

Urban Expression is an urban mission agency that recruits, equips, deploys and networks self-financing teams pioneering creative and relevant expressions of the Christian Church in under-churched urban neighbourhoods.

Potters Bar

Roger & Jenny Taylor reflect: Amazingly, we've been here 3 years in April, and this is very much our home, and the place we're called to be. We've returned several times over the last few months to our original thinking, and remain captivated by the Message version of John 1:14: 'The Word became human, and moved into the neighborhood' – and humbled by the idea that this description is worked out through all of the followers of Jesus that live and work on this estate, including us, with all our flaws and brokenness.

Sometimes (actually often!) we get bogged down in detail and busy-ness and lose sight of the vision. We become 'embalmed' for a while, wrapped up in activity, thinking that we are a centre or a focus, and find we've stopped moving forward. Then a friend or a colleague chips in, and we glimpse again the idea that we are 'embedded' here, like a war correspondent in the army, with both a calling to the people and stories around us AND a bigger, wider, grace-driven narrative to demonstrate and share.

We keep forgetting that Jesus was a failure. To the accepted wisdom of his day, the Messiah was a victor, a champion, who would drive out Rome, sanctify the Temple, and lead his people as God's chosen race on earth. He most certainly would not be convicted and executed as a criminal. That's just ridiculous. So when it happened, even the disciples felt betrayed. The two that trudged towards Emmaus were not just grieving the loss of a friend, they were aching

from the sense of betrayal: Jesus wasn't the Messiah after all, he couldn't be, he was dead. And then they were joined by a companion who gently reframed the stories of their faith, and convinced them that the 'failure' they'd witnessed was something else entirely.

Yet we, in the church, keep sharing in their mistake. We expect to 'succeed' in all we do, because (we think) that MUST be what God is leading us to. But that's to think too small, to think too short-term, to miss the point. Almost nothing works first time. Every work of art, every great idea, every useful skill requires practice, risking, failing, tweaking, adjusting, and trying again. That's our world. And faith-activities are no different. We try, we risk, we fail, we learn, we try again.

It seems to us that God has a bigger agenda than 'success': he wants us to walk with him, in and out of failure. It's about journey, not results.

Wolverhampton

Phil & Christine Core write: We have established a time when rough sleepers can come to talk about the barriers they face in getting off the streets and called it 'Pathway of Hope'. One of the critical barriers for those from EU countries is having ID. As they are not eligible for any benefits, employment is the only avenue to getting accommodation. For this they need ID. However, ID is often lost, stolen or expired. Replacements can only be made at the appropriate Embassy or Consulate. This has meant several trips to

London with groups to obtain replacement ID or to renew passports. One man found out that his embassy had been holding his lost passport for 7 years but had no way of contacting him! We assisted him finding a job. Several others are now in work and are no longer sleeping rough.



There was time in London to take in a few sights.

Currently the Pathway is in the process of being defined. It offers the replacement ID service but the vision we have is far wider, transformational and proclamational.

The Wolverhampton Church Night Shelter is currently open in the church building we operate from. It opened at the beginning of January and will remain open for 3 months. It has space for 20 rough sleepers and over recent nights has been full. Christine is managing the day-time teams who run errands, shop and do the laundry – really anything to ensure the smooth running of the Shelter. The Shelter is closely coupled with Pathway of Hope, with those sleeping in the shelter encouraged to engage with Pathway of Hope.

Our monthly Night Church continues, with a slightly more special event on New Year's Eve. The Night Club across the street is keen to partner with us with a big event they are planning next Halloween. They want to close off the street, have mobile food outlets and marquees with live music. They want Night Church to be open and in their words, they want people to go into the church for the 'proper' reason. There are clearly many issues to be sorted out here, but there is general excitement about the possibilities of

occupying a common space with those who visit the Night Club.

We went to the 'Rule of Life Retreat' and the 'Kingdom Power and Glory' conference at the Ffald-y-Brenin Retreat Centre in Wales. They are encouraging others throughout the UK and the World to model Ffald-y-Brenin in what they are calling Local Houses of Prayer. The nature of the work that we do in the city has led to interest from Ffald-y-Brenin in supporting the setting up of Local Houses of Prayer in Wolverhampton.

UE Developments

For the past couple of years, **Carmel Murphy** has combined being one of the leaders of the UE team in Cobridge (Stoke) with travelling to Bradford as a UE development worker. We believe the time is now right to build on what she has done and appoint a one-day-a-week regional coordinator to develop teams and other initiatives in Yorkshire, in partnership with the Yorkshire Baptist Association. Please pray with us for a suitable person.

We have also appointed **Gordon McDade** and **Karen Sethuraman** as UE development workers in Ireland. They not only planted and lead the Down Community but are keen to develop similar communities elsewhere and to forge links with others involved in urban and marginal places across Ireland.

UE Outcomes

Although Urban Expression describes itself as a church planting agency, our approach is flexible and does not usually result in traditional forms of church emerging. The context in which they find themselves and the vision of the local team determine the outcomes.

Three teams have completed their assignments with Urban Expression during

the past year, so here are examples of the outcomes.

- A team in Stoke has initiated a very effective local radio ministry and continues to develop this.
- One of our Bristol teams has launched 'Holy Spokes', a bike maintenance project that is a very impressive social enterprise.
- Another of our Bristol teams has evolved into a Christian community based in a converted vicarage on a large housing estate. Phil and Alice Lawrence reported on this in the previous newsletter.

All three developments are encouraging in that Urban Expression has facilitated them and helped them to reach the point at which they are viable without our ongoing support. None have planted what might be regarded as a traditional church, but all three are involved in evangelistic and social ministry among those who would not normally be found in church.

Crucible Webinars

A new development this year is a series of webinars following up each weekend, giving an opportunity to explore some subjects in greater depth. These are free and open to all. Here are details about the next two webinars:

Wednesday 22 March at 7.30pm: 'Mental health: developing inclusive communities, promoting positive wellbeing.' Led by **Jo Fitzsimmons** (UE Birmingham).



How do we safely support children, young people, adults and whole families in our faith communities in regard to mental health issues? What role do we have supporting someone already engaged with mental health services? How do we keep boundaries in life and death situations? How do we deal with conflict and aggression due to mental illness? How can we be inclusive and protective? How do we promote positive wellbeing in our community?

Jo is a youth and community worker and counsellor. Having worked in the mental health sector of youth work, Jo also brings her experience of Mental Health Services supporting her own children with their needs.

Thursday 20 April at 7.30pm: 'What have the children ever done for us?' Led by **Sara Barron** (UE Havant).



So often we look at children as those we need to teach. What if we saw that building relationship was mutually beneficial? How would that affect church, life, and community? Can we grow intergenerational communities that enable all to flourish? Jesus said 'the kingdom belongs to such as these.' In what ways can we hold space for children in and out of the church to build friendship, community and relationship with God?

Sara is a Baptist minister, currently working as an Anglican pioneer in an area of deprivation. She is also the development worker for CURBS, which resources, trains and supports children's workers in urban and estate areas.

Go to <http://www.brethren.org/webcasts/> to access these webinars. There will be a link box to click on, posted at the bottom of the webinar description, that will direct you to the webinar room.

If you missed the previous webinars in the 2016-17 series, you can watch recordings: 'Post-Everything?' (Stuart Murray Williams): <http://brethren.adobeconnect.com/p80yedpa6yq/>
'Augmented Margins' (Juliet Kilpin): <http://brethren.adobeconnect.com/p3kdpdag1wl/>

UE Youth

We mentioned in the previous newsletter that over the past couple of years we have begun to organize events for young people involved in UE teams or other marginal urban communities.

A group of these young people, accompanied by [Carmel Murphy](#) and [Juliet Kilpin](#), have just returned from a trip to the Philippines, where they participated in a conference run by Servants of Asia's Urban Poor and spent some time in a slum community, learning from other activists.

We hope to have news of this (and some good photos) in the next newsletter.

Dates for the Diary

The annual UE teams' day will take place in Manchester on **Saturday 18 March**.

The annual team leaders' day is scheduled for **Saturday 17 June**.

And please note the date of our Community Weekend – **4-5 November** – which this year will be a celebration of UE's 20th anniversary. All readers of this newsletter are welcome to join us for this event. Details coming soon.

The final Crucible weekend in the current course is on 20-21 May.

Prayer

Please pray for the ongoing work of all of our teams and especially for:

- The teams in Potters Bar and Wolverhampton, mentioned above.
- The ongoing development of ministry in the three initiatives that have now completed their time with UE.
- Those who have recently joined Urban Expression, and for more team members to join new and existing teams.
- For the teams' day, team leaders' day and community weekend.
- Those who are studying with Urban Life or on the *Crucible* course.
- The young people growing up in UE contexts and their development.

Four times a year we set aside a day to pray especially for our teams and other matters. If you would like to join us and would value some information, please let us know.

Further information

To follow what is happening across the teams and to read their reflections on urban mission and ministry, have a look at the UE blog: <http://urbanexpressionreflections.tumblr.com>

For further information about anything you have read, to enquire about joining a team, or to contribute financially, please contact:

**Urban Expression: PO Box 16991,
Birmingham B32 9HX
enquiries@urbanexpression.org.uk
www.urbanexpression.org.uk**

Urban Expression is a registered charity (no. 1090734)