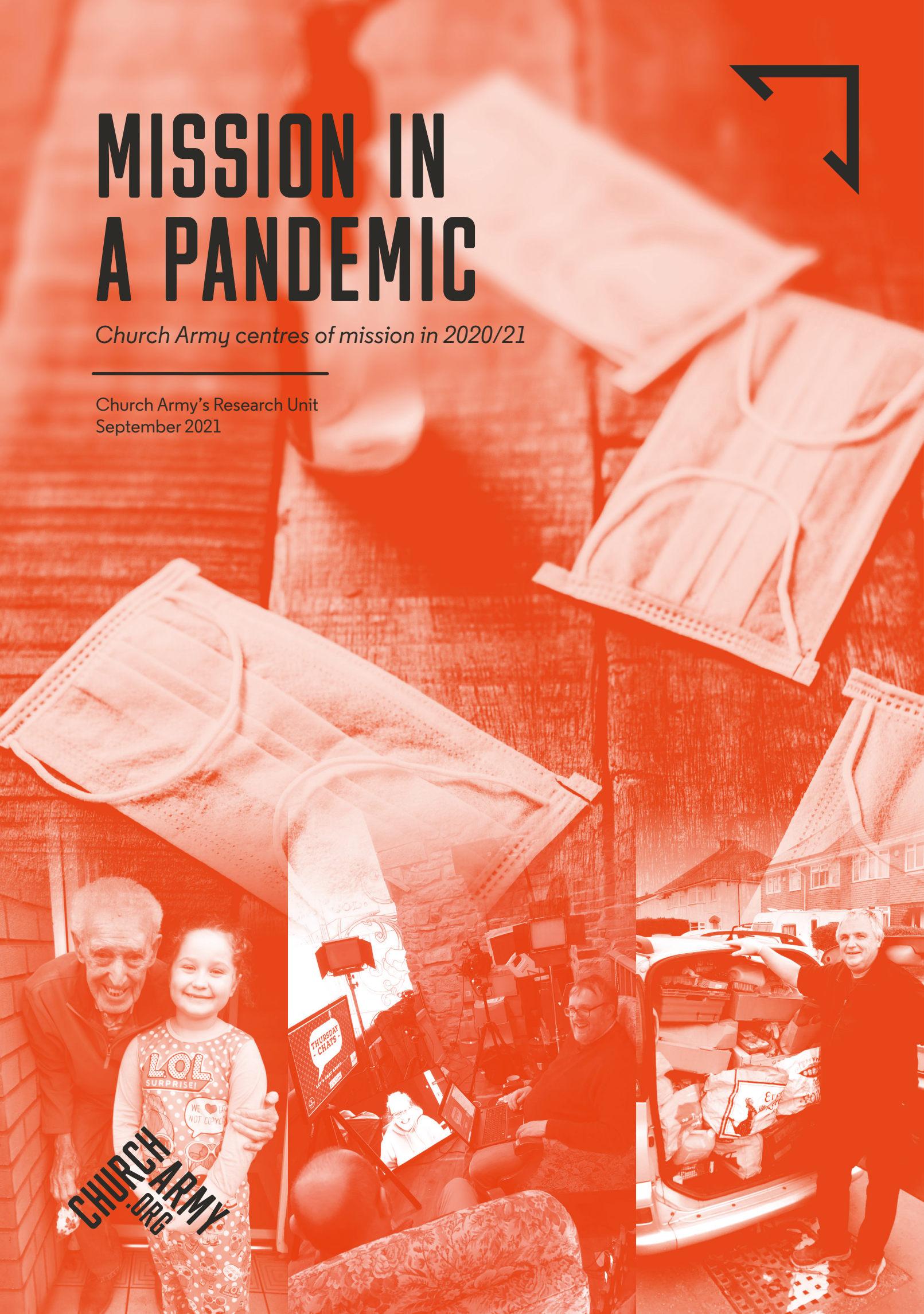


# MISSION IN A PANDEMIC

*Church Army centres of mission in 2020/21*

Church Army's Research Unit  
September 2021

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# FOREWORD

On 23rd March 2020 the UK followed the Republic of Ireland into widespread lockdown, and a season of life unparalleled in living memory began. In the midst of restrictions and the pain of loss, this has also been a period of social change. Christianity is the faith of God made flesh, and the disciples of Jesus are always directed towards the world, as the life of God in Jesus Christ was directed to the world. Small wonder perhaps that the upheavals of the recent past have resulted in not only challenge for the churches of these islands, but also a flourishing of creativity. We have been called into service in the name of Jesus in a rapidly changing and unpredictable world.

This report is a timely consideration of how one part of the Anglican churches of these islands has risen to the challenge, taken knocks, but also discovered growth and creativity. Church Army, the Anglican mission community, has the privilege of living out its missional calling amongst some of the most deprived neighbourhoods of these islands. The story of this report for those communities is certainly one of suffering under a social, political and economic system which in times of stress does not distribute that stress equitably. On the ground where they serve, our evangelists have seen the fault lines evident before pandemic widening and growing more destructive as the weeks and months have passed. Yet in the midst of that suffering, theirs is also a story of seeing God at work, reconciling the world to himself in love.

Like many, many parish churches, the experience of Church Army has been one of a yet more demanding ministry, but a transforming ministry - journeying to new places, finding unlooked for opportunities, receiving support and funding from those not previously associated with our work. It is telling that 44% of those volunteering with Church Army over this period were not regularly involved with a church community. Our evangelists have prayed hard, loved deeply and 'had a go'. They have developed new skills and grown in courage. I pay tribute to them and join them in thanks to God.

Challenges still abound for us all but, in addition to the practical lessons about mission and ministry, elements of this report are perhaps important to bear in mind as we face into those challenges. Being persistent and courageous in service and evangelism has the capacity to make us more of the people God intends us to be. It can certainly push the buttons of our insecurities, but it can also open us to the grace that helps us confront them. The more we engage outwards, the more care we must take to resource the life of faith and be diligent in our care for each other. We do not all do things in the same way. We are in many ways a mixed bunch, a mixed ecology perhaps, but being open to partnership and collaboration in our response to God's missional call can make a strength of that very diversity. There is not only one way of doing things, yet there is one God and Father of all.

I thank Church Army's Research Unit and all who have contributed to this study for a timely and valuable report.



**Ven. Dr. Peter Rouch**  
CEO, Church Army

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Undertaking mission and evangelism during an international pandemic has been an incredible challenge, throwing into question many things we had previously taken for granted. Covid-19 has dramatically changed not just the routines of our daily existence, but also how many of us experience and engage with faith, worship and what it means to be part of Christian community.

Building on our previous *Mission Under Lockdown*<sup>1</sup> report, which was based on research conducted in the first few months of the pandemic, this report explores the experience of Church Army *centres of mission*<sup>2</sup> (CoM) across the British Isles and Ireland in the period April 2020 – March 2021. These 12 months were a time of considerable flux, uncertainty, and upheaval and, with different restrictions and levels of lockdown, the experience of each region and nation was different.

In view of these differences and the unprecedented nature of the past year, Church Army's Research Unit (CARU) were keen to research the experiences of centres of mission in a relational and conversational way. During the 2020/21 reporting period, there were 29 active centres of mission, and we were able to arrange video call conversations with Evangelists from 26 of these. These conversations were structured around an agreed reporting template, with Evangelists also given the opportunity to share written responses in advance.

The questions we asked were structured around three main areas – the impact of the pandemic, the Centre of Mission's response, and wider reflections from the past year. Our report considers each of these three areas in turn.

## THE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC

During 2020/21, Evangelists in centres of mission had to react and respond to multiple changes. The nature of these changes varied depending on context, locality and the needs of local communities but included considerable changes to workload and working patterns, and a need to be extremely flexible to changing demands, restrictions, and governmental guidance. Despite this upheaval, there have also been moments of joy. Three of the new centres of mission we spoke to had begun their work during the pandemic.

The Evangelists we spoke to also told us about the impact of the pandemic on local communities and churches. They spoke powerfully about their first-hand experience of seeing increasing numbers of people experiencing poverty and financial and food insecurity, as well as a greater number of adults and young people experiencing mental health issues or distress. They also told us how the churches they work with had responded to the pandemic by providing practical and pastoral support as well as online worship. However, some Evangelists also identified tensions regarding the question of whether to continue to provide online worship as well as recommencing offline (or in-person) worship.

<sup>1</sup> [churcharmy.org/our-work/research](https://www.churcharmy.org/our-work/research)

<sup>2</sup> [churcharmy.org/our-work/centres-of-mission](https://www.churcharmy.org/our-work/centres-of-mission)

## MISSION IN A PANDEMIC - CENTRE OF MISSIONS' RESPONSE

During the reporting period, there were 29 active centres of mission, and we were able to interview 26 of these. Four of these, however, were not active for all of 2020/21 (some were only launched midway through the year) so were limited in what they could report. But the Evangelists we did speak to provided us with lots of rich material about their activities and impact, which was both quantitative and qualitative in scope. The full report explores this in more detail, but some brief statistical headlines and commentary are provided below.<sup>3</sup>

### Social Impact

- 19 centres of mission reported involvement in some form of **food provision** during the pandemic, providing more than 23,800 food parcels with at least 3,100 families / households benefiting.
- 11 centres of mission reported helping to provide **other essentials** (e.g. clothing, furniture, baby equipment) for vulnerable individuals and families, with an estimated 1,500 people benefiting.
- 22 centres of mission reported providing **emotional support**, keeping in touch with an estimated 3,100 people benefiting.
- 6 centres of mission reported supporting **social events and community activities** (online or offline) during the pandemic, with activities attracting an estimated 310 people.
- 12 centres of mission reported running **support groups** or other activities focused on identified groups. The typical attendance at these groups totalled an estimated 440 people.
- 12 centres of mission reported providing **activity packs or gift bags** for children, young people, and families, with an estimated 3,000 packs distributed.
- 8 centres of mission also reported running groups and **activities for children, young people, and families**, with the typical attendance at these groups totalling an estimated 420 people.
- 7 centres of mission reported helping provide **emotional and educational support in schools in a one-to-one or small group setting** to an estimated 420 children and young people.
- 3 centres of mission reported involvement in **environmental projects**, including community litter picking and helping to develop a community garden.

### Faith Impact

- 6 centres of mission told us of examples of **creative outdoor evangelism** which used an estimated 5,300 physical objects (e.g. knitted angels), outdoor messages and artwork seen by countless people.
- 4 centres of mission reported engaging in **prayer walking** outdoors.
- 15 centres of mission reported running **online services**, with an estimated total typical attendance of 700 people.
- 11 centres of mission reported running additional **prayer activities**, with a total typical attendance of 200 people.
- 8 centres of mission reported posting **devotional thoughts and reflections** online and on social media, with an estimated 19,700 views.
- 7 centres of mission reported running **seasonal events and evangelistic activities**, particularly around Christmas and Easter. These events engaged an estimated 2,200 people.

<sup>3</sup> As we were only able to interview 26 of the 29 active centres of mission, total beneficiary figures have been adjusted to represent the numbers of people engaged across all 29 centres of mission.

- Centres of mission Evangelists helped people in their communities mark **grief and the end of life** in lots of different ways.
- 11 centres of mission reported providing **assemblies and spiritual support** in 22 schools. The most common example of this was assemblies.
- 7 centres of mission said they had run **faith-sharing courses** (Alpha and equivalent) in 2020/21, with an estimated 80 people engaging.
- 9 centres of mission reported running **discipleship or Bible study groups**, with an estimated 150 people (both adults and young people) engaging.
- Although we did not explicitly ask them about numbers of people becoming Christians or making faith commitments, 8 centres of mission volunteered information about people who had made some form of **faith commitment** in 2020/21. At least 27 people had become Christians in or through these centres of mission.

'[Name] was "in a state" after a relationship breakdown led him to a very low point. The team provided him with some food and got to talking with him. He felt overburdened by his past (he had been a drug dealer). The team asked if he'd be interested in volunteering with them. Volunteering gave him something to focus on and over time he got more involved with the Centre of Mission and has now given his life to Christ.'

### KERRY DIXON, LEAD EVANGELIST, DUNDEE CENTRE OF MISSION

'I've been working with someone for two years and then in the Bible study in October she felt ready to become a Christian which was amazing. It shows how important it is to invest in those relationships and how often it takes more than two to three years for people to really feel our presence.'

### CHERITH WITHINGTON, PIONEER EVANGELIST, LIVERPOOL CENTRE OF MISSION

- 18 centres of mission reported fresh **expressions of Church** or new worshipping communities that met (either in person or online) during the pandemic, engaging an estimated 620 people each month.



### Resourcing and enabling others

As part of Church Army's DARE strategy, all centres of mission are involved in advocating, resourcing, and enabling evangelism, which is often addressed through volunteering opportunities, supporting other individuals, and doing outreach with local churches. The restrictions of pandemic living have meant that volunteering and outreach work have looked very different. However, centres of mission have continued to provide support and resources to individuals, communities, and churches. Although some resourcing and enabling activities were heavily restricted or stopped altogether for a period, many Evangelists commented on the encouraging work that they were undertaking behind the scenes.

During 2020/21, centres of mission worked with an estimated **463 volunteers**. 56% of volunteers were regular churchgoers, while 44% were not.

## REFLECTIONS FROM A PANDEMIC

We also asked Evangelists to reflect on their learning from the past year as well as the questions and future challenges they were wrestling with.

Evangelists identified a plethora of ways in which their experience of evangelism and mission in a pandemic has contributed to their learning and further reflections. The development of online ministry is probably the most obvious piece of identified learning. However, there have also been far more subtle and nuanced expressions depending on their context and the needs of the local community. This has been evidenced by many Evangelists identifying a change in working style, trying new things, exploring what pioneer ministry in a time of pandemic means and discerning and (re)learning to trust where God is at work in their mission and ministry.

As centres of mission continue to work during a time of continued uncertainty and changing restrictions, *Mission in a Pandemic* also identifies some of the challenges and questions that Evangelists are facing or exploring. From resourcing volunteers, future financial sustainability, re-establishing or creating community, or youth work, there are no easy or straightforward answers. However, these questions do provide an essential and important snapshot into what it means to be a Church Army Evangelist in a Centre of Mission in the changing world of today.



# INTRODUCTION



# 1. INTRODUCTION

This report summarises the findings of research about the experiences of Church Army centres of mission (CoM) during the Covid-19 pandemic, focusing on the period April 2020 - March 2021. During this reporting period, there were 29 active centres of mission across the British Isles and Ireland. This report summarises the main findings from interviews with Evangelists from 26 of these, which were conducted by researchers from Church Army's Research Unit (CARU).

Due to the unprecedented nature of that 12-month period, CARU opted for a relational, conversational, approach to hearing from centres of mission. Evangelists were contacted by researchers between April and May 2021 and invited to take part in a conversation about their Centre of Mission's experience of the past year. These conversations were based around a reporting template developed by CARU for gathering quantitative and qualitative data. All Evangelists were asked about:

- The impact of the ongoing pandemic on their ministry and mission as well as the impact on their centres of mission, the local churches, and the communities in which they serve (these questions are reported on in [Section 2](#) of this report)
- Their Centre of Mission's activities and impact in 2020/21 (see [Section 3](#))
- Reflections from the past year and questions / challenges moving forward (see [Section 4](#))

As each Centre of Mission experienced the pandemic differently,<sup>4</sup> there were some differences and variations in what each Evangelist could report. However, the conversational template meant that CARU could adapt Lead Evangelists' experience to their own context and period of active mission and ministry. It also needs to be noted that the descriptions of local contexts and the impact of centres of mission outlined in this report are based primarily on the perceptions of Evangelists themselves (though some Evangelists also shared examples of feedback they had received from local people and partner agencies). In this sense, this research provides a snapshot rather than a comprehensive, definitive, account of the experiences of centres of mission in 2020/21.

<sup>4</sup> Some centres of mission, for example, were launched part-way through the 2020/21 reporting period. A Lead Evangelist from another Centre of Mission was on furlough from their diocese for 8 months of 2020.



# THE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC



## 2. THE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC

### 2.1 IMPACT ON EVANGELISTS AND CENTRES OF MISSION

There have been multiple changes for all CoMs to navigate since the pandemic began.

#### 2.1.1 Changes in workload

- In Dundee, Lead Evangelist Kerry Dixon's workload increased as the CoM took on a much wider supportive role alongside home-schooling.
- Jane Emson, Lead Evangelist in Middlesbrough CoM, felt that she was able to get more done in her community as she spent less time travelling to meetings or other commitments.
- In Scunthorpe CoM, there has been a marked increase in poverty and people needing support so the workload for the food bank and people in crisis has increased.

#### 2.1.2 Changes in centres of mission and staffing

- At the time of interview, some centres of mission were still waiting to officially launch.
- At the time of interview, Haverfordwest was in a transitional stage with a new Lead Evangelist starting in Spring 2021.
- One Lead Evangelist was placed on furlough by their diocese for much of 2020.
- In Southampton CoM the restoration project was put on hold due to restrictions and has recently been able to resume in a limited way.
- Newry CoM launched in the pandemic. Lead Evangelist Scott McDonald expressed that the past year has been a 'big learning curve and has necessitated the building of new skills'.
- As a result of the lockdown(s) in Ballina, the CoM had to sell its bus.

#### 2.1.3 Personal impact on Evangelists

- Kinder and Gina Kalsi, Lead and Pioneer Evangelists in Attercliffe and Darnall, have had to be incredibly flexible in establishing connections and roots.
- Andy Wilson, Lead Evangelist in Gloucester and Forest CoM, expressed: 'I have had to look after myself, give myself time and space, and it is good that I have got people to help me manage my time properly.'
- In Langley, starting there in a pandemic has had a big impact on the team.
- In Medway, Lead Evangelist Stephen Ramshaw felt quite 'shell-shocked' during the first lockdown but has expressed he has since adapted well and helped 'steady the ship' of the Centre of Mission.

### 2.2 IMPACT ON LOCAL COMMUNITIES

How has it affected the communities you serve?

#### 2.2.1 Increase in poverty

The majority of centres of mission talked about the increasing levels of poverty, deprivation and inequalities their local communities are experiencing.

##### Digital poverty and lack of reliable online access

- In Dundee, meeting online has been a struggle for many as lots of people in the local area lack affordable access to the internet and are reliant on pay-as-you-go contracts.
- Greenwich (Eltham) CoM is in an area of high deprivation so online provision has been a struggle.

- In Attercliffe and Darnall, many people in the local area cannot afford tech provision or internet access.
- Southampton CoM were able to help alleviate digital poverty for online school by sourcing and providing computers for young people as many were using their parents' phones to access lessons.
- In Scunthorpe, it has been concerning that those who used to attend church regularly cannot access online services due to tech poverty and/or stage of life and technological confidence.

### Financial impact and food insecurity

- In Bradford CoM, there has been a big increase in the amount of people in work using the local food bank.
- In Sholing, an area which Southampton CoM serves, there has been a 'surge' in people using the food bank which runs out of the church.
- In Dundee, the CoM has encountered several people who have to choose between 'heating or eating' and the need for food has 'gone through the roof'.
- In Haverfordwest, the pandemic has had a big impact on local businesses and industry including those who rely heavily on income from tourism.
- In Medway CoM, the pandemic has 'magnified existing inequalities and divisions'.
- North Belfast CoM have become the regional hub for Baby Basics and have helped lots of people who have been struggling.

### Geographical deprivation

- In Llandaff, Lead Evangelist Andy Settle said some of the communities the Centre of Mission serves have felt very isolated, especially in rural areas with unreliable internet connection.
- In Newry, lots of young families have been struggling with poverty and the challenges of parents and guardians taking on key or essential worker roles.
- In West Highlands CoM, the area covers 400 square miles with a population of approximately 4,000 who have become increasingly insular throughout the pandemic. This has meant that it has been challenging for Priest Evangelist Amanda Fairclough to identify need within these communities. However, since the easing of lockdown, engagement has increased, and Amanda is optimistic for the future.
- Lead Evangelist Isaac Hanna stated that that in the area in which Drumcliffe CoM serves, the rural community has become even more isolated.

### 2.2.2 Increased mental health needs

There has been a marked increase from centres of mission of mental health struggles present in their communities.

- In Ballina, the CoM has been limited in the support it can offer those with mental health issues and addictions whilst in lockdown.
- In Middlesbrough, Lead Evangelist Jane Emson has experienced a real impact on the mental health of the local community and estates in which the CoM serves.
- In Newry, Lead Evangelist Scott McDonald commented that lots of people have felt 'adrift and anxious', especially those who live alone.
- In Greenwich (Eltham) some in the community have struggled with making ends meet which contributes to increasing mental health needs.

### Children and young people

- In Bradford CoM, Lead Evangelist Tracy Milne said there has been a 'massive increase in [young people's] mental health needs' and they have been supporting young people through grief and tragedy as well as providing emotional and pastoral support.

- At King's Lynn CoM, Lead Evangelist James Hawksworth experienced a growing need for more and more young people needing pastoral support and resources to care for them.
- In Wrexham, the Tin Can project hasn't been able to provide the emotional support that the young people in the area really need.

## 2.3 IMPACT ON LOCAL CHURCHES

How has it affected the churches you work with?

- In Scunthorpe CoM most local churches closed and moved worship online, but some people are beginning to be 'put off or abandoned by Covid regulations around church and some were anxious about returning to the building'.
- The Newry CoM has launched a new online kids church during the pandemic.
- Many churches in Llandaff embraced online worship but Lead Evangelist Andy Settle notes numbers have gone down recently and thinks it's partly due to being 'less locked down'.
- At Liverpool CoM, the monthly Living Room Church moved from monthly services to weekly online and will start in person in June.
- At Hackney CoM, the number of people attending online worship has continued to decrease substantially over the last year.
- In Haverfordwest, Lead Evangelist Mike Dare has noted that as restrictions relax there 'is a tension between people who want to return to how things were or how things have been during the pandemic'.

## 2.4 CHANGE AND CONTINUITY WITHIN CENTRES OF MISSION

### 2.4.1 Developing online ministry

In the majority of centres of mission, worship, small groups and other forms of ministry have been adapted and moved online.

- Blackpool have a new website for their CoM which has helped with a recognition of their ministry.
- North Belfast has been undertaking online ministry work in partnership with local churches.
- Attercliffe and Darnall have been providing opportunities for small groups to gather online to talk and pray together.
- Lead Evangelist Jane Emson in Middlesbrough has seen a marked increase in how she uses technology and social media.
- Pioneer Evangelist Amy Hayes in Selby CoM started an online kids club which 'sometimes got hundreds of views'.

### 2.4.2 Connecting with others

centres of mission have all been creative and flexible in responding to changing rules on gathering face to face, providing pastoral support, and working with local organisations in their contexts.

#### Maintaining existing relationships

- Haverfordwest intentionally maintained, built upon and nurtured their current connections in the local community.
- King's Lynn CoM was a bridge between local schools and churches throughout the pandemic.
- Lead Evangelist Andy Settle has been working hard at keeping the local missional community group going in Llandaff whilst in lockdowns.

### Building new relationships

- Newry CoM has met frequently with local stakeholders, community groups and potential funders and has secured £40,000 of grants to employ a part time administrator and invest in office equipment for the CoM.
- In Scunthorpe, Lead Evangelist Sean Andrews has been able to provide vital emotional and social support to vulnerable people in the community.
- Langley CoM started in the pandemic. Lead Evangelist Val Legg and Pioneer Evangelist Simeon Jarvis are currently introducing the CoM to the local community but feel they are starting several steps back due to past and present restrictions.
- In Selby, the team delivered 1,500 cards with the centre's Facebook details on them, letting people know that whatever their 'Covid mood' the CoM was praying for them.
- Hackney has started a new food project from their centre as the need for it 'is even greater'.

### Pastoral relationships

- Liverpool CoM has been maintaining pastoral relationships through frequent phone calls.
- For Ballina CoM, one of the main priorities has been maintaining pastoral contact with vulnerable and isolated individuals.

### 2.4.3 Youth work

The youth work provision that many of our CoMs provide and support has changed and adapted in multiple ways as the pandemic restrictions have continued.

### Partnership with organisations, schools and churches

- Blackpool CoM is now working with Youthscape to help develop youth work across the local deanery.
- Lead Evangelist James Hawksworth in King's Lynn ran a youth group at a local church.

### Relationships with young people

- Lead Evangelist Tracy Milne in Bradford stated that maintaining contact with young people is much more time consuming than it was pre-pandemic but they are currently experiencing a blended (online and in person) way of gathering together.
- In Drumcliffe, all youth projects have been put on hold.
- In Hackney, a lot of Pioneer Evangelist Andrena Palmer's work with young people who don't attend church has not been possible.
- Wrexham has only been able to provide limited support to young people through the Tin Can project due to in person restrictions.

## 2.5 ENCOURAGEMENT AND HOPE

### Amidst all the challenges of the past year, what has brought you encouragement and joy?

The signs of encouragement and hope that Evangelists identified can be themed together in the following ways:

- Online engagement and development of online ministry
- Maintaining personal connections and forming new relationships
- New ways of working with children and young people
- Important conversations about the work of their CoM
- Changes in evangelism and mission



*'We [established a] new online community ... people have really appreciated the fact that there is a community who will be there, whatever happens, ready to listen and support them; people need that space.'*

### **LEAD EVANGELIST ANDY WILSON, GLOUCESTER AND FOREST CENTRE OF MISSION**

*'...doing simple things such as taking cards and biscuits to local shopkeepers and providing opportunities to start building relationships and just seeing delight on people's faces.'*

### **LEAD EVANGELIST VAL LEGG, LANGLEY CENTRE OF MISSION**

*'I think just the realisation that God is everywhere – we always say that but I think now lots of people are realising it. There has also been real joy of Living Room Church and how it has continued...'*

### **PIONEER EVANGELIST CHERITH WITHINGTON, LIVERPOOL CENTRE OF MISSION**

*'...four young people and one adult want to be baptised and a couple started to attend church as a result of youth work with young offenders.'*

### **LEAD EVANGELIST NICK RUSSELL, GREENWICH (ELTHAM) CENTRE OF MISSION**

*'I think when I'm on the doorstep with somebody and have a conversation. Most often it's just about life and what's going on for them. It's just seeing that you make a difference...'*

### **LEAD EVANGELIST STEPHEN PLUMB, HACKNEY CENTRE OF MISSION**

*'What has brought me joy has been slowing down and remembering what is truly of value ... it has brought me back to my first love of spending time with people and God.'*

### **LEAD EVANGELIST MIKE DARE, HAVERFORDWEST CENTRE OF MISSION**



# MISSION IN A PANDEMIC

## 3. MISSION IN A PANDEMIC

### HOW HAVE CENTRES OF MISSION RESPONDED TO THE PANDEMIC?

centres of mission have responded to the challenges of the pandemic in innovative, diverse, and contextual ways, but all have engaged at some level in:

- Social impact
- Faith impact
- Resourcing and enabling others

This section unpacks each of these three dimensions in turn. In making sense of the statistics that follows, it is important to note that:

- During the reporting period, there were 29 active centres of mission, and we were able to interview 26 of these.
- Four of the 26 centres of mission we interviewed were not active for all of 2020/21 (some were only launched midway through the year and one Evangelist in another Centre of mission was furloughed by their diocese for eight months of 2020).
- Total beneficiary figures have been adjusted to represent the numbers of people engaged across all 29 centres of mission.

### 3.1 SOCIAL IMPACT

#### 3.1.1 Food provision

19 centres of mission reported involvement in some form of food provision during the pandemic, providing more than **23,800 food parcels** with at least **3,100 families/households** benefiting. This included:

- Running food banks (Dundee) or providing food hampers (Greenwich), food parcels (King's Lynn, Liverpool, Middlesbrough, Sheffield), food packs (Leeds), and meals (Gloucester and Forest, Hackney)
- Supporting other food banks (Attercliffe and Darnall, Scunthorpe), homelessness projects (Medway), FareShare (Gloucester and Forest), Hot Meal Projects (Wrexham) and Make Lunch (Southampton) schemes
- Informal food distribution – receiving unused food from bakeries and other food suppliers and sharing with individuals known to be in need (Attercliffe and Darnall, Blackpool)

Other centres of mission were also involved in helping people learn to cook during the pandemic. Examples include Cook and Eat sessions for vulnerable families (Bradford), recipe boxes (Sheffield) and online / in-person 'Baking Buddies' (North Belfast) and 'Baking Blessings' (Liverpool) groups.

#### 3.1.2 Other essentials

11 centres of mission also reported helping to provide other essentials for vulnerable individuals and families, with an estimated **1,500 people** benefiting. Examples include:

- Clothing banks (Medway, Dundee)
- Furniture redistribution (Dundee)
- Baby Basics – baby clothes, equipment and other essentials for new mothers and families who are struggling (North Belfast)

- Accessing targeted support for vulnerable individuals known to the Centre of Mission (Liverpool, Selby, Scunthorpe)
- Helping with medicine deliveries via local pharmacy (Hackney)

### 3.1.3 Keeping in touch / emotional support

centres of mission all had different ways of regularly keeping in touch and looking out for people in their communities during the pandemic, but 22 centres of mission mentioned this explicitly, with an estimated **3,100 people** benefiting. Examples include:

- Doorstep conversations
- Visiting
- Pastoral walks
- Phone / text messaging and welfare calls
- Detached youth work

As well as simply keeping in touch, some centres of mission supported vulnerable people in other practical ways, for example arranging shopping or accompanying them to appointments.

### 3.1.4 Building community

centres of mission ran numerous social events and activities for building community and bringing people together. During the pandemic, many regular activities moved online, and other new activities emerged.

6 centres of mission reported supporting social events and community activities (online or offline) during the pandemic, with the typical attendances at these events totalling around **310 people**. Examples include:

- Online coffee mornings (Central Fife)
- Community Bingo (Blackpool)
- Quiz nights (Drumcliffe)

12 centres of mission reported running support groups or other activities focused on identified groups. The typical attendances at these groups totalled **440 people**. Examples include:

- Men's groups (e.g. Ballina, Drumcliffe)
- Groups for young women (e.g. Hackney 'This Girl Can')
- Youth mentoring groups (e.g. Greenwich)
- Recovery groups (e.g. Dundee Pirate Monks)

### 3.1.5 Children, young people, and families

Though centres of mission engaged with people of all ages, work with children, young people, and families was a prominent focus for many.

During national and local lockdowns, 12 centres of mission reported providing activity packs or gift bags for children, young people, and families, with an estimated **3,000 activity packs** distributed.

8 centres of mission also reported running groups and activities for children, young people, and families, with the format often switching between online and in-person over the course of the year. The typical attendances at these groups totalled 420 people.

### 3.1.6 Supporting schools

7 centres of mission reported helping provide emotional and educational support in one-to-one or small group settings to an estimated **420 children and young people** through engagement with local schools.



Though centres of mission were not able to engage with schools in the ways they had done previously, they responded to the pandemic in varied and creative ways. Examples include:

- Help with digital and outdoor learning (Central Fife)
- Lunchtime / school gate engagement as and when lockdown restrictions allowed (Haverfordwest)
- Supporting alternative provision for young people struggling to engage with mainstream education (Bradford)
- Mentoring and pastoral / mental health support (Greenwich, King's Lynn, Leeds)
- Transition project - working with children moving to senior school (North Belfast)
- Serving on school governing bodies or parent and teacher associations (Scunthorpe)
- Informal emotional support for head teachers and other members of staff

In addition to the above, one Lead Evangelist was invited to be part of a wider team (organised by a school) undertaking welfare visits and delivering food packages to around 500 schoolchildren (Leeds).

### 3.1.7 Environmental projects

3 centres of mission were involved in environmental projects, including community litter picking (Attercliffe and Darnall, Middlesbrough) and helping to develop a community garden (North Belfast).

## 3.2 FAITH IMPACT

During the pandemic, centres of mission were sharing faith through words and action in varied and creative ways. Following on from the description of Centre of Missions' social action in the Social Impact section, this part of our report details some of the ways in which centres of mission were sharing faith through words.

### 3.2.1 Sharing faith in a pandemic

#### Helping people pray and reflect during the pandemic

For centres of mission, 2020/21 was a time of experimentation and innovation. Many experimented with several different ways of enabling people in their communities (both Christians and non-Christians) to pray and reflect during the pandemic.

15 centres of mission reported running online services, with an estimated total typical attendance of **700 people**.

11 centres of mission reported running additional prayer activities (both in person and online), with a total typical attendance of **200 people**.

8 centres of mission reported posting devotional thoughts and reflections online and on social media, either regularly (thought for the day) or on special occasions (Valentine's Day – Langley CoM), with a total estimated **19,700 views**.

*'Caim prayers are prayers when we don't know what to pray. These were received so well in the pandemic world.'*

**DRUMCLIFFE CENTRE OF MISSION**

### Creativity outdoors

6 centres of mission told us of examples of creative outdoor evangelism which used an estimated **5,300 physical objects, outdoor messages, and pieces of artwork** seen by countless passers-by. These included:

- Activities with knitted angels – either leaving them around the local area for people to find (Attercliffe and Darnall) or giving them away (Gloucester and Forest)
- Paper hearts with an invitation to remember loved ones (Attercliffe and Darnall)
- Chalk art evangelism - leaving encouraging messages and pictures on pavements in prominent places around town (Ballina)

4 centres of mission also engaged in prayer walking outdoors.

### Seasonal events

7 centres of mission also mentioned seasonal events and evangelistic activities, particularly around Christmas and Easter. These events engaged an estimated **2,200 people**.

### Marking grief and the end of life

During 2020/21, there were lots of different ways in which Centre of Mission Evangelists helped people in their communities mark grief and the end of life. Notable examples include:

- Hospital ministry – during the pandemic, ordained Evangelists like Isaac Hanna (Drumcliffe) were invited to be with patients in hospital near the end of life and to minister to relatives and staff as well as patients
- Heart Outreach (Attercliffe and Darnall) - people in the community were invited to write names of people who had died on paper hearts which were then planted in the garden
- Funerals – both Covid-related and other community bereavements

*'I took the funeral of a teenager murdered in a drug gang related incident.'*

### LEAD EVANGELIST NICK RUSSELL, GREENWICH CENTRE OF MISSION

*'Funerals. I give a fair bit of time to that. That includes time before but follow up as well. I mentioned the guy we prayed for whose partner had died - I took her sister's partner's funeral. They've asked me to do some sort of blessing for the gravestone: They want this to be a connecting with God moment in some way.'*

### LEAD EVANGELIST RICHARD COOKE, SELBY CENTRE OF MISSION

### Sharing faith in schools

As well as the school-based emotional and educational support noted in the Social Impact section, 11 centres of mission reported being involved in providing spiritual support in **22 schools**. The most common example of this was assemblies. Though for most of 2020/21 it was not possible to deliver assemblies in person, centres of mission adapted, filming assemblies and other resources to share with schools. Feedback to date suggests these were well-received. As one school commented:

*'[staff are] so positive about these – it really helps [the children] too when they're stuck in class all day and see very few other adults and children.'*

### 3.2.2 Exploring faith

7 centres of mission said they had run **faith-sharing courses** (Alpha and equivalent) in 2020/21, with an estimated **80 people** engaging.

9 centres of mission reported running **discipleship or Bible study groups**, with an estimated **150 people** (both adults and young people) engaging.

Although we did not explicitly ask them about numbers of people becoming Christians or making faith commitments, **8 centres of mission** volunteered information about people who had made some form of faith commitment in 2020/21. At least **27 people** had become Christians in or through these centres of mission. Other centres of mission mentioned people who had become Christians, but no numbers were given.

Every Centre of Mission's experience was difference, but the interview extracts below provide a series of snapshots of the ways people are exploring faith within centres of mission.

*'[Name] was "in a state" after a relationship breakdown led him to a very low point. The team provided him with some food and got to talking with him. He felt overburdened by his past (he had been a drug dealer). The team asked if he'd be interested in volunteering with them. Volunteering gave him something to focus on and over time he got more involved with the Centre of Mission and has now given his life to Christ.'*

**KERRY DIXON, LEAD EVANGELIST, DUNDEE CENTRE OF MISSION**

*'I've been working with someone for two years and then in the Bible study in October she felt ready to become a Christian which was amazing. It shows how important it is to invest in those relationships and how often it takes more than two to three years for people to really feel our presence.'*

**CHERITH WITHINGTON, PIONEER EVANGELIST, LIVERPOOL CENTRE OF MISSION**

*'Fewer people have been attending groups and activities during the pandemic, but people have been texting saying things like: "My husband has been taken to hospital. Please pray"'*

### **LEAD EVANGELIST MATT ROWLEY, BLACKPOOL CENTRE OF MISSION**

*'Most of the people who come to us are exploring faith. All are on a journey. Nearly all ask for prayer, though none have "come to faith".'*

### **LEAD EVANGELIST STEPHEN RAMSHAW, MEDWAY CENTRE OF MISSION**

*Jane Emson first met [name] when she piloted the [project] in October 2020 and [name] got involved in helping. As they were working, [name] kept asking Jane questions about Jesus: 'My son comes home from school and mentions things about Jesus but I don't really know anything or how to answer him.' Through talking to Jane and asking her questions, in March 2021 [name] became a Christian.*

### **LEAD EVANGELIST JANE EMSON, MIDDLESBROUGH CENTRE OF MISSION**

*'Two of the young people baptised were sexual abuse survivors and these were troubled young people who found peace with Jesus. The person planning to be baptised is a girl with ADHD who was always objecting to the Christian faith and disrupting youth church, but made the suggestion that they should be baptised.'*

### **CENTRE OF MISSION NOT IDENTIFIED TO PRESERVE ANONYMITY OF INDIVIDUALS INVOLVED**

### 3.2.3 Fresh expressions of Church

18 centres of mission reported fresh expressions of Church or new worshipping communities that met (either in person or online) during the pandemic, with a total typical attendance of 620 people each month.<sup>5</sup>

Over the course of 2020/21, many centres of mission experimented and adapted with different ways of meeting, whether in person or online. As Drumcliffe Centre of Mission report with relation to Recentre Community Church:

*'In the early weeks of lockdown we met online using Zoom. When we could meet together between lockdown 1 and 2 in our home, we did so but when we returned to lockdown in October there was no appetite to return to Zoom as a medium for meeting. As a community we opted to explore new technology and in November we started to use StreamYard to meet and stream our community worship across our digital platforms. We then met on a Sunday afternoon for community time on Zoom.'*

Many fresh expressions of Church were still very young or at a fragile stage of development when the pandemic hit. In Blackpool Centre of Mission, for example, a new church for the Grange Park estate, Hope Community Church (HCC), was established not long before the first lockdown. The past year has not been easy for HCC. There have been two deaths and HCC's older members have been quite isolated. But a regular pattern of (online) meetings and pastoral visiting has been maintained and the team are now looking to rebuild.

Some fresh expressions of Church which engage with homeless and other vulnerable people, were not able to worship in person for much of 2020/21 because meeting online was not possible. But practical and emotional support continued throughout the pandemic as at Medway Oaks (Medway Centre of Mission). When we interviewed Lead Evangelist Stephen Ramshaw in April 2021, he told us that Medway Oaks had only recently restarted, at a slightly different time and in a new venue, after a year of not meeting due to the pandemic. Initial numbers were lower than before, and it will take a while to build back up again.

<sup>5</sup> Note that these figures rely solely on self-reporting. One limitation of the research methodology employed is that we have not been able to assess the reported examples against established criteria for verifying fresh expressions of Church.



The quotations and interview extracts that follow provide further snapshots into the life of the fresh expressions of Church and worshipping communities supported by centres of mission during the pandemic:

*'In the WhatsApp group people have been starting to pray for each other and that has been really nice to see. Myself and two other leaders sit back and look at the WhatsApp group sometimes just to witness how great it is to see them supporting one another.'*

### **LIVING ROOM CHURCH, LIVERPOOL CENTRE OF MISSION**

*'The members of Pirate Monks had been really struggling with the Covid restrictions and the lack of physical contact allowed. So the Centre of Mission team constructed a special area which included plastic sheeting barriers that meant the team could lay hands on those who wanted to receive prayer.'*

### **PIRATE MONKS - A RECOVERY COMMUNITY DEVELOPED BY DUNDEE CENTRE OF MISSION**

*'The best part of youth church is the prayer time when young people bring their worries to God.'*

### **JLJL YOUTH CHURCH, GREENWICH CENTRE OF MISSION**

## 3.3 RESOURCING AND ENABLING OTHERS

In line with Church Army's DARE strategy, all centres of mission are involved in advocating, resourcing, and enabling (as well as doing) evangelism. But due to the pandemic, the way in which this happens needed to change and evolve in 2020/21.

### 3.3.1 Supporting volunteers

During 2020/21, centres of mission worked with an estimated 463 volunteers. 56% of volunteers were described as 'regular churchgoers', while 44% were not.

When we asked if volunteer involvement had changed during the pandemic, some centres of mission said there has been 'a little more interest in volunteering' (Ballina) while others (e.g. Blackpool) said that social distancing restrictions and a lack of face-to-face activity had made engaging existing volunteers more difficult. Another, Greenwich CoM, commented:

*'Many of our volunteers have been shielding during the pandemic, and our numbers have decreased dramatically meaning more work for the few who have been able to be with us during the pandemic.'*

Others still said that the number of volunteers remained the same during the pandemic but that volunteer roles changed, with volunteers getting involved in things like hosting / co-hosting Zoom sessions (Bradford) and online church (Newry), or assisting with food banks / clothing banks (Dundee). Within one Centre of Mission, however, it was suggested that the vocabulary of volunteering may be problematic. As one Evangelist put it, 'We don't use the language of volunteers and leadership here.'

### 3.3.2 Supporting other individuals

As well as supporting volunteers, centres of mission are involved in:

- Raising up, developing and mentoring new local 'indigenous leaders' (e.g. Ballina, Bradford)
- Helping people to engage with Xplore, Reunion, Envoy and other Church Army resources and programmes (e.g. Bradford, Haverfordwest, Liverpool)
- Hosting ordinands and other people on placements (e.g. Attercliffe and Darnall) and linking potential Evangelists to the Church Army Vocational Discernment Journey (e.g. Medway, Middlesbrough)

### 3.3.3 Supporting local churches

The ways in which centres of mission resource and enable local churches include:

- Advising / supporting other churches in mission and evangelism (e.g. Attercliffe and Darnall, Central Fife, Medway)
- Advocating evangelism in local clergy / church leader networks (e.g. Bradford, Central Fife, Greenwich)
- Running webinars on evangelism (e.g. Medway) or courses for local churches, including Faith Pictures (e.g. Southampton)
- Leading services and preaching (e.g. Greenwich, Liverpool)

### 3.3.4 Resourcing the wider Church

At a wider level still, centres of mission help to resource and enable the wider Church in mission and evangelism in a variety of ways. These include:

- Participation in diocesan, regional or national initiatives and working groups on pioneering mission and evangelism (e.g. various Irish COMs' participation in strategic conversations about pioneering in Ireland, Bradford COM's participation in the national Missional Youth Church Network)
- Developing local networks of evangelists across a diocese (e.g. Medway)
- Sharing resources with other centres of mission (e.g. Drumcliffe / Selby Kids Club)
- Social media – e.g. Drumcliffe Church Army Instagram Takeover

Other centres of mission said there had been fewer regular 'resourcing and enabling' evangelism activities during the pandemic but reported positive developments and emerging partnerships 'behind the scenes'.





THURSDAY CHATS - LET'S CHAT ABOUT...

GOD





LOCKDOWN

**REFLECTIONS  
FROM A PANDEMIC**



## 4. REFLECTIONS FROM A PANDEMIC

As has been evidenced throughout this report, the role of an Evangelist in a Centre of Mission has adapted considerably since the start of the pandemic. In CARU's conversations with Evangelists it was important to capture some of the learning and reflections that have happened since the pandemic began as well as Evangelists' questions and challenges for the future. These reflections, questions and examples of learning are summarised thematically under two subheadings, *Learning from the past year* and *Questions and challenges moving forward*.

### 4.1 LEARNING FROM THE PAST YEAR

We asked Centre of Mission Evangelists: 'What are you learning about pioneering mission during the pandemic?'. The Evangelists that we spoke to provided numerous examples of what they had learnt during the pandemic. Some of the most notable themes are summarised below.

#### Developing working style

One Evangelist said they felt they needed to build a more reflective space and retreat during work life. This was echoed by other Evangelists in talking about: establishing a work rhythm; being adaptable and flexible amid constant change; the importance of good admin and working as a team.

#### Trying new things

Many Evangelists said that the pandemic has meant they have improved existing skills and learnt new ones. There was some discussion of having the courage to take risks, look for new opportunities and try new things whilst creating a space where failure is not a negative thing but a useful tool for learning.

#### Pioneering

Some Evangelists spoke of how their understanding of pioneer ministry has changed. One Evangelist said that pioneer mission means working as a team, and another said that there was no one way to pioneer apart from just 'going for it'. This was echoed further by other Evangelists in the need to represent Christ in all contexts and combining social action with evangelism. Dundee CoM has received 'the most income they've ever had this year and much of it has come from new sources'.

#### Developing online ministry

There has been a considerable amount of learning about online ministry and how it has changed and developed during the pandemic. A lot of centres of mission were continuing to run online or blended groups for the local community and/or church. One Evangelist has learnt how people respond better to interactive online worship rather than something passive to watch, and another found the development of online ministry useful as 'traditional denominational boundaries didn't apply online'. There was also a more nuanced understanding of how online resources can sometimes be exclusionary, and that even if uptake isn't that high for online provision it doesn't necessarily mean that people don't like what is being offered, rather, they may be at saturation level of engagement.

#### Discerning where God is at work

Many Evangelists spoke about (re)learning to trust God's will, especially during challenging or difficult times when there was no ability to plan with certainty. Evangelists felt that the pandemic has made them more open to God's will even if it's hard work, to bringing situations to God, and thinking about where God is at work in their lives and the centres of mission in their local contexts. As Lead Evangelist Tim Hyde from Southampton CoM summed up, 'God is always at work even when we can't be!'

## 4.2 QUESTIONS AND CHALLENGES MOVING FORWARD

We also asked Evangelists: *'Looking to the future, what is the biggest challenge or question facing your Centre of Mission?'* Evangelists identified various questions and challenges in response to this question, which have been grouped together in the following themes:

### Resourcing volunteers

A number of Evangelists felt one of the biggest challenges at was finding more volunteers and resources to develop their centres of mission and the work they are currently undertaking.

### Uncertainty

Many centres of mission felt that there was still lots of uncertainty about what will happen in the future, and how it is really difficult to plan anything due to changing restrictions and local outbreaks. However, as part of that, centres of mission are asking important questions about how they work, what needs to change, and what they were doing before lockdown that can be stopped or adapted to the new context.

### Financial sustainability

Some centres of mission were concerned with their own financial sustainability and asking what ministry provision will look like post-pandemic. This includes how they will continue to resource their Centre of Mission with reduced staff, changes in diocesan financing or how to resource fresh expressions of Church or community that they provide in their local contexts. As one Evangelist said, 'Covid has thrown a spanner in the original plan and timescales for our work'.

### Re-establishing or creating community

The biggest challenge for many Evangelists was re-establishing community, re-acquainting themselves with past relationships and making new connections. For some Evangelists, a key part of re-establishing the community is related to the building from which they work out of. One Evangelist said that they would like to generate a community that reflects the diversity of the area but it is a challenge to avoid it becoming polarised.

### Youth work

The centres of mission that provide support for children and young people asked similar questions about how they were going to reconnect with young people in their communities and particularly how to respond to the impact the pandemic has had on their mental health and wellbeing. Additionally, there were questions about when Evangelists will be able to provide in-person youth groups again and re-connect with schools. In Greenwich CoM, the biggest challenge the team are facing is how to bring young people with adverse life experiences and a history of criminality to Christ.

## 5. CONCLUSION

For all involved in Church Army centres of mission, 2020/21 was an incredibly challenging year.

As we saw in Section 2, **the impact of the pandemic** on centres of mission, Evangelists, local communities, and churches has been considerable and wide-ranging, with significant variations between regions and nations.

But amidst all the difficulties of the past year, this research has uncovered **statistics and stories to celebrate** and sources of joy to be found. Some of these were reported on Section 3, which outlined the innovative, diverse ways and contextual ways through which centres of mission have responded to the pandemic and emerging evidence about their:

- Social impact
- Faith impact
- Resourcing and enabling others

This report provides a snapshot into the continuing impact centres of mission have in an ever-changing landscape and some of the learning emerging from this. As centres of mission continue to work during a time of continued uncertainty and changing restrictions, Section 4 also identifies some of the **future challenges and questions** that Evangelists are facing or exploring. There are no easy or straightforward answers, but these questions nevertheless provide important insights into what it means to be a Church Army Evangelist in a Centre of Mission in a rapidly changing and unpredictable mission context.

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### From Ireland

Ballina Centre of Mission  
Drumcliffe Centre of Mission  
Newry Centre of Mission  
North Belfast Centre of Mission

### From England

Attercliffe & Darnall Centre of Mission  
Blackpool Centre of Mission  
Bradford Centre of Mission  
Gloucester & Forest Centre of Mission  
Greenwich Centre of Mission  
Hackney Centre of Mission  
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