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News:

'An amazing opportunity for Christians who love the Bible'

A ministry that 'simply teaches the Bible' has been stunned by a recent spike in demand from schools - and is now appealing for more volunteers to meet this new demand

Changes in the Religious Education syllabus at Church of England (CofE) Schools has resulted in a sharp rise in invitations for Walk Through the Bible, which aims to teach the 'big picture' of the Bible in a non-preachy way.

Walk Through the Bible has been leading school events for more than 20 years, reaching 600,000 pupils. However, demand is growing rapidly, according to director Paul Keays, member of Frinton Free Church, a large Baptist church in Essex.

'We have been stunned by the number of doors that are opening up,' said Paul.

'In the last month we have received invites into 85 separate primary schools and we expect that number to rise by hundreds, possibly thousands more in the next few months.'

With the new CofE new syllabus requiring every child to understand the storyline, not just the stories, of the Bible, schools are increasingly keen to bring Walk Through the Bible on board.

Walk Through the Bible teaches through four different interactive live events:

OT MINI - Old Testament overview for school children (aged 9-11)

NT MINI - New Testament overview for school children (aged 9-11)

OT LIVE - Old Testament overview for adults in churches (aged 11+)

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These events 'simply teach the Bible', says Paul. They reveal how the Bible fits together, encourage questions and share keywords to unlock all 66 books. Presenters don't share opinions, promote particular denominations or particular translations. As such, they are ideally suited to meet the new curriculum demands.

'We fit like a glove for these schools,' continued Paul (pictured below). 'It's 100 per cent what we do. Primary school teachers either need to learn the whole storyline of the Bible, or ask one of our well-trained presenters to teach it for them. It helps to solve a problem.'

So far Paul has been in conversation with two dioceses - resulting in 100 additional schools signing up. As word spreads about Walk Through The Bible among the 40 other dioceses, he anticipates further interest. Some schools are already using the new curriculum, which will be fully implemented at the start of the next academic year in September. There are 6000 CofE schools in the country.

With such a rise in demand, Paul is now inviting Baptist church members to consider being a Walk Through the Bible presenter. He said that learning to teach the whole storyline of the Bible in a fun and interactive way - without any preaching - takes just three days. Current presenters are a mix of ministers, children and youth workers, and as well as those simply with an interest in teaching and bringing the Bible to life.

'In 2018 thousands of schools will introduce their children to the storyline of the whole Bible, cover to cover: this is an amazing opportunity for Christians who love the Bible to share its message!

'If a volunteer presenter can offer even just one hour a week they could teach the storyline to six classes every year - to around 200 children.

'We would love to invite you to join us for one of our upcoming courses.'

For more details, or to apply for training, see www.Bible.org.uk, or contact mail@Bible.org.uk

New Year's honour for organ donation champion The daughter of former BMS mission workers was the youngest person in the latest New Year's Honours List

Lucia Mee, 18, was awarded the British Empire Medal (BEM) for her work to raise awareness of organ donation.

Lucia is the daughter of David and Rachel Quinney Mee, who served with BMS World Mission in El Salvador.

She received her first liver transplant in 2007, and has since undergone a further two liver transplants.

While awaiting her third transplant in 2015, she created the Live Loudly, Donate Proudly campaign, to encourage people to have open conversations about organ donation. The initial campaign videos received thousands of views.

As her health improved, Lucia has continued to grow the campaign across social media platforms and her blog, and give frequent presentations on organ donation. All this has been done alongside her A-levels: she is in the final year of her studies and has a long-term goal of studying medicine. She has also competed in the Transplant Games.

On receiving the award, Lucia, from Ballycastle, Northern Ireland, described herself as 'quite baffled and totally amazed'.

She said, 'The reason I accepted this award was in no way because I think I deserve it...it was because I know that this will bring attention to our campaign, raise awareness of our message and get people talking about organ donation.

'I am also the youngest on the list this year, and I think that this really highlights the importance of young people's voices. We are the future, our passions are what will change the future and if we use our voices well enough, we will be heard, and people will take notice.

'Whatever it is that you are passionate about, pursue it. Dream big. Believe in your message and your ability to get it across.'

David and Rachel were mission workers with BMS in El Salvador during the 1990s, during and post the civil war there.

David said, 'Lucia has continually surprised us with her own resilience and commitment, not only to recovering her own health but going much further.

'Although this was not a path any of us would have chosen or foreseen, even through some of the most demanding and difficult periods we have all been strengthened by an overwhelming experience of grace, made real through often astonishing levels of skill, support and friendship.'

He added, 'The BEM is a generous recognition of Lucia's commitment to campaigning for organ donation. Above all, it is a powerful way of saying thank you to the three donors and their families who, anonymously, have saved her life and transformed the lives of us all.'

In El Salvador David and Rachel worked alongside El Cordero de Dios - the Church of the Lamb of God. A partnership between El Cordero de Dios and Didcot Baptist Church that began during their time continues to this day.

David said their intention to return to El Salvador 'was shifted by Lucia's adventures'. He is now involved in community development work on Rathlin Island. Lucia's elder sister, Alice, has just graduated in Psychology in Birmingham University. Rachel

volunteers with the Northern Ireland Liver Support Group and a local health and well-being group, 'while graciously holding the rest of us together,' David added.

'Local pantry' social franchise launched

A local pantry can help people across the UK access affordable food - and reduce the need for foodbanks

Organisations across the UK can now get tools and support to set up a 'Local Pantry' community food store, after the charity Church Action on Poverty (CAP) and its partners launched Your Local Pantry as a social franchise.

Your Local Pantry is a volunteer-led community initiative that helps struggling families make their money go further by reducing food shopping bills (members can save over £500 each year); providing advice and support; and developing skills through volunteering and other opportunities within the project.

For just £2.50 per week, members from the local community can do a shop and choose at least 10 grocery items, including free vegetables. Pantries are run for the community, by the community, aimed at helping to stretch budgets further and bring people together.

They differ from foodbanks in a number of ways, CAP spokesman Liam Purcell told The Baptist Times.

'Foodbanks provide a vital service to people in crisis,' he said. 'Pantries are designed to help people avoid falling into that crisis in the first place – and they have other benefits too.'

'Unlike most foodbanks, a Pantry is a co-operative: members can join without having to be referred by others; they pay in to the club; and they can remain members for as long as they like.'

'There's a dignity in paying, rather than being given to. The food offer is better in terms of quality, variety and freshness – and the transformation in what members are able to eat on a regular basis is huge.'

'You have choice, within constraints. It's not a normal shop, but it is close to a normal shop.'

The launch was attended by more than 50 housing professionals, voluntary and community sector organisations and academic researchers, and hosted by Kellogg's, who actively support Pantries, and FareShare, a national food redistribution charity.

The Pantry social franchise has been developed by Church Action on Poverty in partnership with Stockport Homes and FareShare Greater Manchester, with support from The Bread and Butter Thing, a charity focused on making life more affordable for people in low-income households, and The Shaftesbury Partnership, an

organisation providing consultancy support on social franchising and replication to help other social ventures to grow.

It will provide organisations and groups across the UK with all they need to set up a Pantry in their local community.

Anna Jones, Food Sharing Officer at Stockport Homes, which originally created the initiative, said, 'Our Pantries have been supporting Stockport communities since 2013, saving thousands for members and helping to reduce social isolation and financial insecurity.

'We are thrilled that by launching this franchise we are able to share our learning to benefit even more communities across the whole country.'

Dave Nicholson, Business Development Officer at Church Action on Poverty, said, 'This social franchise offer applies the principles of commercial franchising to scaling the social impact of Pantries - helping people on low incomes across the country to help themselves out of food poverty.'

Award for Parish Nursing Ministries UK

Parish Nursing Ministries UK received a boost in the latest Christian Funders Forum awards after collecting a silver award in the 'Best Rural Project' category

Parish Nursing Ministries UK helps local churches appoint nurses, who in turn support people and communities towards whole person healthcare.

Parish nurse founder, Baptist minister Helen Wordsworth, collected the award alongside Baptist parish nurse Jessica Pitt from Mildenhall, Suffolk and advocate Dr Robert Wordsworth at the event at Westminster Central Hall.

'This award recognises the immense contribution that Parish nurses are making to health and spiritual care, across all denominations, with all age-groups, and in rural, urban and suburban communities,' she said.

'We hope it will help us towards the achievement of our vision of a Parish nurse in every community, complementing both the work of the NHS and ministry teams, providing a bridge between the health needs of the community and the work of the local church.'

Currently there are 106 active parish nurses around the UK. Helen said that the number is growing steadily, as the mission value of this community based health outreach is experienced, and the professional support available from Parish Nursing Ministries UK provides confidence to both churches and NHS professionals.

Around one third of the churches that have a parish nursing service are Baptist.

One Baptist deacon says that although it was initially difficult to get unanimous agreement to commence this work for one day per week, the appreciation of the nurse's care for all both in and outside of the congregation is so positive that church members are now asking for more hours to be offered.

The cost is not great given the potential for outreach and spiritual care. Baptist Insurance has now offered to help churches with funding by inviting them to apply for a grant, and in some areas Cinnamon start up grants are available.

Opinion

Are we guilty of writing ourselves off?

The role of Simeon and Anna in the Christmas story shows there is a place for old people in the purposes of God.

Thank God, I say, for Simeon and Anna!

Of course, all our focus in recent weeks has been on the baby Jesus, on Joseph and Mary, on the shepherds and the wise men (with perhaps just a sad, frowning nod towards King Herod?). And quite right too. But now - here they come, these two, slowly and quietly shuffling along to bring up the rear, so to speak, and beautifully rounding off the Christmas story.

An old man and an old woman. Where do they fit in? Well, why not read through the story again? - just those few verses in Luke 2:22-38.

The essence is this. After a baby boy was circumcised "on the eighth day", there were various "purification rites" required by the Jewish law for both the baby and the mother. These might not be completed for over a month, so it seems as if Joseph and Mary were in the vicinity of Jerusalem for some time.

When they went up to the temple "to do what the law required", Simeon and Anna were there to greet them (though not necessarily together - they weren't a couple). Various things are said about Simeon...

He was "righteous and devout" - a godly man. He was "waiting for the consolation of Jerusalem" - eager to see God act in some very special way for his people Israel. "The Holy Spirit was on him" - a man of deep spirituality. (He is never actually described as old, but his cheerful readiness to die - verse 29 - suggests it).

He took Jesus in his arms (can you picture it?) and prayed a prayer of thanksgiving over him, rejoicing in the fact that this baby was to be "a light for revelation to the gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel". And he spoke a word of prophesy, focussing on Jesus' history-making destiny; but also suggesting dark days to come, not least for Mary herself, whose "soul" will be "pierced by a sword".

Anna too...

She was very old indeed, and a widow. She was seen constantly around the temple precincts, always fasting, always praying, always worshipping. And she was a prophet. Like Simeon, she had things to say about Jesus, though we aren't told what they were. Her words were for "all who were looking forward to the redemption of Israel", not just for Joseph and Mary. Yes, she had a prophetic, preaching ministry.

I wonder how Joseph and Mary felt when, whether together or separately, these two striking people approached them, did what they did and said what they said? My guess would be: massively encouraged. Remember, they have just come through a wonderful but bewildering few months. The whole thing must sometimes have seemed like a dream: and if the recent past was a roller-coaster, well, what about the immediate, not to mention the more distant, future...!

How they must have valued these solemn, joyful, radiant, Spirit-filled encounters! How reassured they must have been by the manner and bearing of these two elderly saints. How stabilising, how strengthening, how calming, it must have been to have the mysterious events of recent months confirmed by two such people!

We can only imagine the conversation between Joseph and Mary later that day, as they sat together over Jesus' bed and as dark fell outside. But it's inconceivable, surely, that either of them can ever have forgotten this episode.

All sorts of ideas come spinning off the story like lights off a catherine wheel. But apart from anything else it says this: there is a place for old people in the purposes of God. And so two simple questions arise...

First, does the church you belong to value elderly men and women of God? Or are they shunted to one side as past their use-by date? In our very natural emphasis on children and young people, are we guilty of neglecting those who, over many years, have gathered the kind of wisdom and experience that come no other way?

And second, a word for those (including me!) who are in, or are getting towards, the Simeon-Anna stage. Are we guilty of writing ourselves off? Have we subconsciously decided that God has nothing more for us to do? Yes? Well, it's time to think again!

The role of Simeon and Anna was every bit as important in the Christmas story as that of the shepherds and the wise men, though we hear so much more about them. Fact: as long as God gives us another day of life, he has work for us to do! So let's grab hold of that - and keep our sleeves rolled up.

To work, old man! To work, old woman!

A prayer: Lord God, thank you that you value every type of person - clever and simple, rich and poor, talented and ordinary, young and old. Show me the place you

have for me in your unfolding plans, and help me, by your Spirit, to live it out to the full. Amen.

Colin Sedgwick is a Baptist minister with many years' experience in the ministry.

He is also a freelance journalist, and has written for The Independent, The Guardian, The Times, and various Christian publications. He blogs at sedgonline.wordpress.com