

I'm writing this as the snow lay thick on the ground outside my study window. A Christmas card scene sparkles before me: pure whiteness, crisp and unspoilt, albeit two weeks early. Its December, we're approaching mid-winter, yet once again we seem unprepared: schools are closed, roads blocked, public transport is struggling, and events are cancelled.

Just over 2,000 years ago saw the birth of the baby Jesus: Immanuel, the Messiah, the son of God. A seismic event foretold throughout the Old Testament, from Genesis (3:15) through to the prophets Isaiah, Hosea and Micah. If you like, a 'heads-up' as much as 1500 years before the event. *Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel* (Isaiah 7:14).

Were people then unprepared for what happened? As we look forward to celebrating again that second most significant day in history, are we fully prepared? Not that we've decorated the tree, ordered the turkey or reserved a copy of the Christmas Radio Times at the Newsagents, but for the implications of that unique event 2,000 years ago in a stable in Bethlehem - the start of that great rescue mission; Jesus coming to earth to save us from our sins.

That amazing event reminds us that we matter to God, deeply. So much so that the invitation to turn to Him is open to everyone: the lost and the broken, the hurting and the forgotten - people that Church Army works alongside 365 days every year. Each is as precious to Him as you and I are, and each we lift to God in prayer as part of our response to what Jesus has done for us. This Christmas time lets be a people prepared for God's work, lets be praying and responding to His calling: to love God, to love our neighbour, to make disciples; and let us give thanks and praise that He came to earth 2,000 years ago to rescue us.

Can I take this opportunity to wish you a peaceful and blessed Christmas and thank you for your support of Church Army in 2022. I hope you find this newsletter encouraging and I look forward to being in touch in 2023.

CHURCH VISTS

It's been my pleasure in recent months to speak about CA's work to some of our partner churches. Each visit has been a fresh chance to thank, encourage and inspire churches and individuals with stories from the front line. As well as keeping our supporters in touch with news, it's always a privilege to hear from them about their connections with CA, often over many decades.

From Oxfordshire to North London, I've had the privilege of talking to small and large congregations who value CA as their mission partner and share a passion to see individuals and communities transformed by the gospel. Church Army is working in areas where there is food poverty, unemployment, homelessness, and social isolation; in areas of deprivation and places where many find themselves marginalised. Our vision is that everyone everywhere





would encounter God's love and be empowered to transform their communities through faith shared in words and action. I'm similarly passionate about seeing lives transformed by the gospel and would love to talk to individuals, churches and organisations who would like to find out more, or that feel moved to support the work of Church Army in this region. So please do contact me if that's you.

CENTRE OF MISSION VISITS

During the second half of the year, I've been visiting more of CA's amazing frontline work. In July I took one of our supporters to see the Genesis Project; set up by Church Army some years ago as part of the Medway Centre of Mission's (CoM's) work. Genesis is an exciting project based at a local Football Club. The aim is to engage



with marginalised and vulnerable adults, those homeless and vulnerably housed to see an increase in fitness, aspiration, and positive relationships through a weekly opportunity to play football, share a meal together and, for those interested, an opportunity to explore faith. It was such a privilege to spend time with the people there, to eat with them, to hear the gospel shared and to witness God's love in action.



In October I spent the day with our Lead Evangelist in the Southampton CoM. Ruth works with families across a large estate which is among the top 10% most deprived areas in England. A significant number of people there struggle practically and emotionally. Alongside other areas of outreach, Ruth runs a small group in her house once a week. All the attendees are unchurched, most are single mothers, but the one thing they all have in common is a desire to find out more about Jesus. It was encouraging to witness their hunger for scripture, their mature questioning and telling observations during our time of Bible study together. Ruth commented afterwards that everyone in the group was growing as a believer, and all want so much to serve. At the end of the study, we had soup together and it was a real joy to hear from several individually about how the fellowship and support they experienced through this group was, to them, a vital lifeline.



SOUTHWARK DIOCESAN CONFERENCE

For the first three days of September, I was asked to represent Church Army in the Marketplace at the Southwark Diocesan Conference. Held at Bacon College in Rotherhithe, with the theme *"Christ Centred and Outward Focused"* to reflect Bishop Christopher's passion for seeing parishes, schools and communities across the diocese share their faith widely, the conference was designed to deepen discipleship and widen focus for mission, by encouraging and equipping lay and ordained from across the diocese. A full programme of worship, main sessions, seminars



and networking presented a great opportunity to promote the work of CA. With two CoMs located in the diocese, in St Helier and Greenwich, it was great to be joined on the stand by Lead Evangelists Tracy and Nick who were able to share stories of what God is doing in their areas and the impact the work is having. In addition, CA's CEO Peter Rouch delivered a powerful seminar entitled *'Vital Signs - Why evangelism matters?'*

OTHER NEWS

I'm excited to share the news that in September CA entered a partnership with New Wine. This partnership, limited to a small number of organisations every year, is designed to support an organisation's priorities, and achieve mutual goals. CA shares a similar vision and values to New Wine, and it is hoped this partnership will deliver inspiration and opportunity for mission and evangelism into areas not yet reached. CA's focus will be through New Wine's leadership network where we will be collaborating on a range of initiatives to introduce this new audience to the many aspects of CA's work and ways to engage.



Also, in September I received the wonderful news of 24 baptisms that had happened in two CoMs in the space of two weeks! Firstly, at St Helier where 14 baptisms took place at St Peter's church. Thirteen of those were new believers who had their first contact through CA outreach events in the community. Then the report from Medway of 10 baptisms that had taken place at St John's, Chatham. Again, 7 of those number 10 had their initial contact through Medway Oaks/Open Church, a Medway CoM initiative.

HELP US CHANGE LIVES

Stories like these are so uplifting and the amazing work going on in CA's projects and CoMs continues daily in communities right across London and the South East. However, there are still many people who have yet to encounter the love of God. So, we at Church Army are passionate about increasing our capacity to reach the whole of the region with the gospel, through our words and actions.

Not all of us are called to be evangelists and not everyone is able to be those who provide that practical, emotional, and spiritual support, but there are many other ways in which you can sow seeds for the kingdom, and we're so grateful to those who already help us:

- You can pray for CA, knowing that we have your prayer support is a huge encouragement.
- You can invite someone to speak at your church about the work.
- You can support us financially to enable us to fund these projects, to develop new initiatives and to keep reaching the most vulnerable, marginalised and hurting people in our society.

We believe in the value of our work; we see it reflected in the stories from those who have engaged with our projects and the lives that have been changed. So, we invite you to join us in this mission to, by God's grace, change the lives of people across this region. To bring the Good News of Jesus to everyone, everywhere.

To support us financially, please go to the ['Ways to Give'](#) page on our website and quote the reference **LSEnews**. Please also feel free to get in touch with me directly if you have any questions or if you would like to book a speaker.

In the meantime, thank you so much for your continued support.

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