdown, it has changed our practices and forced us to work out

how, in a new context, we keep central the aspects that should be central to our faith. Gathering together is a vital part of the Christian life and this has been severely restricted. Sharing the good news of Jesus with those around us is integral to what we believe, and we haven't been able to do this in person for a large portion of this year.

And yet, the good news of Jesus is not stopped by government regulations, the forced cancellation of plans, or the shuttered doors of church buildings. In a survey conducted by the Evangelical Alliance in May 2020 we found that 59 per cent of church leaders surveyed had experienced more people than usual interested in finding out about the Christian faith since the start of the lockdown. Eleven per cent of church leaders said they have seen an increase in people making first-time commitments to Jesus (see page 14). Other research has also shown an increase in

prayer by people who would not normally pray, and many churches have experienced surges in online engagement.

Public life

The UK church did two things in particular with passion and commitment throughout the height of the coronavirus pandemic and ensuing lockdown. It found ways to continue meeting, and it remained committed to caring for the most vulnerable in its community (see page 8). Churches found themselves diving headfirst into a steep learning curve of online video software, social media broadcasting, simulcasting and video editing – not the normal fare covered in the training provided for church leaders, but essential for maintaining the teaching and discipleship of their congregation (see page 16).

This commitment to continue providing spiritual nourishment for their congregation



was matched with a conviction that while everyone was being forced to adapt to unusual circumstances these times would affect some far more than others. Many with acute existing health conditions or considered at specific risk were told to shield and avoid any contact with other people, so were isolated and alone. Others found themselves out of work as, despite the Government's assistance schemes, unemployment rates rocketed.

Foodbanks across the UK found themselves caught in a storm of increased demand and reduced supply. As supermarket shelves emptied and most people avoided shops, apart from for essentials, the usual donations dried up – at the same time people hit financial crises and needed urgent assistance. For many charities there was a double bind created by lockdown: demand for their services increased, but their ability to provide

services was severely hampered.

The place of Christianity in public life may not have been visible through the open doors of churches, but it was abundantly present for those who needed the care and support of compassion ministries run by churches up and down the country. We found from 88 per cent of church leaders that their churches were working to meet the needs of the most vulnerable, and almost three-quarters of these churches were working in partnership with other churches, charities or the local authority.

Christianity in public life may not look like it used to. Commentators expecting public leadership from church leaders found themselves disappointed, but they were looking for the wrong things in the wrong places. Church leaders led services on national television throughout the crisis: they joined together to call the nation to pray, and they have consistently engaged with government to press their case that restrictions on churches should be lifted as soon as they can. If the life of the church was judged by open doors to buildings, then it deserved a poor verdict – but buildings are not the church.

At the same time, this has been a chance for the church and its leaders to be bold in their engagement in public life. Society benefits from the fruit of Christian belief and in the compassion and care it provides, but it is not willing to give credit to the roots of that action. Social commentator Os Guinness describes this as a 'cut flower culture': we like the flowers, but they have been detached from their roots and will soon and surely die.

The challenges

Speaking truth in public life is difficult in an era when the ground rules are not agreed on and the norms that we live by are consistently contested and reimagined. Speaking up about the good news of Jesus is vital in a culture where truth is devalued and goodness constantly subverted. But speaking up is not all that we should do. Our witness is more than our words and our mission is more than what comes out of our mouth. We should certainly do no less than speak about the good news of Jesus, but how can we live so that society is affected by the public truth of the gospel?

The gospel fundamentally changes lives, and changed lives change places. The gospel is the fire-starter for social and cultural transformation – without it we are running on the legacy of Christian works and the fumes of previous generations.

But what good is a fire-starter if we don't build the fire? The spark of the gospel ignites our hearts to live for Christ, and it changes us in ways that fuel us to go into the world and live as ambassadors for His kingdom.

To push the metaphor to breaking point, fires are sustained when it's not just one log on fire but many logs together, and fire spreads when there is fuel for it consume. In our engagement in public life we are to be committed to outworking God's kingdom in the places we live and work. The gospel and the extension of God's kingdom go hand in hand. It's why we believe that public leadership is integral to the life of the church in the UK. We need to equip and develop believers to work out their faith in every part of society, and through leadership and responsibility they can have a disproportionate affect on the culture around them.

Our freedom

Our freedom to share the good news of Jesus and the abundant life He offers is strongly protected through the laws and systems of the UK. It's not always easy to live as a Christian, and challenges to Christian values and practices keep on coming. But we should use the freedom that we have to make Jesus known.

Our *Speak up* guide, which was originally produced in 2016, remains incredibly helpful to navigate what the law allows – and it's a lot – in terms of sharing our faith in public, in private, and in the workplace. We need a combination of courage to speak up and wisdom to know how best to talk about Jesus, but the good news is that we have the freedom to make Jesus known. (Download your copy of *Speak up* here: www.eauk.org/what-we-do/initiatives/speak-up)

Innovation, courage and compassion

The impact of the coronavirus pandemic on church programmes and mission has been significant, and as these are put back together there is a moment for innovation, courage and compassion. We need innovation to not go back to doing things the way they were just because that's how we did them. We need compassion for the world around us, a world groaning with lasting pain and experiencing new and acute shocks. And we need courage to make Jesus known in a culture and society that rejects Him and rejects what following Him means.

How has church and mission adapted amid the coronavirus crisis? Our *Changing church* report gives us an idea, says **Richard Powney**, evangelism and theology officer, Evangelical Alliance.



A CHANGING CHURCH IN A TIME OF

UNCERTAINTY

As an organisation we are passionate about seeing people's lives changed by the good news of Jesus. It's in our very name; we're the Evangelical Alliance – the people of the good news.

We love to hear stories of how churches and individual Christians across the country are creatively making Jesus known in their communities. At the same time, we want to be as well placed as we can to best serve you, our members, to be Jesus' witnesses in your area, as together we make Jesus known.

With that in mind, we are very aware that all of us have faced challenging and changing times throughout most of 2020. All of us have had to make dramatic changes to how we go about our everyday lives, including how we socialise, gather together as a church community, work, engage with schoolwork, shop... the list could go on. Consequently, during the height of lockdown in May we decided to find out how churches and organisations have had to change how they operate due to the lockdown.

So we ran an online survey between 14 and 20 May. We were really encouraged by the level of engagement: there were 694 valid responses submitted by or on behalf of church leaders and 196 valid responses submitted by or on behalf of organisation leaders. I want to take a moment to share three key stats that we'd like to highlight from the *Changing church* report.

1. During lockdown, most churches were seeing a surge in interest. 59 per cent of church leaders saw an increase in people interested in finding out more about Jesus and the Christian faith. More than 1 in 10 church leaders were seeing an increase in people making first-time commitments to follow Christ.

2. We found that almost all churches

“ All of us have had to make dramatic changes to how we go about our everyday lives. ”

were working to help the vulnerable during lockdown. 88 per cent of church leaders said their churches were working to meet the needs of vulnerable people. Of these churches, 72 per cent are working in partnership with either local authorities, other churches or charities.

3. Prioritising ministry to people who are not yet Christians makes a difference. We found that churches that were focusing on making their online service a place for people who are not Christian to encounter Jesus were three times more likely to see people express an interest in Jesus and make decisions to become a Christian.

Through making phone calls to our member churches at the start of lockdown, we at the Evangelical Alliance had heard anecdotal stories that suggested there was an increase in people being interested in aspects of the Christian faith. We were so encouraged when we discovered that out of nearly 700 church responses to the survey, 59 per cent said they'd seen an increase in people interested in finding out more about Jesus and the Christian faith. The pressure situation of all the lockdown measures, especially during the early weeks of lockdown, seemed to cause people to have the time, space and inclination to ask the bigger questions about life.

The growth in interest could also be seen through an increase in people trying church online, with 70 per cent of church leaders saying that people who would not normally attend church were attending. Now some of this may be down to Christians trying out different experiences of church services online. However, when coupled with the increased interest and anecdotal stories, it seems fair to suggest lockdown brought about a wave of people attending online church services. This raises an interesting question around how intentional we are in creating online spaces for people to encounter Jesus.

In the survey we asked churches what the most important aspect of their Sunday service was. One of the options was "providing a place for people who are not Christians to encounter Jesus". Only 7 per cent of churches stated that this was the most important aspect of their Sunday service. Yet, 88 per cent of those churches told us they were seeing an increase in people interested in finding out about Jesus and the Christian faith. I think this aspect of the *Changing church* report helps identify two important points: first, an openness to seeing the Spirit at work in online spaces, and second, the importance of being intentional about creating online spaces for people to encounter Jesus.

During lockdown we've been hosting Story Bearer sessions on the Great Commission Facebook page (you can catch up at www.eauk.org/story-bearer-sessions), bringing in different guests each week to explore how

we can all share our faith during coronavirus. One guest was Marie Aitken, England lead at Alpha. She shared incredible stories of people encountering Jesus through the thousands of Alpha courses

currently happening online. In a phone call I had with a church leader, he described leading two people to become disciples of Jesus through Facebook Messenger after his sermon on Facebook. It was the first time he'd ever led someone to Jesus online.

Stories like these and the survey results all point to us raising our expectation of how God's Spirit is working through online spaces and affirms the importance of being intentional about giving people opportunities to encounter Jesus in online church services. It may not be the main focus in every Sunday service, but you could think about having one Sunday gathering a month where the main focus is providing a place for people who are not Christians to encounter Jesus. It's not a new idea, but the online space appears to be one in which people are open to exploring Jesus and the Christian faith.

The *Changing church* report highlighted the incredible role churches and organisations are playing in their communities across the UK as they work to help the vulnerable in society. In particular, almost half of churches that responded (48 per cent) have started new community engagement initiatives since the coronavirus outbreak began. These initiatives are mainly focused on emergency food provision and befriending for the elderly and isolated. At a time when it would be very easy for churches to become inward looking, the survey found that the church in the UK has sought to live out Jesus' teaching to love our neighbours as ourselves and 72 per cent of churches have done that through working in partnership.

As we enter into further uncertain times, let's continue to image our Lord and Saviour by being willingly broken for the sake of the world around us. If you're looking for top tips, key questions and big ideas on how to continue loving and serving your community, take a look at our *Changing church* toolkit at www.eauk.org/changing-church/toolkit. If you would like to find out more about the *Changing church* research, go to www.eauk.org/changing-church where you will be able to download the full report.

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The growth in interest could also be seen through an increase in people trying church online.
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SMALL CHURCH, HUGE POTENTIAL

Moving our ministry online has shown me that even a small church like St. James can spread the gospel far and wide, says **Rev Capt Chris McCarthy**.

We held a Sunday service at our church for the first time in months on 12 July. Nine people attended in person, 40 people watched it live online, 80 people watched it later on Facebook.

It was the right time for St. James Doncaster, The Railway Church, to open its doors, as some of our members haven't been able to attend our online services because they're not shored up digitally. We expect physical church attendance to slowly creep up, but we'll have to wait and see – there's still so much uncertainty. For now, though, we'll press on, albeit in a different way.

So that people could watch the service on Zoom or Facebook, I had to remain seated. I would be out of shot otherwise. We were not able to sing, as there are restrictions on singing and other church practices to avoid the potential spread of COVID-19. We couldn't play music or use other copyrighted material. We'd need licenses for that, and as a small church that doesn't have a lot of money, we can't afford to buy these just yet. Everything was read aloud. With the prayers, I'd read a line and the congregation would recite it back.

I could look at the season ahead and become apprehensive, wondering what will happen and how it'll work. But if the closure of our church buildings has taught me anything, it's that new opportunities are opening up and God has been preparing us for these since before the lockdown and reopening of our church buildings.

When our church building closed at the end of March, we were concerned. Rather concerned in fact. We were not fully aware of what lockdown meant. I began to wonder if some people would develop new routines and stop attending church. It's easy to find other things to do – there are so many activities that take people's attention away from commitment and fellowship. Also, how could we provide pastoral care? I'm a people person; I prefer to meet people face to face and help in that way. How could I do this?

I didn't see amid this initial sense of disquietude that one of the steps that we as a church had taken in January, before the coronavirus seriously affected the UK, would be the foundation upon which we would build a new ministry – or, rather, enhance our current one. Now, as I look back, I can clearly see that God was getting us ready for the period of lockdown, to ensure we could still connect with as many people as possible from our church. More than this, though, He was moving us into a space that would also enable us to reach many more.

God knows

Over the past four years more than 120 asylum seekers have come to us. Some weeks, as many as 30 would attend our church. Once these individuals or families got asylum, they would move out of Doncaster to other parts of the UK. Of course, we didn't want to lose contact with them. Likewise, they saw St. James as their family. So, in January we began to explore how we could retain relationships regardless where they are in the UK. Facebook was the obvious option, so we set up an online community.

Who would have known that a few months down the line this same online community, created specifically for, mainly, Iranian asylum seekers, would be opened up so that all our churchgoers, their families and friends, the wider community and even those further afield could connect, fellowship, hear the gospel and have a chance to encounter Jesus? It was the space we needed to swiftly move our church services online. It's created new opportunities and has extended our reach.

As somewhat of a tech and social media novice, I started our 'lockdown online ministry' with a thought

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I could look at the season ahead and become apprehensive, wondering what will happen and how it'll work.
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for the day, keen to be a visible presence and let folk know here is a vicar – a church – they could link in with. Twenty-three devices connected straight away. Before long, 103 devices (which we estimate to be at least 200 individuals) were signing in as we continued to follow the Church of England’s lectionary and went on to read and unpack the gospel Luke in our other services and meetings.

Church members have found these daily online gatherings invaluable. Janet said, “I am enjoying our online meeting each morning... Although we can pray anytime and anywhere, knowing God hears us, I like the short, structured thought for the day. I phone Joyce each morning and she listens in over the phone. Joyce is 95 and the longest serving member of St. James. She has no internet connection.”

Mike said, “Meeting each morning for a thought for the day / morning prayer via the church Facebook group has been really valuable during the lockdown. It has provided an anchor point to the day and has been something to look forward to. Having to isolate for this long has been tiresome, but the use of technology has kept me connected to the church family.”

We have also been encouraged to see new people connecting with us, people who wouldn’t normally come through our church doors. In normal times 80-90 people would attend our Sunday service each week and around 50 per cent of these would be the individuals and families who keep the church going through small groups, Bible study and prayer meetings – a ‘core group’ if you like. But during the lockdown it looked like we were connecting with 200+, including a lot of our non-Christian and Roman Catholic friends, and many of these individuals were asking for prayer daily.

We carved out space in our online services for altar calls, to give people the opportunity to encounter Jesus. In normal times, this would be a matter of course in my teaching; every two or three months

I would lead a prayer and a call to commitment. I started making altar calls online right at the beginning of lockdown and have continued since. I remember in the first week some of those on the fringes of the church connected with our service on Facebook and made a commitment to Jesus.

An opportunity

As I said to members of the church as soon as lockdown began, we should see the changes brought about by the coronavirus pandemic as an opportunity – an opportunity to be seized. Through Facebook and Zoom we have developed deeper relationships with each other and welcomed into the community more people. We have seen people come to know Jesus. Mike, who’s quoted earlier, said, “The talks have been fresh and have enabled spiritual growth in people and have impacted the lives of established Christians and those wanting to know more about Christianity alike.”

So, having just held a Sunday service at our church for the first time in months, I know that alongside this we can continue to maximise the use of technology and make our services available online. We can raise and invest funds in relevant licensing so that we incorporate music into our streamed services. We can train up one or two people in the congregation to take on some of this extra work. Even as a small church, we can take the gospel to the ends of the earth.

“We have also been encouraged to see new people connecting with us, people who wouldn’t normally come through our church doors.”

Rev Capt Chris McCarthy spoke to Naomi Osinnowo.



THERE'S A SCHOOL NEAR OUR Church

Partnership. That's how we'll enable children and young people to make informed choices about their beliefs and values, says **Megan Patterson**, vice-chair, CVE Scotland.

There's a school near our church. There are children inside. Rory's grandad died of the virus. Harris learnt to speak French during lockdown and Ewan has forgotten his two times table. Sophie can't stop wiping her table with hand sanitiser. Alfie and James look as if they haven't had breakfast. Charlie has started wetting the bed at night and Isla has developed a stammer. Amelia has shot up such that her trousers are half-mast.

There's a school near our church. There are kind, hardworking teachers inside. These days some of them look a little careworn. It's hardly surprising. They have navigated countless changes over recent months, learnt new skills and had their ingenuity tested to the limit. The school year ended in exhausting uncertainty and now back in the classroom they face a list of obstacles which would daunt the most robust. Some of their pupils have forgotten how to learn, others find school no longer conducive to study. The attainment gap has become a chasm, and the pressure to make up lost time hampers the teachers' creativity. On top of these challenges several teachers are grieving the loss of loved ones during the pandemic. And still

the nagging thought remains that tomorrow looks so uncertain too.

The Scottish Government's HGIOS 4 (How good is our school 4) document describes partnership and collaboration as "significant features of a highly effective school and a high-performing learning system". That's in normal times. These aren't normal times. I suggest that makes it even more important that we reach out a helping hand to the school near our church.

Is partnership and collaboration possible? And does it matter whether or not we partner with the school in our community? I would answer a resounding 'yes' to both of those questions. Yes, partnership and collaboration are possible. A good place to start is to pray. Christian Values in Education (CVE) Scotland holds 'PrayerWorks' events with teachers in a variety of locations in Scotland, either in person or, recently, via Zoom. These are a great means of support and we hope to see a PrayerWorks event in every corner of Scotland before too long.

Each time I see a child trundling past our house, dwarfed by his backpack, clutching a PE bag, I pray. I pray for that child, for his friends, for his teachers, for the school management, for the families

represented in the school. The organisation Pray for Schools (www.prayforschools.org) has a vision to see every school in the UK a prayed-for school, and it is possible on the website to discover who else is praying for the school nearby. I can encourage my church fellowship to pray for the school near our church. Together we can pray about how we can serve the school. The charity Serve Your Local School (syls.org.uk) has lots of examples of how to do this.

Then, soaked in prayer one morning, we'll take scones for the staff tea break to the school receptionist and ask if we could make an appointment to discuss any ways we can help. At our appointment we'll ask:

- How can we help you?
- Would it help if the church hall were open for breakfast once or twice a week?
- Would a homework club after school help?
- Would it be helpful if the chaplain prepared 'Time for Reflection' sessions off-site for the time being and delivered them digitally?
- Would some drop-in sessions for staff or pupils who may need a listening ear be helpful?

And whatever the answer to our questions we will keep praying.

Does it matter whether or not we partner with the school in our community? Again, a resounding 'yes'. It matters because thousands of children in our land don't know who Jesus is. Our national curriculum requires children to make informed choices about beliefs and values. They can't choose to believe in Jesus unless they know who He is. Thousands of children are unaware that the Bible tells the story of how and why they were made. Each child has the right to explore faith whilst in school, the Christian faith and other faiths.

CVE Scotland's strapline is: Supporting school staff, chaplains and families to communicate the Christian faith, so that children and young people can make informed choices about beliefs and values.

There's a school near our church. Those children may never come inside our church on a Sunday morning, but as we partner with the school they can learn who we believe Jesus is. There are several resources available to help teachers, chaplains and schools' workers creatively present the Christian faith to children and young people.

Dr Steve Younger, who has been a chaplain for nearly 40 years and who works for CVE Scotland in a chaplaincy project, has written four booklets each containing 24 ideas for 'Time for Reflection' in schools which match the requirements of the Curriculum for Excellence. You can read about them on the CVE Scotland website (cve-scotland.org.uk/tag/assembly-religious-observance-time-for-reflection). There you can also see several other resources highlighted. These provide a treasure trove for teachers, chaplains and schools' workers wanting to teach about Christianity.

- www.compassion.com.au/colin-buchanan
- tenbiblestories.org
- scottishbiblesociety.org/our-work-in-scotland
- bibleproject.com
- bigstartassemblies.org
- www.suscotland.org.uk

Burdened for the children, young people and families around our church there's more we can do. Parents welcome reassurance that they are not alone in their anxieties for their children and teens. Sometimes a church will partner with the

“ Each time I see a child trundling past our house, dwarfed by his backpack, clutching a PE bag, I pray. ”

local council, with the NHS, the police and Cybersafe Scotland and host a meeting where a speaker will address issues relating to mental health, drugs, cyber bullying or alcohol, for example. The possibilities are endless, and let's remember: partnership and collaboration are significant features of a highly effective school.

Paul said that he had become all things to all men so that by all possible means he might save some (1 Corinthians 9:22). Partnering with the school near our church is a step towards making Jesus known.



The Talking Toddlers research shows that all churches have an incredible opportunity to reach families of under-fives with the gospel, **Rachael Heffer** tells Naomi Osinnowo.

A MISSIONAL OPENING FOR THE TAKING



We have a significant opportunity to share life with and encourage Christian witness to the non-Christian families that are already connected to our local churches.

Such was the finding of the Talking Toddlers research released in May. It showed that almost two-thirds of non-Christian parents with children under five have taken their children to a church-based activity such as a toddler group or Messy Church in the past year. "There's a huge opening here," says Rachael Heffer, the Evangelical Alliance's head of mission. "Many non-Christian parents who seek supportive, friendly and values-driven environments for their children are coming to our churches, often on a weekly basis."

I spoke with Rachael about the research, which was jointly commissioned by the Evangelical Alliance, HOPE Together and the Church of England, and about what churches might do to be an impactful Christian witness in these spaces.

The stats are encouraging! 62 per cent of non-Christian parents or carers of 0–4 year olds attend groups within our churches. Why are they popular?

Being a parent is challenging. You enter an unknown world, especially when becoming a parent for the first time. It has the potential to be overwhelming and isolating. The needs of a baby or young child are

significant and can take over your world as you knew it.

These groups can therefore be a lifeline for many. Parents re-evaluate and look for such lifelines to help them grapple with their new lifestyle. Opportunities to connect with other adults, manage the challenges of parenting alongside others, and discover new spaces to enjoy parenting are invaluable. These needs are so often met within the warm welcome of church toddler groups, and non-Christian parents see the benefit.

The research also shows that parents believe these activities will enhance their children's lives. Forty per cent participate in these groups because their children will enjoy them; 33 per cent go so their children can make friends; 29 per cent want their children to learn good values. Isn't it also interesting that 18 per cent would like their children to be familiar with church?

I'm heartened that 55 per cent of the 62 per cent had said they explored their own beliefs as a result of taking their young children along to a church activity.

I know of a lady who became a Christian in a toddler group setting, having taken her own children along. She went on to run that group for 20+ years. This flags the huge opportunity, and challenge, to ensure our groups have an accessible and Christian distinctiveness. As people are welcomed and drawn into community, there's great

potential for God's Spirit to bring about an encounter with Christians and with Jesus.

Many of my friends with newborns who came along with me to local church toddler groups loved the sense of warmth and openness. They started to ask questions: why do they care about me and my children? Why do they remember my name? The question I asked myself was: beyond them developing a love for the community, how do we help point them to Jesus?

Dr Rachel Jordan-Wolf, assistant director of HOPE Together, emphasises that the church can use these activities not just to engage the parents but to share the gospel with under-fives.

The research focuses on engagement with the whole family, and the faith of children is at the heart of this ministry. Children as young as three have had encounters with Jesus that have impacted their adult lives. Rachel Jordan-Wolf remembers praying and singing her own worship songs at the age of three. I became a Christian at seven at a church holiday club, but I had a relationship with Jesus long before that, having learnt that Jesus is my friend. The research reminds us that this is a significant missional opportunity for all churches. Those already running groups may wish to review this aspect of church life and raise the Christian distinctiveness and content of the groups, acknowledging that it is both expected and welcomed.



There's also a prompt for churches that don't yet run such activities. Why not take the steps to establish a toddler group or similar, to welcome families into the life of the church? It's a great opportunity to involve all members of the church to simply provide a space for families, carers, grandparents to come, feel at home, and engage in new and meaningful relationships.

Being strategic and intentional are clearly key components of successful church-based activities for under-fives.

We're to be consistent. Running such activities week in and week out is demanding, but we can't underestimate the positive impact consistency and familiarity have on these parents, who we've described in the report as 'fringe parents'. We're also to be holistic (interested in the whole family), prayerful, openminded (appreciating that for some families these activities are perceived as 'church') and flexible with when we hold these events so that whole families can attend.

Strategising and careful planning is important, and we should think long term. Ministry to young children is crucial and can be incredibly formative, but what might the transitional piece look like for your church? We need to ask ourselves, what about when these children are seven, eight, nine years old? It's most certainly worth looking at the hoped-for spiritual development in a child

from 0-18 years old and letting this guide our planning and provision.

Can we do more to invite our non-Christian friends into church? 35 per cent of parents who have no connection with a church would welcome an invitation to a church-based activity for them and their children.

As a Christian adult with young children, I found that inviting friends with young children along to a toddler group or Messy Church was the easiest missional opportunity that I've ever had. Many of these activities are aligned with what feels and seems familiar to non-Christian parents and, as I mentioned earlier, meet the needs of their children.

Very rarely did any of my friends turn down an invitation. So, yes, I think we should be doing more, recognising that this is an open door for us. The research shows us that 73 per cent of 'fringe parents' attend a Messy Church or toddler group through word of mouth, i.e., an invitation from a friend.

Due to coronavirus, churches aren't running these groups. Is there anything churches can do now to engage with these families?

This research is not to be banked for when we are gathered again in our bigger numbers. I'd love to encourage all churches to still be intentional in their outreach to these families who may need them even

more than usual. Looking at the research, with a COVID lens over it, let's ask ourselves as leaders, what could be done online and through small groups before things return to normal?

Many leaders of toddler groups have run Zoom gatherings with parents and their children. These have included bedtime stories and storytelling, engaging families even during lockdown. Some have seen encouraging growth in their numbers and many a positive response from both parents, carers and children alike.

What would you say are the top three takeaways from the report?

Review your focus in this area in light of the findings; we feel this ministry should be a priority for a church and, where investment and time is given to this ministry, stands to bear great fruit. Recognise that Christian community is a lifeline for parents of 0-4 year olds, particularly first-time parents, for whom the experience can initially be daunting and challenging. Lastly, don't wait; connect with these families now – the pandemic doesn't need to be a barrier.

Visit www.eauk.org/great-commission/resources/talking-toddlers for more on the research. Register for a Talking Toddlers webinar which will take place on 25 September at www.hopetogether.org.uk/talkingtoddlers

Through our baby and toddler group we seek to share the gospel of grace with families in our community, says **Karen Relton**, community minister at Countess Free Church, Ely.

FUN, FRIENDSHIP AND FAITH

The children usually rush in ahead of the adults and go to one of five or six areas laid out in the church hall: craft, construction, snack zone, imaginative play, jigsaws, baby corner, garage. Parents quickly head to where intravenous coffee, tea and biscuits are available at the hatch from our kitchen team. Other helpers are on hand to chat with both parents and children.

At about 10am we do the notices and remind people of future activities. The children are then allowed into the sanctuary area for ride-ons, tunnels, dressing up and more. This area becomes a big, open space, enabling children and parents to move freely between rooms.

Most Thursdays see between 30 and 40 sign-ins – a carer (parent, grandparent, childminder) plus one, two or more children. As families sign in, we offer them a term-card which also signposts our guests to other seeker-friendly events organised by the church. At £1.50 per family, those on low incomes can still attend, and we provide free termly passes for families we meet at the foodbank or the hostel nearby.

Every two months or so we tell a Bible story to the children in the sanctuary area. Between 10 and 15 parents and their children listen to the story, mainly told with toys and artefacts rather than read. It is interactive and the children, many of whom haven't started any formal education, listen well. The craft that week links to the story – we have had whales, sheep and lions, as well as lost things.

There is more of an extravaganza at Christmas, with children donning nativity outfits and encouraged to join in the story as it unfolds. Each child is sent home with a copy of the Christmas story appropriate for under-fives and an invite to the crib service. At Easter we tell the Easter story, using pictures from the book they will receive. We order 60-70 books and only one or two are deliberately left behind each time.

This year, owing to the coronavirus lockdown, the Easter story was told over eight days in the manse window next to the church. Pictures were uploaded onto our private Two by Two Facebook group, with each one being viewed more than 70 times. Ascension was tricky, but Pentecost was a huge success.

Church parents at the Countess Free Church in Ely, Cambridgeshire, set up our Two by Two baby and toddler group for their children and others more than 15 years ago. It has now seen thousands of children come through its doors, and we estimate that at least 75 per cent of our families are not church attendees. What an opportunity to connect with families in our community and be an effective Christian witness.

From the start, the toddler group has been undergirded by prayer, with at least two church groups considering Two by Two to be their outreach prayer focus. Prayer is important to us, and we start the morning with a few minutes' prayer, asking God for protection, wisdom, safety and stamina. We have some non-Christian helpers who are encouraged to pause at this time. We pray

“It is interactive and the children, many of whom haven't started any formal education, listen well.”

again at the end, thanking God for those we have met, and we pray for individuals.

Are we going to start back after lockdown? We prayed about it and, yes, we are going to try. Many say Two by Two is the best playgroup in Ely. It is obvious to the parents, carers and guardians that we like children. We provide a listening ear and a shoulder to cry on. We encourage, affirm and support parents who are often exhausted, some of whom are at the end of their tether. We hope it's not just because we are nice people but because we know Jesus.

We are trying to talk the talk as well as walk the walk. It is Jesus who sustains us on what can be a very long morning (9am-12pm). “Christ's love compels us” (2 Corinthians 5:14) to keep going. Our non-Christian helpers, who are experienced parents, are sympathetic to the Christian faith. Praise God we have seen them change, too, as they have experienced the gospel of grace.

IT STARTED WITH AN ORANGE

Where would I be without the Christians who have touched my life? Where would others be if we don't touch theirs? asks **Pete Winmill**, co-founder of Count Everyone In.

I was 17 when, on holiday in Austria, I set out on a walk in the mountains. It was already hot and we soon felt thirsty. A fellow walker reached over a stone wall and plucked an orange from a tree.

There was a kindly rebuke, "If I want an orange, all I need to do is ask my heavenly Father and He will give me one. Remind me to tell you one of my sermons about stealing." With that, we'd barely walked a hundred yards when an orange landed at the speaker's feet.

The recipient of this orange was Jim Fry, a vicar from Chalk, in Kent. When I found myself striding out alongside Jim we began to talk. "Pete, where is God in your life?" No one had ever challenged me like that and I thought hard before replying tremulously, "I really don't know." Jim responded, "That's a good place to start." By late afternoon my life was back on track.

I had been brought up to honour God. I hadn't enjoyed Sunday school but always attended church, was confirmed and became a server. It was when I left school and was training to be an aircraft fitter that my faith floundered. Who was I? I seemed to be living multiple lives and no longer had the assurance that God was interested in me. And then came the incident with the orange.

Moving on a couple of months, I joined the youth group from Jim's church for a weekend at Hildenborough Hall in Kent. Young people were discussing the Bible and enjoying it. They were playing guitars and singing. This was such a contrast to my experience of hymn singing. This was relevant and good.

At work in the aircraft factory I overheard a fellow apprentice describing his holiday. It struck bells with me and we exchanged experiences. My new friend was a Christian and had been to a house party run by TES, The Evangelisation Society. I started attending Steve's church in St Albans and the youth group run by Steve's dad Reg. As I began to grow in my relationship with God, I found a desire to understand the Bible. Reg gave me my first opportunity to speak in a village chapel and a gift of preaching began to develop.

When Christine and I married in 1976, we revelled in evening classes at London Bible College (now LST), attending conventions and immersing ourselves in church life. I became a youth leader and Bible class teacher, learning just one step at a time ahead of the class. I loved inspiring young people to live for God and to know the Bible. Personal experience had taught me how much teenagers need to be valued and

shown by example that faith is a life-shaping experience.

After leaving Hawker Siddeley I moved to BT, eventually working on their community programme. In 2001 a new role came up with Prospects, the Christian learning disability charity. My friend Malcolm, a volunteer with Prospects, declined an invitation to apply, saying, "It's not for me but I know a man who can do it. He's not available and he won't want it!" To cut a long story short, I was unexpectedly made redundant, applied for the job I didn't want and, although fearful and lacking in knowledge or experience of learning disability, ended up with the job and have never regretted it.

In 2016 Prospects merged with Livability and 12 months later Christine and I felt called to start Count Everyone In (www.counteveryonein.org.uk). Building on previous experience, we lead accessible streams at festivals and events and offer local church training in sharing the love of Jesus with people with learning disabilities. This year everything has been cancelled due to the coronavirus, but we have launched the Count Everyone In YouTube channel with resources to sustain people in difficult days.

Sometimes I stop and think:

- What if an orange hadn't landed at Jim's feet?
- What if he hadn't asked, "Where is God in your life?"
- What if Reg hadn't believed in me and encouraged me?
- What if Malcolm hadn't urged me to apply for a job I didn't want?

I wonder, am I missing opportunities to help other people find faith in God and live for Him? How about you?





How might we partner with God, the great evangelist, and share the gospel in an increasingly post-truth and post-Christian culture? asks **Rebecca Pippert**, author of *Stay Salt*.

IN GOD'S STRENGTH WE CAN

What unites all Christians everywhere is our joyful agreement that the greatest thing that ever happened on our weary and battered planet is the coming of Jesus to earth – and that the message of the gospel is quite simply the best news ever.

So here is my question: if this is so, why do so many Christians struggle to share this breathtakingly glorious good news? How can we believe that there is no greater news in the world but still feel unable or unwilling to tell others?

Though the gospel is as glorious as it ever was, the world has changed

dramatically. Today our western culture is increasingly post-truth and post-Christian: not merely not Christian but set against Christianity. Our challenge in the west comes from living in a culture that reflects the distortions of post-modernity: the collapse of absolute truth; the shift from authority to personal preference; the 'designer religion' approach of picking and choosing what we believe, cafeteria style; the sexual revolution... the list goes on.

Yet we must never forget, that even as our cultural landscape becomes increasingly secular, secularism does not have the power to erase our human longings for meaning and worth. If anything,

it increases them. God has placed in all human beings a hunger for meaning, worth and wholeness that can only be found in Him. Unbelievers don't know the reason for their longing and wistfulness – but it's there. This is why I believe our age is the greatest opportunity for Christian witness since the time of Jesus and the apostles.

Yet many Christians today are fearful of sharing their faith and don't know how to make Jesus known in today's cultural context, especially with an increasing hostility towards faith. That is why I wrote a new book on evangelism, *Stay Salt*, to help Christians who feel inadequate, who fear evangelism means memorising a technique

to use on a victim, and who forget to focus on God's power and presence, and worry that it's really up to their expertise, which they already know they don't have.

Cultural changes and our witness

In my book, *Stay Salt*, I tell the story of a lively conversation I had with Sue, who was seated next to me on a flight. As our conversation began, I prayed a quick silent prayer asking the Holy Spirit to guide the conversation. Then I asked Sue questions to learn who she is and to see where we might have common interests. It didn't take long before we discovered that we both loved to travel and to learn about cultures, which we discussed at length.

Then Sue began sharing some of her views: "Listen, if I want to be a man on Monday and a woman on Wednesday, who cares? At the end of the day, gender identity is simply a matter of personal preference." She went on to say she was a firm believer in the law of Karma.

Her comments reveal the challenge we face in witnessing to today's culture. How do we engage in significant conversations with people whose views are so radically different from ours? For starters we need to ask questions. When Sue told me she believed in the essential goodness of human nature, I asked her how she'd describe the state of the world. She said, "The world is clearly falling apart. It's a mess!" I asked, "Okay, but how can the world be a mess when it's filled with good people?"

She paused and then she offered a uniquely American analysis: "I believe our problem stems from two sources: people either have addiction issues and need a recovery programme, or they are psychologically wounded and need therapy. Don't you agree?"

I said, "Both of those solutions have helped people. But what if we learn to live in recovery, only to discover that our problem is deeper still? What if our ultimate addiction is to ourselves? What if, at our core, we have a heart problem?" She replied, "Yes, but who in the world has the power to heal the heart? Where do you go for rehab of the heart?"

For the first time in the conversation I mentioned God and said, "Honestly, I can't

think of anyone or anything but God. In fact, that realisation is what led me from being an agnostic to ultimately becoming a Christian. But that's a long story." She said, "I want to hear your story," and we discussed faith for the rest of the flight.

When we landed and were retrieving our luggage she said, "Becky, I am embarrassed to say this, but if I emailed you would you write me back?" I said I'd be delighted. We are now having an ongoing email conversation about Christianity. Sue revealed what current research shows: that people today are often open to having a spiritual conversation if we approach them in the right way.

Tips on raising the topic of faith

Something I frequently hear in our evangelism training conferences is: "How do we move from a 'normal' conversation to a spiritual one? How can we raise the topic of faith naturally?" Let's return to my conversation with Sue and unpack it briefly.

Pray. When talking to someone, always say a quick silent prayer inviting God to be present and to guide your conversation. Prayer reminds us that God is the great evangelist, not us. Christians often tell me: "I can't witness because I am inadequate and weak." But when the apostle Paul was frustrated with his weakness ("thorn in the flesh") and asked the Lord to remove it, the Lord Jesus answered: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." We must learn to celebrate our smallness and rely on the power of the God.

Find common ground. Finding areas we have in common enables us to connect as human beings. When they discover we are a Christian it becomes hard to put us into a box because we've already connected authentically.

Ask good questions. Questions are powerful because they aren't preachy; they reveal we are truly listening, and may cause people to reconsider their views. When I asked Sue how the world could be a mess if people were entirely good, she immediately saw the contradiction without becoming defensive. Questions are not aggressive, even when they gently challenge a worldview.

Agree where you can. We need to affirm what we legitimately can. When Sue said many people struggle with addiction and find help in recovery programmes, I agreed with her. But how can we help people see that the problem is deeper still?

Ask deeper questions but use their terminology, if possible. We often make the mistake of expecting people to come onto our turf, rather than starting from theirs. When I asked Sue, "What if our ultimate addiction is to ourselves?" I was expressing the idea of sin but using her language, rather than biblical language that she wouldn't understand. Later in the conversation I explained more fulsomely what our problem is and why the Bible calls it sin. The point is that we can use biblical terminology, but only after explaining it in everyday language.

Bringing up the gospel is often easier than we think. When I asked Sue, "What if our real problem is a problem of the heart?" she responded, "Yes, but who on earth has the power to heal the heart? Who offers that kind of rehab?" I could now easily bring up the subject of God and my own experience, because it was natural and organic to our conversation.

Where do we go from here?

We are living in extraordinary times. Christ calls and sends us into our battered world to be signs and agents of His blessed kingdom: through being, doing and telling the gospel. That is why local churches and parachurch ministries must encourage and equip believers in everyday evangelism, and seminaries need to offer evangelism courses to future church leaders.

What we need is a holistic approach to evangelism that is biblically faithful, culturally relevant, Spirit-dependent, and relationally authentic. We need an effective evangelism strategy that offers three things: training in personal evangelism; training in small group evangelism such as a seeker Bible study; and creative ways to do proclamation evangelism.

God is the great evangelist who goes before us and who dwells within us and who calls us to be His witnesses. And in God's strength, we can.

Sometimes I feel awkward. Sometimes I wonder what others might think. Most of the time, I share my faith with my friends anyway.

By **Naomi Osinnowo**

FAITH SHARED, FAITH MULTIPLIED

“**D**ebra, I believe God has been so compassionate. Think, before the coronavirus lockdown your father was in and out of A&E and had to sometimes spend days in hospital. Isn't it a blessing that over the past four months he has been, by and large, stable? Well, I think it's a blessing, and I give thanks to God.”

I've said this to my friend Debra a few times as I've stood at the end of her drive. She lives a couple of miles from me and during the earlier stages of the pandemic I would walk or cycle to her house around once a fortnight. Not being able to see family and friends in person, I appreciated our chats. Debra valued them too, as during the lockdown she became the sole carer of her elderly father who has dementia. She thought continuing to bring in the carers, who went from home to home by public transport looking after the infirm and elderly, would risk her father's health or, worse still, his life. To protect him as best she could, she also decided to shield. She told me during my most recent visit that she left the house for the first time in 15 weeks (she had to go to the GP surgery on her dad's behalf).

She'd stand in her doorway, and I'd stand by the hedge, and we'd exchange lockdown stories and experiences until her dad bellowed for help, or I had to dart off because my daily exercise session would

soon be coming to an end. Debra would often describe her father's state as, yes, “up and down,” but, even with the variability, she'd say, “He's doing okay; he's sometimes confused, but he's doing okay.” For me, this seemed like a far cry from 2019, when in our WhatsApp group chats she'd often share with me and others that she's spent hours in A&E because her dad's condition had suddenly deteriorated. She joked once that she may as well rent a space in the local hospital.

“Sharing faith for me has been becoming a better friend with Jesus and a better friend with my friends.”

As she would describe her father's mostly stable condition, it was as if my heart would leap for joy. I'd think, God, surely you're keeping them; surely you're protecting Debra from more than she can bear; surely you're keeping her dad out of

hospital, for you know, God, that a hospital admission could cause her to be anxious and afraid; surely you're the one who is giving her the strength she needs to look after her father. So strong was my belief that God was taking care of my friend and her dad that, despite a sense of awkwardness and the risk of her neighbours overhearing and perceiving me as an oddball, I went for it and said: “Debra, I believe God has been so compassionate...”

Encouraged by others

I explicitly shared my faith in God with my friend. My colleague Phil Knox, head of mission to young adults, has been urging each of us to do this for, well, as long as I can remember. Along with other Christians, he's said that the coronavirus pandemic has created an “unprecedented opportunity to share our faith with our friends”. Many people, like my friend Debra, are in trying times and need hope and encouragement. Many are open, curious and asking questions. Many of us are connecting with our friends a little more or in new and different ways. And these are just a few reasons why there's no time like now.

Yet we might let feelings of awkwardness or thoughts about what others might think get in the way. I've had to push through these feelings and thoughts on my friend's drive. So, to equip, encourage and inspire us to share our faith,



Phil's book *Story Bearer*, which is all about witnessing, was used to underpin a series of Facebook Live conversations that pulled together stories and insights from across the UK church for the mobilisation of the UK church in everyday evangelism.

I've tuned in to these Story Bearer sessions and have been encouraged because other people's stories of God's Spirit at work have resonated with me. The series has also reminded me to be proud of, and open about, my relationship with Jesus. While I urge you to check out the series yourself at www.eauk.org/great-commission/story-bearer-sessions/stories, I'd like to share what were for me some of the highlights, nuggets of information and much-needed reminders.

Dez Johnston, Scotland director at Alpha: "The only thing we can't make more of is time, and we should be spending this time with people who we really care about. Is this not exactly what Jesus did? Take the woman at the well. Jesus asked the woman for a drink of water. He didn't come out with condemnation or anything like that. He sat down and initiated a conversation. He did the same with Zacchaeus, His disciples and many others. It was all about getting to know each other and going on the journey together. I think any one of us can do that."

Miriam Swanson, global student mission lead at Fusion: "I hope I'm on a journey of this for the rest of my life, but I'd say over the

past 10 years, and even now, I'm definitely still on a journey about how to naturally and authentically be a good friend of God, like mates with Jesus – and, therefore, a good friend to the people who I'm in community with. To be a good friend for me means being real – telling the truth – and to be authentic enough to not leave out that I'm friends with God, and that I believe He's real, present and active today. So sharing faith for me has been becoming a better friend with Jesus and a better friend with my friends."

Rev Les Isaac OBE, founder and CEO of Ascension Trust: "One of the greatest effects that we can have is by telling our stories. You don't have to be a preacher or minister. You do so from the standpoint of an ordinary person; I see myself as an ordinary person. I meet people and I talk, and I allow the opportunity. I encourage people to allow the opportunity because you can't manufacture this; it will happen. You will find, more often than not, that people will ask, for example, why do you do this? That's the open question for you to say, 'I do this because of my faith...'"

Sarah Yardley, Creation Fest coordinator: "So much of the best sharing of story comes through relationship. It doesn't come when you've memorised a great script or have your three-point evangelism strategy; it comes when you genuinely love the Lord your God with all your heart and

love your neighbours really well... To break it down quite practically, there's a one by one opportunity for us to look at the people who God has placed around us, and in this particular season, that's our neighbours... Secondly, it's looking for, to quote Frederick Buechner, the places 'where our great gladness and the world's great need are met together'... So you can ask yourself, what's in my hands? Who's the person in front of me? What are the ways that I might portray the beauty of the story of Jesus for those two?"

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OUR GOSPEL MISSION to the UK

One of the stupidest ideas I ever had was to try and break the world record for the longest five-a-side football match. The rules from Guinness were really tight and so many people were involved in making this event a possibility.

There was a group working on logistics for the 12 months leading up to the event, the whole thing had to be filmed, food and drink were needed, as were massages, medical expertise, blister plasters, and ice baths. There were so many people helping out, and that's before anyone kicked a football. Further still, there were supporters, officials keeping score, referees. The list of those involved seemed endless. After much pain, anguish, resilience and teamwork, two days after the game had started we had set a new world record of playing five-a-side football for 48 hours, raising £53,000 for Youth for Christ in the process. As the

final whistle blew, the attention was on the players, but no record would have been broken without the huge team which had worked together in many different roles towards the same target.

It's incredible what is possible when we unite and people play to their strengths, work hard to help each other, and pursue a common outcome with clear focus. Former US president Harry S. Truman said, "It is amazing what you can accomplish if you do not care who gets the credit." How much might be possible for the church in our mission if we all work as one body and not one of us gets the credit, because Jesus gets it all?

In a world of brokenness, pain, confusion, division and lack of trust, there are few things more important than the call for the church to unite at this moment in its gospel mission to the UK. This cry for Christian unity seems to be getting louder, perhaps because many of the divisions in society are growing wider. In our culture, separation, hostility and isolation are seemingly rampant – mentally, physically, tribally, spiritually, geographically and emotionally – and yet the Father calls His children to cross all of these divides by coming together and reflecting His glory. Surely in a world that is torn apart, the reality of a united body becomes even more infectious to those who are lost?

In John 17 Jesus prays passionately that the church may be united. That people from

every tribe, tongue and nation would be one because it will point the world to the love and salvation available to them in Christ. Unity is not an option, it is something that is on God's heart for His children, so we can be certain He will aid us in seeking it. In John 17 Jesus prays for unity – a harmony of spirit, mind, heart and will. He's praying that God would do it, not us. We can't force unity. John Stott, in *The Message of John*, explains this further: "Our part is not to create this (unity). Patently we cannot. Our responsibility lies in maintaining and expressing it."

As I read those words of Jesus again in John 17 – "so that the world may believe that you have sent me" – I'm reminded why we are united: not for our own sakes but to point people to Jesus. Anyone who sees a united church will be profoundly impacted by it. This is not just about sitting around in cosy huddles being nice to one another; this unity is part of the great commission, to go into the world and make disciples. We go out together, in relationship; we do not go alone. We all long for people from every tribe, nation and tongue to encounter Christ, so let's unite to reach them with the gospel.

Yes, witnessing can often feel like a fruitless task and one that is so hard to do, but if we are engaged in it together, we embody Christ's oneness and demonstrate a powerful message to a divided world. This is exactly why the Evangelical Alliance exists: to bring many Christians together with a shared mission of making Jesus known. If a bunch of us working together can set a world record, what more could we do for the kingdom in mission as we all play our part, alongside each other, cheering one another on?



EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE ANNUAL REPORT 2019-2020 HIGHLIGHTS

What a year it has been. Thank you for journeying with us as we said goodbye to Steve Clifford as he stepped down after 10 faithful years leading the Evangelical Alliance and I stepped into my role as CEO.

In the last year we have galvanised prayer during Brexit and through our general election. We have brought together agencies and organisations on issues around mental health, gun and knife crime, education, drug and gambling reforms, and many others. We have shared the stories of individuals, churches and towns as the transforming power of Jesus has changed lives. We have produced resources, articles, videos and podcasts to help Christians navigate the coronavirus pandemic. In the last year the team has hosted or participated in more than 400 events across the UK and beyond.

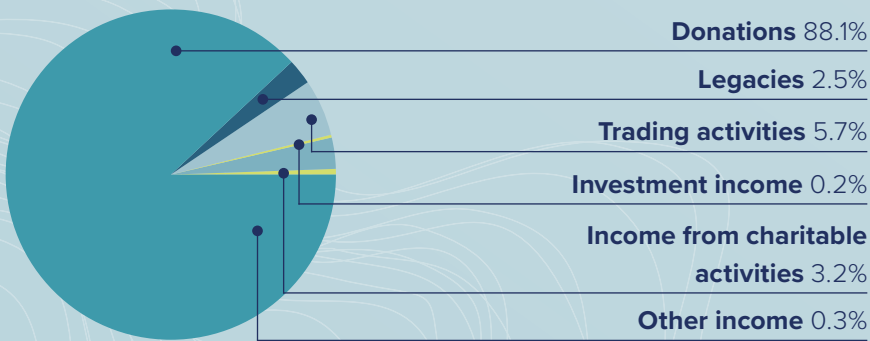
The Evangelical Alliance has worked tirelessly this year with parliamentarians and policy makers to influence legislation and affect policy. Much of our work takes place behind closed doors to represent the concerns and convictions of evangelicals and ensure that the freedom to practise, live out and share our faith is maintained in our society.

This coming year may look very different. Our church buildings have been closed, our movements have been restricted, and as we look ahead, we don't yet know how long this pandemic will last or what comes next. But of some things I am certain: the church is alive, the gospel is changing lives, and we are the hope of the world.

Gavin Calver, CEO

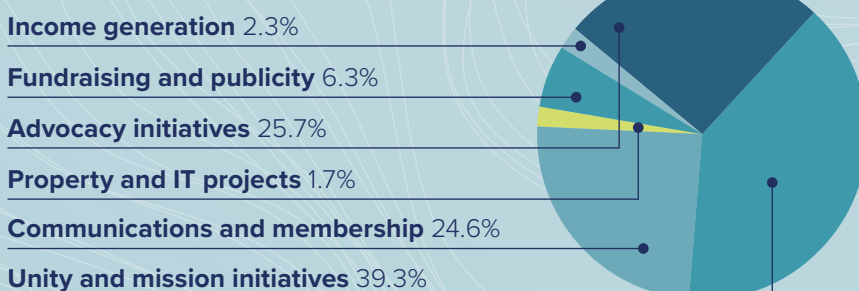
INCOME £2,640,451

up from £2,508,079 last year



EXPENDITURE £2,615,919

up from £2,568,479 last year



MEMBERSHIP

We have built upon the significant membership growth we saw in the last financial year and have increased the number of new members by 50%.

2,384

NEW MEMBERS INCLUDING:

2,212
INDIVIDUALS

127
CHURCHES

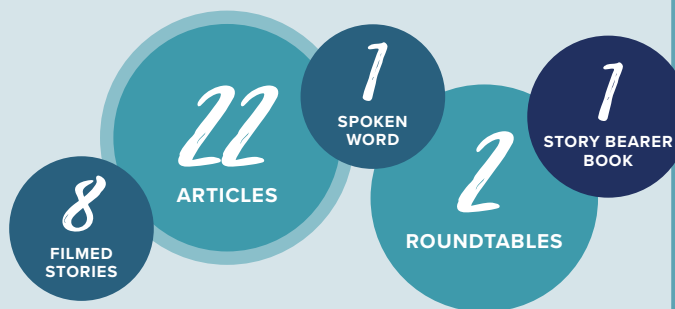
45
ORGANISATIONS

SHARING THE GOSPEL

The gospel is central to everything we do. We never cease proclaiming the gospel, through unity, words and actions; so that people are led to a life with Jesus. This year we have collaborated and celebrated as we have seen lives transformed by Jesus.

The Great Commission

We believe that sharing stories about the goodness of God builds confidence and equips people to share Jesus. Through the work of the Great Commission we have sought to inspire and enable the church to share the hope we have in Jesus.



The Comeback

A spoken word film which creatively shares the Easter story. Released in March 2020. A message of hope amid the coronavirus outbreak in the UK.

“Poetical, stunning, visually brilliant!”

Matt Summerfield, Senior Pastor, Zeo Church



6,500+
VIEWS

348
DOWNLOADS

743
SHARES

RAISING OUR VOICES

We are speaking up into government and the media on issues that matter. We provide a hope-filled, trustworthy and confident voice. We are here to champion the church.

5
YEAR-LONG RESEARCH ASSISTANT PLACEMENTS

Young Adults

We are committed to raising up voices within the evangelical community to be salt and light wherever they are positioned. Through Public Leadership, Mission to Young Adult conversations and our OPC young leaders forum, we have made great strides in seeing the church thriving amongst all generations and significant numbers of young adults in their 20s and 30s coming to faith in Jesus.

21
MISSION TO YOUNG ADULT WORKSHOPS

100
PEOPLE ON OUR PUBLIC LEADER COURSES IN ENGLAND, SCOTLAND AND NORTHERN IRELAND

Being Human

We launched this six-part podcast series in February 2020. Hosted by directors Jo Frost and Peter Lynas, the podcast looks at the themes behind the news, taking the long view and trying to understand what is driving some of the big stories, all the while exploring what it means to be human.

“Brilliant cultural critique from a Christian perspective. An absolute must for Christians trying to navigate life in the 21st century.”

– iTunes review

HIT THE TOP 5
IN RELIGION AND
SPIRITUALITY
ON ITUNES

SEASON ONE:
5,700
DOWNLOADS

Both Lives Matter

In July 2019 Westminster chose to intervene and impose a new abortion framework on Northern Ireland. Through the Both Lives Matter campaign, we played a major role in mobilising tens of thousands of people from right across our province, to speak out against that new abortion law.

Silent gathering at Stormont attended by more than 20,000 people.

100,000 POSTCARDS were sent by supporters to their political representatives at Stormont and Westminster.

More than 1,000 media mentions across print and broadcast in four months.

30% GROWTH in Both Lives Matter social media following.

SERVING OUR MEMBERS

We are committed to reaching out, listening, and engaging with our members. We are finding out how to pray for our members, what your needs are and what God is doing. We are spotlighting the great things happening, the challenges being faced and the hope being realised by our members for our communities.

In December 2019 we published **The [Im]possible Dream**, by Rev Yemi Adedeji and Steve Clifford. This workbook is based on the experiences and lessons learnt over the years of building the One People Commission and encouraging rich cultural expression within UK churches. The book includes many case studies and experiences of churches and leaders, inspiring readers to increase their outreach and be more fully representative of the ethnic and cultural diversity of the communities in which they serve.

In May 2019 we held our second **Above and Beyond** conference to help churches and Christian charities run their organisations for the glory of God. With expert input from lawyers and finance specialists, and input from politicians and Christian leaders, the 200+ attendees were equipped to navigate the terrain with diligence and expertise and thrive in fulfilling their mission.

eauk.org

27%

INCREASE IN USERS
FROM LAST YEAR

ALMOST
240,000
VISITORS

552,254

UNIQUE PAGE
VIEWS

MOST POPULAR
ARTICLE:
CORONAVIRUS: A
CHRIST-CENTRED
RESPONSE

74,000
VIEWS

MOST POPULAR
DOWNLOAD:
TRANSFORMED

2,524

120,000
NEWS AND VIEWS
VISITS

30,479
FIND A CHURCH
SEARCHES

May the God of hope

fill you with

ALL JOY AND PEACE

as you trust in him,

so that you may

**OVERFLOW
WITH HOPE**

by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 15:13



“I wish I had this in my hands sooner! A vital resource for churches seeking to embrace and integrate different nationalities and cultures.” - Rev Anne Calver

The workbook that helps the church achieve greater ethnic integration.

By former Evangelical Alliance general director Steve Clifford and Rev Canon Yemi Adedoji, director of the One People Commission

Order yours: eauk.it/theimpossibledream

Kick Start

BITESIZE VIDEO SESSIONS HELPING PEOPLE IN YOUR COMMUNITY MOVE FORWARD IN LIFE.

Free sessions for your church to deliver online or 'socially distanced' in your community.

Access all nine videos free today and equip your community with practical tips on job searching, money management, habits that harm and worry & loss.

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