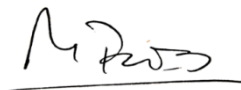


URBAN LIFE: ONE YEAR ON

Welcome to the first annual report from *Urban Life*. The report presents the developments that have taken place in our first year as well as some future plans. We hope too that the report will inspire your own involvement in mission and suggest some practical ways in which Urban Life might be of help in your own situation.

We would very much like to keep in contact with you. We would welcome personal enquiries and these can be made by contacting Mike Pears, the director of *Urban Life*, at mpears@urbanlife.org. We also send out a regular email news update and you can sign up for this on the homepage of the website www.urbanlife.org

Thank you



Mike Pears



What is Urban Life About?

Urban Life provides training and facilitates research. We aim to help congregations, Christian communities and mission teams to engage thoughtfully and creatively with marginalised and deprived places. Our approach is distinctive in a number of important ways:

- Rather than asking people to come to a classroom, learning takes place where mission is actually happening. Learning is from the ground up and engages with what really matters in each context.
- Rather than training individuals, whole groups participate in the learning experience together. In effect groups take part in learning as they are involved in mission.

By taking this approach to 'learning on the job' Urban Life aims to build the church's capacity for mission in deprived communities. It seeks to work together with small groups, churches, regional associations and colleges to facilitate learning so that well-informed and thoughtful approaches to mission can be explored by people at all levels, whether in a team on the ground or those doing accredited courses.

What does Urban Life Do?

Urban Life will provide a wide range of learning resources for groups involved in mission and these will be developed over a number of years. We have been keen to get going as quickly as possible and have made it a priority to launch a number of initiatives in the first year; the rest of this report introduces the main areas that we have been working on.

Urban Life resources are designed to serve practically in a number of ways: to support congregations and small Christian communities in existing or new initiatives; to provide structured learning for NAMs and Continued Ministerial Development; to support groups who want to develop work in particular marginalised communities.



LEARNING JOURNEYS



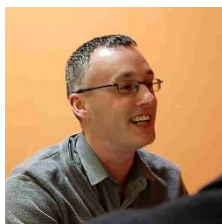
Learning Journeys are one of the core ways that *Urban Life* will deliver training in local areas. They are based on a menu of modules which are specifically tailored to help Christian communities understand and engage with marginalisation and deprivation and to explore approaches to incarnational mission in their own contexts.

The inductive approach to learning and the flexible use of modules enables *Learning Journeys* to be adapted to the specific circumstances and contexts of the learning community. In practice *Learning Journeys* will be delivered by facilitators who will accompany the group over a period which may last for up to three years.

Learning Journeys incorporate a number of additional important aspects:

- Group formation: learning as a whole group enables the spiritual and relational formation of the group.
- Mission focused: the Learning Group's encounters with its wider community are the main focus from which its learning takes place.
- Incarnational living: learning in and from the context enables the group to form mature relationships with those around them.
- Practical theology: good theological reflection is a critical part of sustaining good inductive learning.
- Discipleship and formation: personal formation and transformation is an integral part of the journey of mission.

To develop *Learning Journeys*, a core team of four people have been convened. These include Andrew Grinnell, Anna Ruddick, Carmel Murphy and Mike Pears. Over a three year period they will work on curriculum and production of training materials. They will be responsible for training and supporting a network of ‘facilitators’ in urban areas across the UK who will be able to deliver training in their own regions. In 2016 we plan to start four *Learning Journeys* pilot groups.



Andrew Grinnell



Anna Ruddick



Mike Pears



Carmel Murphy

CREATIVE CONVERSATIONS

‘Creative Conversations’ is run in partnership with CMS Pioneer Leadership Training and is designed to assist churches and those involved in urban mission to develop a deeper awareness of their own location or context. It uses established methods of research and involves making audio recordings of conversations between small groups of people followed by some careful and thoughtful analysis.



A grant from Durham University (Common Awards/Seedcorn Grant) enabled us to offer funding to two people to each convene between 6 and 8 conversations. The response to our proposal was so enthusiastic that in April 2015 we were able to launch Creative Conversations in Oxford with a group of 14 people from around the country, all of whom are deeply involved in a wide variety of marginal and deprived communities. Through 2015 the two researchers and others in the group will convene conversations as a way of seeking to understand a variety of experiences of marginalisation including those of the elderly on estates, prison leavers, asylum seekers, young unemployed people and the Punk Rock community in South Wales.



Creative Conversations will be further developed through 2016 so that it can be used as a learning tool for groups around the country. It will include a web-based facility for managing research and sharing findings.

EXPLORING YOUR PLACE

Exploring Your Place is an approach to research that can be used on its own or in combination with other methods such as Creative Conversations.

Walking offers a particular opportunity to see the city in new ways. Non-hurried wandering provides the space for us to notice significance and meaning in people and places which usually go unnoticed. Chance encounters, events and conversations can open our eyes to hidden layers and richness in our urban environments. The aim is to get under the skin of the city, to see beyond the familiar, to see meaning in the everyday.

In 2014 and 2015 we have led walks with a number of groups and through them explored issues such

as the effect of globalisation in local communities and the ways in which boundaries can work both positively and negatively in relation to patterns of deprivation in a place.



THEOLOGY-TO-GO



Theology-to-Go aims to encourage ongoing learning and research for those involved in urban ministry and mission by exploring a practical approach to theology that connects with the places and challenges experienced by those in the group.

Theology-to-Go takes a conversational approach to learning and is structured over eight 3-hour sessions throughout a year with a short bibliography and some preparatory reading allocated to each session. Meetings are of a conversational style (always involving food and coffee!) with a mixture of presentation and discussion.

Group members will have access to resources on a dedicated *Theology-to-Go* webpage and where possible the use of local college libraries. In addition online seminars and webinars are arranged around some of the key areas of interest.

Theology-to-Go can be used for newly trained ministers who wish to focus on mission and marginalisation; for ongoing ministerial development; for those working in voluntary sector organisations and Christian charities and for those who are thinking about starting a research degree.

In 2015 we are running *Theology-to-Go* groups in Birmingham and Bristol and in 2016 aim to start a further three groups in other areas.

BI-VOCATIONAL MINISTRY CONSULTATION

This consultation is convened jointly by *Urban Life* and Bristol Baptist College hosted in Bristol on 14-15 July 2015. We recognise that increasing numbers of people are involved concurrently in work related to ministry and work in a 'secular' field. For some this dual involvement is not through choice, but presents a practical way of sustaining church-based ministry. For others it offers a welcome opportunity to engage more creatively in mission.

Through this event we aim to explore the key questions and challenges that patterns of bi-vocational ministry are presenting by drawing together people from a wide variety of interested groups: those involved in bi-vocational ministry and mission; regional ministers and leaders; representatives from colleges; theologians.

The programme for the two days is designed as a structured conversation that will enable a thoughtful and rigorous exploration of the key issues. The intention is that this will be the beginning of an extended process of exploration and research that will shape and inform the work done in regional associations, colleges and mission organisations.

WEBSITE

The *Urban Life* website, which was launched in 2014, is designed to be a platform and resource centre supporting a wide variety of *Urban Life* initiatives. Though still in its early days it already hosts a number of different initiatives:

- **Webinars:** there are currently six webinars on the website with a further four planned in 2015-16
- **On-line seminars:** we are pleased to be filming our first seminar in June 2015 which will be presented by Anthony Reddie. This will be the first of a series exploring key issues relating to mission and marginalisation.
- **Blog:** this is a conversational space with contributions from a wide range of practitioners and researchers. It will include reviews of books and other helpful learning materials and links to other organisations.
- **Platforms for research projects:** the website is hosting dedicated pages for projects such as Creative Conversations, Theology-to-Go, Learning Journeys and Exploring Your Place



POSTGRADUATE DEGREES

MA with a Mission Focus: our aim is to work with a number of partners to launch an MA track in September 2016 with a strong focus on mission studies and particular opportunity to draw on the contextual approach that has been presented in this report. The MA programme is accredited through Durham University and this track would be delivered through a combination of distance learning and contextual learning in different parts of the country.

Research Programmes: in partnership with Bristol Baptist College and Trinity College Bristol we are now offering research degrees (MPhil, MLitt, PhD) validated by the University of Aberdeen and together with Urban Life they are convening a group of supervisors who will enable us to focus on a variety of aspects of mission studies and contextual missiology. Applications are now being welcomed for full time (1-4 years) or part time (2-8 years) study.

PUBLICATIONS

Mission in Marginal Places

Under the auspices of Urban Life, a series of six books is to be published over the next three years by Paternoster. The books will be edited by Mike Pears and Prof. Paul Cloke with the first two manuscripts submitted in August 2015 and published in summer 2016.



Christian mission is facing critical challenges as it seeks to locate itself in diverse, complex and rapidly changing contexts and fundamental questions are being raised about both the theology and practice of mission. The vision behind this series is to engage with these questions in a way that will help to equip existing churches, newly forming Christian communities and church-planting teams to take an informed, thoughtful and creative

approach to the way in which they develop mission in their own particular location.

The series incorporates a number of distinctive elements that it sees as critical for contemporary mission which are then explored and developed from different perspectives. A core conviction is that Christian mission must give priority to those on the margins of society and that questions of 'difference' must therefore be a guiding consideration in all aspects. The authors argue for a practical or 'lived' theology which grapples with the actual experiences of life in a broad range of contexts—as such it is predicated on an approach that seeks to integrate theory and practice as a fundamental for theology of mission. Furthermore, the series contends that, to be both rigorous and credible, mission studies must be in dialogue with the social sciences where much can be learned about the context for mission, for example in relation to globalisation, shifting experiences of 'place' and 'space', self-other relationships, urban studies and changing patterns of marginalisation.

An integral theme of the series concerns the nature of the spirituality and character of the Christian community that is needed to sustain such an embodied and highly contextual approach to mission and the books will seek to help readers ground the theology into their own personal journey and develop rhythms and practices to enable such engagement.

Written and/or edited by Mike Pears and Paul Cloke the series includes a rich variety of authors many of whom have extensive experiences of living in marginalised places and who come from a variety of backgrounds in contemporary missiology, theology and social sciences.

The books:

- *Mission in Marginal Places: the Theory* (2016)
- *Mission in Marginal Places: the Praxis* (2016)
- *Mission in Marginal Places: the Stories* (2017)
- *Exploring Spiritual Landscapes: Mission in Marginal Places* (2017)
- *The Peaceful Way: Mission in Marginal Places* (2018)
- *Placing the Powers: Mission in Marginal Places* (2018)

Meals With Meaning

Meals with Meaning are intended to help communities find creative connections between their own place and the Biblical Story. They are being designed as a innovative table-top resource for groups who want to explore celebrating and worshipping together around the table with a calendar of feasts and festivals. The meal table is a 'storied' place. There are meals that Jesus would have eaten and tell something of the story that framed his life. There are meals that our ancestors would have celebrated that tell something of the histories and stories that frame our lives, sometimes with direct reference to the story of following Jesus and sometimes not. There are meals that we eat that weave into the fabric of our lives and may tell something of our own stories, shaping and framing our lives as they continue to unfold.



HOW IS URBAN LIFE ORGANISED?

Collaborative Partnership

Urban Life is based on a collaborative partnership between the Baptist Union, Baptist Missionary Society (and IMC), Bristol Baptist and Trinity Colleges and Urban Expression. Representatives from each of these organisations form a steering group which oversees the work and development of Urban Life. Members of the steering group include:

- Stephen Keyworth (Baptist Union)
- Ali Boulton (Pioneer Mission Enabler for Southern Counties Baptist Association and West of England Baptist Association)
- Stephen Finamore (Bristol Baptist College)
- Stuart Murray Williams (Urban Expression)
- Paul Cloke (Exeter University)
- Howard Worsley (Trinity College)
- Mark Ord (International Mission Centre)

Partnerships are being developed with other groups and organisations to assist in the development and delivery of learning and research materials. Currently these include CMS Pioneer Leadership Training (Creative Conversations), Livability (Learning Journeys) and Crucible.

Finance and Funding

The launch of Urban Life in May 2014 was enabled by a generous investment in mission from the Baptist Union of Great Britain and further grants have been received for the development of the website (Urban Expression) and Creative Conversations project (Seedcorn Grant / Durham University). Further grant funding is being sought to cover the developmental costs of the projects described.

The medium term strategy is to develop an income stream through the delivery of courses and resources. The extent to which this covers core costs will be balanced with the affordability for those involved in mission.

