



# IGNiTE

SPARKING PASSION FOR THE GOSPEL ACROSS THE UK | SPRING 2026



## FAITH IN ACTION

GOD IS AT WORK IN EVERYDAY LIVES

- **Twelve baptisms** at Windmill Church, Wolverhampton
- **Steve Cowles** equips future leaders through outdoor discipleship



# WELCOME TO IGNiTE

*In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the Gospel from the first day until now... Philipians 1:4*

Counties is committed to making Jesus known, but we do not stand alone. In this issue of Ignite, you will see many partners who work shoulder to shoulder with us in this great task.

We love the ministry of GLO Europe, and many Counties evangelists and One2Lead students participate in their summer teams. Indeed it was on a GLO summer team where I cut my teeth in mission and felt called to full-time ministry.

Our Evangelists partner with other organisations, and most importantly with local churches and individual believers.

Whether it is Gordon

Curley at the Alresford Show, Steve Cowles at Capernwray, or the Life exhibition in situ in Exeter, the work is done in partnership with others.

Thank you for partnering with us through your giving, your prayers and your encouragement.

Martin Erwin, CEO

**How to use QR codes:** Just open your mobile phone camera, point the camera at the QR code image, tap the link that appears on your mobile screen, follow any instructions which will take you to the Counties website.

## Making Jesus known: inspiring and equipping local churches

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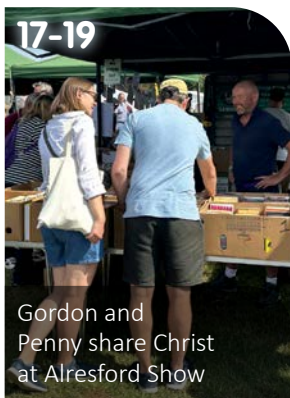


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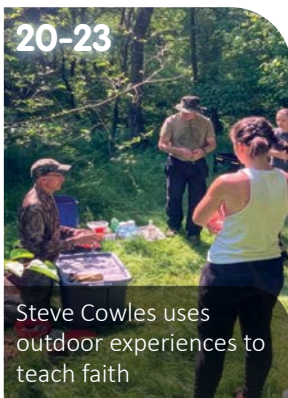
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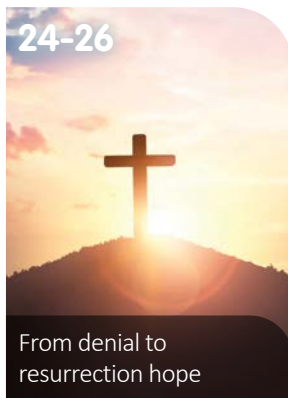
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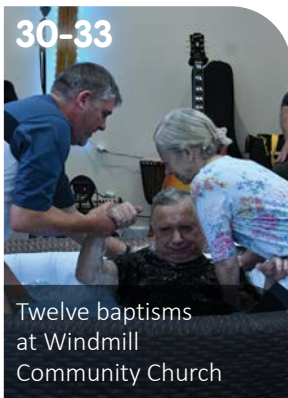
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# NEWS IN BRIEF

## A divine moment at dinner



Lesley Lawrence recently found herself in the middle of God's work at the Tony Hancock Appreciation Society dinner! Lesley is a Counties evangelist based in South Wales.

She arrived at the dinner feeling flustered after her car nearly broke down on the way. But, during the dinner, the man next to her asked what Lesley did. When Lesley explained, he became reflective and serious.

"My wife and I used to be Christians, but we lost our baby," he said. "It was such a painful time. I thought how can there

be a God? How could He take our baby away?"

He started to well up. Lesley, realising this was a God moment, just listened and asked Him how to respond. She simply shared how much God loves him, knows, and is with him in his grief. It felt like a moment of intimacy with God in the middle of a crowded room.

The man said he missed the community of belonging to church. It seemed like he had been thinking about it recently. "Maybe God wanted to speak to you today," Lesley told him.

These moments that seem small to us may be huge for others.

"If we're open and pray for opportunities to help people on their journey to God, they will happen," Lesley reflects. "Be humble – I was distracted by my stressful journey that day, but God still used me. Listen and pray, don't jump in. Then, when you do speak, what you say will be what that person needs. Remember, God is already working in people's lives, and we get to join in."

### Have you experienced a God moment like this?

We'd love to hear your stories of unexpected conversations, divine appointments, or moments when God used you to share His love. Whether at work, in your community, or in everyday encounters, your testimony could encourage others to be open to God's promptings.

Send your stories to: [kate.lawson@countiesuk.org](mailto:kate.lawson@countiesuk.org)

## Wales Leadership Forum Equipping churches for Gospel growth

Something significant is happening across Wales. While some church buildings are closing, new expressions of church are emerging, congregations are growing, and a new generation of leaders is being equipped. The Wales Leadership Forum (WLF) sits at the heart of this movement, uniting churches and networks around a shared commitment to evangelism.

Founded around 2015, WLF began with a single weekend gathering and has grown into a year-round movement. Today, it connects leaders from almost every evangelical denomination in Wales, alongside networks such

as Cant i Gymru, the evangelical movement of Wales and New Wine Cymru.


“In my lifetime, I don’t know of any other time where we’ve got all these groups together,” says Counties evangelist Phil Davies. This unity creates space for shared learning, encouragement and collaborative mission.

This year’s Equip conference reflected the breadth of WLF. Events were held across multiple locations, concluding with a Saturday gathering of 120 people in Cardiff. Teaching from Rico Tice and Andrew Ollerton focused on evangelism,

Biblical confidence and engaging those on the edges of faith. One participant described the experience as “like having a shot of black coffee, it really fires you up!”

A recurring theme was reaching younger generations for Christ. Andrew Ollerton spoke of a “quiet revival”, with many people encountering the Bible for the first time. Other sessions explored discipleship, youth ministry and church planting.

Through partnership with Cant i Gymru, WLF supports a vision to plant 100 churches in Wales, with 33 already underway. In 2026, WLF will also launch the Growing Youth project, equipping volunteers and emerging leaders for long-term ministry.



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# GOOD NEWS IN UNEXPECTED PLACES

Reflections from GLO Summer Teams 2025,  
by Judith McKeown and Stephen McQuoid

GLO Europe is a long time mission partner of Counties, with a focus on Summer mission teams, church planting in Europe and training.

“Expect the unexpected.” It’s a familiar phrase, but one that proved particularly fitting for GLO’s 2025 summer team programme. Over the course of the year, teams served in fifteen locations across the UK and Europe, sharing the Good News of the Gospel through a wide range of ministries and encountering God at work – in places both familiar and new.

Some teams returned to locations that have been part of the programme for many years, while others stepped into communities where GLO has never been before. The shape of the outreach varied from place to place. Activities included international evenings, outreach concerts, English teaching, practical

street work, and children’s and youth ministry. In each setting, teams sought to serve local churches and organisations, responding to the needs of the community while creating opportunities for conversation and witness.

One particularly encouraging development was the launch of a team in Slovenia for the first time. During Reformation Day celebrations in October, the team engaged with children and families, building relationships and sharing the Gospel in a context where Christian outreach is less common.

Elsewhere, in Marseille, a man came to faith following conversations with the team, while in Edinburgh, people from many different cultures encountered the Gospel through street evangelism during the summer festival season.

## Sharing Jesus at the Edinburgh Festival

Edinburgh once again proved to be a particularly strategic location for a GLO



team. With a population drawn from across the world, and an additional two million visitors during August for the city's festivals, the city offers unique opportunities for Gospel engagement. A team based at Bellevue Chapel worked alongside partners from the Heralds Trust, distributing a Gospel tract written specifically for the festival, running a street café offering free tea and coffee, and giving away copies of John's Gospel. Around 900 Gospels were distributed over the course of the outreach.

Alongside street conversations, the team also engaged in open-air preaching, recorded interviews on the theme of loneliness, and took part in church-based activities, including a music café and a ceilidh.

Daily times of prayer and Bible study were an essential part of the programme, grounding the outreach in discipleship and reflection.

### What did the teams get out of it?

GLO team members were deeply affected by seeing God at work beyond their own familiar settings. One participant commented, "It was great to see God working in a different country to my own, showing that God is a God for everyone, no matter our nationality or background." Others were impacted by the stories they'd heard of lives being changed, sometimes quietly and gradually, but no less meaningfully for that.

A strong theme running through feedback this year was the value of teamwork. The team members spoke warmly of the experience of serving together, supporting one another, and sharing responsibility for

outreach and ministry. One person said, "I loved how connected the whole team was, and how we were always looking out for and caring for each other."

Preparing activities together, working across generations, and learning to rely on one another were all important aspects of the team experience.

This emphasis on working together reflects Jesus' own model of mission. In Luke 10, he sends out the seventy-two in pairs, and the discipleship built into GLO teams continues to play a vital role in helping participants grow in faith and confidence.

Several team members noted that serving on a summer team sharpened their awareness of opportunities to share the Gospel after returning home. As one person put it: "It was such a joy to be able to share the Gospel and interact with so many people. It's changed how I look for opportunities in everyday life."

Everywhere the GLO summer teams went last year, the impact was seen not only in individual conversations and moments of response, but in the longer-term encouragement of local churches and the personal growth of the team members themselves. Serving in unexpected places continues to shape hearts, build confidence, and deepen trust in God's work.

**Are you ready for an adventure this year?**

Join a GLO team this summer. Visit the GLO website to see what's planned for 2026 and find out how to get involved.



Planning is already underway for the 2026 summer team programme. Please pray for wisdom as we explore possible new locations and partnerships, and for those who may be considering taking part.

## Growing Leaders Together One2Lead and GLO

Behind much of GLO's summer team work sits a longer story of investment in young people, and their development as Christian leaders. In recent years, this has been strengthened through a growing partnership with One2Lead, a Counties programme that shares many of the same priorities and convictions.

The connection between One2Lead and GLO has developed naturally over time. GLO and Counties have worked closely together for many years, and through these relationships, GLO workers were invited to contribute to One2Lead events as teachers and speakers. GLO has helped to promote One2Lead opportunities through its own networks, introducing young people to a programme designed to support them in faith, leadership and service.

At the heart of the partnership is a shared commitment to mobilising and

equipping the next generation. Both ministries believe that young Christians should be encouraged to play an active role in evangelism, church life and wider society, while being supported to grow in maturity and confidence as followers of Jesus. There is a strong desire, not simply to involve young people in activities, but to help them become grounded, thoughtful and resilient Christians who can make a lasting impact.

This shared vision has already borne fruit. While individual stories are often best told quietly, there are several young people who have taken part in both GLO summer teams and One2Lead groups. For some, a summer team has been the first step, offering practical experience of mission and teamwork. For others, involvement in One2Lead has provided ongoing discipleship and accountability after returning home. A number of One2Lead graduates have also gone on to study at Tilsley College, continuing their training for Christian service.

The leadership qualities both ministries seek to develop begin with character rather than role or platform. Central to this is a desire to see young leaders grow in Christlikeness, learning to read the Bible deeply, to pray, and to make God-honouring decisions in everyday life. From this foundation flows the confidence to share faith with those who do not yet know Christ, as well as the ability to encourage, support and inspire other Christians.

Alongside spiritual formation, there is a growing emphasis on servant leadership. Young people are encouraged to



recognise and develop their gifts, while learning that leadership in the Christian context is rooted in humility, service and faithfulness rather than status.

Exposure to mission through GLO plays a significant role in shaping One2Lead participants. Serving in different cultural and social contexts helps young people recognise the privileges many of them have grown up with, while also deepening their awareness of the spiritual needs of those around them. Encounters on the streets of UK cities or in communities across Europe often sharpen a sense of calling and responsibility, reinforcing the need for personal faith and transformation in Christ.

Looking ahead, the partnership between One2Lead and GLO opens up new opportunities to reach and support a wider group of young people. By working together, the two ministries can offer a broader range of experiences and pathways, from mission exposure to



longer-term leadership development. We hope this collaboration will continue to grow, with One2Lead groups established across the country, nurturing the next generation of evangelists, church leaders and Christian influencers.

One2Lead equips young people aged 16-25 as disciples of Jesus and future leaders.



Find out more at [countiesuk.org/one2lead](https://countiesuk.org/one2lead)



# A LIFE THAT MADE JESUS KNOWN:

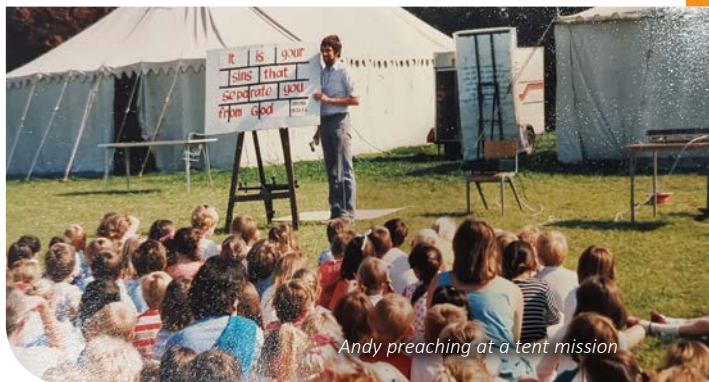
MARTIN ERWIN GIVES THANKS  
FOR ANDY JELFS



On Sunday 21 December Andy Jelfs went home to be with Jesus. Personally, it was a privilege to have known him and his wife Miriam, as they served the Lord together with Counties for 60 years. I was privileged to share at his Thanksgiving Service in Colchester, where over 400 people gathered to thank God for his life and ministry. The following is largely taken from what I said at that service.

For six decades, the ministry of Andy Jelfs left a deep and unmistakable mark on churches, communities, and individuals across the UK. Those who knew him speak not only of his faithfulness and longevity, but of a character shaped by gentleness, sincerity, and a steady, joyful devotion to Christ. As we give thanks for his life, we also recognise the unique legacy he leaves—a legacy made up not of headlines or accolades, but of transformed lives, encouraged hearts, and a Gospel faithfully lived and lovingly shared.

Andy's journey with Counties began on 1 May 1966, when he joined what was then known



*Andy preaching at a tent mission*

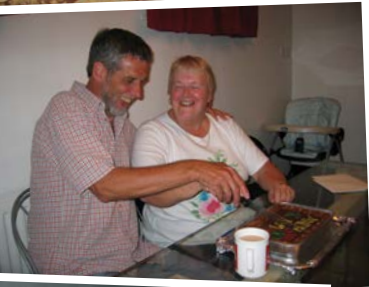
as Counties Evangelistic Work. It was a step of obedience that would define the next 60 years of his life. The decision itself, however, was rooted in an even earlier conviction. Miriam, Andy's beloved wife, shared that Andy had decided he would marry her when he was just twelve years old—a promise he kept through 62 years of marriage and ministry together. That combination of early conviction, faithfulness, and quiet determination became a signature of his whole life.

## Foundations of a Ministry

Many resonate with the recollections of Gordon Billage, who first met Andy and Miriam when they moved from Devon to Essex to begin their

missionary work. Gordon remembers those early tent missions vividly—open-air gatherings in places with names like Matching Tye—where Andy's warmth, sincerity, and unmistakable Devon accent drew in children and adults alike. Teams of young people often joined Andy and Miriam in those early days, supporting tent missions and children's clubs throughout the region. Those were formative years, planting seeds of faith that continue to bear fruit across generations.

Across six decades, Andy's ministry was marked by unusual consistency. Whether teaching, preaching, visiting homes, or simply listening, he carried a sense of purposeful calm and genuine interest in people.



## A Gentleman of the Gospel

Lionel Cargio, Counties evangelist in Surrey, described Andy with words echoed by many: “His kindness, gracious speech, and his habit of truly listening. Children especially loved hearing him preach; he unfolded the Gospel with a gentle, compelling warmth that made Christ both beautiful and accessible.

It was Andy and Miriam’s encouragement that led Lionel to join Counties in 1969—another reminder of Andy’s generational influence.

Victor Jack, recalling Andy from their days at Moorlands Bible College in 1963, noted the spiritual depth and thoughtful, caring nature that marked him even then. His preaching was memorable—rooted in Scripture, carefully prepared, and spoken from the heart.

## Memories That Speak

One of the warmest reflections comes from Bob Telford, who shared a moment from a Counties

conference. “Andy’s teaching was sound, clear, and encouraging, shaped by a deep love for Christ. His humour was gracious and never at anyone’s expense.”

## Three Qualities That Defined a Life

In 1 Thessalonians 1:3, Paul highlights three qualities that also beautifully capture Andy’s life: faithful work, loving deeds, and enduring hope.

### 1 Faithful Work

Andy’s work was the overflow of his faith in Jesus. He devoted himself to sharing the Good News wherever he went. His hands were also busy with practical tasks—building platforms for marquees, repairing tents, and supporting mission work.

### 2 Loving Deeds

Those who knew Andy testify that his service was saturated with love. He cared for young evangelists, invested in emerging leaders, and supported believers through pastoral care.

### 3 Enduring Hope

Andy's hope was rooted in Christ—the risen Saviour he trusted in all things. Even late in life, he expressed a desire to preach the Gospel for another fifty years.



### A Life That Points Us to Christ

Andy's greatest desire was that others would know Jesus. This hymn captures this perfectly:

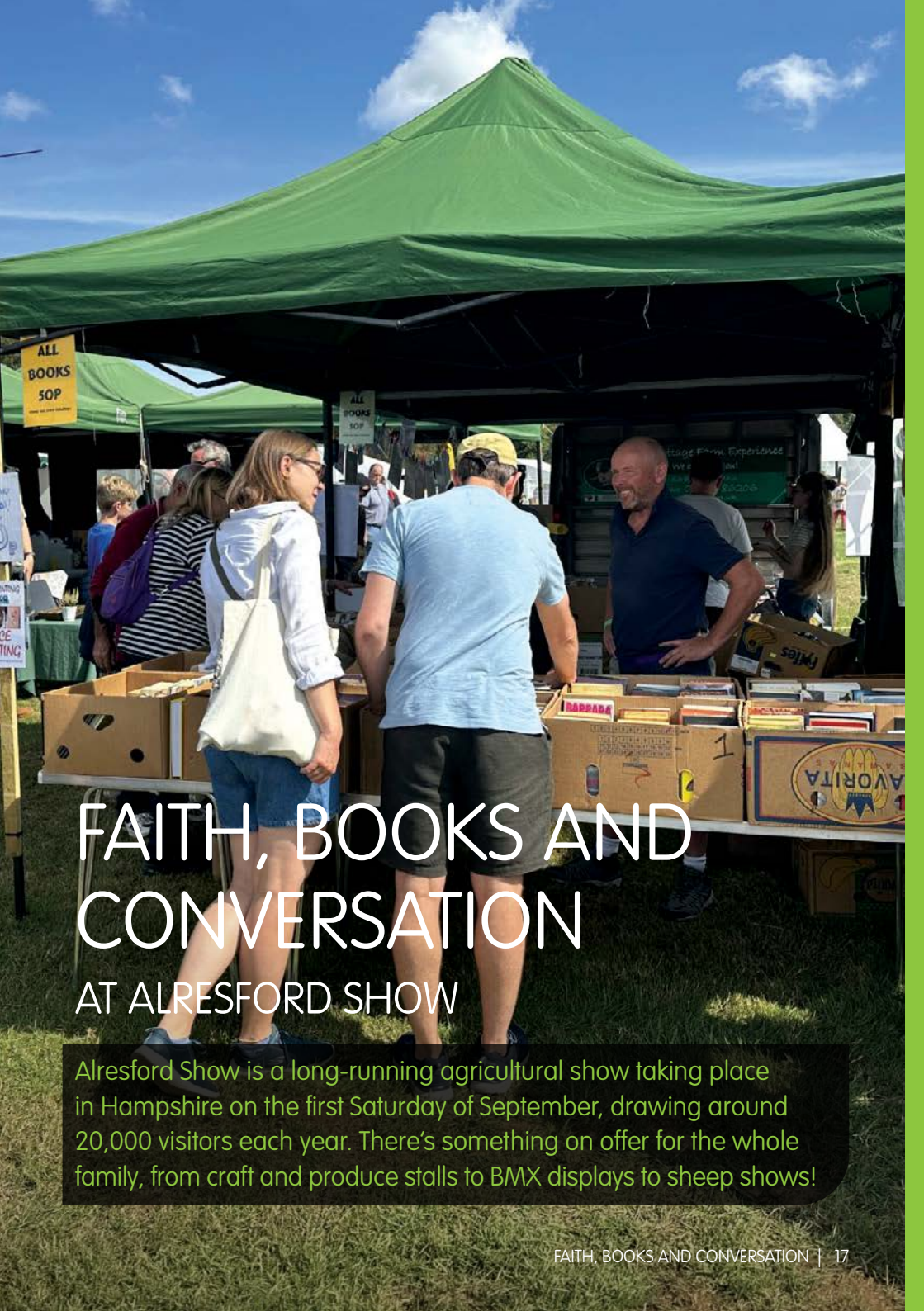
*How Good Is The  
God We Adore!  
Our Faithful,  
Unchangeable Friend.  
His Love Is As Great  
As His Power  
And Knows Neither  
Measure Nor End.*

Andy praised God for all that was past, and trusted Him for all that was to come.

He is now with the Lord he loved—leaving us richer because we had him.

The following poem was written by a friend of Andy's and shared at the Thanksgiving service. It appears here with permission from the poet, Jacob Hussain.

*A pillar stood in the centre of the town,  
A visage of marble and strength.  
Peace and gentleness were etched into its eyes,  
Steadfastness and courage carved into the sinews  
of its arms.  
It wore a breastplate, a shield, and belt,  
And carried on its right a sword made  
out of words,  
Reading as a scroll, "For God so loved the world."  
The pillar remained, through violent winds and  
waters from the heavens  
That would see it eroded from history  
Till all that remained was dust.  
Yet the statue stood, with its gentleness  
fixed upwards.  
The town around it soon fell to ruin,  
ransacked by armies  
Of Canaanites and Hittites,  
Though none could tear down that pillar,  
For Love had formed it from that unshapen block,  
And held it upright,  
And ordained that it would never be removed –  
that witness of salvation –  
Till Love beckoned it home.*



ALL BOOKS SOP

ALL BOOKS SOP

# FAITH, BOOKS AND CONVERSATION

## AT ALRESFORD SHOW

Alresford Show is a long-running agricultural show taking place in Hampshire on the first Saturday of September, drawing around 20,000 visitors each year. There's something on offer for the whole family, from craft and produce stalls to BMX displays to sheep shows!

Gordon and Penny Curley, who work full time with Counties as evangelists, have attended Alresford Show every September for the last several years, helping to run the New Farm Chapel & Friends tent of witness, organised by chapel members Sarah and Tom Main.

New Farm Chapel & Friends run a busy tent, complete with a small animal petting area, face painting, craft tables and a second-hand book stall. All in all, 15 members of the local Christian community help to run the tent throughout the day – painting faces, giving out goodie bags, and talking with visitors. Penny takes part in the face-painting, whilst Gordon runs the book stall – backed with years of experience running book stalls at Fareham Market.

Mixing both secular and Christian books has proved effective for pulling in a large crowd and engaging those of any or no faith.



## Books and bargain Bibles!

Equipped with 16 banana boxes full of second-hand books, Gordon believes the key to the success of his stall is combining two universal appeals: books and a bargain. In particular, mixing both secular and Christian books has proved effective for pulling in a large crowd and engaging those of any or no faith.

Visitors often go straight for the boxes shoved under the tables, keen to find a hidden treasure. The browse-and-rummage nature of the bookstall provides the perfect opportunity for striking up a conversation with visitors. Parents often wander across from the face-painting queue, taking it in turns to wait with the kids while the other has a look through the books.

A key element of the bookstall is Gordon's offering of £1 Bibles. One woman attending the fair with five grandchildren stopped to buy them a Bible each after seeing their excitement, telling Gordon it was important to her that each of them had one. The children were excited to receive a free Gideon New Testament and a comic book of Bible stories.

Questions about the different types of Bible on sale also act as a useful starting point for wider discussions around faith. This year was a great success, with 11 Bibles sold as well as eight New Testaments given away.

For Gordon, the power of the stall as an opportunity for witness lies in its simplicity, and just how doable it is. Universal attractions like books, face painting, and petting animals pull in large numbers of visitors,

especially when most of the other stalls are more specialist and aimed at farmers. It's the kind of stall that people revisit throughout the day – for a browse of the books, a quiet moment at the craft table, or just one more look at the animals. These repeat visits build trust, allowing plenty of time for unhurried, pressure-free conversations. Faith is present and constant, without being overwhelming for newcomers.

Gordon's favourite part of the day is seeing the team in action – Christians drawn together by their

commitment sharing the Gospel. For volunteers at the New Farm Chapel & Friends stand, the Alresford Show offers a joyful opportunity to reach out to their wider community, engaging with people of all faiths and none while celebrating local traditions. Even these small interactions can plant seeds of hope and

Gordon's favourite part of the day is seeing the team in action, Christians drawn together by their commitment sharing the Gospel.

belief, bringing people closer to God.

*The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.*

**Matthew 13:31-32**



# FINDING SHELTER: FAITH FORMED OUTDOORS



## An interview with Counties evangelist Steve Cowles



On a rain-soaked day at Capernwray Bible School, 21 Ministry Assistants from eight nations huddled under a newly built shelter in the woods to escape the rain. The downpour didn't dampen spirits – in fact, it became the lesson. As water hammered the roof, Counties evangelist Steve Cowles pointed to the structure above their heads and quoted Psalm 91:

*“He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High...”*

Theology, discipleship, teamwork, and lived experience fused into one.

This is Steve Cowles's ministry in essence: practical, relational, outdoors, and deeply rooted in the Gospel. Originally from the United States, he has spent more than three decades shaping lives in the UK through chaplaincy, evangelism, and innovative outdoor outreach—equipping others to share Christ using the gifts and environments God has already placed in their hands.

Steve's relationship with Capernwray began long before he ever led students into the woods. He first arrived as a Bible school student himself in 1997. That formative experience planted

seeds that would later bear unexpected fruit. Both he and his wife Debbie have been in full-time ministry for approximately 40 years. For the past 18, most of his time has been spent serving as a lead police chaplain, work that opened doors into trauma care, crisis response, and wellbeing support. Yet alongside chaplaincy, another passion steadily grew: using the outdoors as a place of restoration, discipleship, and Gospel≈conversation.

For over 15 years, Steve has helped organise the annual Police Family Fun Day at Capernwray's grounds – a large-scale outreach with indoor and outdoor activities, cakes and coffee donated by churches, a zip line, go-karts, and student involvement. One recent event welcomed 1,175 police officers, staff and family members, creating a joyful bridge between the Bible school and the wider community.

But it was Steve's outdoor teaching days that truly captured the school's imagination. For several years, he led Capernwray students to woodland sites off-campus to experience faith lessons through fire-building, shelter-making, and shared reflection. Several years ago, Capernwray asked if this could become a regular part of student formation. Recently, the school developed its own outdoor ministry site, and Steve was invited to help shape its vision and practice.

*“It's a very practical school, and this is just another way to live out faith rather than only talk about it.”*

The vision of the outdoor days is simple but profound: to use creation as a classroom and catalyst for transformation. Steve describes himself as “a passionate outdoor person.” His background includes bushcraft, woodland management, deer management, long walks, and men's outreach. Over the years, he discovered that shoulder-to-shoulder activity often opens deeper conversation than face-to-face discussion ever could. That insight first found expression in his police wellbeing programme, “Battling the Elements.” Officers spend a full day outdoors, divided into teams, completing challenges like building shelters, starting fires without matches, cooking over open flames, and taking an hour of silent solo reflection. The day ends with debriefing and shared stories. More than 900 police officers/staff have now taken part, alongside church and men's groups, bringing the total to over 1,500 participants.



*“The outdoors gets people away from stress, away from noise, and into God’s creation. Then hearts open. You can talk about home while building a shelter, about the power of our life and purpose while making fire. Every activity becomes an illustration.”*

Capernwray’s outdoor programme adapts that same philosophy for emerging Christian leaders. It equips students not only to grow personally but also to learn how they might use similar approaches in youth work, men’s ministry, church outreach, and evangelism back home.

The recent event in September 2025 gathered 21 brand-new Ministry Assistants (MAs), representing Austria, Germany, Switzerland, Romania, the UK, Spain, Australia, Canada, and the USA. These second-year students serve as ministry leaders-in-training, helping with outreach, pastoral care, and student life at the school. Steve led two outdoor sessions across different afternoons.

October sessions welcomed over 20 students each time, and combined with other Capernwray students, around 50 participants engaged in the programme per day.

Students come to Capernwray to grow spiritually, learn ministry skills, and prepare for service across the world. The outdoor programme offers something unique: embodied learning. In the rain, they constructed shelters. They cooked together. They solved problems. They prayed around a fire. They experienced community, leadership, and faith lived out rather than merely discussed. Classroom teaching imparts knowledge. Outdoor ministry forms character. Some discover leadership potential they didn’t know they had. Others learn to trust teammates. Many encountered God in a new way — outside classroom walls and structured schedules.

Steve sees these days as a way of “passing on the skills” God has entrusted to him.

*“I’ve taken out teenagers, men’s groups, and hundreds of police officers. Now I get to train young Christian leaders to do the same.”*

In the woods, students confront real challenges: weather, teamwork, problem-solving, patience. These become spiritual lessons in humility, perseverance, and community. As Steve pointed out,

*“Jesus did most of His teaching outdoors.”*

The natural world provides endless illustrations: fire that must be nurtured,



shelter that protects, bread that must be shared, silence that invites reflection. One of the most powerful moments in every outdoor day is the hour of solitude. Participants sit alone without phones, noise, or tasks— simply listening. Many describe it as the first true silence they've experienced in years.

*“This is where God often speaks. Not through me, but through stillness.”*

In recent seasons, Steve has been in discussion with churches about developing outdoor ministry models for young people, dads and children, and men's discipleship. American churches, like those in the UK, face the challenge of reaching a generation saturated in technology and short on silence. Steve's vision offers an answer: bring people outdoors, remove distractions, and let God speak through creation and shared experience.

He is also passionate about evangelism training — helping believers discover that sharing faith isn't limited to street preaching or door-to-door visits.

*“When I talk about evangelism, people get scared, but you can share your faith through whatever skills God has given you. My skill happens to be the outdoors. There's more than one way to share your faith.”*

This message has resonated strongly in both UK and US contexts, encouraging believers to see everyday interests as mission fields.

As Steve's season of police chaplaincy approaches its conclusion, a new chapter is unfolding. Conversations



are underway with Capernwray about expanding the outdoor programme. Churches are exploring ways to engage young people and families through similar models. Fathers are seeking help to pull children away from screens and into shared experiences. Couples are discovering that nature creates space for honest conversation and healing. Steve believes God is stirring a renewed call to practical, relational evangelism-meeting people where they are, using what we have, trusting God to open hearts.

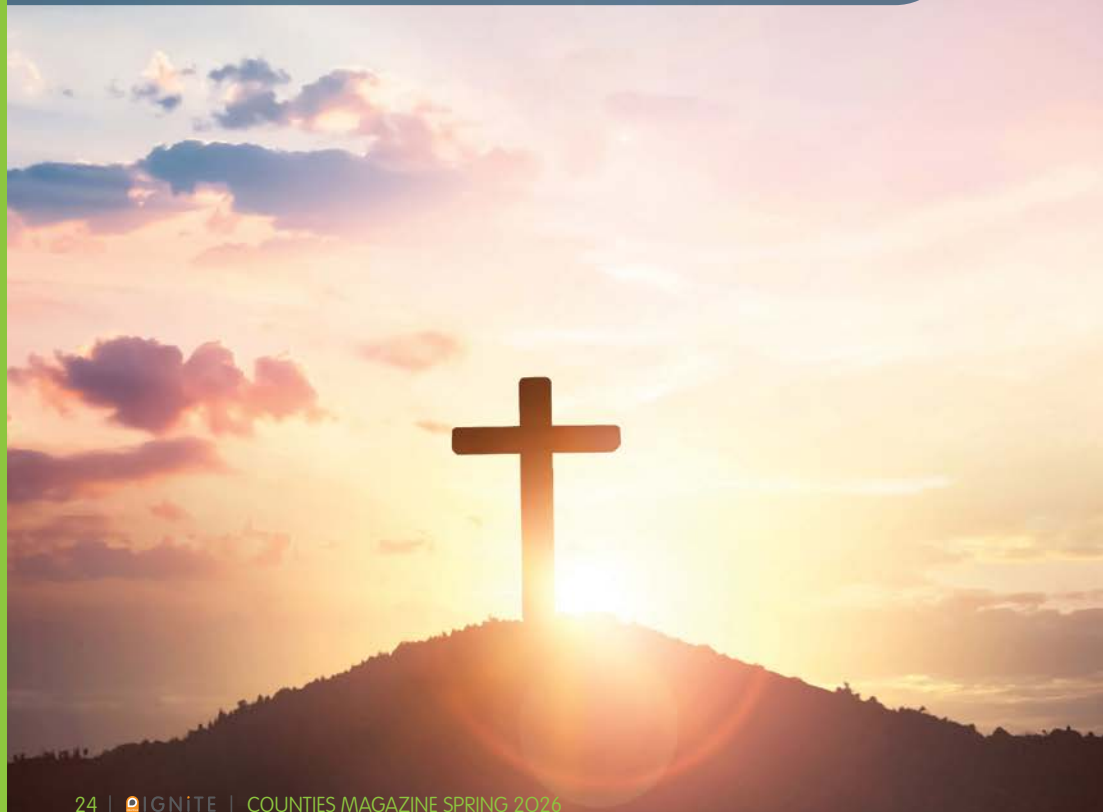
From police officers finding rest in nature, to international students discovering new ways to disciple others, to churches reimagining outreach, Steve Cowles' work stands as a vivid reminder that evangelism is not a programme – it's a posture. Steve sums it up simply:

*“I'm all in.”*

# PETER'S RESURRECTION

By Roger Chivers

Easter changes everything! Whatever your mind can conceive: creation itself, personal life now, the future, relationships – everything is changed because of Easter. Nothing is the same! The event itself took place with a violent earthquake as heaven descended to announce the incredible news (Matthew 28:2) (How else could such an unbelievably amazing event be appropriately revealed?) And the aftershocks continue to be felt in every corner of the world we inhabit.



The focus of Easter is rightly on Jesus. He is what Easter is all about. The One, who was dead, is alive again. It is the pinnacle and heart of the Christian faith, and is, what many have referred to as, 'the hinge of history'.

Whilst all this is true at a universal and cosmic level, for most people, Easter is experienced and known much more directly and personally than just an event to be historically observed or philosophically considered. Life, my life, is changed because of Easter.

Take the story of Peter who played a pivotal role as the incidents of those few days unfolded. For him, it was completely and shockingly transformative.

We often forget the privilege we have because we know how the Easter story unfolds and how all the incidents fit together, whereas those involved were unaware of the end from the beginning. They were just there! This is true of Peter.

The lead up to the resurrection opens

with an encounter with Jesus prompting a response from Peter which, no doubt, was largely understandable and unremarkable. As Jesus and His friends ate together, Jesus explained what was to happen in the next few days;

*"You will all fall away",* He said. Peter's reaction was, *"Even if all fall away, I will not"* (Mark 14:27, 29).

Those there almost certainly thought his response was great, even praiseworthy, worth emulating, and a worthy example of loyalty to follow. It seems to me, that was exactly the intention of Peter's words heard by the Twelve. In fact, when he underlined his boldness with, *"If I must die with you, I will not deny you"*, it encouraged all the others to add their voices of agreement and support. Verse 31 tells us, *'... and they all said the same'*.

Yet, we know what Peter didn't. This turns out to be just an opening encounter on which the events turned, even shaping what was to take place in the following few hours.

A short while later as a small crowd stood around the fire on the night of Jesus' trial, they accused Peter of being one of His followers. His response, so familiar to us, was, *"I do not know this man of whom you speak."* (Mark 14:71), repeated vehemently to the point where, *'he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, "I do not know the man" (Matthew 26:74)* Thus, the denial of Peter initiated by a servant girl's accusation (Mark 14: 66) but picked up by others standing around, is seen as one of the great crimes in the trial and death of Jesus.

So, here are two completely understandable responses from that evening, and we may ask, in which is Peter most guilty? The first, though somewhat arrogant was well-meaning, applauded and imitated by others, and the other prompted by weakness and fear and the realisation of his inability to control events.

Most would argue that in the first, being personal, private and understandable Peter was less culpable, he

was well intended and admired, whereas the second response was public, cowardly, repeated and had severe results as, *'and they all left him and fled'* (Mark 14:50) and, therefore, is much worse.

But if we see it from God's perspective, we may think differently. In the first incident Peter is in control, strong and arrogant, filled with self and pride. The second shows him weak to the extent that it broke him, *'and the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered'* (Luke 22:61). He was crushed by it. In the first Peter was spiritually predominant. In the second, Peter spiritually died.

Although there were other followers of Jesus around the cross that night watching what took place, hearing what He said, and weeping, I suspect that Peter suffered more than all the others between the death and resurrection of Jesus. The last thing he knew as he watched Jesus being led to the cross was that look from His trial when Jesus looked at him. He simply could not get

out of his mind that look in Jesus' eyes. He knew Jesus knew and it broke him. It was too late to apologise and attempt reconciliation. The masterly, bold, outspoken Peter was finished. From a spiritual point of view, at that moment the arrogant Peter died. For him it was the end!

Yet, it was not the end. Within a few days the crucified Jesus, focus of mockery and ridicule, forsaken by all, even His heavenly Father, was raised in the *'immeasurable greatness of His power.'* (Ephesians 1:19). The greatest event in history had taken place. Jesus was alive! Nothing in all of history or experience would ever be the same.

One of the most telling phrases in the story of Peter after the resurrection is, *'He [Jesus] appeared to Cephas [Peter]'* (1 Corinthians 15:5). We are not told the details, but it appears to have been a private meeting before Jesus appeared to the other disciples. What did they talk about? What did Peter say? How did

Jesus wrap His heart of love around Peter as they talked? We do not know, though we may guess at some things. But what we do know is that from that moment, life that had ceased for Peter, started again. The resurrection of Jesus at that moment became a reality for Peter at a deeply personal level. It was nothing short of the resurrection of Peter too! Having 'died', he writes later, *'he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead'* (1 Peter 1:3)

Peter, in that moment, discovered that what Jesus said about Himself soon after He entered Jerusalem on the way to the cross was to be worked out in all who would follow Him. Self must die if there is to be fruit. But for those who do die to self, the resurrection of Jesus is a magnificent, glorious reality.

*'Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it bears much fruit.'* (John 12:24)



# TWELVE BAPTISMS

## AND THE STORIES THAT FOLLOWED

Testimony, discipleship and church growth at  
Windmill Community Church, Wolverhampton

Recently, something remarkable took place at Windmill Community Church in Wolverhampton. Across two baptism services, one in September and one in October, twelve people aged between eight and 82 publicly declared their faith

in Jesus Christ. It was a season marked not only by celebration, but by spiritual renewal, thoughtful conversations about faith, and a growing sense that God is at work among the local community.

Those baptised came from a wide range of backgrounds. Some had grown up around church, others were new to faith, while a few had walked with God for many years but sensed a call to a deeper, more personal commitment. Family members, friends, neighbours and visitors from the community filled both church buildings, with some even standing due to lack of space. In a moment that reflected the church's practical and welcoming approach, a donated hot tub was pressed into service as a baptism pool.

To understand what has shaped this

season, we spoke with Andrew Hodson, Senior Leader and Counties church



planter at Windmill, who has been involved in church planting since 2003. He explained that Windmill serves two distinct communities in Wolverhampton: Finchfield and Compton.

One building, a more traditional church that seats around 60 on a Sunday, welcomes over 100 people during the week through activities such as coffee mornings, mums and tots, and craft groups. The second, a modern building with space for around 120, sees roughly 400 people pass through each week via its coffee lounge, gardening club, wellbeing walks, toddlers' groups and community meetings. While different in style and size, both congregations share leadership, trustees, youth work, prayer life and a

set of core values: Welcome, Wellbeing and Worship.

Central to Windmill's life together is a simple but intentional ethos: people are encouraged first to belong, then to believe, and over time to see their behaviour shaped by faith. Alpha courses, wellbeing events, cafés and everyday conversations create safe spaces for people to explore Christianity at their own pace. For many of those baptised, the decision felt deeply personal. Several had not realised others would be baptised on the same day, which only underlined the significance of the moment for them.

Despite the wide range of ages and life stories, Andrew noticed a common theme running through each testimony. In every case, faith had become personal. Whether someone was taking early steps or responding to a fresh challenge after years of church involvement, baptism marked a clear declaration of trust in Jesus.

Romans 12:1 has shaped Windmill's theological outlook, calling believers to offer themselves as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. That conviction was evident not only in the baptisms themselves, but in their wider impact. Friends, family and neighbours who would not usually attend church came to watch, and many stayed to talk and ask questions. During one of the baptism services, a person gave their life to Jesus, and since then the church has seen a growing number of people enquiring about faith.

In response, Windmill has focused on careful and intentional follow-up. Those



baptised are being supported through Beta courses (following on from Alpha), life groups and small discipleship huddles of two or three people. The church doesn't see evangelism and discipleship as separate activities, but as closely linked aspects of church life.

## Lois and David

Two personal stories illustrate the breadth of what God is doing. Lois first came to church at age 11 after a Christian neighbour had been praying for her for some time. For a while she was the only young person her age, but she continued to attend, grew in faith and chose baptism as her own declaration of trust in Jesus. She is now helping to lead the Christian Union at her school.

At the other end of the age range is David, who has served faithfully in church for over 40 years and played a key role in the Compton church plant.

Through the church planting journey and the M4 course, he was challenged afresh about obedience and personal faith. *"Part of me didn't want to draw attention to myself,"* he admits, *"but I knew I needed to make a personal commitment to Jesus as my Lord and Saviour."* After his baptism, he described feeling: *"free, more able to become the person God made me to be."*

Looking ahead, Windmill's focus is not on preserving a moment, but on stewarding what God has begun. The church continues to invest in children, youth and community work, and is actively seeking a second worker with a passion for young people. Andrew sees this wonderful season as less about numbers and more about obedience, openness and expectancy – the church community offering themselves afresh to God and trusting him to bring transformation in deeply personal and lasting ways.



# THE LIFE EXHIBITION



Helping churches engage primary schools with confidence

For many churches, engaging local primary schools can feel daunting. Questions around suitability, safeguarding, curriculum relevance and confidence often create hesitation. **The Life exhibition** was

developed to address those concerns, offering a way for churches to serve schools with a professionally produced, well-supported resource that helps children encounter the story of Jesus in an accessible and age-appropriate way.

Designed primarily for Year 5 and 6 pupils, the Life exhibition can also be adapted for Years 3 and 4. It provides an immersive learning experience that complements RE lessons and locally agreed syllabuses, while encouraging pupils to think for themselves about who Jesus was, what He taught, and why His story still matters today.

## What is the Life exhibition?

The Life exhibition is a multimedia experience made up of interactive pods, films, quizzes, songs and a discussion café. Using tablets, headphones, graphic panels and QR codes, children are invited to explore the story of Jesus through sight, sound and participation.

Rather than being talked at, pupils are encouraged to listen, watch, respond and reflect. Many teachers describe the Life exhibition as both engaging and memorable, noting that it enriches classroom learning without feeling like a traditional lesson. As one teacher put it, *“It was the best RE lesson ever!”* Children frequently ask when the exhibition is coming back, or what else the team does.

What sets the Life exhibition apart is its tone. It is Christ-centred without being evangelistic, invitational rather than instructional, and carefully designed to respect the classroom setting.

## How does the Life exhibition work?

Hosting the Life exhibition is designed to be straightforward, with clear support at every stage. The process involves five main steps:

- 1 **Sharing the vision** – Churches begin by showing a short promotional video to their congregation or local church network.
- 2 **A site visit** – A member of the Life exhibition team visits the venue to answer questions and help churches visualise how the exhibition will work in their space.
- 3 **Planning and preparation** – Once dates are agreed, churches receive detailed information packs covering safeguarding, scheduling and practical arrangements.
- 4 **Inviting schools and volunteers** – Local schools are invited and volunteers recruited.
- 5 **Training and delivery** – Volunteers attend a local training session and are then ready to host the Life exhibition.

Throughout the process, churches are supported by the Counties Life exhibition team. Even practical details such as coat racks and hangers are provided, allowing hosts to focus on welcome, hospitality and relationship-building rather than logistics.

## A shared effort

Volunteers play a vital role in making the Life exhibition work, and roles are matched carefully to people’s confidence and skills. Some volunteers enjoy talking with

children and answering questions; others prefer practical or behind-the-scenes tasks. From guiding groups through the exhibition to serving drinks in the café, there is a role for everyone who wants to be involved!

This flexibility means churches of different sizes and experiences can host the Life exhibition with confidence, including those engaging schools for the first time.

## Inside the Life exhibition

The Life exhibition is structured into four connected areas, each exploring a different aspect of the Christian understanding of Jesus.

- **Introduction**

Pupils are welcomed and shown a short film that introduces the themes of the Life exhibition and sets the scene for what they will explore.

- **The Pods**

Children then move through a series of coloured pods, using tablets and headphones to explore interactive content. These pods cover key themes from Jesus' life, including His historical and prophetic roots, His teaching and His miracles. Volunteers are present to support and respond to questions, but the emphasis remains on guided exploration rather than instruction.

Teachers frequently comment on how effective the use of technology within the Life exhibition is. Tablets and QR codes help pupils feel that the experience has been designed for them, encouraging engagement without the sense of being formally taught.

- **Life Giver**

In this section of the Life exhibition, pupils watch a carefully produced film exploring the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. The content is handled with sensitivity, balancing depth with care. Teachers often note the maturity of pupils' responses and the thoughtful conversations this part of the exhibition prompts.

- **The Café**

The final space within the Life exhibition allows pupils to relax with a drink, take part in an interactive quiz and reflect together on what they have experienced. There is no pressure to give "right answers".



Instead, children are encouraged to express their own thoughts and questions about Jesus.

## What impact does the Life exhibition have?

Feedback from schools consistently highlights how much pupils enjoy the interactive nature of the Life exhibition, and how valuable teachers find the discussion elements. Parents also appreciate the opportunity for learning to continue beyond the classroom.

One church in County Durham hosted the Life exhibition over three days, welcoming 240 pupils from three local schools. A headteacher commented:

*“The children have really enjoyed learning about Jesus in such a fun and interactive way. It was a great enrichment activity for everyone. There was a real buzz about the whole day.”*

Not all impact is immediate or easily measured. Some of the most encouraging stories connected to the Life exhibition are shared



years later: teachers recommending the exhibition to colleagues, volunteers discovering new confidence in speaking about faith, or children recalling specific songs or questions long after their visit. These moments may seem small, but together they reflect steady and faithful fruit.

## What's next?

At its heart, the Life exhibition exists to equip churches to engage schools and young people with confidence and care. It creates space for curiosity, conversation and reflection, often for children encountering the story of Jesus for the first time.

In the future, we hope to expand the Life exhibition further. With additional

team capacity, we could develop a schools-only version enabling the resource to reach more children and travel more widely.

For now, the Life exhibition continues to offer churches a thoughtful, well-supported way to serve their communities, helping the story of Jesus to be heard clearly, respectfully and memorably.

Could your church host the Life exhibition for your local primary school children? Find out more at

**lifeexpo.co.uk**

or contact Kevin Baldwin  
**lifeexpo@countiesuk.org**



# JUST A MINUTE

With Jordan Armstrong



Jordan, alongside wife Lacy, is the leader of the Counties church plant, Orchard Church, Wollaston, Stourbridge, which opened in 2021. The regular church congregation at a Sunday gathering is around 40-50 percent non-Christian, an incredible figure for a church that only opened four years ago.

## How did you become a Christian?

When I was 11, I went to a youth camp called Oasis. I did not enjoy it, but God clearly had decided that was where I was to fall down before Him. On the final night, something clicked for me and I knew that was the saving grace of Jesus. I don't remember what was said, but I wept as I reflected on sin and that Jesus loves me enough to die for me. The song 'Nothing but the Blood' by Matt Redman was playing in the background and has always held a special place in my heart from that experience.

## What drew you to become involved in Counties/church planting?

I suppose it would be cheating to say Jesus... but Jesus. I didn't know what church planting was until I was already gathering a small group of people for a worship ministry, and then Andrew Hodson began to disciple me and develop me as a leader. I joined Church Planting Initiative (CPI) in 2017 as Andy disciplined me. After CPI merged with Counties in 2019, I was invited to also join Counties. I said no the first time, as I felt strongly that I am not an evangelist. Fast forward to 2022, I had some very fruitful conversations with Martin Erwin (Counties CEO) and James Hyde (national coordinator for CPI) and they graciously invited me

again, and the Lord fit all the pieces together for me to join as a Church Planter.

## How are you finding ministry?

I love what I get to do. It's a true blessing and privilege to be able to serve the Lord in a full-time capacity as I lead this church plant. Most importantly, I love and enjoy being with our Church Family, doing life alongside brothers and sisters, and finding opportunities to engage our community with the Gospel. No matter what challenges we face as we serve the Lord, He continually provides for us and protects us and leads us in His wisdom and purpose.

## What is your favourite Bible passage/story and why?

Acts 2:42-47. No matter how much I read, I come back to this over and over again. This passage about the early church's community has been a focal point of the vision we have as we plant this church because we truly believe we can see people in genuine community with Jesus and each other even now, in 2026 Britain.

For more info on **Counties Church Planting**, visit our website:



# EVANGELISTS

## NORTH OF ENGLAND

- Steve & Debra Cowles
- Julian & Ella Gutteridge
- Phyllis Jenkins (Senior)
- Martin & Angie Korchinsky (CP)
- Lee & Lesley Marsland
- Matt & Nicola Rich
- Rob & Sarah Watson

## MIDLANDS

- Jordan & Lacy Armstrong (CP)
- David & Lindsey Brown
- Roger & Hazel Chilvers (Seniors)
- Angela Cooper (Senior)
- Tim & Katrina Cracknell (CP)
- Andy & Isobel Hodson (CP)
- Bob & Rita Telford (Seniors)
- Simon & Yvonne Terry
- Paul & Vanessa Willmott

## EAST OF ENGLAND

- Charles & Elizabeth Addoco
- Lynne Andrews (Senior)
- Tim & Joy Ayrton
- Madelene Bathgate (Senior)
- Mark & Amanda Bingham
- Lionel & Katy Clargo (Seniors)
- John Hardwick
- Kim & Jo Hobbs
- Tony & Ruth Hood
- Victor Jack (Senior)
- Miriam Jelfs (Senior)
- Colin & Linda Johnson

- Caleb & Adanesh Mathewos (CP)
- Andrew & Rachel Mugford

## SOUTH WEST

- Jean Campbell (Senior)
- Steve Ellacott
- Mike & Su Strange (Seniors)
- Alex & Beth Symons
- David & Katie Symons
- Stevie & Natalie Walker

## SOUTH CENTRAL

- Jonathan & Heather Brain
- Gordon & Penny Curley
- Ray Dadswell (Senior)
- Stephen & Jean Gillham (Seniors)
- Wendy Iliffe (Senior)
- Steve & Dawn Loader

## WALES

- Grace Anderson (Senior)
- Clive & Fiona Cornish (CP)
- Paul & Laura Davies
- Phil & Sheila Davies
- Janet Hawking
- Lesley & Andrew Lawrence
- Mike & Jan Thomas
- Steve & Gwyneth Treseder

CP – Church Planter

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