

STORIES FROM THE GROUND



Church growth, vibrant ecumenical relationships

David Evans highlights the impact of prayer walking

In autumn 2019 I became the pastor of Ford Baptist Church in Plymouth. It was a small church which had seriously considered closing. The congregation rarely got into double figures.

When the pandemic struck, like every church, we cancelled all of our church activity except for online. However, soon we were allowed to go for walks together and there was nothing to stop us from praying for the area as we walked – so we prayed. None of us had much experience of prayer walking, so we just prayed for peace and health for the homes in the streets we walked along, safety and blessing for the children in the schools, prosperity for the businesses and everywhere that people would reach out to Jesus and

that he would call them. Soon we were joined by David from the Messianic congregation that met at Ford Baptist, Jonny and Margaret from St Marks and the Lee Abbey Community, and then by Pastor Steve from Restore Church, a Pentecostal church nearby.

Has it made a difference? By faith we can say a definite and resounding “Yes!”.

All three churches have seen significant numerical growth since Covid. St Marks has developed a vibrant church fellowship where before there was nothing; congregations at Ford Baptist are double or even treble what they were before Covid; and Restore Church has problems fitting everyone in on a Sunday morning.

Part of this is also due to the fact, I am sure, we are now working together ecumenically in a very natural way. I have been in ministry now for 43 years (and ordained ministry for 35 of those) and this is the closest, most vibrant, ecumenical relationship between churches I have ever known. There are things that we do separately, but many things we do together or share in something the other church is doing. There is no sense of jealousy or competition and we rejoice in one another’s successes as if our own. The kingdom is being built.

Early in my ministry I used to be on various ecumenical committees in Lincolnshire. I remember the Revd Brian Levick, the ecumenical secretary (who seemed to me very old but was

probably about the age I am now!) saying, often in frustration, that things would be so much easier if we prayed together – how right he was! Prayer walking was always one of the highlights of my week because I walked not just with colleagues but with friends.

I have recently retired from being the minister at Ford and am thankful that I leave the church significantly stronger numerically than when I started. I would recommend prayer walking to any and every church – it is something that you can do whatever the size of your church and you only really need two people to start.

But beware! Once you start you never know what God might do!

David Evans is the minister of Morice Baptist Church in Plymouth, and was also the minister of the nearby

Ford Baptist Church until his retirement there earlier this year. He is due to retire from Morice in June.



Photo | Jonathan Devereux