

Faith and Society Files: The BIG Welcome Community

The Big Welcome is a simple idea to encourage Christians to invite someone they know to something they love. But the BIG Welcome goes even wider than that – recognising that we are Christians 24/7 with numerous opportunities to share something of God’s love and welcome with those we meet. This File directs you to resources to help you develop these into crossingplace opportunities.



Houses

Many people in the UK lead lonely lives, and hardly know the people who live next door. There are lots of ways in which churches can help to build a sense of community, and support the most vulnerable people close by. All of them need that most precious gift of time, but will make such a difference to those people living in your local area.



Why not begin by organising a **prayer walk** around your community and asking God to open your eyes and ears to the needs that exist. Perhaps this will prompt a conversation with people you meet on your walk. Or you could set up a **Community Prayer Treasure Hunt** - a 60-minute family-friendly adventure outside, praying for your local community. For details, see: www.hopetogether.org.uk/Publisher/File.aspx?ID=92580

Ask everyone in your church - individuals, home groups and youth groups to take up the challenge to deliberately set out to bless others with **acts and words of kindness and support**. Bless someone - anyone! Just go for it and bless. How about asking God what it is that you could do? There's a whole host of possibilities from buying someone a coffee to offering to pray for a friend or neighbour. What is it that you could offer? What have you been given by God which you could pass on? Perhaps it's a gift of money to a local charity, a bunch of flowers to someone lonely in a local care home, or a freshly baked cake for the drop-in shelter. Whatever it is, go for it!



The Diamond Jubilee was a great opportunity to get people together for a **street party**. But there's no need to wait for the next Jubilee to get together with neighbours! Find any excuse to get out and meet the people with whom you share a street, road, estate or block of flats. **The BIG Lunch** is an annual event begun by the Eden Project, which can be a wonderful way to build up your community, and may lead to other joint activities. Pray that God will help develop relationships through these events so that his love can be shared.

To find out more, see: www.thebiglunch.com and have a look at Baptist minister Angie Tunstall's story of planning a BIG Lunch in her street in 2009, at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=16SWMUF3qhk

Another source of useful information for planning a street party celebration is: www.streetparty.org.uk

The StoweAway is a community group for the people of the new Wichelstowe housing development in Swindon. Set up by local churches and working in partnership with Sovereign Housing and other relevant organisations they seek to provide resources and activities that will bring the community together. Could you provide something similar in your area? Have a look at: <http://thestoweaway.org.uk>



TheStoweAway
a place to meet

The Gym/Leisure Centre

For many people, sport is a passion and watching or playing the game is an important part of their lives.



If you're a 'sporty' person who enjoys taking part in a team sport, going to the gym or watching your favourite team, why not use this crossingplace opportunity to share the good news and God's love with others who share your interest. The gym or sports field can be a place where you worship God and are a missionary to those who don't yet know him.

Have a think about breaking out of the church walls and finding new ways to engage with your local community. Can you host a Family Fun Day or an 'Old School Sports Day'?

Are there people who share a sporting interest with you or some of your friends? Could you invite them to watch a match together, or participate in sport together?

Whatever it is, have some fun doing it ... you never know what God can do in and through you!

Why not get in touch with *Christians in Sport* to link in with the amazing network of support, prayer, evangelistic resources on offer? See www.christiansinsport.org.uk for more information.

Third Space Ministries seeks to demonstrate God's love in the third spaces of society, with a particular emphasis on the leisure industry: sport, music, theatre, holidays, nightclubs and so on. They facilitate this through chaplaincy work, and enabling team outreach and working in partnership with the local church.

www.thirdspaceministries.co.uk

Doctors' Surgery and Hospital

The doctors' surgery and hospital can be places which welcome the help of volunteers - perhaps as drivers taking people to an appointment, perhaps as chaplains supporting people through difficult news. This can be a great way to show care and concern for members of your community.



If you are a Christian who is also a qualified nurse, why not consider becoming a **Parish Nurse**? These registered nurses have some community experience and work from local churches to develop a whole-person health ministry in the community.

Parish Nursing Ministries UK is a not-for-profit Christian organisation whose purpose is to maximise the wellbeing of society in community through three specific means:

- Application of professional nursing skills to healthy living and coping with illness
- Response to people's inner (spiritual) needs
- Mobilisation of ordinary members of church communities and beyond.

See www.parishnursing.org.uk for more information.



Shopping Precinct

How frustrating it can be to be stuck in a queue to pay for shopping! But what an opportunity to enter into conversation with other people!



Perhaps you'll meet someone who has been feeling lonely, and would value some friendship; maybe you can offer some kind words of support and encouragement to the shop assistant who is rushed off his feet. God can use these times if we will let him.

Why not consider being creative and taking **church into the shopping precinct** and encourage people to stop and think about God? Baptist Union President and evangelist Chris Duffett has tried many innovative ideas on the streets, and you can read about many of them in the 'Saints on the Streets' section (St St) of his blog at: <http://duffett.wordpress.com>

One of Chris's ideas which has been developed into a national initiative is **Get in the Picture**. This simple idea enables churches to get the Christmas message right onto the streets of their town, village or community – setting up a stable scene in the lead up to Christmas and inviting people to dress up and literally 'get in the picture'. Posing as figures in a nativity scene they have their photo taken, free of charge, which is then uploaded to the Get in the Picture website ready to be downloaded and sent to family and friends.

Get in the Picture is a clear reminder of the true Christmas story, and offers the opportunity to engage in conversation and invite people to your Christmas services and activities. See: www.baptist.org.uk/getinthepicture for details.



Street Pastors

Street Pastors is an inter-denominational Church response to urban problems, engaging with people on the streets to care, listen and dialogue.

Pioneered in London in January 2003 by the Revd Les Isaac, it has seen some remarkable results, including drops in crime in areas where teams have been working. There are now some 9000 trained volunteers in around 250 teams around the United Kingdom.



Each city project is set up by Ascension Trust and run by a local coordinator with support from Ascension Trust and local churches and community groups, in partnership with Police, Council and other statutory agencies.

For more information about setting up a Street Pastors project in your area, see: www.streetpastors.co.uk

Healing on the Streets

With its origins in Northern Ireland in 2005, the Healing on the Streets model is spreading around the world. It's a non-confrontational way of connecting with people on the streets of our towns and cities and introducing them to Jesus.

Healing on the Streets is a simple way to reach out to the lost and hurting on the streets of your town or city. It enables you to connect with your community every week, powerfully expressing God's love in the market place, whatever the weather. Simply invite people to sit on chairs so you can pray for them.



For details, see: <http://healingonthestreets.com>

Nursery, School and College

Churches used to be at the centre of the community, but frequently it is the local school that now fulfils this function, as most families in the area have some link with it. Schools and colleges are also the places where children and young people are to be found for much of the week, whereas the number coming to church regularly has generally reduced. Therefore, to support the heart of many communities and to influence another generation for Christ, linking the local church to a nearby school or college makes a **crossingplace** where gospel values can be demonstrated and explained.

For many years, parents and friends have been welcomed into schools in order to support the children and staff during lessons - perhaps hearing younger children read, assisting with a craft activity, sharing a particular expertise with a class.

Church members have sometimes taken up these opportunities to give their time in service to those in the school. As well as helping out during the school day, there are many additional opportunities to engage with the children and staff in extra-curricular activities such as breakfast, lunch time and after school clubs for the children, and supporting the school as it builds links with the local community.



The Church and School series of **Files** offer guidance for good practice, helpful resources, and stories to inspire and encourage you as you support the staff and students at your local school or college.



Current titles available are:

- Breathe
- Celebrating Christmas and Easter
- Church Support for the Early Years Foundation Stage
- Giving Young People a Second Chance
- Love your Local Further Education College
- Planning RE Days for 16-19s in Sixth Forms in Schools and Colleges
- Praying for Schools
- REInspired
- Resources from Youth for Christ
- School Assemblies
- School Governors - Making a Difference
- Sharing our Christian Heritage
- The Teachers in your Church
- Welcoming a School to your Church

These are available for free download from:
www.baptist.org.uk/Groups/220861/Sharing_and_Living.aspx

Open the Book offers a programme of themed and dramatised Bible stories at no charge to the schools. Each session is around 10 minutes long and fits comfortably into assembly times.



Teams of volunteer storytellers use drama, mime, props, costume - even the children and staff themselves - to present Bible stories in ways that are lively, engaging, informative ... and great fun for everyone involved! It enables children in schools to have the opportunity to discover all the wonder and wisdom that the Bible can offer!

Could your church offer a team of people to deliver Open the Book to your local schools? Training is available. For more information, see www.openthebook.net

Office/Workplace

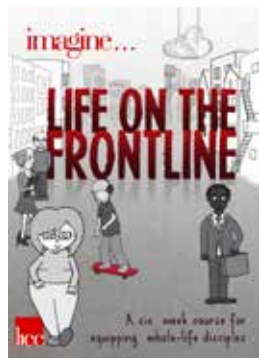
For many people in church, the place they spend most of their week is in the workplace - whether that is a shop, office, factory, school, etc.



Many people are finding that they are working longer hours, with more pressure, less joy and little sense of meaning and purpose in what they do. Christians are called to honour God and make a difference in their workplace.

The **London Institute for Contemporary Christianity (LICC)** is committed to helping disciples of Christ to honour God in their work and bring him into their workplace. They have produced many resources to help you to make a difference, wherever you are. Have a look at www.licc.org.uk for details of the resources and events which are available.

Life on the Frontline is the latest resource from LICC. We may be old or young; healthy or infirm; rich or poor; employed or not. We may be busy or bored; optimistic or pessimistic; radically cutting edge or relatively retro. Whoever we are, as Christians, we have at least one thing in common: we each have a Frontline.



- Your Frontline: the place where you spend much of your time
- Your Frontline: the place where you meet people who don't know Jesus
- Your Frontline: the place God has called you
- Your Frontline: the place of possibility and potential

Often though, we don't see ourselves, our workplaces, homes, colleges and clubs in this light. But what might God want to do where we are day by day? How might he use us? How will we grow?

For details, see: www.licc.org.uk/imagine-church/resources/life-on-the-frontline

Cafe

Cafes and coffee shops seen quite a revival in recent years, with most high streets having at least one thriving business.



They have become popular places for social interaction - a place to meet, talk, write, read or pass the time - and therefore the potential to be a crossingplace.



cafechurch brings communities into the relaxed café atmosphere of Costa Coffee and other coffee shops to deal with issues from a faith perspective. At cafechurch you'll tackle issues such as fair trade, the environment, stress,

adoption, parenting, debt and divorce, together with quizzes, interviews, round table discussions, live music with great coffee and great chat!

For more information, including details of training events for those thinking of starting up a cafechurch, see: www.cafechurch.net

Bible Society has produced some excellent resources which can be used to prompt your coffee shop conversations. **lyfe** is about hearing God, through the Bible, in the company of others. It is a conversation between friends seeking a richer relationship with God, making discoveries together through hearing and reflecting on the Bible.

- Gather together a small group of four or five friends
- Find a cafe to meet in
- Download the sessions from the lyfe website at



www.lyfe.org.uk/lyfe-sessions

Pub

Like cafes, pubs are great venues for meeting with friends and sharing time together in a relaxed atmosphere.



They also offer a venue for having some more meaningful conversations about the things that really matter in life.

Table Talk aims to provide a safe place for people to begin these conversations. In every game there are six big questions.

To play the game, six to eight people gather around a table. Once the introduction has been read, 16 question cards relating to the big question are placed facing up on the table.

The game starts as someone picks up a card and poses the question to the group. At any point in the game someone at the table can pick up another card and pose that question to the group. Games normally last between 30 and 45 minutes and people answer four or five questions.

The hope is that, as you get together over six sessions, relationships will be built and strengthened.



Table Talk for Easter, Talk Talk for Friends, Table Talk for All Age Messy Moments and Table Talk for Blokes are already available - more packs are being developed.

Find out more at: www.table-talk.org

At Christmas time, talk to the Landlord about leading some **carol singing** in the pub. Most people enjoy joining in with the familiar carols, and you could use this as an opportunity to invite other pub-goers to your church carol service, or other special Christmas services.

Church

If your church has its own building, this can be a valuable resource for other community groups. Maybe you already hire out rooms for regular groups to use the facilities. Are there ways that you can be making a difference to the people who regularly visit your church building? How can you share God's big welcome with them as they attend an evening class/baby clinic or other activity?



Try to put yourself in the shoes of someone visiting your church building - how welcoming does it seem? Does the building look like people care? Or does it seem as though it has been designed to keep people out?! What sort of impression do your noticeboards give? Is there enough information for visitors to know how they could find out more about your church? Are there ways that church members can offer a really warm welcome to those who attend other events?

Church-run activities

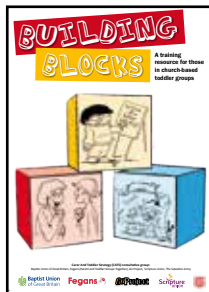
Many churches use their buildings through the week to welcome people to church-run activities such as lunch clubs for older people, parent and toddler groups, youth groups, etc. All of these provide opportunities to share God's love and welcome and make people feel special.

Supporting parents and toddlers

Baptist churches are renowned for toddler groups – mums and tots, carers and toddlers, grandparents and grandchildren, dads and little ones, 'special' toddlers and even twins' groups! Research carried out in 2006, indicated that 28,000 adults and 36,000 young children attend a Baptist church toddler group each week. Clearly these groups are doing well in serving their communities, providing a welcoming, enjoyable and safe environment.

The **Toddler Group Mission File** offers practical ideas and inspiring stories to help you develop your church's Toddler Group and make it a crossingplace. It also includes an extensive list of other resources which you might find helpful. Download it free of charge from: www.baptist.org.uk/toddler

One such resource is **Building Blocks** - a free training resource for those wanting to develop their church-based Toddler Groups, or anyone planning to start a new one. It was prepared by the 1277 group and can be downloaded from: www.baptist.org.uk/buildingblocks



The parent and toddler world has traditionally been populated by mostly mothers and female carers; relatively few fathers have taken part. **Who Let The Dads Out?** seeks to change that culture by taking the usual parent and toddler format and specifically targeting it at fathers, male carers and their children. What began as a local church initiative in 2003 has now grown, and there are around 50 *Who Let the Dads Out?* groups around the country.

A book telling the story of how *Who Let The Dads Out?* came into being, and offering a practical guide for setting up and running the monthly sessions, is now available:

Author: Mark Chester
(founder of *Who let the Dads Out?*)

Publisher: BRF (March 2012)

ISBN: 978 184101 885 0

RRP: £6.99

See also: <http://wholetthedadsout.org>

Research has shown that 52% of the UK's under-5s attend a church-based toddler group. That's around 2 million children who regularly go somewhere warm and safe to play, but they are not the only ones who benefit. Obviously this is also of benefit to the parents and carers who attend with them. To this end a new consortium of churches and agencies has come together to support church toddler groups and help release the mission opportunities that exist through toddler groups. The consortium is called 1277 as, on average, a UK child has just 1,277 days between birth and starting nursery education. Together, we want to 'make them count' for the children, for their families and for the toddler groups that they attend. To find out more go to: www.1277.org.uk/groups



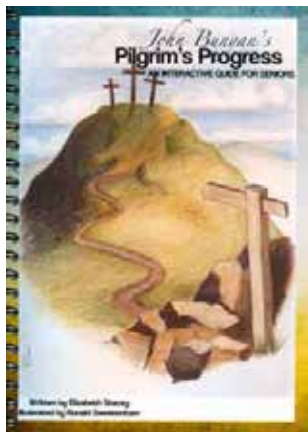
Meeting the needs of Older People

Many churches also support the older people in their community by providing lunches and organising transport to these and other midweek groups. Providing this welcoming service is so valuable to those who live alone.

Some churches have developed their work with older people over the past few years to really engage with third and fourth age seniors, and have seen older people come to faith through this work.



Pilgrim's Progress Study Guide



John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* is a wonderful story about a pilgrim called Christian and his adventures as he tries to find his way to the City of Gold (heaven). Liz Stacey has developed an interactive study guide which she's used with some 80 and 90 year old seniors to help

them gain a greater understanding of what the Christian life is all about, especially the wonderful provision of eternal life God has made through Jesus. Many found faith, and all experienced comfort.

The study guide costs £25 + p&p and is full of interesting ideas, dramas, and relevant artwork for each session. In fact everything you need to run your group. To order a copy, or find out more, contact Liz on e.stacey@talktalk.net

Holiday at Home

Holiday clubs have been run for children during their school holidays by many churches, and for many years. However, holiday clubs for older people, who are often unable to go away on holiday for health or financial reasons, are a valuable way to share God's love and serve the community. Many older people can feel lonely and isolated - a problem which intensifies during the summer when regular clubs have a break, and carers or neighbours are away on their holidays.

Providing a holiday club during the summer is a wonderful way to honour older people in the community, to build up relationships and share God's love with them. Many Baptist churches have used this crossingplace opportunity to develop creative teams to plan and run special summer holiday at home events.

To get you started, have a look at the Holiday at Home resource produced by the Outlook Trust. See www.outlook-trust.org.uk for details.

Sheltered Accommodation



It is easy for people living in sheltered accommodation and residential care homes to feel isolated and forgotten by those 'outside'. If you have an area of sheltered accommodation in your community, could you develop a group of people to make regular visits to the residents? Some of the people may well live far from their loved ones and would appreciate the offer of a big welcome from visitors. God can use you to meet the spiritual needs of these residents.

Perhaps a group of singers and musicians (of all ages) from your church could arrange to sing carols at Christmas or rehearse some 'old favourites' to lead a sing-along at another time of year. Or maybe you could take some harvest gifts to share, and sing some of the well-known harvest hymns together. Try to involve the residents in what you do - they may have special memories which they'd love to share. You could build on this, and maybe offer a regular 'Songs of Praise' style service with favourite hymns and readings.

As you get to know people living in the home, you make like to offer a Senior Alpha course, or the Pilgrim's Progress studies already mentioned. For those unable to get out to church, having a visit shows they are valued, and can make such a difference to their lives.

For more information on supporting older people see the Outlook Trust website at: www.outlook-trust.org.uk

The Park

Most communities, even in city centres, have areas of green which can be used by families, friends and individuals for a bit of relaxation and exercise.



Could your church start up a regular community activity in your local park? Your more sporty church members could join a **sports league or team**, whilst others might be able to offer time to help out 'behind the scenes' - providing refreshments, maintaining equipment, etc.

Why not get together and plan an '**It's a Knockout**' style event that all ages could take part in?

Or offer a '**Praise in the Park**' service to mark a special occasion?

How about planning a **family fun day** with free activities for people to join in with? The offer of a free gift can be a good way to start a conversation about God's gift to us all.

The Arthur Rank Centre has an **inflatable church** which is available to hire for such events, and it makes a great - and unusual - focal point! Why not consider hiring it so that your church gets noticed at your local community event.

You can use it in many situations and adapt it for a variety of purposes, such as:

- a quiet area for prayer during a local event
- an exhibition about your church at a town fair
- a life size nativity scene with church members dressing up as the main characters
- a prayer space for praying on the streets
- an Easter garden
- a coffee shop
- a book stall
- a place for seekers to come and find out more about the Christian faith
- a quiet place

The Bus Stop

Travelling by public transport has the potential to be a very sociable way to get from A to B!! Very often though, commuters and shoppers sit in stony silence, engrossed in their own thoughts and oblivious to the needs of their fellow travellers!



Why not buck the trend and start up a conversation with the person you are next to at the bus stop? Pray that God will help you and that he will use you to make a difference to that person - who knows where it may lead?



Or follow Baptist minister Chris Duffett's lead - and offer a free hug, a doughnut or a bacon sandwich, to those waiting at a local bus stop!

Demonstrate the love and welcome of Jesus in practical ways - and tell people why you're doing it if they ask.

