

CHURCH ARMY CENTRES OF MISSION IN 2022/23

Recording the Journey Summary Report

Church Army's Research Unit, August 2023



Introduction

This report presents the key findings from the Recording the Journey research project on Church Army Centres of Mission during 2022/23. It highlights some of the ways that Centres of Mission are impacting their communities and dioceses, with a particular focus on:

- Social Impact
- Faith Impact
- Resourcing and Enabling Impact

In doing this, it draws together and summarises two types of research data collected by Church Army's Research Unit over the past year:

- Quantitative data (numbers) collected through a 'Numbers and Activities' spreadsheet completed by Centre of Mission Evangelists at two time-points (October 2022, April 2023)
- Qualitative data (stories) through annual research interviews with Centre of Mission Evangelists

Across 2022/23, there were 32 active Centres of Mission (CoM). Over the course of the financial year, 3 CoM had closed and 2 new CoM had opened. 29 of these CoM provided usable quantitative data (19 at both collection points, 10 at just one) and 26 took part in a qualitative research interview.

Every Centre of Mission is different, so it is impossible for a short report like this to do justice to the breadth and diversity of activities taking place. But we hope it gives at least some idea of the wide variety of creative and contextual ways through which Centres of Mission are making a difference.

With grateful thanks to all the inspiring Evangelists who have shared their stories, numbers, and experiences with us, and the brilliant team of researchers who have journeyed with them this year.

Dr Andy Wier

Research Team Leader, Church Army

Summary

- Across 2022/23, there were **32 active Centres of Mission (CoM)**. Over the course of the financial year, 3 CoM had closed and 2 new CoM had opened.
- CoM have been involved in around **21,500 hours of organised activity¹** during this period.
 - This is 2,130 hours for every month active.
 - The average CoM has been involved in approximately 72 hours of organised activity every month.
- CoM have interacted with over **41,000 people** through organised activity over the course of the financial year.
 - The 'average' CoM has interacted with about 1,000 people (although this ranges from 139 to 3,672 people)
 - 55% of those interacted with were children (under 18 years old)
- Evangelists were asked to categorise activities into '**social impact**', '**faith development**' or '**advocating, resourcing and enabling evangelism**' activities. The table below summarises the key statistics for all activities of each type combined:

Activity type	Hours activity	Monthly hours activity	People interacted with	% Children	% Adults
Social impact activities ²	13,680	1,263	15,200	53%	47%
Faith development activities	6,460	692	19,450	71%	29%
Advocating, resourcing and enabling evangelism	1,400	175	6,800	20%	80%

- The rest of this report explores these findings in more detail with more statistics and examples.

¹ Please note that the figures in this report are projections: When a CoM only submitted usable data for a single time-point, that data was extrapolated to predict totals for the whole of that CoM's activity throughout the year. The total statistics for responding CoM were 'multiplied up' to calculate estimated totals for all CoM.

² Note that many CoM activities fulfil both 'social impact' and 'faith development' functions, and that 'social impact' is the first option that evangelists are presented with when they are completing their returns.

Social Impact

- During 2022/23, CoM were involved in around **13,680 hours of social impact activity** including food provision, pastoral support, community activities and social events, children's groups, support groups, and educational / emotional support in schools.
- Through social impact activities, CoM interacted with around **15,200 people** (53% children and 47% adults)
- Most CoM are involved with food provision in some form. In total they have provided/distributed over **24,600 meals or boxes of food**.
- CoM also help provide other essential items such as school uniform, household appliances, haircuts and hygiene packs. In total they have provided/distributed over **3,000 items**.

Food Provision

Most CoM are involved in some form of food provision, but the way that they do this varies from context to context. Over the past year, this has included:

- Running or supporting **Food Banks** and similar initiatives
- **Hot Meals** – *Throughout the summer holidays and half-term, Wrexham Centre of Mission ran a Hot Meals project for families and individuals who were struggling. This provided around 88 meals a day, three days a week.*
- **Social Supermarkets** (e.g. Cross Hands CoM) and **"Top Up Shops"** (e.g. Suffolk CoM)
- **Informal food distribution** – receiving unused food from bakeries and other food suppliers and sharing with individuals known to be in need:

One lady who is someone embedded in her community – she knows lots of people locally, and is someone who cares for the people on her street. Since delivering her bread and cake, we have learnt about her care for others and this has been reflected in her sharing of bread with neighbours and friends... She works locally, and so knows lots about what is going on in the area, and so helps us to understand what is going on locally, and also connects us with people, when appropriate.

(Kinder and Gina Kalsi, Attercliffe and Darnall Centre of Mission)

Cost of Living Support

During a year in which the cost of living has risen dramatically, CoM have provided lots of support to people experiencing financial hardship. Once again, the way this is done varies from context to context, but notable examples include:

- **Discretionary funds** to support people in crisis
- **Advocacy** - helping people access and apply for other support – e.g. navigating complex Council systems
- Help with **budgeting**
- Distributing **clothes, bedding, and hygiene packs**
- Providing **baby clothes and equipment** for families who are struggling

Baby Basics has now given out 1500 packs since we started in 2017. This is an amazing feat. The volunteers are amazing and... we are able to meet the increased demand for packs for families in crisis. We have seen a big increase in refugee families and asylum seekers needing support – often they are living in hotels or hostels.

(Karen Webb, North Belfast Centre of Mission)

Supporting children, young people, and families

CoM work with people of all ages but some have a particular focus on certain age groups or life stages. While some, like North Belfast CoM, have ministries like Baby Basics (as featured above), others like Bradford, Greenwich, Leeds, and Wrexham CoM engage extensively with at-risk teenagers and young adults.

Young people are listening and starting to question their own way of life... Young people are asking me to speak to other young people going down the wrong path.

(Neil Obbard, Leeds Centre of Mission)

Physical and emotional well-being

CoM are helping to promote physical and emotional well-being in their communities. For example:

- Newry Centre of Mission runs a Kids and Youth Gym, Mental Health Days, and a Healthy Heart Programme in partnership with local schools.
- The North Coast of Wales Centre of Mission has recently started a Menopause Café.
- St Helier Centre of Mission runs a Bike Project (restoring bikes recovered by the police), Zumba classes, and a Community Choir sponsored by the NHS.

Supporting people who are isolated or vulnerable

CoM are often working with people in quite vulnerable positions. This includes work with people with experiences of:

- Homelessness and drug and alcohol addictions (e.g. Dundee, Medway and Sheffield City CoM)
- Prison – e.g. *Scunthorpe CoM runs a drop-in for people who have come out of prison and need support. One former prisoner (released after serving a sentence for a serious crime) told Lead Evangelist Sean Andrews he was amazed that ‘we accept him for who he is - we treat him as a human being’.*
- Refugees – e.g. *Cork CoM helping host 7 women and children from the Ukraine, having repurchased old parish centre for accommodation*
- Domestic abuse
- Bereavement
- Social isolation

It's about meeting individual needs by the building of friendships

(Marian Edwards, Ballina CoM)

Building community

Finally, a lot of the work of CoM seems to be about bringing people together and building community. Again, this seems to happen in a myriad of different ways within different CoM, but some notable examples are briefly described below:

- Selby CoM has worked with other community organisations to develop a much-needed community hub building for the Flaxley Road estate. Lead Evangelist Richard Cooke took on chairing 'Selby Big Local' last summer to help bring a quarter of a million-pound refit through to completion, and to see this significant project start to help address the many needs of the community.
- The North Coast of Wales CoM has established a weekly community meal called The King's Table. As Lead Evangelist Jo Leslie explains, one of the significant features of this is that has drawn together people from 'both sides' of a local community that contains a mix of council flats and retirement bungalows:

The King's Table changes the perceptions between the two dominant social groups of the town, allowing them to become friends.

(Jo Leslie, North Coast of Wales CoM)

- Greenwich CoM has been working for many years in parts of London experiencing high levels of knife crime, drug dealing, and gang violence. Within this context, the CoM is building community through unconditional love and acceptance, growing people's gifts, and facilitating mutual support:

There's a lot of mutual support: using ex-offenders to help young offenders, or creating spaces where carers can support each other as well as being supported by us, rather than being isolated recipients.

The affirming love of God channelled through our mission raises self-esteem and enables people to develop gifts with which to help others in their communities.

(Nick Russell, Greenwich CoM)

Faith Impact

- During 2022/23, CoM were involved in around **6,460 hours of faith development activity** including fresh expressions of Church, prayer gatherings, seasonal evangelistic events, enquirers' courses (e.g. Alpha), school assemblies, and discipleship or Bible study groups
- Through faith development activities, CoM interacted with around **19,450 people** (71% children and 29% adults)
- **38% of CoM posted videos online** that offered short devotional thoughts, reflections or similar. In total, these videos received over **27,000 views**.
- CoM were involved in **55 child or adult baptisms, 78 infant baptisms or thanksgivings, and 34 people going forward for confirmation**. 41% of responding CoM said that they had been involved in assisting with a funeral. In total they have assisted with **44 funerals**.
- CoM report that approximately **580 people are exploring faith** with them and **630 people are growing in their faith** with them.
- CoM reported that they had seen approximately **80 people make faith commitments** for the first

Sharing Faith

Within CoM, faith is shared through words and actions. Alongside the various social impact activities described already, CoM are also involved in various activities with more explicit or intentional faith development and words. Examples include:

- **Informal conversations and relationships** with local people, people who attend community activities and volunteers (many of whom are not regular churchgoers).
- **School assemblies** - Approximately 40% (13 out of 32) of all CoM provide assemblies in local schools. Assemblies provided by CoM have been attended by over 6,000 children.
- **Chaplaincy** in a wide range of contexts like football teams, schools, prisons and hospices
- Opportunities for **exploring faith** – both through enquirers' courses like Alpha and less structured, more relational approaches.

We had some lovely chats on the road, and then met up for coffee. When we started gathering around a fire, with a short service and a discussion about a Bible passage, they came along.

(Kinder and Gina Kalsi, Attercliffe and Darnall CoM)

- Fresh expressions of Church and other **new worshipping communities**

It [Impact Church] is so a church where you don't need to worry about your children making a noise or disturbing the service – no need to bring sweets to bribe them to be quiet. It is a family of all sorts of people.

(Esther Lockley, Cross Hands CoM)

- **Rites of passage** – Helping people prepare for baptism and confirmation and support with community bereavements and funerals

Signs of Growing Faith

As noted already, CoM report that approximately 580 people are exploring faith with them, and 630 people are growing in their faith with them. In 2022/23, they also saw around 80 people make faith commitments for the first time and 45 people rediscover their faith or make a faith recommitment. These numbers, however, only tell part of the story. The examples and quotations below are provided to further illustrate some of the different ways through which people are finding and growing in faith through CoM.

'I've never felt so loved'

(a recovering addict who found faith at St Helier CoM)

We are astounded at what God is doing every week. Most of our church are what Church Army refers to as the profoundly un-churched. They are hungry for the gospel and bringing their friends and family. The people who come are so embedded in the estate. They're bringing their people, saying, 'Come to our church, it's not what you think.'

(Tracy Marlow, St Helier CoM)

There's a lady who was baptised late last year. When I first met her, she was painfully shy, and her English wasn't great. I met her for coffee and started sharing about Jesus with her and invited her to EDGE Disciples. It took her ages to pluck up the courage. Now she's completely changed! Her confidence has grown, her English has improved, her business is growing and she comes to group and asks questions and prays out loud!

(Ruth Hills, Southampton CoM)

It's been lovely to see 6/7 Ukrainian refugees coming along to our Sunday morning service off the back of our relationships with them. Faith is coming alive for them and moving from a simple cultural inheritance to something more vibrant.

(Matt Gould, Cork CoM)

A single mum in her 30s who had some church involvement in her teens but had subsequently drifted away has recently come back to faith, saying (something like) 'I want to go back to the relationship with God I used to have as a teenager.' The catalyst for this was her children attending Centre of Mission activities. She is still going through a tough time but now sees church as one of her anchors.

(Alan Williamson, Sligo CoM)

I am also a part of prison ministry here and involved in leading worship for a Sunday service. One Sunday, I also shared my testimony of how I came to know God's love for me and how that changed my life. After the service, one of the guys came up to me and thanked me for what I had shared... He could see where God had saved him and protected him in the past, and that his life too, must have meaning.

(Meg Borges, Llandaff CoM)

Resourcing and Enabling Others

Volunteering

- There were **572 volunteers** in total across all CoM. The 'average' CoM would have 16 volunteers, although in reality this ranges from 0 to 75.
- **43% of volunteers were not regular churchgoers.**

Background	% of volunteers
Regular churchgoer	57%
Occasional churchgoer	11%
Historical churchgoer	9%
Never churchgoer	24%

There is a clear sense of many volunteers 'going on a journey' through their involvement with CoM. Every volunteer's journey is different, but common themes include:

- Finding a **place of belonging**

One of our volunteers has a difficult relationship with her family... She said recently that we are her family!

(Karen Webb, North Belfast CoM)

- Growing in **confidence**

Two people who have previously been hurt quite badly in other contexts have grown hugely in confidence through being part of, and volunteering with, the CoM.

(Alan Williamson, Sligo CoM)

- Gaining **new skills** and /or **finding employment**

Sometimes young people end up asking to do college placements or apprenticeships with Sorted. One young woman who has completed an apprenticeship with Sorted has gone on to get a job working with young people.

(Tracy Milne, Bradford CoM)

- **Faith development**

There is one who came to faith about five years ago and is just growing more and more in the faith. She shares her testimony and connects with the people in the community really well.

(Mike Dare, Haverfordwest CoM)

- **Exploring vocation** – including training to become a Church Army Evangelist

Churches

- During 2022/23, 104 churches were supported in mission and evangelism by CoM
- CoM Evangelists also undertook 156 speaking engagements promoting the work of Church Army

All CoM are active in advocating, resourcing, and enabling evangelism. But the way that they do this varies from context to context. Resourcing and enabling churches in evangelism seems to take place at several different levels:

- **Local churches**

In a neighbouring parish there has been a recognition of the work we are doing, and a desire to learn from us. There have been opportunities to share with them about our work and our approach to mission... Across different deaneries of the diocese there have also been opportunities to show people what pioneer evangelism is and to help them develop this in different contexts.

(Andy Wilson, Gloucester CoM)

- **Dioceses**

There have been positive 'behind the scenes' discussions with the Diocese of Lincoln about enabling the Centre of Mission to play a greater role in advocating, resourcing, and enabling evangelism.

(Sean Andrews, Scunthorpe CoM)

The effectiveness of Karen's (Greenwich Pioneer Evangelist) ministry has caused a big change to thinking in the diocese: pioneer ministers tended to be recruited from (generally middle class) clergy, but my conversation with a diocesan missionary led to some radical thinking. He's applied for a grant to train local people to be fresh expressions leaders. He's also invited Karen to go to a conference in York so that they can pick her brains a bit. Church Army has a lot to offer here!

(Nick Russell, Greenwich CoM)

- **Nationally**

Sorted plays a key role in resourcing and enabling evangelism nationally through its participation in Missional Youth Church Network (MYCN). The Sorted model has been used to develop youth churches in various other UK contexts, as well as in Africa, by people who have worked and trained with Sorted.

(Tracy Milne, Bradford CoM)

Learning and Challenges

As well as gathering evidence about CoM's social impact, faith impact and resourcing impact, the 2022/23 RTJ qualitative interviews also asked Evangelists questions about:

- Pioneer Mission and Evangelism – ‘What have your experiences over the past year taught you about mission and evangelism?’
- Challenges – ‘Is there anything your Centre of Mission is finding especially difficult or challenging at the moment? Anything you’re wrestling with?’

Responses to these questions are being analysed separately and reported elsewhere. The learning about pioneer mission and evangelism is being fed into the Research Unit's new stream of research on effective evangelism. Key challenges noted by CoM Evangelists will be fully reported (along with material from other sources) in a wider internal report on difficulties and challenges within CoM but our initial analysis suggests that key challenges experienced by Evangelists include difficulties around:

- Communication - helping different people (including dioceses, local churches, and different parts of Church Army) understand what their Centre of Mission does
- Managing expectations – especially when there are targets linked to external funding
- Recruiting and retaining volunteers
- Engaging local churches
- Staffing – including navigating changes in personnel or not having a Pioneer Evangelist
- Buildings – e.g. not having dedicated premises for the CoM's work
- Pressures and demands on Evangelists (especially for those who combine being a Lead Evangelist with another role)
- Self-care and maintaining professional boundaries when working in quite chaotic contexts
- Ensuring safeguarding best practice is followed within these contexts
- Balancing different priorities – finding the right balance between
 - Reaching new people and support for new Christians / people exploring faith
 - Doing evangelism and advocating, resourcing, and enabling evangelism

Conclusion

This short report has shown some of the ways that Centres of Mission have impacted their communities during 2022/23, with a particular focus on:

- Social Impact
- Faith Impact
- Resourcing and Enabling Impact

It has also highlighted some of the difficulties and challenges that Centres of Mission sometimes experience. As noted already, a summary report like this cannot do justice to everything that goes on within Centres of Mission, but we hope it gives the reader at least some idea of how Centres of Mission are making a difference and a desire to find out more.

As a Research Unit, we look forward to continuing Recording the Journey with Centres of Mission in 2023/24 and producing a similar report next year.

Andy Wier
Research Team Leader, August 2023