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THE MAGAZINE OF THE EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE  
AUTUMN 2025

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# Welcome

**A**s a self-proclaimed extroverted introvert, I have always sought to find the balance between allocating time for fellowship and socialising and for 'recharging' alone. After years of being misdiagnosed as a child, misunderstood as a teenager and mystifying others as an adult (who seem to think my bubblyness is at odds with my disposition) I have come to accept that this is just the way I'm wired. And while not all things that come naturally to us are acceptable to God, I believe He is ok with this one and so I have learnt to be ok with it too.

However, despite my need to find moments of solitude throughout my day, when my social battery feels like it is close to running out and I desperately feel the need to withdraw and seek solace, I cannot deny that I, in equal measure, find great joy in connecting with others. Whether it's amongst my family and friends, church group

or colleagues, I find the gift of community to be a beautiful and invaluable one. The Bible is filled with scripture that demonstrates to us that community has been part of God's design since the Garden of Eden. We are reminded in Ecclesiastes 4:9 that "two are better than one". When gathered with other followers of Jesus we sharpen one another in our faith (Proverbs 27:17) and Heaven comes down to earth when just two or three of us are gathered (Matthew 18:20). So, I pray that no matter where you fall on the introversion-extroversion spectrum, this edition of *idea* magazine entitled 'Rooted in community' will encourage and inspire you to find new ways to build and foster community in your context, just as God always intended.

Be blessed.

Nicola Morrison  
 Editor



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# Recovering the church as an authentic family

**John McGinley** runs an organisation that is committed to enabling and supporting new church communities and beautifully illustrates the importance of honouring God's original intention for the church through love and community.



In an age of increasing isolation, transient relationships, broken families and digital

connection replacing physical presence, a deep longing for genuine community pulses through our culture. The church, at its best, holds a powerful answer to this need – a radically different way of living, a life rooted in community where we are known and loved and love others more than we love ourselves.

Just as the Creation story culminates in the formation of the first human family, the coming of the Son of God into the world was marked by His experience of family. Jesus lived and worked within an extended family for 30 years and from this, formed His new covenant community, the church. He created a new kind of family, founded not on blood ties but on relationship with Him, as He said, “Whoever does the will of my Father in Heaven is my brother and sister and mother” (Matthew 12:50).

Jesus’ way of life was intensely relational. He ate with His followers, shared homes, travelled, taught, wept with them and entrusted His mission to them. He modelled kingdom life in community before sending His followers to replicate that pattern. After His resurrection and ascension, the early church gathered in homes. The Greek word ‘oikos’, meaning household, captures this dynamic. Strikingly, after

Acts, the word ‘disciple’ disappears from the New Testament. Instead, the apostles use family language – believers as children of God, brothers and sisters, spiritual fathers and mothers.

Acts 2:42–47 offers a snapshot of these family-like church communities: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer... All the believers were together and had everything in common.” New believers were adopted into a spiritual household where they were known, loved, challenged and supported. Leadership grew from within, shaped by relational trust. Discipleship happened around tables. Mission flowed from shared life.

The early church grew not through strategy but through communities of love and welcome.

In 2021, as I prayed about the post-Covid church, God arrested me with a challenge: in 25 years of ministry, I had never regularly eaten with and shared life with a group of brothers and sisters. I had led many small groups, but these were usually task-driven – Bible studies or ministry teams – not true communities loving one another and being formed into Christ’s likeness. Discipleship had been reduced to a course, not a life lived in relationship. And despite all the good from Sunday

worship, those gatherings alone did not produce whole-life disciples.

From these reflections, the work of Myriad was born – equipping everyday people to make new disciples and form new church communities where God has placed them – in homes, cafés and workspaces. Using the oikos model of the early church as a blueprint, these communities are rediscovering life together; eating, praying, raising children, carrying burdens, growing in Christ together. We are now living in a time when God is moving in a fresh way. Reports like *Finding Jesus* and *The Quiet Revival* show many are being drawn to faith. But how will they learn to follow Jesus, become like Him and do what He did? Many come from brokenness, isolation or spiritual hunger, with no grounding in faith. The answer is in authentic church community – accepting people as they are, surrounding them with grace and helping them grow through real relationships. This is the kind of community Jesus formed and the early church lived out. It’s what the world longs for today.







## Here are four general insights from our Myriad experience of working with over 100 communities:

- **Intentional communities.** These oikos-style communities have the potential to create transformational relationships, but they require intentional shaping of rhythms of prayer, hospitality and mission, and a culture where discipleship and care flourish.
- **A shift from programmes to relationship.** The gift of these communities is that shared life together can be simple – a meal together, opening scripture around the table in which everyone participates, the vulnerability of sharing the joys and struggles of trying to follow Jesus, and praying for one another.
- **Reimagining evangelism as hospitality.** Inviting others into community, into family, is a powerful gospel expression. The early church grew not through strategy but through communities of love and welcome.
- **It is costly, but it's worth it!** Community is not easy. It demands forgiveness, patience and sacrifice – but it is also where joy is deepest. And those who step out on this journey need the support of the wider church and experienced leaders to oversee them.

One leader told me about a friend who joined their evening gathering of food and worship. Afterwards, she said she'd experienced something hard to explain. She felt welcomed and moved by the care people showed each other – offering help and praying for needs. Then, she described a sense of being loved beyond human love – an atmosphere of love. She had encountered Jesus' presence. As the community embodied the love of God, the Spirit manifested His love for her and she came to faith.

To be rooted in community is not a trend; it is a return to the way of Jesus. The world does not need more polished services or clever branding. It needs spiritual families where the lonely find belonging, the broken find healing and all find purpose in Christ.

*John McGinley is an experienced Christian leader, church planter and author. He currently leads Myriad, which equips everyday people to make disciples and start new church communities.*





# SPOTLIGHT!

The mission team share key findings from their latest *Finding Jesus* report and offer encouragement for the church to forge relationships and community.



**B**ased in the Evangelical Alliance's London office but serving across the

UK, the mission team is a small but mighty team of three: Rachael Heffer, head of mission, Phil Knox, evangelism and missiology senior specialist, and me, Lydia Gilbertson, mission and communications assistant.

United, our aim is to encourage, champion, resource and equip the local church to make Jesus known.

## How do we serve the UK church in mission?

We speak to thousands of local churches every year and work across hundreds of mission partnerships within churches and organisations, gathering leaders around evangelism, mission and discipleship. Our aim is to both encourage and create impact across the local and national church.

Our team champions ministries of all kinds, such as toddler groups, Christians Against Poverty (CAP) centres, foodbanks, youth, family and seniors work, encouraging them all to grow in their Christian distinctiveness and sharing of the gospel.

Through research and shared learning, we speak to both the

encouragements and challenges of the missional landscape in the UK and highlight the ways in which people are coming to faith today.

## Purpose of the *Finding Jesus* report

In June 2025, we published the *Finding Jesus* report. This research was commissioned to provide deeper insight into the growing number of stories we were hearing from adults across the UK who were discovering

and choosing to follow Jesus. With the results, we wanted to encourage and resource the UK church in its mission and identify the main pathways to faith in adulthood.

To create the research, we joined with experienced researchers, Dr Ruth Perrin from the University of Durham and freelance writer, researcher and coach Joe Warton, who surveyed just under 300 adults who had come to faith in the last five years. The results were fascinating, encouraging and inspiring.

### Which of these helped as you explored Christian faith? (Select any that apply)





## Some of our key findings:

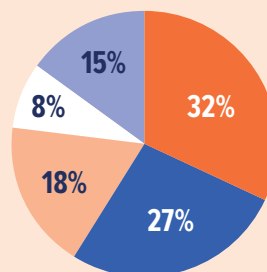
(See the full report for the following stats.)

- **People are searching for help and meaning.** The most frequent responses when asked what prompted their journey were “I needed help with life” (37%) and “I was looking for meaning” (34%).
- **The impact of relationships.** The words and actions of Christians are powerful. 29% said their journey was prompted by a Christian sharing their faith, and 29% saw the impact of faith on someone they knew.
- **The power of the Bible.** 47% responded that reading the Bible helped them explore the Christian faith.
- 39% had a **spiritual experience**, which prompted them to explore faith.
- 59% said **their journey to faith took a year or less.**
- **Patient discussion, time and space.** They regularly described Christians who journeyed with them as patient. The respondents valued being given time and the opportunity to chat, think and work through key aspects of the Christian faith.
- **Answers to questions.** Those exploring faith loved having someone to talk with to help explore all the questions they had.
- **Role modelling and authenticity.** Participants were impressed by the character of the Christians who were journeying with them and seeing how their faith impacted their lives.
- **Support.** Many participants shared moving stories about how individual Christians had helped and supported them through both the challenges of exploring faith and life struggles they were experiencing.
- **Invitations.** One of the things that helped them explore faith further was being invited to something by a Christian friend, such as an Alpha course or a Sunday service.

New Christians referred to how powerful the following aspects were, given to them by the individuals who supported them as they explored faith for themselves:

### How long it took people to come to faith

- Less than 6 months
- 6 months to 1 year
- 1–2 years
- 3–5 years
- I’ve been curious for longer than 5 years



## Takeaways from the research for the church

### 1. Support new Christians in the messy transitional phase

Coming to faith is often a messy journey, marked by significant life changes and possible relational strain. During this time, new believers need patience, understanding and a welcoming, supportive community.

### 2. New believers deeply value the role of scripture in their faith journey

Many seekers don't understand the Bible or how it relates to their lives.

It's vital not only to put scripture in their hands but to walk with them as they learn to engage with God's word.

### 3. The power of friendship

The research clearly showed that friendships and community are vital in people's journey to finding Jesus. Feeling welcomed and invited into a church environment, engaging in Bible reading with others and experiencing authentic community within the church all play a significant role.

“

Donny described how he read the entire Bible, starting with Genesis: “By the time I was at Exodus, I’m a full believer, and by the time I got to the New Testament, it just broke my heart. When I got to the true story of Jesus, I was a broken man. Just an absolute love for what He’s done.”



Be encouraged; God is at work. God is moving in people's hearts and lives in all kinds of ways: helping people recognise their discontentment, speaking to them through the Bible, arranging 'coincidences' in their lives, answering prayers and making Himself known through supernatural encounters.

We hope that these findings will encourage fresh reflections, inspire practical action and support the local church in mission.

Find the full report at [findingjesus.co.uk](https://findingjesus.co.uk) or contact a member of the Evangelical Alliance mission team at [mission@eauk.org](mailto:mission@eauk.org)





# TO OVERCOME

**Mary Bourne**, member of City Praise Centre church, shares how community played a key role in her journey through trauma, loss, healing and restoration.



**W**hile my story is about overcoming life's toughest storms, one of the key

threads woven throughout it is the role of community; how we shut down, how we open up and how God often uses people to help us rebuild.

When I went through loss, I didn't go looking for people. I didn't think I had the energy, the words or the right to ask for help. After a cancer diagnosis, the

stillbirth of my daughter and a financial crisis, I kept things close. I convinced myself that if I just stayed strong, prayed harder, and held it all together, I'd be okay. But I wasn't.

I had lovely people around me: kind, Christian, supportive – but I wasn't letting them in. And I wasn't telling anyone about Jesus either. I wasn't reaching outward. I wasn't using my gifts. I felt so unqualified, so weighed down by grief and anxiety, that I didn't believe I had anything to offer. And the longer I stayed in that mindset, the more comparison and jealousy crept in. That silence isolates more than you realise.

Eventually, I came to a point where I knew something had to change. I couldn't keep living closed off and burnt out. I needed to open my eyes – and when I did, I saw people I hadn't noticed before. Not just those within my church circle, but those beyond it. A hurting world that didn't need me to be perfect, just present.

It wasn't about joining a group. It was about stepping into relationships where I could bring what was in my hand: my creativity, my organising, my story. And the more I gave, the more healing came – for them, and for me. That's when I realised God had placed something in me all along that could serve others, even if I didn't see it at first.

As I write in *To Overcome*: "God doesn't ask for what you don't have. He simply asks you to trust Him with what you do."

Community, for me, wasn't the plan. But it became the path. It showed up quietly at first, through unexpected friendships, shared tears and laughter. It gave me the courage to show up again, to use my voice and to believe that maybe I wasn't as unqualified as I thought.

*To Overcome* is about learning to live again after deep pain. It's about faith, resilience and discovering that healing rarely happens in isolation. It happens in relationship. And at the centre is the most important relationship, our relationship with God.

It's His love that sustains us. It's His strength that helps us keep going. Through Him we find the love, compassion and courage to show up for others too.



*Mary Bourne is the author of To Overcome: A journey of faith, strength, and resilience. She describes herself as a survivor and encourager who shares faith-filled hope through lived trauma, helping others overcome life's storms with honesty, strength, compassion and trust in God.*



# Church life:

# TIM ROWLANDS

**Tim Rowlands**, head of Evangelical Alliance Wales and lead pastor of Festival Church, shares the extraordinary shifts he is witnessing of people coming to faith in his context.



**H**e looked slightly awkward, sipping a coffee at the back of the church. The Sunday service had just finished, people were milling around, kids were running about, and the coffee bar volunteers were working overtime. I'd wandered over to say 'hello' to the nervous looking young guy who, as far as I could tell, had plucked up all the courage he could muster to come along to our church for the first time.

We got chatting, and his story completely took me by surprise. Up until a few weeks beforehand, he'd been a self-assured atheist, whose only focus in life had been to make lots of money. However, through the online content of a number of social media influencers I wasn't even aware were particularly well known for having a Christian worldview, he'd realised that he needed to get right with God and go to church.

So here he was. A man in his early twenties, coming along to church as an adult for the first time because of the influence of social media, was talking to me about wanting to become a follower of Jesus. In just a matter of weeks, he was baptised.

A couple of weeks before my no longer 'self-assured atheist' friend came along, I spotted that a mum and her young children had started attending church too. They'd always sit near the front, the children would race off to Sunday school at the opportune moment of the service, and it was clear that God was moving in the life of this lady. It turned out she'd started attending the weekly parent and toddler group, had recently moved to the country, and through contact with volunteers in the church had made a commitment to follow Jesus. For her, too, it was just a matter of weeks before she was baptised.

I love the way that this young family are finding their feet in God's house, discovering the newness of

life that can only be found in Jesus. I was so blessed, too, to be reminded of how effective the faithful ministry of God's people can be. The Apostle Paul must have had something like this in mind when he wrote in his first letter to the Corinthian church, "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow" (1 Corinthians 3:6).

As I reflect on these two salvation stories and observe similar testimonies in lots of other church communities, I'm beginning to notice that something is stirring in the nation, and I sense it requires a response from us. When a young man walks into church off the street, seeking God because of what someone said on Instagram, and

is baptised three weeks later, I reckon we need to sit up and pray, 'More, Lord, for your glory.' When a young mum brings her family to church for the first time, responding to a conversation with a church volunteer, and also gets baptised weeks later, I reckon it's time to step up and say, 'Use me, Lord, for your glory.'

God is at work in so many ways in the hearts of so many people. My prayer in this season is like that of the psalmist in Psalm 90 declaring, "Let the favour of the Lord our God be upon us and establish the work of our hands upon us; yes, establish the work of our hands!"

For the extended version of this article, entitled *God is at work in Wales*, visit [eauk.it/god-is-at-work](https://eauk.it/god-is-at-work)

*I'm beginning to notice  
that something is  
stirring in the nation,  
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a response from us.*

*Tim Rowlands is head of Evangelical Alliance Wales, and senior pastor of Festival Church, with congregations in North Wales, mid-Wales and Chester. He is married to Emily, has four adult children and enjoys music, poetry and mountaineering.*



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10 minutes with...

# DR RHIANNON MCALEER

Following on from the huge impact of *The Quiet Revival* report released earlier this year, **Dr Rhiannon McAleer**, director of research and impact at the Bible Society, gives a deep-dive interview into the research and its findings.

## What is the Bible Society and what is your role there?

Bible Society is a 200-year-old charity which exists to make the Bible accessible to everyone. For much of our history we worked on translating the Bible into different languages and making it available around the world. Today much of our work focuses on Bible engagement: helping Christians grow in confidence to read, explore, speak about and apply the Bible throughout their lives. As director of research and impact, my job is to lead a team that undertakes research to understand what people around the world think about the Bible so we can be as effective as possible in our mission.

## Tell us what inspired the Bible Society to carry out *The Quiet Revival* research

The data presented in *The Quiet Revival* is part of a wider piece of work which began in 2017 and was designed to map how adults in England and Wales relate to the Bible, including their attitudes, behaviours, touch points, openness and barriers. We also asked questions about religious identity, religious behaviours (including church attendance) and attitudes to the church. From this we identified key 'Bible personas' or types in the population that became key audiences for us. (You can read about these on our [lumino.bible](#) website.) Since then, we've polled either the full survey or parts of it regularly to see how the landscape is changing.

## What were some of the key findings?

An increase in the number of adults in England and Wales who go to church at least once a month.

In 2018 this was 8%; now it's 12%. Also in 2018 just 4% of 18–34-year-olds said they went to church; in 2024 this had increased to 14%, with the effect particularly notable among young men (although it is also present in young women, just to a lesser extent). Really encouraging!

## Can you outline the methodology? Is it robust?

The surveys are conducted by YouGov, one of Britain's leading polling agencies used by academics, policymakers and business to understand what Britain thinks. YouGov's method of panel management and surveying is robust and produces models which are frequently well matched to other types of sampling and real-world outcomes, like election results. Our surveys used very large samples (larger than is typically used) which increases the reliability, as well as weighting to ensure a representative sample. Additionally, we aimed to keep the questionnaire as similar as possible each year, and surveyed at the same time of year to keep conditions as similar as possible. There are multiple indications the sample is good, including coherence in how they answer the questions, and a profile of religious identity that is in line with the census.

While no piece of research is flawless and all surveys carry a margin of error, we are confident our results indicate a big-picture change in the place of Christianity and spirituality in England and Wales today.

To read the full extended interview, visit [eauk.it/deep-dive-quiet-revival](https://eauk.it/deep-dive-quiet-revival)

# 5 TOP TIPS

on building connection  
and community within our  
neurodiverse churches





**Triona Brading**, an autistic Christian and Roofbreaker disability champion with charity Through The Roof, shares some helpful tips on how we can make church a place of community for everyone, including all neurotypes.



**A**s the concept of neurodiversity is increasingly recognised, you might be wondering

how to effectively create connection and community in our neurodiverse churches. For all churches will be neurodiverse – congregation members with different neurotypes meeting together, individuals who are neurotypical and neurodivergent (the brain is ‘divergent’ from ‘typical’): autistic, ADHD, dyslexic etc. So with that in mind, how do we build real relationships with one another?

## 1. Learn about different neurotypes

Whilst every individual is unique, a basic knowledge of some of the common experiences of those who are neurodivergent will help you understand what may or may not be helpful when getting to know someone of a different neurotype. You could look at resources on websites such as [throughtheroof.org](https://throughtheroof.org).



## 2. Consider a variety of ways to connect

We are used to our standard methods of getting to know someone such as chatting at the end of a church service or grabbing a coffee together, which are great ways to connect and work well for many. But sometimes it is good to think about other ways you can spend time with someone; participating in an activity you know they enjoy and feel comfortable doing, completing a practical task together or going for a walk. We all connect best when we feel safe and relaxed, so think creatively about how that might look for different people.

## 3. Remember we are “the body” and all our parts are “indispensable”

1 Corinthians 12:12–27 gives us one of the metaphors for the church. We may be familiar with this passage and how it demonstrates we all have different gifts, but zoom in on verses 23 and 24 and that word “indispensable” really stands out. We need “parts that seem weaker”, whether that’s through disability, neurodivergence or any other reason. It’s how God has designed the church.

## 4. Celebrate the image of God in every person

When God breathed life into humanity, He made us all image bearers. We can forget this so easily, but remembering this truth when we meet with each other helps us to honour one another and build gospel community.



## 5. Be willing to be flexible

Sometimes those of us who are neurodivergent may find it easier to participate in specific ways that cater to our sensory, social or communication needs. It’s really helpful if you are willing to bend towards us in these situations.

*Triona Brading is co-writing a book currently about disability in church life, supported by Through the Roof.*



# ARE YOU A GOOD NEWS PERSON?

On 17 September, CEO of the Evangelical Alliance Gavin Calver and our missiology senior specialist Phil Knox launched their new book, *Good News People: Hopeful Evangelicals Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*. Ahead of the launch I sat down with them to find out more about the book and how we can all accept the challenge to be good news people in a bad news world.



By Nicola Morrison

**Nicola:** Today, you are here to talk about your new book, *Good News People: Hopeful Evangelicals Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*. Gavin, in short, what's the premise of the book?

**Gavin:** The premise of the book is that we are gospel people; we are good

news people in a bad news world, and throughout our history, we have been people who have proclaimed that hope in our culture. In our current world, we want to continue to do that now and into the future. We are also owning the fact that the term 'evangelical' is not redundant, but it might need redeeming a little. So, we have tried to take it back to the core of what it is, express what it is biblically, express what that term is historically and set a posture for today.

**Nicola:** You have many endorsements of the book, describing it as "challenging", "stimulating", "joyful", "humbling", "contemporary", "refreshing" and "honest"—that's quite an impressive cosign! So, with that in mind, who is this book for?

**Phil:** This book primarily is for people who identify as evangelicals and evangelical Christians. If you think you are a Christian who wants to understand the word evangelical better, it's for you... We hope this is for leaders





as they lean into what it means for the future of the church but also this is for any Christian who wants to be encouraged by what God is doing across the UK... Every Sunday Gav and I text each other and ask what is going on and what we have seen, and it's almost always just an amazing picture of what God is doing. We want to enthuse people with those good news stories.

**Nicola: You talk about the fact that we are living in a state of 'permacrisis', which is characterised as a period of instability and insecurity. So, how can we be good news people in a bad news world?**

*Phil: 'Permacrisis' was the Collins dictionary word of the year for 2022, which I think sums up for so many the way the world has been creaking at*

the minute as we lurched from a global pandemic to a cost of living crisis, global wars all over the place... I think where we are now is that this is beginning to have an impact on the generations. As we scroll down bad news feeds and as we look at how people are coming to faith, many people are saying they are struggling with life, there is personal pain, and the global picture is impacting people's worldview... We don't just have good news; we have the best news, and we have a hope that surpasses all others. Many people and media outlets and business and products have tried to offer hope, but none can do so like the gospel, and that is the unique offering of the church at this time.

*Gavin: Church has been given the opportunity every day to show*

what's different when you have Jesus. I think we don't make enough of this. What's different when you face the same stuff, but you have Jesus?... I think when you stand on the Rock of Ages, the Unchanging One, whilst everything around changes, there must be something profound that people encounter that's different – we must be people of hope!

**Nicola: What's the most encouraging thing you are seeing from the pulpit and in the mission field at this time in the UK?**

*Gavin: I'm just seeing fruit like I've not seen for a long time... The Lord is moving. There is an openness... I'm not sure if we are in a revival, but there is a spiritual awakening that I've not seen before.*

**Nicola: I love the part in the book where you talk about serving the length and breadth of the membership of the Evangelical Alliance and the different contexts that you serve in. Every Sunday you are somewhere different, talking to people in a different way. What is the thing you most enjoy about working at the Evangelical Alliance?**

*Gavin: I think for me there are two things: what you've just said, and also the gospel heart of this thing; the fact that we stand on the shoulders of giants who for 180 years have done all they can to make Jesus known and to do it alongside others. But then diversity is amazing... You don't know until the first worship song where you are; is it hands in the air or is it hands in the pockets? Is the service going to be an hour, because it's never gone over that? Or is it hopefully going to end today? Am I going to be translated today, or am I not? Occasionally am I young in this environment; often am I old? The diversity is amazing. And what I love about the Evangelical Alliance is it's not uniformity; it's unity, but it's unity with a purpose – that we may go together and make Jesus known. What a joy to be a part of!*

**For the extended video interview, including conversations around Gavin and Phil's Guinness World Record, a mandate for the church on changing style not substance, and practical advice on how we can all apply the principles of the book to our own lives, visit [eauk.it/meet-the-authors](http://eauk.it/meet-the-authors)**



# Being salt and light: how can Christians make a difference in their community?

**Mary Deller** of national drug and education charity Hope UK shares the stories of two volunteers who are making a difference in the lives of young people through drug prevention programmes.



**T**here has never been a better time to inspire Christians to get more involved in their local communities and to share the love of Jesus with young people in practical ways. Two volunteers with Hope UK's team in the East Midlands are doing just that.

## Maureen

Maureen witnessed a 'modern-day miracle' when her husband made an unexpected recovery from a life-threatening illness 35 years ago. It led her to rediscover a faith she had drifted away from as a teenager and to recommit herself to God.

"God asks us to love others, and a big part of that for me is seeking opportunities to help others, particularly young people, to lead fulfilling lives," explains Maureen.

Having had a career supporting children and families through difficult times, Maureen felt challenged by an appeal in her church newsletter seeking volunteers who were interested in training to become drug educators.

"It sounded like something I could do, so I prayed about it, made some enquiries and signed up to do the training," she says.

Eight years later, she is fully involved in a local Hope UK team of five based in the East Midlands, where she relocated following retirement. "It's about helping young people to understand the fears and risks they might encounter and how to keep themselves feeling safe and confident in their lives," she says.

As a drug educator, Maureen delivers short talks to local churches about the work of Hope UK and for the past three years she has taken part in a programme called Safety Zones for year six pupils in Nottinghamshire. Safety Zones helps young people with the transition to secondary school. Children participate in a carousel of mini workshops on a range of personal safety and wellbeing topics, including drug awareness, all delivered by local agencies.

In the coming months, Maureen hopes to deliver drug education

sessions within local schools to support pupils in developing resilience and self-confidence. She is also planning her October fundraiser for Hope UK's annual 'Coffree Conqueror Challenge' by hosting a caffeine-free coffee morning in her village. The annual fundraiser will help raise vital funds for Hope UK's mission to equip young people to lead drug-free lives.



*Annual conference in April: Michelle second from left and Maureen on the right alongside two other members of the team, Jaki and Ian.*





God asks us to love others, and a big part of that for me is seeking opportunities to help others, particularly young people, to lead fulfilling lives.

## Michelle

Michelle had a busy career as a bed and breakfast landlady in Skegness for 25 years, together with her husband Robert. Not surprisingly, many of their customers over the years were regulars at the Spring Harvest Christian festival. And in fact, it was at Spring Harvest that Michelle first came across Hope UK.

“They were looking for volunteers to train as drug educators. I was already working with children, running a Girls’ Brigade at my local church and felt that drug prevention work could fit nicely alongside that,” she explains.

Michelle wasted no time filling in the application form to train as a voluntary drug educator. That was 15 years ago. Since then, Michelle has been very active in her local community, running

It’s about helping young people to understand the fears and risks they might encounter and how to keep themselves feeling safe and confident in their lives.

drug education sessions. More recently, she has taken on her second voluntary role with the charity, serving as a trustee on the board of Hope UK for the past four years.

Michelle’s heart for children and young people is demonstrated by her dedication to serving in her local primary schools as part of a church team delivering assemblies. Her relationship with the school has opened the door for her to offer Hope UK drug awareness sessions for all ages, from reception to year six.

“Working with reception age children is challenging but fun, and sessions are very short,” says Michelle. “We talk about the children being special and about items around the house being safe and unsafe, to get them used to the idea.

“Being a Christian organisation, Hope UK supports my ability to do what I can do, by prayer, ongoing training and by giving me a sense of being part of God’s work.”

Together with her colleagues in the East Midlands team, Michelle hosted a Hope UK stand at the 2025 Praise in the Park community event in Burgh Le Marsh near Skegness at Pentecost, where 250–300 people attended. She says, “Hope UK has so much to offer and events like this are a great way of reaching out to people to tell them what we can do to help their community.”

Hope UK is seeking Christians with a heart for serving young people. Full training is provided for free and is OCN accredited. To find out more about becoming a Hope UK voluntary drug educator visit [hopeuk.org](https://hopeuk.org)

*Mary Deller is the press and media officer for Hope UK, and is also a trained voluntary drug educator with Hope UK, delivering drug education to schools and youth groups in her local community.*



For **Elinami**, school is more than just **learning**.  
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\*Child Marriage in Eastern and Southern Africa: A statistical overview and reflections on ending the practice, UNICEF, New York, 2022.



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# My STORY

**Dr Usha Reifsnider**, co-regional director of Lausanne Europe, explores the extraordinary potential of community – if only we will bear each other's burdens.



By Bryony Lines

**U**sha's childhood was divided between two worlds. "Those two worlds were apart and had very tiny overlaps. But they were really important overlaps," she says.

"We lived in an area of the West Midlands that was mostly White, and there wasn't an Indian community on our doorstep. My dad was one of the first men who was able to bring his wife over from India, and so all the single men who'd had to come on their own had a sense of community that was centred on our house at the weekends."

She lights up when remembering those weekends. "Oh my goodness. They were full of food, and noisy. I'm an extreme extrovert, as was my mother, and we were a very musical family. My dad would pull out the harmonium and we would sing Indian songs. It was just fun," she says. "Now, I also was part of a White community because I went to school."

This was not long after Indian independence, and Usha remembers history being taught at school "very much from a superior position".



Our neighbours had a different idea of who we were, not what society said.



The prevailing attitude was that “we were less than welcome and in some ways less than human”. But individual relationships countered that narrative: “Our neighbours had a different idea of who we were, not what society said.”

Two doors down lived Mrs McHugh, whose brother had a turkey farm. Every Christmas Eve she would bring a turkey to Usha’s family and put it in their oven before going to midnight mass.

“The turkey cooked all night, and we would wake up on Christmas morning and the house was warm. The Indian community would come. There were no buses on Christmas Day, so they would walk five or six miles. This is 55 years ago, and people still talk about it.”

When Usha was about five, one of her teachers invited her and her sisters to Sunday school. Sometimes Usha’s mum would come to watch them sing. On Mother’s Day, the church did something that meant a great deal to the young family. Each child was given a flower for their mum – and if they brought their mum, they got two!

Her parents had a very small income and sent much of it back to family in India. One night Usha came downstairs and found her mum crying as she tried to make a pair of shoes for one of her children. “I had no idea how poor we were. So getting a flower was great. If five of us went and took our mum, we came home with a bouquet.”

Usha remembers that church as a place of acceptance, which allowed her to come to faith in Jesus in her own

time: “They never argued against our Hinduism. They only taught us the Bible. When I was ready, I made the decision I wanted to, and they supported it.”

Several years later, Usha decided to be baptised. By this time her family had moved to another town, and the Christians she now knew had stricter ideas of discipleship. “We were encouraged to not be in any place with idols, which meant I couldn’t stay in my own home. It destroyed the relationship between me and my parents.”

At only 19, Usha had counted the cost and made the decision she understood to be right – only to be let down by her Christian community. “I was homeless for two years even though I went to church every Sunday. I quickly learned that when Christians called you ‘sister’, it only meant from 10 till 12 on a Sunday. My whole concept of what family is had to change.”

Since then, she has seen the extremes of what community can do – from those who let her go hungry to those who helped her and her husband to buy a house. She poses this challenge: “When you bear my burden as somebody who’s come from a Hindu family, what’s it going to cost you? Because saying ‘I’ll pray for you’ and calling me sister is not going to cut it. The number of converts that have told me about being homeless – they can’t share this in church because we want the success story.”

Eventually Usha and her parents did reconcile, but the pain of their life in the UK was not over. “There was a horrible attack on my parents in the corner shop, and the people weren’t prosecuted. My dad was very, very badly hurt. He had to have 22 surgeries on his eye.”

After 50 years in the UK, they moved back to India. “But miraculously, both of my parents came to faith. It’s still, to me, almost unreal.

“One evening, my mum recalled all the kind things Christians had done for us: the Sunday school teacher, the neighbour, the songs that we used to sing. My mum told my dad that she had become a Christian, but they never discussed it. And yet 10 years later, he did the exact same thing. He remembered the first time he met Christians, the kind things that people did. My dad came to faith in 2016 and 10 days later, he passed away in my arms.”

Usha imagines those acts of kindness not as seeds but as spores: “Community is more than roots. Millions of spores come out of mushrooms and go everywhere. They may stay dormant for a long time, silently growing. Bearing somebody’s burden costs. That’s what community is.”

*Usha is passionate about making space for everyone’s voices in church, even when it is uncomfortable. In December 2024 she published **Unmuted**, which she describes as “an opportunity for evangelicals to hear from some of our own, albeit with a different life experience”. Contributors share challenging perspectives*

*including from people who have experienced trafficking, those living with disabilities and Roma groups.*



Bearing somebody’s burden costs. That’s what community is.

# GOD IS AT WORK IN OUR COMMUNITIES – DO YOU PERCEIVE IT?

**Sarah Small**, head of Eden at The Message Trust, illustrates how God is transforming lives in some of the most unexpected places through faith.



“**T**he number of conversations we’ve had with people who can’t believe we moved back is crazy,” says Niki. “They can’t wrap their head around why, after getting out of South Bank, we’d come back.”

Niki Coulson and his wife Krista both grew up on the South Bank estate in Middlesbrough. He says: “Back when I first lived in South Bank I spent years struggling with drugs and alcohol (Krista did too) and was in and out of prisons from when I was 16. Years later, I hit rock bottom, and in that moment, I cried out to God and instantly knew I was loved. God restored me and my life and if He can do it for me, He can do it for anyone.”

In 2020, God led Niki and Krista to move back to the town with their seven children and start an outreach project called ‘The Open Well’. Since The Open Well started, people have been responding to the gospel every week. So far, they have seen 130 new Christians. “There’s Chloe who, when we met her, was struggling with her mental health and on the brink of having her kids taken away by social services,” says Niki. “As we got to know her, we were able to support her and tell her about the hope Jesus offers. When she gave her life to God, the change was massive. She found hope and light in the darkness. Fast forward to today, she’s not only got a job – something she never thought she was capable of – but social services can see what a good mum she is, and her family is still together. We love how God’s impacting whole families.”

South Bank is named among the 0.5% most deprived neighbourhoods in England by the indices of multiple deprivation. It’s a place facing







high child poverty, lower than average life expectancy and high numbers of people leaving education with few or no qualifications. But this is not the story we want spoken into lives, so in 2023 The Message Trust partnered with Tees Valley Community Church, where Niki and Krista are members, to launch an Eden team in South Bank. Eden teams have at their heart a mission to share the good news of Jesus in word and action as they do life with their neighbours for the long term.

As I read my Bible, prayed and chatted to the Eden team about Jesus, I could feel myself changing.

Building on the work begun by The Open Well, Eden South Bank are seeing Jesus turn lives around, like Kelly's. Part of a large South Bank family of over 100 people on the estate, Kelly often says, "My family used to be known for chaos and causing trouble, but I believe God's changing our story."

When Kelly's son was critically ill in hospital, she cried out to God and asked the Eden team to pray for him too. Miraculously Riaz survived, and in that moment, Kelly knew she had to go to The Open Well.

"As I shared how God had saved Riaz's life, it all clicked into place," Kelly recounts, "I knew I was loved by Jesus and couldn't live without Him. That night I gave my life to God. I felt alive for the first time in a long time and haven't looked back since! I loved Jesus and knew I had to be all in, living every day for Him, so I made some big changes in my life such as giving up drugs. As I read my Bible, prayed and chatted to the Eden team about Jesus, I could feel myself changing. What surprised me most was that people around me saw the change too. I remember neighbours stopping me in the street asking what had happened to me as I was different. Me, Kelly, from the family known for causing trouble!"

Kelly has since joined the Eden team in South Bank along with Krista, Niki and others. They use every opportunity

they can to share Jesus' love with their neighbours in word and action. Now called to live as urban missionaries, they are involved in sharing the gospel, living sacrificially, building up the community, doing all they can to see God's kingdom come and His church built in South Bank.

Recently they sent me a wonderful WhatsApp video – precious footage of a group of people worshipping at The Open Well. Every Tuesday, they put on a meal for their community. As neighbours eat together, a testimony is shared, followed by worship and prayer. It's a holy place to be. It reminds me of the story in Luke 7 when Jesus visits the house of Simon and a sinful woman anoints His feet with perfume. Jesus rebukes Simon's poor hospitality but commends the woman for her lavish care, commenting that those who have been forgiven little love little – whereas this woman who had been forgiven much loved much.

There in South Bank, people who love much are seeing the power of God transform lives. Here's evidence that God is well and truly on the move in some of the most forgotten areas in our nation. I could tell you stories of God doing the same thing in Sheffield, London, Blackpool and Liverpool – in fact, in any community where we have an Eden team or where The Message Trust is stepping out on mission. Do be praying that God will continue to impact communities and lives, and that people will discover the love and hope He offers them.

To find out more about The Message Trust's work through Eden, joining one of our existing teams or developing a team for a community near you, visit [message.org.uk/eden](https://message.org.uk/eden).

*Sarah Small is head of Eden at The Message Trust. She is passionate about seeing Jesus impact estates and cities. Sarah, her husband Steve and their three sons have lived as part of an Eden team for the past 13 years.*

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# Church life:

# MARK HOPKINS

**Mark Hopkins** shares that across the Midlands people are looking to the church to answer some of life's big questions and how this is creating great opportunities for salvation.



**F**rom what I see and hear from churches across the East Midlands, and my own church network, there is a real and tangible sense that something is happening, that the spiritual atmosphere in our nation is shifting; stories of people walking into church to find out about Jesus, young men exploring what faith in God is all about, a hunger and passion amongst young adults. Something is happening.

But is this the case in every church? Are there any patterns emerging?

Many of the large city churches are experiencing weekly salvations, people walking in that are exploring faith and making the decision to follow Jesus.

Malcom Baxter, senior pastor of Heart Church in Nottingham, shared that in the first few months of 2025, he saw 63 responses, with 24 firm decisions to follow Jesus.

This is significantly more than they saw in the same period last year. He says: "The number of people seeking answers to life's big questions and engaging with church is up; people are open in a way I have rarely seen before."

Are they doing anything different? No; they are continuing to preach and teach God's word, focusing on discipleship and continuing to worship Jesus with passion. They are intentional about creating a great welcome, making it as easy as possible for people to engage with church and encounter Jesus.

## **The number of people seeking answers to life's big questions and engaging with church is up...**

Further north in Yorkshire, Paul Bedford, pastor of Hope House Church in Barnsley, says: "We have seen most of our growth through people coming back to Jesus – the return of the prodigal and the drifters. We've found people want to be in the room and stay in the room when they are made to feel welcome."

In Nottingham at The King's Church, Arnold,

we have had a few examples this year of people walking in with no previous connection to church wanting to explore what faith is all about – even of a four-year-old telling her mum that she wanted to go to church to learn about Jesus. We've also seen partners of long-term Christians leaning in to explore faith rather than remaining cynical or critical.

There is definitely something happening across our nation.

The Evangelical Alliance's *Talking Jesus* research has shown there is an openness amongst people to explore and talk about faith in God, with one in three wanting to talk further and find out more about Jesus. And our new research, *Finding Jesus* (released in June 2025), shows the importance of both the Sunday service and the Bible in people making a decision to follow Jesus.

As a football fan, I'll remain optimistically and unrealistically hopeful that this is the season for my team and will continue to cheer them on.

But as a church leader, I know my hope is founded in the security of God's promises and on the confidence of the words of Jesus that He will build His church and that He will fulfil His promise, and that He will draw everyone to Himself (John 12:32) – a sure and solid, reliable hope.

This article was adapted from: *Seeking answers and finding Jesus in the East Midlands*. To read the full article visit [eauk.it/seeking-answers-finding-jesus](http://eauk.it/seeking-answers-finding-jesus)

Mark is part of the Evangelical Alliance's unity team, with a focus on the East Midlands. Alongside this he leads a church in Nottingham. He is part of the Ground Level Network national team and he runs their leadership and theology training course. Mark also helps oversee the unity prayer movement Nottingham City Prayer. He has a passion to see the local church equipped and empowered, working together for the sake of the kingdom.

# Social media is helping us reach and build communities

**Lucy Bugg** highlights how Christian Vision are maximising their online platforms for discipleship and seeing amazing results.



**C**hristian Vision's global mission is to spread the gospel in every direction and equip the church to do

the same. Building community is an essential element in this widespread communication of the gospel.

One of the ways we are taking the gospel in every direction is through the yesHEis app, launched in March 2025. With available courses, training tools, Bible plans and shareable videos, the app provides invaluable content for Christians who want to share their faith. The app also includes a map of the world, detailing areas where people are sharing their faith. This visualisation reinforces the idea that individuals are part of a greater whole, working towards the same goal. So far, we have had 10,000 downloads. That's as many as 10,000 people rooted in our yesHEis community, wanting to share Jesus.

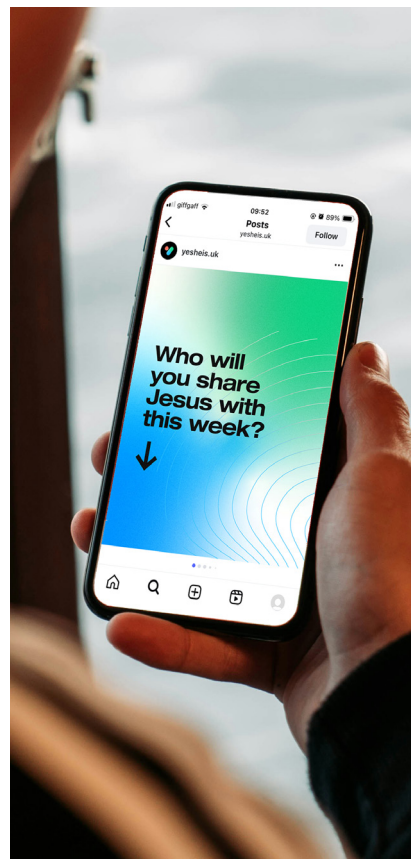
Millie Faulkner-Bugg (a former community responder for Christian

Vision) says: "It's been so encouraging to see more and more young people passionate about sharing their faith and contributing to the yesHEis community. I've seen the younger generation grow in confidence, realising that they can make a difference, and that sharing Jesus is something personal and accessible. No step is too small, and every act of faith counts. It's been a privilege to help create spaces where that kind of growth and courage can flourish."

## Social media as a powerful tool

Another way we are seeing community being cultivated is through social media. In 2024, we repurposed our Bible plan content to encourage acts of evangelism during the Christmas period. This challenge generated several evangelism stories from those who engaged. One post shared said:

"We were getting on a train but then it was cancelled and we had to get a different one, and it was so cramped and full. We were stuck for a while but when the train got moving, we heard





I've seen the younger generation grow in confidence, realising that they can make a difference, and that sharing Jesus is something personal and accessible.

this person say, 'Thank you, Jesus,' and the other person said, 'I don't think Jesus had anything to do with it!' So from this we joined the conversation and asked if they knew Jesus. One person said, 'No, not personally,' and then we asked, 'Would you like to?' A few said no, but one guy said yes, so we explained the good news to them by starting with Adam and how we all sin but then God sent His only Son because of His amazing love, grace and mercy for us, and His Son Jesus lived a perfect life none of us could live but died a sinner's death to save us from our sins so that we can have eternal life with God.

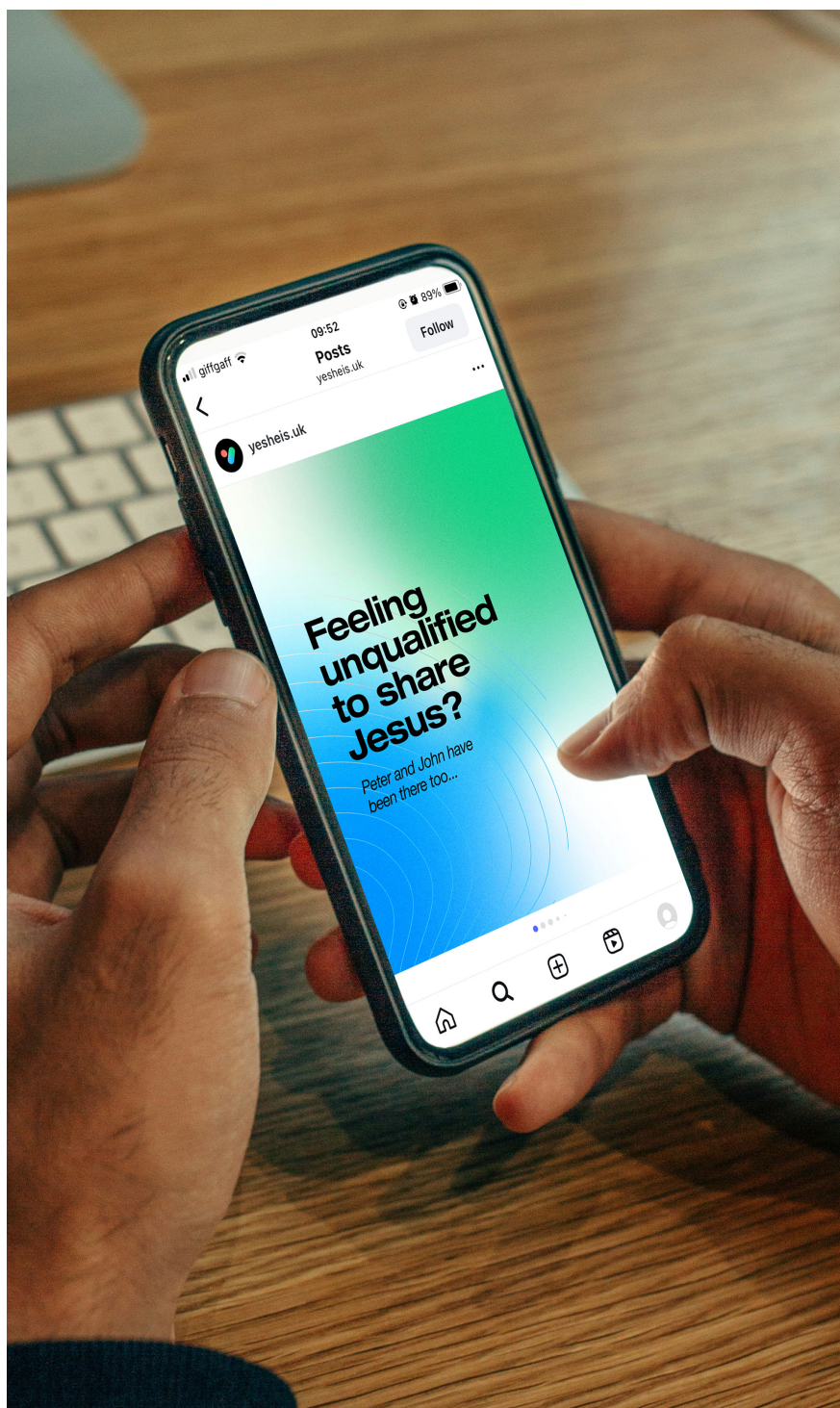
"When we were telling one person, others were listening as well. We asked if they would like to dedicate their lives to Jesus and explained what that looks like. One said no, but I'm praising God for those planted seeds in him and those around him."

These community members were so inspired and encouraged by this challenge that they were pushed to share their faith and could have potentially brought someone to know Jesus. Being 'rooted in community' laid the foundation.

### Training through social posts

As part of our yesHEis platform, we want to help people who feel like they are 'underqualified' to share their faith. By providing training, we are able to provide them with the tools they need to be confident in sharing the gospel. This is an invaluable element of our community, as it lays the foundation for development and growth.

Through our Instagram account, we offer training through carousel posts.



These are posts made up of multiple prompts that allow the viewer to go on a journey of understanding and gaining knowledge.

Our training content gave a community member ideas on how to share their faith better, and provided them with the inspiration to do so. Here's what they said:

"... I am trying to share Jesus with my friends who don't know Him yet. I try and pray for them every day and had the opportunity to invite them to a Christmas market evening at my

church. Four of them came and got to meet everyone there and see what my church is like, which was so nice for them to see. Thank you for your posts – they are so encouraging and there are so many amazing ideas on there to inspire to share about Jesus."

*Lucy Bugg is a content specialist working for Christian Vision, who has a passion for helping others share the gospel.*



# Thresholds and tables

**David Smyth**, head of Evangelical Alliance NI, shares the importance of ‘extending our tables’ and how hospitality can provide a great opportunity to share the gospel.



**M**any of the best and most significant moments in our lives are shared over

Sunday lunches, BBQs, family feasts, dinner or just a cup of tea with friends.

Hospitality is central in almost every culture. I’ve sat in near strangers’ homes sharing food around their tables in India, Ukraine, Malawi, Zambia and many other parts of the world. I’m sure you have similar stories.

Something essential happens when we cross into each other’s homes and share food together. It’s like we were created to do this.

However, in this moment where there is a pandemic of loneliness, distrust and polarisation, it can be tempting to keep others out. But what if instead of

building higher walls, we opened our doors and extended our tables?

I find it fascinating that when God wants His people to remember how He rescued them from slavery in Egypt, He commanded them to share a meal together. When Jesus wanted us to remember how He rescued us from sin and death, He commanded us to share a meal together.

The coming of the Son of Man is referenced several times in Luke’s Gospel: on one occasion, as the one who came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10), and on another, as the one who came eating and drinking (Luke 7:34). Jesus’ mission was salvation and redemption and His method was to eat and drink with people. The very Bread of Life promises that “whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever

believes in me shall never thirst” (John 6:35). The physical sharing of a meal can open up the opportunity for a spiritual encounter. Throughout scripture we see stories of people sharing food and hospitality and God being present.

The very definition of hospitality is to “welcome the stranger”. Just as God has welcomed us into His family, we can welcome others into ours by extending our tables. Professor Rosaria Butterfield, author of books such as *Openness Unhindered* and *The Gospel Comes with a House Key*, encourages us to practise radically ordinary hospitality, seeing “strangers as neighbours and neighbours as the family of God”.

Imagine if Christian households were known for sharing God’s hospitality with their neighbours over a meal. Very intentionally, very simply, very humbly.





Jesus' mission was salvation and redemption and His method was to eat and drink with people.

David Smyth is head of Evangelical Alliance Northern Ireland and co-ordinates the Public Leader: Northern Ireland course. He is a former solicitor and represents the Evangelical Alliance on a range of government, civic and charitable forums.

## Here are a few practical tips:

- 1. Pray about who to invite.** Maybe you already have someone on your mind to invite or maybe you don't quite know yet. May your first guest be the Holy Spirit, inviting Him to lead you.
- 2. Pray that you will see your neighbours as Christ does.** Don't see your interactions as isolated evangelistic moments. Instead, love people as God's image bearers. When dining with Pharisees and lawyers, Jesus instructs them to "invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind" to their feasts, for in doing so they "will be blessed, because they cannot repay you" (Luke 14:13-14). Who could you ask who cannot repay you?
- 3. What will you make?** It can be tempting to try to wow your guests by cooking an impressive and technically skilled dinner, but don't confuse the art of entertaining with the heart of hospitality. Whether you live in a palace or a bedsit, serve a roast dinner with all the trimmings or a cup of tea and a biscuit, share what you have – your food and your faith.
- 4. Approach your conversations with respect and understanding.** Many of our neighbours will hold to different values and belief systems than we do. How amazing that we have these freedoms! So be prepared to listen genuinely, to be questioned, and to give an answer for the hope that you have. There is a new openness to faith in many unexpected places right now.
- 5. Make hospitality a habit.** Some of us are planners, so send an invite and get the date in the diary as you plan out your week. Some of us are more spontaneous, so create some margin, make extra food and keep your eyes open for opportunities to accommodate those last-minute guests. Hospitality isn't a one-off event; it's a way of life.

This autumn and harvest, we have so much to be thankful for, physically and spiritually. Who will you share it with?







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# We all belong



**Susana McIntyre**, our membership engagement and communications assistant in Scotland, offers up a prayer of thanks for the gift of community

## *Our Father,*

We thank you for the gift of community.  
You did not create us to be alone,  
But placed us into families, churches  
and neighbourhoods –  
To journey together through our  
everyday lives.

You have called us to bear with one  
another in love,  
To carry each other's burdens,  
To live in harmony as one body,  
To rejoice with those who rejoice  
And weep with those who weep.

Help us to walk in this vision of community.  
Where we have forgotten others or left  
them behind,  
Forgive us and help us to make things right.  
Teach us what it means to build your  
church together.

We lift to you those on the margins –  
The sick, the widow, the lonely, the lost,  
All those seeking connection and refuge,  
Searching for a place to belong.

May they find their true home in you –  
The God who sees and hears,  
Who never leaves nor forsakes,  
Whose love is a mighty refuge.

Help us also be your hands and feet,  
Creating spaces of warmth and welcome,  
Where all are known, seen and loved.  
Let our lives extend Christ's blessing  
of belonging.

Thank you that you are making all things new.  
May our communities here be a foretaste  
Of the day when we will feast at your table,  
And worship as one voice with every tribe,  
tongue and nation.

We long for that day of perfect community –  
When mourning will be no more,  
Division will be healed  
And joy will be complete.

Until then, help us to live as your people –  
To love deeply, welcome generously  
And live rooted in your boundless love.  
Amen.

*Susana McIntyre is the membership engagement and communications assistant at Evangelical Alliance Scotland. She enjoys finding creative ways to share what the Scotland team is doing and connecting with churches, organisations and individuals across Scotland. Originally from Northern Ireland, she moved to Scotland to study French and modern history at the University of St Andrews. Susana joined the Evangelical Alliance through its graduate scheme and has since taken on her current role.*



# Investing in the future: advancing youth ministry through professional training



Principal **Andy du Feu** and youth work lecturer **Paul Cable** from Moorlands College share from their experience of training Christian youth workers and call on the church to increase its investment in reaching the next generation.



**T**aylor Swift, Marcus Rashford or Tom Cruise – who would you trust to lead your youth

group? It's a question that puts a smile on the faces of our first-year students. Swift fills stadiums. Rashford's advocacy for vulnerable young people earns kudos. Tom Cruise? ... Few are willing to take responsibility for the kind of risk assessments involved!

The light-hearted exercise delves into the heart of something serious: what do we really value in those called to work with young people?

Faced with a decline in trained youth

ministers, we've designed programmes that are fun, engaging and relevant, hoping they'll draw young people in. But here's the truth: the reason these spaces flourish isn't the slick content. It's the people behind them, like the faithful volunteer who never misses a week, welcoming each young person by name. It's people who help root young people within church communities; it's the job of the whole church to raise young people (see Deuteronomy 6:4–7).

But this is also where things can become difficult. We've all seen the misuse of power by people on platforms, and the lasting damage when trust is broken. When it comes to solutions, we

don't pretend to have all the answers. But we do want to take this moment to fly the flag for training professional Christian youth workers.

Our friends at South West Youth Ministries (SWYM) highlighted a striking trend in their region: many churches place surprisingly little value on qualifications for youth work. One respondent suggested, "Experience can be as valuable as a qualification," while another argued, "The most important things are a passion for young people and a strong faith." These perspectives reveal a gap in our thinking about equipping people for ministry. And that's a shame.



**“We believe deeply that the whole church benefits when it invests in training youth workers alongside volunteers.”**



*Young person celebrating their baptism*

## Invaluable training

Hope is a community youth worker. She suggests, “Youth work is about showing up – consistently, compassionately and locally. It’s a quiet kind of ministry that serves the community by creating spaces where young people are seen, heard and safe.” For her, beyond even

skills and character formation, “The professional qualification and the placements I had meant that I could step into youth work spaces with confidence and respect. It gave me credibility.”

Rob leads a thriving Anglican youth ministry. He reflects, “It’s crazy to think I graduated almost ten years ago, but the formation I received is essential to the ministries I’ve overseen.”

This isn’t to diminish those with rich experience and deep faith – far from it. Church-based youth work has always been powered by volunteers. We want to honour them for their extraordinary investment in young people. However, we believe deeply that the whole church benefits when it invests in training youth workers alongside volunteers.

Like Rob and Hope, we are thankful for the process of formation that did far more than give us a box of resources to ‘do’ youth work. It formed our character, deepened our awareness, and developed the kind of professional instincts needed to sustain a lifetime of ministry with young people.

And maybe Tom Cruise has something to teach us after all. Behind every stunt are countless hours of training and support. The same is true for us. Scott, a Baptist youth pastor,

says, “I was equipped not only with the biblical tools to teach God’s word with conviction and authority but also the practical foundation for building a faithful youth ministry.” This is often the result of intentional formation. If we want to see young people rooted in communities, we don’t need daredevils or superstars on platforms. But we do need people who are willing to do the slow, unseen work of being formed for ministry – and churches who are willing to invest in them.

Could you invest in training up one of your volunteers? Is there a sense of calling that you could affirm? Find out more by scanning the QR code.



*Scott leading a Bible study*

*Andy du Feu leads Moorlands College and is also trustee of Urban Promise UK and the Oswald Chambers Publishing Association.*

*Paul Cable is a lecturer in youth work at Moorlands College and has led Christian youth work in London and Wiltshire.*



# Cultivating community in a North Korean prison camp

**Galvin Calver** recalls listening to the powerful story of Hae Woo, who planted a church in the worst of places.



I was away speaking at a conference. It had been a great week, and we'd all been really challenged

on how to live wholeheartedly and inter-dependently as a church community. During one of the evening meetings a speaker called Hae Woo shared. She was tiny and made her way unassumingly onto the stage to be interviewed by some of the team from Open Doors. Nothing in my ministry up to this point had prepared me for the challenge that was about to come from the mouth of this hero of the faith.

Hae Woo was from North Korea. She had been incarcerated for her faith in a labour camp and was one of the bravest and most sold-out Christians I had ever encountered. The power of her words was not lost in translation and as she explained about starving in North Korea and all that it meant to be a Christian there, even the hardest of hearts in the room couldn't avoid being deeply moved. As Hae Woo outlined what it

looked like to plant a church in the labour camp that she was imprisoned in, the true cost of following Jesus in her context impacted us all. The church had to be planted in the toilet queue as this was the only place you could ever realistically gather with other believers. The tiny congregation would whisper quietly the truths of God together, knowing their very lives depended on not getting caught. They also had tiny biodegradable tracts of scripture that were their most prized possessions. What was very clear was how vital this small church was for those believers. It was hard to see how they would possibly cope without the support, love and prayers of one another.

The church in the labour camp especially loved it when it rained. This provided the only real opportunity to worship in song without fear of being caught. As the rain lashed down the Christians would cry out in worship with the kind of unbridled freedom that they were denied the rest of the time as the guards stayed inside during bad

weather. The interview with Hae Woo lasted about 45 minutes, but the time flew by. You could hear a pin drop as the whole crowd of thousands hung on this incredible woman's every word. As she drew to a close, she rose to her feet and sang in what was little more than a whisper 'Amazing Grace' in her native tongue. There was not a dry eye in the house as we all realised quite how different it would be to live out our faith in her homeland. It was also amazing to see what is possible for such an authentic Christian community. This small North Korean woman instantly became a spiritual hero to me among a crowd of thousands.

That evening showed the importance of a local church community in every context, however challenging. We are built for community with other believers, and it is essential that we meet together and grow in our walk with Jesus. Whether that is in a North Korean prison camp or my own context of suburban London, we were all made to be rooted in local Christian community.



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