

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 areas of the inner city.

New Teams

We are delighted to welcome two new teams – in cities in which Urban Expression has not previously worked:

- **Ian Michel** (as team leader) and **Steve & Jane Watson** are forming our first team in Nottingham. Phil Warburton, our regional development worker in partnership with the East Midlands Baptist Association, will be helping to discern the team's specific location
- **Phil & Christine Core** will be leading our first team in Wolverhampton. The context is different from normal. They have a very large building in the heart of the city and will be developing new and innovative forms of mission here.

We have also formed a partnership with the Yorkshire Baptist Association and hope in the next month to announce the appointment of a further regional development worker, whose primary focus will be on Bradford. We hope to see teams deployed in this city before long.

The main area in which further development is needed, as we mentioned in the previous newsletter, is our ability to recruit more team *members*. We do quite well at recruiting team leaders, but we need to find ways to connect with those who are willing to move into poor urban neighbourhoods, continue with careers or find new jobs, commit themselves to serve the local community and join existing teams or help to form new teams. So, if you know anyone who might be interested and suitable, please invite them to contact us. We would love to explore this with them.

Avoiding Line Management

As Urban Expression expands and we bring more people into the 'core team' (all of whom are very part-time), we have been reflecting together on our structures, understanding of leadership and ways of communicating. We need clarity if we are to function effectively in a growing organization, but we are wary of becoming hierarchical and are not keen on the notion of 'line management'. Some of us have enjoyed the book, *The Starfish and the Spider*, and we had a day in January with one of our trustees, Catherine Cowell, exploring alternative approaches.

We already operate in a fairly flat way. All of us are on the same rate of pay, whatever our roles, and we use terms like 'co-ordinator' to describe those who exercise leadership. There is a high level of trust among us, enabling us to get on with things without always seeking permission first. But we do want to ensure that we communicate well, learn from each other, offer encouragement and constructive feedback, and maximize opportunities. So we will introduce some new working practices that are in line with our core values and keep these under review over the coming months.

Reflections from Mitcham

Mark Scott writes: 'During Advent we launched our community 'rule of life' here, which concluded discussions of around nine months involving many ideas, questions, hopes, concerns, coffee and cake! One of our issues was with the language of a 'rule', and

the negative connotations this brought to mind for some people. We toyed with the idea of naming the outcome a pattern, rather than a rule, and it even became labelled the 'thingy' for a while as we wrestled with the name and what lay beneath it. Eventually we discovered a description of a rule by the New Life Fellowship which was very helpful. It informed us that the meaning of such a rule comes from the Greek word for *trellis*, which is a tool designed to enable plants to leave the ground and grow upward, which in turn allows it to be fruitful and productive. This resonated with us regarding our spiritual lives, and suddenly a rule became a positive mechanism, rather than something we may break and feel guilty about, or something that excludes others from journeying with us.

We have realised that structure, particularly amongst the often chaotic lives we experience in our communities (and in our homes too) can be a very helpful thing, and this could help facilitate our growth rather than it being a measuring stick for effectiveness. We have agreed that there is not an expectation for people to sign up to the rule to be part of our gatherings, but we will use the rule as a basis for shaping our rhythm of life and the way we interact with neighbours. Each Advent we will revisit the rule, assess its value to us, and allow anyone who has joined us since the previous Advent period to input their ideas into the rule for the coming year. We intend to use the rule to guide us, but we also agree to hold it relatively lightly so that it remains a help and not a burden.

During the process, a quote from Brennan Manning's book, *The Furious Longing of God*, became important to us and spoke into our perception of how we should be as church: 'Home is a place of welcoming love, non-judgmental acceptance, accompanied by many signs of affection.' Our prayer for this year is to enable those who feel they have no home to experience the love of God which can provide such an environment, and for those who are in relationship with Jesus to display that He is within them to the people

they encounter (John 15v4). I am excited at the prospect of a new year, knowing that a spring season is on the way, and thank all of you who are contributing to our journey and guiding our growth.

Lee's Story

We are delighted to share with you another of the 'faith journeys' of people linked with UE teams. **Phil Lawrence** (Bristol) writes:

We have been excited to have Lee come and join us in living at The Cairn. Lee grew up in Inns Court, and can see the house he grew up in from his bedroom window at The Cairn. Lee comes complete with a crazy white cat called Gizmo. Lee is 35. He turned to God at the age of 33 after many years of resistance, during which time he would describe himself as having been 'a vile person' who 'hated God'. Moving into The Cairn represents a complete turnaround, as Lee has recently felt challenged to serve God on the estate he grew up on. He has surrendered his business into God's hand, accepted re-possession of his home, and followed a strong leading to occupy a room at The Cairn which became available at just the right moment.

Lee recalls a reasonably happy childhood in Inns Court, with some good friends. But his family situation was complex. Sadly, when Lee was just one and a half, he lost his older brother in a road accident. Lee never knew his brother but always lived with the sadness and fallout from that event. In the aftermath, his parents split up and he was separated from his mum for six months while she was in recovery. A year later, his grandfather also died. Lee's earliest memories were of losing his brother, his grandad and his mum – all of them were taken away from him.

When he was 7, Lee gained a big sister, Kim, from his father's previous marriage, who shared a room with him. Lee loved having an older sister. He later gained a younger sister, Natalie, who was born when Lee was about 8

or 9. Kim also had a baby around that time, so Lee in effect also gained a little brother (his nephew, Jamie). Sadly, when Lee was 13 and Jamie 5, Kim gave Jamie away for adoption. This caused a major conflict between Lee's dad and Kim, who cut each other out of their lives. So Lee experienced another major loss in his life – of his nephew, but also his big sister and a niece (Kim's 2 year-old daughter, Emma).

At the age of 10, Lee found out that his mum and dad had divorced when he was about 3, and that, although they were living together they were not *really* together. An additional source of grief at this age was when his best friend suddenly decided he didn't want to be Lee's friend anymore, just before they started senior school together. Lee suffered anorexia from the age of 13 to 19. Looking back he sees this was an area where he felt he could have some control in a world where he had lost so many things. It must be his fault that this had happened – Lee must be too fat or too ugly.

Lee traces his animosity towards God to the time his mum had cancer, when he was about 21, which was the first time he really became aware of her faith. Lee turned against his mum and did not support her at all. He was living with his girlfriend and didn't care about his mum. He was too busy with his own little financial and business world. His sense of identity was totally tied up with money. He had been going out since the age of 16 with Angie, who was from a well-off background. Lee felt insecure and inferior, but also felt he deserved better than life had given to him. He recalls being horrible to his mum, his dad and Angie – 'a vile person'. In his own self-assessment Lee stayed 'a messed up little kid' until the age of 33, when he met with God.

Through the ups and downs of business, life, and relationships, Lee had always blamed God when things went wrong. He had always avoided turning to drugs and alcohol, even though this would have been an easy route to take on the estate, as he always thought that

he would succeed financially. Four years ago, he reached a major point of conflict with his mum because of her insistence that only God could solve everything. So, for six months, he cut his mum out of his life. This proved to be a turning point, with Lee finally surrendering to God two years later.

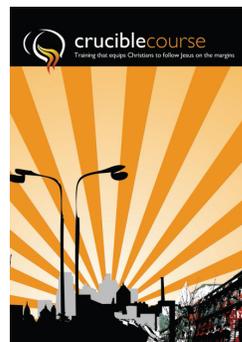
Since turning to God, Lee has continued to experience ups and downs but has never doubted the reality of God. He is learning that it is not all an easy ride, but he rejoices consistently in his new-found freedom from addiction to material pursuit. His desire now is to serve God and to do good, as he learns to trust daily and prays towards next steps.

More information about The Cairn and Phil & Alice's ministry there can be found at <http://welcometothecairn.blogspot.co.uk>.

Teams' Day

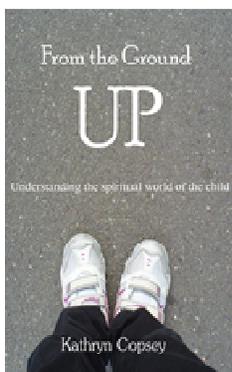
Our annual teams' day (for all team members and mission partners) will be in Nottingham on Saturday 21 March. We will be learning about and praying for this city in which a UE team will soon be deployed. We will also be hearing from long-time team leaders **Nick & Kerry Coke** and celebrating their transition from 'team' to 'church' (Hope Asha church in East London). And we will welcome Juliette Pol, a Dutch researcher exploring the role of UE teams in the UK and the Netherlands in helping people on their 'faith journeys'.

Crucible



The second weekend of this year's course (our tenth year) took place on 7-8 February. Once again, numbers were good and feedback was positive. Please pass on the brochure to anyone who may be interested.

From the Ground Up



Kathryn Copsey was not only a pioneer in the field of children's spirituality, but also a much loved trustee of Urban Expression. We miss her but are glad to promote her book. It can be purchased for £4 on Kindle eBooks.

When this book was first published in 2005 many in the field of children's spirituality cited it as a landmark publication. Indeed, in retrospect the book can be seen as ahead of its time. Dr Keith White, the Director of Mill Grove, wrote in the foreword: 'Kathryn has written a practical book that those working alongside children and young people will treasure, but that also has the potential to open eyes and hearts of all Christians to some hidden truths of the Gospel.'

Kathryn had spent her whole life working with children in the East End of London. She had also been an editor for Scripture Union and had founded CURBS (Children in Urban Situations). All proceeds from the sale of the book will go towards CURBS, with whom we are now working in partnership. Her heart was always to understand the world of the child and to 'see' the spiritual potential of that unique person. She was never happier than being a mum and leading holiday clubs!!

Out of her experience of entering the world of the child and producing materials to awaken spirituality within the life of children she wrote this book. It brings together the insights of the Bible, children's spirituality, developmental psychology, counselling theory and her own unique understanding of children. This is a book that has emerged out of practice. It is a book about the spirituality of every child. Kathryn challenges the church to become more child-aware and to include children in the full life of the church.

Youth Weekend

Team members with children are often asked about the impact of bringing up children in poor urban communities. We have decided to ask the children themselves. We have invited several of our teenagers to a youth weekend at Centre Parcs in March. We want to learn from their experiences and insights. We'll tell you more in the next newsletter.

Prayer

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

- The new teams in Nottingham and Wolverhampton.
- Lee in Bristol as he continues to grow in his new-found faith.
- The youth weekend in March and the children growing up with UE.
- The new development worker soon to be appointed in Yorkshire.

Four times a year we set aside a day to pray especially for our teams and other matters. The next date is **26 February**. If you would like to join us on that day and would value some information to help, 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:

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