

FOUNDATIONS

SUPPORTING
KINGDOM
BUILDING

EMBRACING ALL

Creating welcoming and accessible
church environments

Also in this issue:

Making
your church
building more
welcoming

Creating a
culture of
hospitality

Welcoming
refugees: more
than just a
greeting

Welcome



We all know from our own experience how important it is to welcome people to our gatherings and to do so in a way that is appropriate, helpful, loving

and joyful. You may have experienced visiting a church where the welcome is non-existent or left you with a negative impression of the fellowship. A good welcome can make a huge difference; after all, as the saying goes, “you only get one chance to make a good first impression”.

Sometimes we are happy to welcome people to our church meetings and different activities, but are more reluctant to welcome people into our homes. However, doing so often removes significant barriers and enables people to open up both in terms of their own life story, but also to respond to the Gospel, particularly as they see you living it out.

As we read of the life of Jesus, we see Him welcoming children, those that the world considered to be “sinners”, seekers after the truth who turn up in the middle of the night, and crowds, even when He and His disciples are in need of a rest. As we spend time with Jesus, we become more like Him and more willing to welcome people, even if it is inconvenient or challenging.

I hope you enjoy this edition of Foundations as we explore the theme of “welcome”, so you and your church are inspired to open up the doors both of your church building and your homes.

Giles Arnold

Chief Executive of Church Growth Trust

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QR codes

We have introduced 'QR codes' to Foundations to make it easier to access more information online. Just open your mobile phone camera, point the camera at the QR code image, tap the link that appears on your mobile screen and follow any instructions that will take you to the relevant website.



What's new?

Our latest news in brief

New launch of fundraising microsite

Church Growth Trust (CGT) are delighted to announce the launch of a new fundraising microsite in partnership with Church Grants, the only online grant search engine focused exclusively on churches and faith-based organisations. This tool is available to churches occupying CGT buildings and provides a valuable resource for securing funding.

By using Church Grants, churches will gain access to hundreds of local and national funding sources relevant to church projects, as well as resources and tools to help plan and execute successful fundraising campaigns.

Giles Arnold, Chief Executive of CGT, shared his enthusiasm about the new resource:

“Church Grants is an answer for us at CGT, as we believe this will be an excellent resource for our connected churches when looking to close the funding gap they often face with building projects.”



How to access Church Grants

Visit cgt.churchgrants.co.uk. You will need your organisation ID and church name.

If you do not know your ID, please email enquiries@churchgrowth.org.uk

We are thrilled to offer this new opportunity and believe it will be a valuable tool for churches seeking funding to support their ministry.

Visit....

cgt.churchgrants.co.uk



CGT welcomes Mark Wallace as new trustee

We are excited to announce the appointment of Mark Wallace as a new Trustee at CGT. Living in Suffolk all his life, Mark brings a wealth of experience and a deep-rooted commitment to serving his local community. He has been actively involved in local churches from a young age, including serving as an elder and preaching in the area.

Mark also holds trustee positions with various churches and charities and acts as the treasurer for Bury St Edmunds & District Christian Youth. Professionally, he

is a tax partner at an accountancy practice based in Hadleigh, Suffolk. In addition to his work and charitable roles, Mark enjoys swimming, snooker, cricket and Advanced Driving. We are delighted to have him join the team and look forward to the valuable insights and expertise he will bring to CGT's mission.



Mark Wallace, Trustee

New Fire Risk Assessment Training well received by church leaders

CGT recently held its first-ever Fire Risk Assessment training event and it was a resounding success!

Designed exclusively for leaders of churches occupying CGT buildings, the free online session took place on 5 March 2025 and quickly reached full capacity.

This training provided invaluable guidance on how to conduct effective fire risk assessments, helping churches ensure their premises are safe and compliant. Feedback from attendees was overwhelmingly positive,

with many appreciating the practical insights and clarity offered during the session.

Due to the high demand and positive response, CGT is considering running another session later this year. Keep an eye out for updates on future training opportunities!



Share your good news with us

Church Growth Trust is always looking for good news to share. If you have an encouraging story about the ministry in your area or a building project you are working on, please contact our Communications Manager.



Sharon Short

Communications Manager

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Making your church building more welcoming

Practical advice for building improvements

The importance of providing a warm friendly welcome to any visitors to your church meetings and activities is well known, but have you considered whether your church building itself extends the same welcome?

It was often the case that buildings designed for independent churches were often modest and understated, typically featuring a simple

frontage with an opaque door, minimal signage and sometimes no windows at all. While these design choices were made with good reason—to align with values and ensure wise financial stewardship—their lasting impact today is that these buildings can often feel austere, closed-off and even unwelcoming to newcomers unfamiliar with the church. Fortunately, even small, budget friendly changes can have a big impact on your building's appearance and atmosphere.

Before...



...and after



Great improvements from render decoration works

Building frontage

If your building's front elevation has a rendered finish, it may be showing signs of wear, such as faded or peeling paint, or it may never have been painted, leaving it with a dull grey appearance.

Applying a fresh coat of paint can significantly improve the look of the building. However, it is important to seek professional advice on the appropriate type of paint to ensure it is suitable for the rendered surface.

Front entrance door

If the front entrance door of your building is solid with no glazing, consider replacing it with a predominantly glazed door. This change will not only allow natural light to brighten your lobby but also create a visual connection between the building's interior and passers-by, making the space feel more open, active and welcoming.

Additionally, to comply with current Building Regulations and the Equality Act, the

entrance door should have a level, step-free threshold. Replacing your front door provides an opportunity to address and remove any existing threshold steps, improving accessibility for all visitors.

Welcome area

Does your building have a small, cramped lobby just beyond the front entrance? If so, you are likely familiar with the challenges this can create. For those entering the building for the first time, a confined lobby can feel awkward and may make it difficult for church members to offer a warm and welcoming reception.

Many churches are now exploring the possibility of creating a larger lobby or open space, often referred to as a "welcome area." As the name suggests, these areas provide an inviting entrance, but they can also serve multiple purposes. They are ideal for pre and post service tea and coffee gatherings and can even offer a space where parents with young children can step out of a service temporarily if needed.



Kingsbury - Welcome area outside



A glazed welcome area connecting the inside and outside

Expanding the lobby does not always require extending the building. In many cases, extra space can be created through a simple internal reconfiguration of the front section. However, if you are considering an extension, it presents a great opportunity to enhance the building's appearance by incorporating glazing, which can create a brighter, more open and visually striking entrance.

Facilities within the building

Both the Equality Act 2010 and Building Regulations require that buildings open to the public include an accessible WC. Part M of the Building Regulations outlines the specific design criteria that must be met to ensure accessibility. Many churches may already have an accessible WC; however, if it was installed many years ago, it may not meet the latest regulatory standards.

It is important for churches to review their facilities and assess whether upgrades are needed to comply with current requirements.

If any significant building work is planned, upgrading the accessible WC to meet current regulations will be a necessary part of the project.

Support available from Church Growth Trust

Church Growth Trust (CGT) offer architectural services to independent evangelical churches in providing advice and help with potential building projects, including those to help a building feel more welcoming. These projects can range in scale from modest internal reconfigurations to larger extensions to existing buildings, and Church Growth Trust always seek to work alongside a church to help them find the best approach for their particular circumstances.

CGT can also advise upon what statutory consents may be required for the works proposed, along with providing advice on other relevant matters including Health & Safety relating to building works.



A newly installed accessible WC



A newly added ramp and level access

Find out more...

CGT have a variety of 'Practical Guides' relating to building projects which you may find useful.

These are available as a resource to view and download from the website – go to www.churchgrowth.org.uk/briefing-papers-library/ or scan the QR code.



Got any questions?

If you have any questions about your church property or believe CGT can assist with a building project, please contact CGT's architect, Jonny Heaney. He will be glad to discuss your project and explore how CGT can help bring your vision to life.



**By Jonny Heaney RIBA,
CGT Architect**

Jonny is married to Emma, and they are currently renovating their home in Wales. Jonny is a Chartered Architect joining CGT back in 2020. If you have specific enquiries relating to your church property and how to make it more environmentally friendly, please contact Jonny.

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Creating a culture of hospitality

A warm welcome in Corby

The village of Corby in Northamptonshire remained relatively unremarkable until the mid-nineteenth century when the discovery of iron ore deposits led to the establishment of a vast steelworks.

This industrial boom attracted a wave of Scottish workers who migrated to the area, forming a thriving community known as Little Scotland. The newcomers were welcomed in, their customs being absorbed into the existing community, enriching and changing it. Even though the steelworks closed over 40 years ago, reminders of this migration remain, from haggis in local fish and chip shops to Irn Bru on supermarket shelves.

Damian Carr, a Corby native, shares his perspective: “It is a generous and welcoming town, but with the steelworks closing, it experienced massive unemployment. After studying at university in Birmingham, I got married to Maggie, started a family and was ordained as a minister. Increasingly, my wife and I felt called back to Corby to start a church. In 2008 we started ‘Hope Church,’ because we wanted the name to resonate



Pastor Damien and his wife Maggie

with people in the town who had experienced years of hopelessness. We came with a conviction that the message of Jesus still changes lives and the Good News is always relevant."

Hope Church Corby now regularly hosts over 300 people at its Sunday morning gatherings.

"When we started, we dreamed of being the friendliest church anyone had ever visited. We wanted people coming in to feel loved, valued and seen. We offered tea and toast before the service and doughnuts afterwards. Although we had welcomers on the door, we wanted to create a culture where everyone in the church was on the 'welcome team'. As we grew, and moved to our current home in a secondary school, we developed more of a welcoming strategy. Now everyone is greeted at the door and, if they are new, introduced to at least one person who takes them into the church meeting. During the notices, newcomers are invited to raise their hands to receive a welcome bag. (This includes a booklet about the church, a Connect Card and pen and a generously sized bar of chocolate). As stewards hand out bags, the congregation claps to make all guests feel welcome."

Hope Church also has a designated area called the 'Connect Lounge', where newcomers can go after the worship service to meet friendly people, have coffee brought to them and ask questions. It is awkward and overwhelming to stand alone in a crowd and Hope Church wants to build a culture of inclusivity and authentic welcome. When a new person fills in a Connect Card, the church administrator sends a handwritten note to them on Monday morning. This is regularly credited as one of the reasons people decide to make Hope their home church. Four times a year, a 'Connect Lunch' is held after the Sunday meeting to allow newcomers to meet the elders and be welcomed officially. This feeds into the 'Connect Course,' where people learn the history of the church, hear about

the vision and values and find out how to get connected. This includes joining a midweek Life Group, finding their joyful place of service and becoming a church 'Partner,' Hope's word for a church member.

Hope Church is fully accessible to those with disabilities and works in partnership with local agencies to serve the most vulnerable in the community. Some community-facing initiatives include providing a homeless drop-in and supporting members of the growing refugee population in Corby. A number of Eritrean asylum-seekers attend regularly and two Iranian refugees have recently also been welcomed. When language barriers arise, the church attempts to find members who can communicate in the visitor's native language or will even use translation tools such as Google Translate to communicate, offering friendship and support.

And Hope Church's top tips for other churches wanting to emulate them? "Major in hospitality. Think like a visitor. Smile. Do not worry about resources – love God and love your neighbour as yourself and everything else will fall into place."

Want to know more?

To learn more about Hope Church, explore their community initiatives, or join a Sunday gathering, visit:

www.hopechurchcorby.org



By Ruth Leigh

Ruth is a freelance writer who works with a number of Christian charities.



Welcoming refugees: more than a greeting

How churches can offer friendship,
support and a place to belong

At Welcome Churches, we are passionate about equipping local churches to provide a warm and meaningful welcome to refugees and asylum seekers arriving in the UK.



Our vision is for every refugee to be welcomed by the local church, and we offer training, resources, and a network of over 1,400 churches committed to hospitality. Through practical support, friendship and spiritual encouragement, we help churches extend Christ's love to those seeking safety and belonging.

The chances are many of you reading this know at least one person who has sought refuge in the UK. Whether they come from Iran, Ukraine, Afghanistan, or elsewhere, we have a unique and powerful opportunity

to truly know these individuals by name. To move beyond seeing them as “refugees” and instead welcome them as unique individuals, as neighbours and friends.

How many refugees do you know by name?

The reality is that thousands of refugees arrive in the UK seeking safety and a fresh start. As local churches, we have the privilege of meeting them at our very doorsteps. Many have fled their home countries due to war, political turmoil or religious persecution - especially those who have chosen to follow Jesus or are exploring faith in Him. They arrive with little more than hope, and we have the chance to extend a hand of welcome.

Daniel's story

Daniel is one of these individuals. He fled Iran because of his Christian faith and arrived in the UK, where he was placed in a hotel in Thatcham - a small town in Berkshire he had never even heard of before. “When I first came here, I could hardly speak English.

I'd left my family and the opportunities I'd had in Iran, and I was scared to death. I felt completely alone."

Thankfully, Thatcham Baptist Church was ready to respond. Although they had no prior experience of welcoming refugees, they partnered with Welcome Churches, which trained and equipped them to extend a warm welcome to those being accommodated in the nearby hotel. The church began offering conversational English classes, spaces for international meals, Bible studies and invitations to become part of the worshipping life of the church.

"The church has helped me so much. They've taught me their language and, more importantly, shown me how to live in Christ. They've become like my family, and the church is my first home in the UK. They know me by name."

This ministry not only transformed the lives of refugees - it also revitalised the church itself. As people from all backgrounds and cultures found a sense of belonging, the congregation experienced a new lease of life, as newcomers discovered a place to call home.

The challenge of ongoing relocation

However, the journey of seeking refuge is filled with uncertainty. Many refugees, including Daniel, were only in Thatcham temporarily before being relocated to other parts of the UK while awaiting their asylum decisions. Just as they began to feel at home, they found themselves uprooted once again isolated and alone in an unfamiliar community.

Once again, Welcome Churches stepped in. Through our Welcome Network, which includes over 1,400 churches committed to being 'refugee-welcoming,' we were able to connect Daniel with a new church community through our online referral system.

Sarah from Thatcham Baptist Church elaborates: "The very next day, I got a call from one of the churches. We shared stories of baptisms, meals, jobs around churches and the sadness of moving all over the country, with no predictability. Just 48 hours after Daniel's sudden move, he had a visit from a member of the church and an invitation to join them on Sunday. What a network!"

Do you know people, like Daniel, who are looking for a welcome from their local church? Who in your community might be waiting for someone to truly see them, welcome them and call them by name? Welcome Churches' vision is for every refugee to be welcomed by the local church. We exist to equip churches across the UK to say 'Welcome' to those arriving and seeking refuge. We believe in the biblical mandate to welcome the stranger and practise hospitality, which is woven throughout scripture. And we believe in your church - its capacity to be a community of refuge, warmth and belonging.

You can make a difference

Your church members have the opportunity to make a lasting impact in the lives of those seeking safety in the UK today. Find out more at welcomechurches.org or reach out to our team - we would love to connect with you!



Tim Leese

Tim Leese is the Chief Operating Officer of Welcome Churches. He is passionate about creating opportunities for the most marginalised individuals in society. Tim enjoys traveling and learning

languages, and in his spare time, he plays in a rock band.



Welcome
to Church

Buildings that are accessible to all

CGT's Chief Executive offers tips and advice
on creating a truly welcoming space

How often have you seen a church sign proudly declare, “All are welcome,” only to find that the building itself tells a different story? Imagine arriving at a church only to face steep steps, a poorly lit entrance, or unclear signage. For many, these barriers make the difference between feeling truly invited and being turned away before they even step inside.

Other barriers can be just as off-putting—littered and overgrown pathways, neglected gardens, and buildings showing signs of disrepair, from broken windows to leaking gutters. Inside, damp, poorly ventilated rooms create an unwelcoming atmosphere. But the most significant barriers are often the ones that exclude people with disabilities: steps without ramps, inaccessible toilets, limited parking, no loop induction system for those with hearing impairments, and a lack of training for those greeting visitors.



A new accessible entrance in East Cowes

Despite the requirement for “service providers,” (which includes you as a church), to make “reasonable adjustments” to their premises to eliminate physical barriers to access over 20 years ago, many churches have yet to act.

The bigger picture

Beyond the legal obligation to make your property accessible, as a church, you should strive to ensure that people with disabilities, along with their families, have the same opportunity to hear the Gospel and fully engage in church life as everyone else. Failing to provide necessary facilities may imply that people with disabilities are not valued by you or God, making them feel unwelcome.



A poor example of church signage



Accessible ramp

The experience of many churches has shown that once a church provides such facilities (not just for wheelchair users, but for people with other impairments), people with disabilities and their entire families start to attend.

Church Growth Trust (CGT) found this with its property in East Cowes on the Isle of Wight. When the building was provided with a level access and all the main facilities on the same floor, one lady in her wheelchair came along for the first time and has since brought along three generations of the same family.

There are many practical changes that you can make to your church building that will enhance the facilities, be more welcoming and be more comfortable for all people.

For example:

- **Level access and lightweight doors:** Beneficial for parents with pushchairs, elderly people, and wheelchair users.

- **Loop induction systems:** Enhances hearing aid users' ability to hear the spoken word. But beware, as this may include your neighbours.
- **Good lighting:** Helps those with hearing impairments, lip readers, partially sighted individuals, and the elderly. Can you see the speaker's face clearly?
- **Colour contrast:** (between ceiling and walls) assists visually impaired people in perceiving room size and can add attractive design features.
- **Good acoustics:** Improves speech clarity for those with speech difficulties and enhances the sound of music and singing.
- **Carpeted floor:** Smooth pile carpets benefit various groups of people with disabilities, including wheelchair users.
- **Clear signs and information:** Helpful for all users of your facilities.



Clear signage to attract and guide your visitors

Good practice

Here are some examples of good practices worth considering for your church building:

- **Car parking:** Ensure accessible parking spaces are near the entrance and that there is suitable lighting in the car park and around the building.
- **Physical access:** Provide a platform and space at the top of ramps to allow doors to

be opened. Include steps as well as a ramp, as ramps can be difficult for elderly people not in wheelchairs.

- **Toilets:** Ensure the accessible WC door opens outwards, is wide enough, and has an alarm fitted.
- **Seating:** Leave spaces for wheelchair users and provide some chairs with armrests for people with conditions such as arthritis.
- **Projectors:** Use a digital projector with 30pt type size, in combination with upper and lower case text to assist people with dyslexia.
- **Trip hazards:** Repair damaged floor surfaces to prevent tripping hazards for people with mobility difficulties or partial sight.
- **Training:** Conduct ongoing training to raise awareness of the Equality Act requirements and encourage the whole church to make the facilities as accessible and welcoming as possible.

Want to learn more?

These examples highlight just a few of the many practical, often small and inexpensive measures that can be taken to make your church more welcoming and accessible to everyone, including those with disabilities.

By implementing these changes, you can create an inclusive environment where all individuals feel valued and supported. For more information, take a look at the practical guides on disability access on the CGT website at:

www.churchgrowth.org.uk/area/disability-access



By Giles Arnold
Chief Executive

Giles has been managing Church Growth Trust since its inception in 2010 and before that worked for Stewardship. He leads the expanding team

and is regularly meeting trustees and elders of independent churches, who are considering how CGT can help them with their properties.

He works with other sister organisations on a national basis, including with church planting work and revitalisation of churches. He also specialises in advice on church and charity buildings, such as unravelling Trust Deeds.



Building on a firm foundation

From a garden shed to global impact:
The story of Gospel Printing Mission

For decades, a remarkable ministry in East London has spread the Good News of Jesus. From a garden shed to a global mission, the Gospel Printing Mission has distributed free Christian literature worldwide. This is the story of how God used a small team to impact lives in over 50 countries—and how their legacy continues.

In May 1960, a nineteen-year-old called David Cotton set up a hand printing press in his father's garden shed. Attending a World Evangelisation Crusade meeting with his friend David Matthews, he was challenged by the amount of communist literature that was being printed and distributed. A recent convert, David decided to design and print

text cards with the Good News of Jesus to share with others. At a prayer meeting, he found out that the Congo was in desperate need of tracts and so began the process of having the material translated into the Bangala language. They took six months to reach their destination, and, in the meantime, many scoffed at the idea of such an ambitious ministry. However, letters began arriving in England telling of conversions. Leaflets went to Angola and Mozambique and the same response was received. Eighteen months into the ministry, now known as the Gospel Printing Mission, the shed was outgrown. Cranbrook Road Baptist Church in nearby Ilford offered David their basement, a former coal cellar.

Several volunteers joined the team. Their prayers were intensified when new premises and equipment became urgently needed. In 1966, two key events occurred. The

ministry moved into a disused Gospel Hall in Barkingside and a young woman named Margaret met David Cotton at an OMF meeting.

Margaret Cotton recalls, “I went with my friend Pam. She asked if girls could help and David said yes. I started out setting up the printing blocks and using a treadle, which was hard. I got backache, but I reminded myself of what the Lord bore for me.”



Margaret Cotton, joint Founder of Gospel Printing Mission

David and Margaret married in 1974 by which time the GPM had a sizeable team, many of whom found faith through the work. The production and distribution of free Christian literature expanded worldwide, leading to thousands of people overseas coming to faith in Jesus. In 1976, a dispatch section for Spanish and Portuguese leaflets was opened in Epping. GPM then moved into a former Gospel Hall in Plaistow, East London, their current premises and one of Church Growth Trust's properties.

“We leaned on the Lord for everything”, Margaret remembers. “We had no money for equipment, but miraculously, over the years, God provided us with everything we needed.

I remember one day I was sending out newsletters and realised I did not have stamps or any money to buy them. Suddenly, an envelope came through the front door filled with stamps. We often received anonymous gifts. A man used to slip money through the door, then drive off. To this day, I do not know who he is.”

Under Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of perestroika and glasnost in 1990, the USSR opened up and floods of letters arrived at GPM asking for literature in Russian. Today, the ministry sends tracts and booklets in 35 languages to 57 countries.

With the sad death of David Cotton in 2022, it became increasingly difficult to keep going. Ian Jamieson is a trustee for OPAL, a charity that serves Christian leaders and churches by equipping them with quality evangelistic literature. Ian put Margaret Cotton in touch with OPAL. A merger is now planned between the two charities.

“Of course, I am sad that I cannot do the work anymore”, says Margaret, “but God has supplied just the right people to take over in His wonderful timing”.

Dr Ian Shaw is the Head of Ministry at OPAL. He says, “We share goals and visions with GPM and it would have been a great shame if they had had to close. Some of their material will be updated and refreshed and we will be able to add to the existing stock. Expanding our reach had been on our hearts for some time, so to have God's confirmation was wonderful. We are honoured to carry the work on.”



By Ruth Leigh

Ruth is a freelance writer who works with a number of Christian charities.



A light rising in the darkness

Bringing hope to Uttoxeter, one meal, one conversation at a time

***‘If you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness...’
Isaiah 58:10.***

In a town where the high street is struggling, and many face poverty and isolation, Renew Church are shining a light in the darkness.

Through their foodbank ministry, what began as a simple act of providing food has grown into a thriving community hub—offering not just meals, but hope, friendship and faith. Associate Pastor Paul Jones shares how, with the support of Church Growth Trust (CGT), the foodbank has become a place of transformation for the people of Uttoxeter.

‘Our church, Renew, took on the foodbank from the Salvation Army ten years ago. We dropped food parcels, supported pensioners,

the unemployed, people leaving prison and anyone who needed some help. After Covid, the language of mental health was more prevalent and we wanted to connect our community. Simply dropping off a food parcel doesn’t lead to relationship building. We were working out of the creche at the church building and running out of space. That was where Church Growth Trust came in.’

In 2021, CGT gave **Renew Church** a grant of £2,500 from the sale of a local Gospel Hall. They used the money to renovate their storage room and fully rack it out for more effective storing of food, move out of the creche downstairs and into a new accessible room on the ground floor, buy tables and crates and establish a weekly drop-in foodbank café.

‘The grant helped us become more effective,’ Paul explains. ‘Now, everyone sits around the

tables and chats while enjoying coffee and cake. The foodbank is set up like a shop next door. Often, our clients will collect their food and supplies then continue chatting with us. Now we have a real community feel.'



Foodbank at Renew Church

Some of the clients are open to prayer and others have started to attend events at the church. One of Paul's favourite stories is about a lady who came to volunteer at the foodbank as part of her community service.

'Through the love and acceptance she found, she began to attend events at church. She gave her life to the Lord and was baptised in 2024. At a recent AGM, she shared about her work with the church craft group, which attracts a diverse group of people who would never have set foot in the place before. The foodbank feeds people physically, but also spiritually.'

Many clients are slowly starting to build up trust and asking for prayer for difficult situations. Renew Church occupies the old cinema on the High Street in Uttoxeter, so have an excellent location. With the new accessible rooms on the ground floor, anyone can come in and there is a lovely flow with the layout which encourages social interaction. The impact of the foodbank, cafe and shop is growing, thanks to the grant.

'Post-Covid, we started inviting local agencies along. PCSO, Moneywise, Mind, the Alzheimer's Society, the Housing Association and a local drug rehab charity all come along



Sharing fellowship at the foodbank café

regularly which gives our clients a direct link to services they may need. One guy with a very severe lung condition lived on the fourth floor of a block of flats. He struggled to get up the stairs and it was getting worse. One of the trustees at church had him in his heart and wrote to the local Housing Association asking for him to be moved. Now he is thriving in a far more accessible home and that is all because of the relationships being built up at the foodbank café. Lots of churches do this kind of thing, but the stories that are coming out of our café are wonderful.'

From an overflowing inaccessible space in the basement to a suite of inviting rooms on the ground floor, Renew Church has been able to reach out to their community, share the Good News and make a real impact in Uttoxeter.



Paul Jones, Associate Pastor, Renew Church

Paul joined Renew Church in 2016 while on placement from Mattersey Hall Bible College. During his time at the church, he met his wife, Emma, and completed his ministerial training with Assemblies of God. Now,

Paul is actively involved in church planting in Rocester as part of the Renew Church team.



Faith in action: Part three

counties
CONNEX
inspire | equip | engage

Simon Ladd continues our series of inspiring stories of church growth and evangelism in East Anglia

Read about the state of Christianity in the secular press, and you might assume it is in terminal decline—shrinking congregations, churches repurposed as housing and fewer people identifying as followers of Jesus. But that is not the whole story. Beneath the surface, faith is growing, communities are being transformed and people are encountering Jesus for themselves.

As a Counties Regional Connector and the Senior Leader at Brockley Baptist Church in West Suffolk, I have seen this firsthand. Counties exists to inspire, equip, and engage churches for mission. Since we began the revitalisation work at Brockley—a small village seven miles south of Bury St Edmunds—we have witnessed remarkable change.

When I first arrived, the church had fewer than ten people, the church secretary had just passed away and the building was hidden behind a row of tall yew trees. It was clear that the church had lost its connection with the village. Counties were approached and they offered help.

I vividly remember that first meeting—just

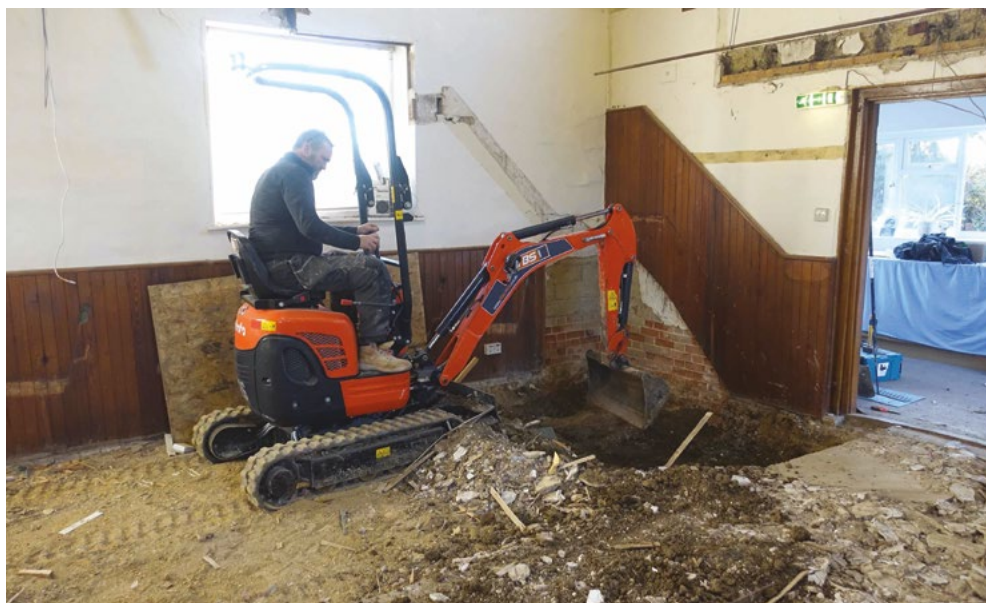


11 of us in the room. One of the first steps we took was organising a Christmas carol service, which was well received. Encouraged by its success, we held a few more services, but then Covid struck. With restrictions preventing us from using the building, we held a Christmas service in the car park. Standing in the dark, a villager asked me, “So where is the chapel?” The question highlighted a deeper issue—the church was almost invisible behind towering trees. We cut them down and suddenly, the building stood

in clear view. It was a simple yet significant change. After all, if people can’t see a church, why would they think to visit it?

It quickly became apparent that the church had lost its connection with the Brockley community. To rebuild relationships, I encouraged the small congregation to get involved in local activities. Before long, church members were taking part in the table tennis club, coffee mornings, computer club, Saturday breakfasts and the QI (Quite Interesting) Club. Gradually, conversations began to emerge. Change in a village community takes time, but as people saw our genuine interest in them, they became more receptive. We joined the village litter pick, trimmed hedges, installed nesting boxes and helped restore a pond. Once the church had re-established its presence, we turned our focus to the building.

After lockdown, the leadership team worked on an extensive refurbishment, making the church accessible, warm and welcoming. This allowed us to start hosting soup



lunches, afternoon teas and other events—opportunities for people to step inside the building. Four years on, Sunday attendance has grown to 50–60 people and the church has celebrated its first baptism in 20 years. In 2024, they held a joint D-Day service with the local Anglican church, welcoming 84 people—more than half of whom walked there, showing they were from the village.

If a church wants to reverse decline, it must rethink how it engages with people. Too often, we preach Acts 2 sermons in an Acts 17 world. In Acts 2, Peter speaks to Jews who already understand the Old Testament. In Acts 17, Paul preaches to Gentiles who don't. Today, the gap between church culture and the wider world is widening. We need to adapt our language, culture and communication or risk becoming isolated. One approach I find helpful is what I call “middle talk.” Moving beyond small talk, we engage in meaningful discussions that build genuine relationships.

Brockley is a small, rural village with an older population, yet lives are being transformed. Recently, two men in their sixties found faith. One had a prayerful wife who had been hoping for years. When we started refurbishing the church, he came to look, stayed, and eventually gave his life to Christ. He even asked when we were going to start an Alpha course—so we did! Another man used to drop his wife off for church and sit in the car park listening to the radio. He came in once and now thinks it is the greatest thing ever! We are not sure if he has fully committed yet, but he is certainly on the journey.

Brockley's Alpha course attracted around ten guests, moving several people along on their journey of faith. Home groups have been started, and new believers are supported through individual Bible studies and personal visits.

tremendous opportunity for collaboration. Within a three-mile radius, there is a Baptist Union Church, an FIEC Church and a Grace Baptist Church. While differences exist, are they really as significant as we often perceive? By working together, we could employ a minister, youth worker, or family worker, amplifying our collective impact. If we prioritise God's Kingdom over our own small empires and embrace bold, radical thinking, who knows what blessings we might see?

There is still work to be done in Brockley, but for the first time in years, the church is not only active but growing and well-equipped to serve its community.



For more information...

Or to get involved, please email:

Simon Ladd, Regional Connector

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By Simon Ladd, Regional Connector, Counties

Simon Ladd is married to Belinda with three grown-up children. Over 40 years, he has pastored in Baptist, Brethren, AOG Pentecostal, and FIEC churches. His

passion is equipping Christians to confidently share their faith. Simon flies a paramotor and has just bought a small boat, which Belinda insists won't be parked on the front lawn this time.

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Running the race with endurance

Ministry can feel like running a marathon in relentless heat—draining and exhausting. In this article, Paul Coulter, Living Leadership’s Head of Ministry Operations, shares how they support Christian leaders and their spouses, helping them endure through refreshment, training and strong relationships.

“Being in ministry is like being an endurance runner in a hot climate and you can easily become dehydrated”. This description of their experience from a Christian leader is typical for many. **Living Leadership** aims to help Christian leaders and spouses of Christian leaders run their race with endurance without dropping out because of discouragement, disillusionment or disqualification. Our network of experienced leaders who understand the unique pressures and temptations of Christian leadership offers support at every turn. Our ministries are

shaped by our convictions about what makes for healthy leadership.

Healthy leadership flows from Christ’s love

Faithful service for Christ flows from joyful living in Christ. Our ‘Formation ministries’ provide biblically grounded and practically applied training in all aspects of leadership and pastoral care. Their core emphasis is on Christ-like character formed in loving relationship with the Lord.

Whether in person or online, we meet churches, organisations and networks across the UK and Ireland with bespoke training for elders, leadership teams and pastoral care teams. Knowing how busy church leaders are, you can run our video-based Pastoral Care Foundations Course at your own pace to develop a team of people confident to care for others in a Gospel-shaped way. Leaders starting out in ministry are equipped through biannual Formation Residential Conferences, which emphasise healthy rhythms and attitudes for Christian service.

Healthy leadership involves lifelong learning

Our weekly blog and archives of articles and podcast episodes offer insights into heart issues and practical challenges in Christian leadership. We also have toolkits for key leadership needs like planning a sabbatical or conducting an annual review of a Christian worker.

We help churches build and sustain healthy leadership cultures, where leaders serve within wise boundaries and are well-supported by those they lead. Our Codes of Best Practice in the care and conduct of leaders set standards churches can adopt and work towards together.

Healthy leadership is relational

Leaders who pour themselves out for others often struggle to find someone they can trust to talk about the challenges they face. Living Leadership's 'Refresh ministries' aim to encourage leaders and spouses of leaders in God's grace through supportive relationships. Annual 48-hour Pastoral Refreshment Conferences and regional Refreshment Days across the UK and Ireland provide a space to draw aside and be blessed. Refresh Groups, including those specifically for spouses of leaders and women in ministry, offer mutual encouragement facilitated by one of our network members, either online or in-person.

Knowing just how helpful a listening ear and godly advice from outside your situation can be, we also provide one-to-one pastoral care and mentoring.

Healthy leadership glorifies God

Leaders who live joyfully in Christ will serve Him faithfully, and that is good for the churches they serve. Healthy leadership helps make healthy churches and healthy churches glorify God and commend the Gospel to others.

Leaders regularly tell us how God has sustained and enriched them in is service through our ministries. One participant in a Pastoral Refreshment Conference described it as, *'An oasis which refreshes, encourages and challenges to hopefully help me serve God and my church in a way that glorifies Him'*. A recipient of one-to-one support, meanwhile, said, *'Meeting one-to-one has been a huge blessing. It feels like such a safe space where I am always heard, helped, encouraged and pointed to Jesus'*.

Find out more...

We count it our privilege to serve those who serve the Lord and His people. If we can help you in any way, we would love to hear from you. You can reach out via our website at www.livingleadership.org



Paul Coulter, Living Leadership

Paul Coulter, Living Leadership's Head of Ministry Operations, previously worked as a doctor, pastor and theology lecturer. He lives in Lisburn, Northern Ireland, with his wife and two teenaged children.

Are you **refreshed** in ministry?

A life of service entails being poured out again and again for the sake of others, but, if we don't keep replenished in God's grace, we can find ourselves dry and parched.

Living Leadership is here to help!

- **One-to-one** tailored mentoring and pastoral support
- **Online groups** for leaders and spouses
- **Refreshment Days** across the UK and Ireland
- **Pastoral Refreshment Conferences**

www.livingleadership.org

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We do this because we want to help independent churches thrive in their mission within the heart of their community by helping to keep church buildings for their original use and fit for purpose. We are passionate about offering our skills, experience and practical support in a way that serves the Church and sees God's Kingdom grow.

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