



URBAN LIFE

Cultivating mission
in marginal places



THE JOURNEY SO FAR
2014 - 2017

Urban Life is a group of people collaborating to explore new approaches to mission and Christian presence among marginalised people groups and neighbourhoods in UK society.

We began in 2014, formed as a partnership between Baptists Together, Urban Expression, Bristol Baptist College, the Baptist Missionary Society and Trinity College Bristol, with a desire to support those wrestling with what it means to follow Jesus in urban and marginalised communities.

Since then we have worked with Christians from across the country and from a range of denominations, all united by their experience of mission in marginalised communities. We have a story to tell from the last three years, but we're also aware that this is just the beginning...

IN A SNAPSHOT



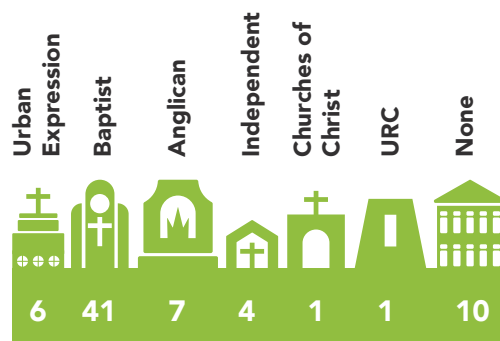
163

The number of people Urban Life has engaged in face-to-face learning experiences



129

The number of people equipped through our webinars



We have worked with people from 6 different denominations and networks as well as with people who would not associate themselves with any formal church structures

THEOLOGY-TO-GO

An eight session discussion group which enables mission practitioners to engage with current themes and ideas in missiology and marginalisation in relation to their own situation and practice.

LEARNING JOURNEYS

A facilitated process designed to help incarnational missional groups reflect on and learn from their context and experiences.

COURSES

Masters modules in Theology and Mission in Contemporary Urban Contexts; Practical Theology and Ethnography; Theological Perspectives on Place and Power; and Christian Responses to Marginalisation, Social Exclusion and Deep-Rooted Deprivation.

CREATIVE CONVERSATIONS

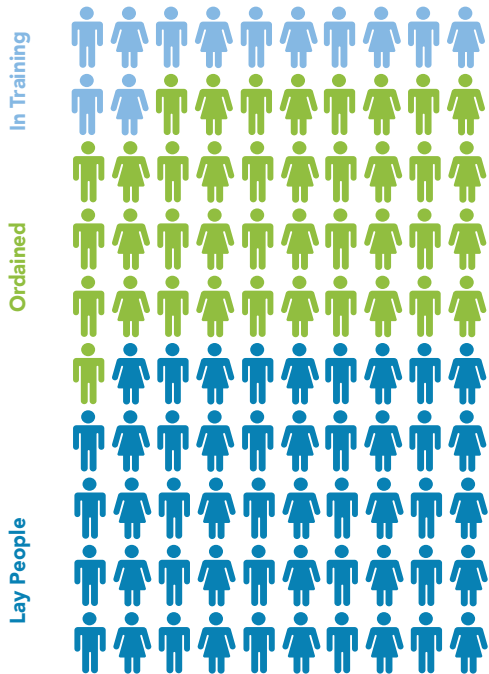
A way for missional practitioners to listen deeply to their communities and to people experiencing marginalisation.

MIGRATION PROJECT

A year-long process of reflection with the founders of Peaceful Borders to examine their response to the 2015 refugee crisis.

MEALS WITH MEANING

Resources for missional groups and their friends to eat and worship together structured around stories, either feasts drawn from Jewish and Christian traditions, or those from the places and communities in which they live.



WE HAVE WORKED
ACROSS THE
COUNTRY



Among the people we have worked with: 12% were undertaking ministerial training, 39% were ordained. The largest group of participants were lay people: 49%

TIME COMMITMENT

Caring
Professionals: 13%

Volunteers: 18%

Part-Time
Employees: 17%



The majority of participants, 52%, were engaged in their mission as full-time employees. 17% were employed in mission part time. 18% volunteered in their mission and 13% were employed in a caring profession which encapsulated their mission.

NETWORKS & INFLUENCE



CELEBRATING, CULTIVATING AND AMPLIFYING LEARNING FROM UK MISSION AT THE MARGINS

We work with a wide range of groups, organisations and networks to enable learning at all levels. Starting with reflection on experiences of mission, we work among congregations and missional groups at the grass roots, with denominational structures and with higher education providers.

GRASS ROOTS

Local congregations

Incarnational missional groups

InnerChange

Tierra Nueva

Seedbed

Urban Expression teams

Newbigin House

William Temple Foundation's
Faith and Flourishing Network

Local missional charities

XLP

Concrete

Hot Chocolate

"Our work with Urban Life has felt like a real gift to the team, a very precious gift that we couldn't have got in another way. Yeah we're very grateful to have it."

Jackie Hird, Joanna Project

MINISTERIAL & FURTHER EDUCATION PROVIDERS

Pioneer Leadership Training,
CMS

Common Awards – Our MA
modules are accredited
through the Common Awards
scheme.

Trinity College

Bristol Baptist College

Regents Park College

DENOMINATIONS & EQUIPPING ORGANISATIONS

BMS World mission

Yorkshire Baptist Association

Fellowship of the Churches of Christ

Diocese of Bath & Wells

Baptist Union Scotland

Housing Justice

Livability

“Urban Life brought a rigorous academic approach with a strong bias towards application ...there is an enthusiastic culture, that God is doing something here that we can join in with. Our partnership with Urban Life has backed up a message of principle, which is that we want to invest more in the poorest parts of the country, and that that’s part of our mission.”

Martin Hodson, BUS

BOOK SERIES

Mission in Marginal Places

Edited by Mike Pears and Paul Cloke, Paternoster

Book 1, *The Theory*, and Book 2, *The Praxis*, were published in 2016 and are available now. The next of this six book series – *The Stories* – will be released in 2017. These edited collections enable the experiences of mission practitioners to engage with and contribute to academic thinking on mission and reflective practice.

“It is clear that there is a learning community beneath this series who are researching and reflecting seriously on an area of mission practice together”

Jonny Baker, CMS



THE URBAN LIFE APPROACH

IN OUR FIRST TWO TO THREE YEARS URBAN LIFE HAS DEVELOPED A PARTICULAR APPROACH TO ENABLING LEARNING. ALL OF OUR WORK IS SHAPED BY THESE PRINCIPLES.



REFLECTION ON PRACTICE

Rigorous theological reflection is a key part of how we learn. The role of Urban Life is to act as theological companions, helping groups to navigate the journey and enable a kind of ‘banter’ between their local story and theological themes.

CONTEXT-BASED

Where we are placed always shapes our learning and Urban Life fosters this connection by situating learning in context and by keeping conversation rooted in context.

INTERDISCIPLINARY

An interdisciplinary approach to theological learning, which means drawing on different fields such as Practical Theology, Social Science, and Urban Theory.

LEARNING IN COMMUNITY

Urban Life believes that everyone is a learner, including the facilitators, so we are strongly relational and participatory in all of our activities.

INCLUSIVE

Open to all who want to reflect on their experience of mission in situations of marginalisation regardless of their role or academic experience.

ATTENTIVE

Attentiveness to everyday life, through the particular use of ethnographic research methods among Christians in mission.

THEOLOGY TO GO

53 people have participated in 7 groups over the last 3 years

Theology-to-Go (TTG) groups gather locally, around food, for conversation that is rooted in their experiences of mission and engages with the latest developments in missiology and thinking on marginalisation.

53 people have participated in 7 groups over the last 3 years in London, Bristol, Birmingham, Glasgow, Dundee and Leeds. A new group will meet in Bristol in the autumn of 2017, and we are looking to develop groups in other host cities in future months.

TTG has been used effectively by denominational bodies and Christian charities as continuing professional development for their staff. It has also attracted individuals wanting to reflect on their life, work and mission in a deeper way with others. A number

of people have used TTG to explore opportunities for and prepare for further study and have gone on to do our MA programme.

“...the group conversations are interesting, there’s clearly a lot of experience in the room... Everything we’ve discussed has been applicable to what I’m doing and what I think about young people.”

JAMES FAWCETT
Youth worker, London

“...my reading is wide but ...a little bit uncoordinated, this way was going to force me to think through a particular subject, enable me to reflect on my practice in

Motherwell. ...I expected some challenging reading but ...there was a depth of challenge that I didn’t expect.”

BOB BAXTER
Baptist minister, Motherwell

“It’s really helped me, in how I work with people. It’s not that my aims have changed it’s that I have a clearer understanding of why I would choose certain ways of working.”

EMMA NEILL
Development Coordinator,
Housing Justice

LEARNING *Journeys*

Learning Journeys is a bespoke learning process delivered by two Urban Life facilitators to a missional group in their context. Sessions usually run monthly over a 4-6 month period. While we offer Presence, Power and Place as broad themes, the Learning Journey is primarily shaped by the questions of the group.

In Learning Journeys we find creative ways to help groups reflect and integrate their conversation with prayer. We have found that this process has enabled missional groups to clarify their theology which, in turn, has fuelled more confident and intentional practice.

19 people



... have participated in 3 Learning Journey groups in Leeds, Salford and Birmingham.

“For us it was a really, really useful thing because we spend a lot of time doing ...so to have time to stop and reflect was a really good thing.”

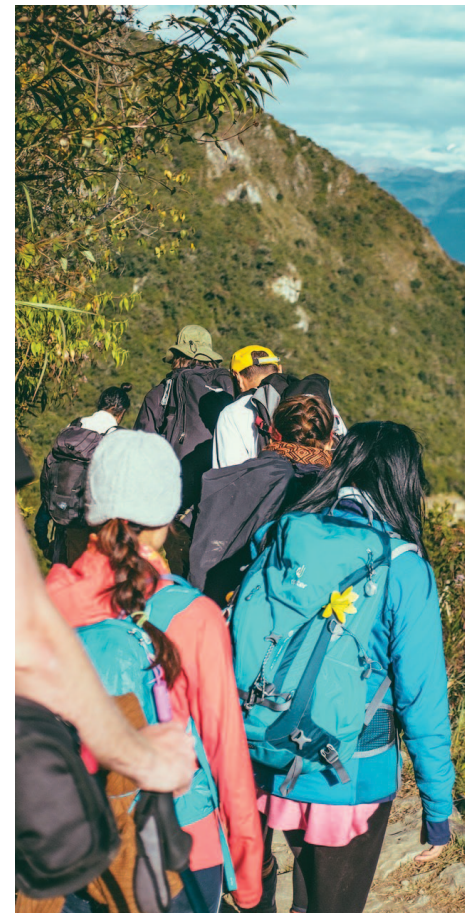
DAVE MYRING

Learning Journey participant,
Langworthy Community Church

“It gives us a greater clarity about what we’re doing and why we’re doing it. ...the process allowed us not just to talk airy fairy about theories but actually deal with a real life situation in a way that was really helpful because it gave us safety to explore.”

JACKIE HIRD

Learning Journey participant,
Joanna Project



Creative CONVERSATIONS

Creative Conversations helps Christians to explore the everyday experiences of those who find themselves marginalised and excluded in various ways from mainstream society. Initially it involved making audio recordings of conversations between small groups of people, followed by some careful and thoughtful analysis.

We have developed this new research method in partnership with

CMS, funding two people to pilot the approach and training a further 39 people to conduct conversations in their mission contexts.

Caitlin Burbridge, who hosted 6 conversations says:

“Engaging deeply in conversation helps us to establish more equal relationships through which we can see hope for another person.”

Professor Mike Higton from Common Awards – the funding body for the pilot -- reflected on the potential of Creative Conversations:

“...quite a lot of the methods of investigation that it’s easy to get hold of and use assume we already know what the questions are and are just trying to fill in the gaps in our knowledge. Whereas Creative Conversations seems to do more to allow the voices to emerge and pose the questions.”



Masters MODULES

The Masters programme launched in September 2016 with 11 participants taking modules in Practical Theology and Ethnography and Christian Responses to Marginalisation, Social Exclusion and Deep-Rooted Deprivation. In 2018-19 they will continue with Theology and Mission in Contemporary Urban Contexts and Theological Perspectives on Place and Power. These modules are delivered using a mix of classroom and context-based learning and are accredited by Common Awards.

“It’s felt exciting... Finding a language for some of the stuff I’ve been thinking has been great. ... it feels like quite a privilege to be a part of something that seems really edgy and different from other theology that I’ve studied.”

Naomi Luff
Masters student

MEALS WITH MEANING

Across all cultures food and meals are highly 'storied'. They form ways of narrating what matters to us and what matters to us in living well, as well as acting as a window into seeing, hearing and tasting what is important to others.

Last year, a small household community in Bristol acted as pilot hosts of 3 particular 'feasts' or 'festival' times as an open invitation to friends and visitors of all ages and backgrounds to participate in a creative and imaginative time of exploring the story of our faith in

an engaging and memorable way. The festivals already celebrated – Lammas Day (a bread festival) in August; Bones and Bonfires Feast in November, Shrove Tuesday and Ash Wednesday in March – have been well received. From this encouraging start, the aim is to continue to establish and make available resources for a rhythm of feasts as particular foci for celebration and creative exploration of how the story of our faith connects with the narratives of our everyday lives, and as a meaningful way of bringing together small Christian communities.

“There was a pleasing mix of family fun and ceremony” that enabled cross-generational ‘worship’”.

BETH
Participant

“I can imagine us opening up our garden and inviting our neighbours to this.”

SIAN
Participant



LOOKING AHEAD

As Urban Life looks towards its fourth year we will continue to develop and share Theology-to-Go, Learning Journeys, Creative Conversations and Meals with Meaning with missional groups more widely across the UK.

As our Masters course continues to grow we have convened the Urban Life Research Community (ULRC) which will extend our postgraduate research up to doctoral level. ULRC is a group of practitioner-researchers with proven experience in both practical mission and in the disciplines of missiology and practical theology who can supervise doctoral research in the areas of mission and marginalisation. They include Dr Ash Barker, Dr Sam

Ewell, Revd Dr Mike Pears, Dr Stuart Murray Williams, Dr Cathy Ross, Dr Anna Ruddick, and Revd Dr Howard Worsley. To find out more see:

www.urbanlife.org/researchcommunity

Having begun with a concern for urban places experiencing marginalisation, we have found ourselves engaging with mission at all kinds of margins: urban, international, rural and suburban. We intend to continue to engage with the complexity and breadth of marginalised communities in our society.

Urban Life has grown through the vision and skill of a core group of reflective practitioners. Having established our ethos and developed a range of learning opportunities we hope to support many more people in mission. In order to enable this, and to embody our ethos Urban Life will seek to develop as a collaborative team of learners, providing theological accompaniment to those in mission among marginalised communities.





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Visit our website:
www.urbanlife.org



If you would like to find out more about Urban
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