

People & Places

March 2026



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WELCOME...I'M SO PLEASED YOU'RE HERE!

Spring is almost here, and it's a season I always look forward to. As flowers return and the sunshine begins to appear (hopefully!), it's a time when change can be seen and felt.

Change is a word I'd also use to describe recent times at Church Army. Much has shifted, some things have been hard, and yet through it all God has remained faithful – and so have you.

Before you dive into these pages, I want to say thank you. Your generosity, prayers and encouragement continue to sustain our work. Because of you, it truly feels as though spring is on the horizon for Church Army.

This edition is full of stories that remind us why we exist: to train and release skilled evangelists who can reach people in the darkest places, and to walk alongside those exploring faith in the midst of real and often complicated lives. There is also space for reflection – on Easter, on evangelism, and on what it means to carry hope into the world today. Our CEO, Matt Barlow, reflects on the season Church Army is in and looks ahead with hope.

Behind the scenes, we're also thinking carefully about how we stay connected with you. People & Places will now come to you three times a year – a thoughtful decision that helps us steward resources responsibly while continuing to share the stories that matter most. We're also exploring new ways to deepen that connection, including forming the editorial panel and opportunities like our online Prayer Breakfasts, where we can gather, pray, and hear directly from those at the heart of the work you make possible.

So, thank you for being here – for walking with us through change, and for your continuing prayerful support. I hope the stories in these pages encourage you, move you, and remind you that your support is helping to carry God's love into places where it is deeply needed.

Now – read on and enjoy!



Sarah Waller
Editor

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Front cover image – kids activities at The Grove, Newry Centre of Mission

Back cover image – aerial view of Newry, Northern Ireland

PRESSING ON TOWARDS THE GOAL

Matt Barlow, CEO of Church Army, reflects on some of our recent challenges and encouragements, shares about why stories like Noel's give him hope, and explains why your prayerful support remains so vital.

I'd been away from church for 50 years – stopped going, stopped believing. But meeting Church Army Evangelist, Scott, changed me... – Noel

These are the powerful words of Noel, a brave survivor of clerical abuse who is exploring faith again through Church Army in Newry, Northern Ireland. Noel's words stop us in our tracks, and they take us straight to the heart of why Church Army exists. His story is a reminder that, even after decades of pain and distance, God continues to reach people with compassion, patience and hope.

You can read Noel's full story later in this edition of People & Places. It is one of many testimonies that remind us why it is so vital that we continue to train and equip skilled evangelists – ordinary men and women with a calling and skills to reach those who may feel overlooked, forgotten or wary of the church.

There is no doubt that recent years have brought challenge and change for Church Army. Difficult decisions have had to be made, and there have been moments of real loss. And yet, stories like Noel's confirm that God is still at work among us, building on the legacy of our founder, Wilson Carlile, and shaping us for what lies ahead.

Alongside the challenges, we have also been blessed with moments to celebrate. A real highlight was the Re-Gathering last October, when

many of the Church Army family came together at High Leigh, Hertfordshire. We were inspired by Bishop Saju's sermon, moved by Bishop Guli's generosity in sharing her story, and uplifted by laughter and connection throughout the conference. It was a meaningful time of growth, connection and prayer.

As 2026 began, I found myself filled with renewed gratitude and hope for the future of Church Army. There is a growing confidence that God is guiding, strengthening and preparing us for the next chapter.

The response to our Christmas Appeal has been an incredible encouragement – for the first time in many years, we reached and exceeded our financial target. At a time of transition, this is a powerful sign of confidence in Church Army's future, and a reminder that you believe in this mission and want to see it flourish.

There are still challenges to navigate as we establish our home in our new offices in Sheffield. But we trust in God's promises. The Bible reminds us to look forward with courage and faith:

"...Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:13-14)

Thank you for standing with Church Army through challenge and change. As you read this magazine, I hope you are encouraged by the stories within – and reminded just how essential your prayerful support is as we continue to share Jesus, ignite faith, and carry hope into the places where it is needed most.



Matt Barlow
CEO, Church Army

HOPE AND HEALING IN NEWRY

Newry in Northern Ireland has long been shaped by stories of division, resilience, and a deep longing for peace. In 2021, Church Army, in partnership with the local diocese, planted a Centre of Mission with a clear purpose: to build genuine relationships, share the hope of the gospel, and create a community where everyone feels seen, valued, and welcome.

Today, this vision has blossomed into The Grove – a welcoming space where people can explore faith at their own pace and join in worship. It's a place where questions are valued, and the life-changing love of Jesus is encountered in profound ways.

This growing community is being shaped by Church Army Evangelists Scott McDonald and Natalie Trainor. Now in her second year of Church Army training, Natalie shares more about The Grove – and what your prayers and generosity are making possible.



Meet Natalie

'I came to Newry in November 2023 as a Pioneer Evangelist. Being right on the border with the Republic of Ireland, Newry has a painful history of division. We wanted to establish a new worshipping community, a neutral place where people could explore faith, feel welcome and safe to ask questions. But we also wanted people to grow in their faith and be equipped to share their faith with others.'

The Grove offers the local community a whole host of initiatives available for people to join. Natalie tells us:

'We run Alpha courses – one for adults and one for young people. We have a kids' gym: a brilliant way for us to reach families with no church background. Often, those children will come to our kids' club, where we look at scripture and make things fun for them to get involved with.'

'We have a women's Bible study group, and we open up the prayer room weekly for people to come and pray. We have a monthly Hope and Healing event for people seeking healing, and we pray with them. People are even coming from across the border, which is brilliant. And of course, there's Sunday worship too, which is in its infancy – but it's beginning to grow.'

'We go out and meet people where they are through healing ministry, street evangelism, and even door-to-door visits, and we want The Grove to be a place for anyone, whatever stage they're at on their journey.'

'Many who come wouldn't call themselves Christians, some are facing addiction or health challenges, and they all bring questions. Some were once connected to church but drifted away, but now find The Grove a safe space to re-engage. Alongside them are those with a heart for Newry, who have made The Grove their home, a place where God can work through them to reach neighbours, friends, and family.'



Natalie tells us about the team's passion for building trust and creating safe spaces for people to explore faith:

'Sadly, we also see the legacy of abuse and mistrust toward the established church, and we aim to bring the hope of the gospel to those people. That's why having a neutral space is so important – somewhere people can set down political or emotional baggage and gather safely, feel welcome and secure.'

'Newcomers to the city are increasing – asylum seekers and people granted refugee status – and that's added a new dimension to our work here in Newry.'

'When people come in carrying burdens and begin to lay them down, starting a journey of healing – that's incredibly encouraging. It's a privilege to walk alongside them. Listening to people who feel safe enough to tell their stories and find hope in Jesus – that's a privilege.'

'Jesus can break into the darkest places. Seeing that happen is the best part of what I do.'

Stories of hope unfold each week at The Grove, often beginning in unexpected places and carried on tender threads of loss, courage and grace. One such story is Noel's. His journey speaks powerfully of the healing, welcome and renewed faith taking root in Newry – a transformation made possible because people like you choose to stand with Church Army.

Meet Noel

'I'd been away from church for 50 years – stopped going, stopped believing. Unfortunately, I'm a survivor of clerical abuse. So, looking through the eyes of a child, you see a priest as the middleman taking you to the word of God. From that point of view, as a child, this was 'God's man' – and I wanted nothing to do with his God.'



'I'd fallen so far that I even got a tattoo – Lucifer and 666, it's fierce looking. Then, a few years ago, I almost took my own life when the Jimmy Savile stories came out – it brought everything back. But meeting Church Army evangelist Scott changed me... It was the first time I'd met someone like him: a minister who was humble, kind and genuine. His words came from his heart.'

Noel shares how Church Army evangelists have created a safe space where he feels a sense of belonging:

'Here, I feel welcome. I can be honest and open and ask all the questions I have about God and faith. And I have met other people like me, who have been away from the church for different reasons but have been welcomed into this space. It's not 'churchy' in the traditional sense, which I like. Here, when Natalie or Scott (Church Army Evangelists) speak, it's full of passion and honesty. You feel uplifted – it carries you through.'

'Now I can look back and see how far I've come. People used to see me as someone not to mess with – all tattoos and walls. Now I'm open, more at peace, enjoying life with my wife. I look forward to coming here. I'm still learning where I'm going, but I've found peace. I can talk to God. It's not always easy, but he listens. This is a place [where] I've found hope.'

Your support has created a place where Noel could walk through the door, be met with compassion, and start to rediscover the God he once felt he had to flee from. Without the generosity of you, our faithful supporters, Noel may never have encountered the love, patience and acceptance that helped him take those first steps back towards faith.

- Pray that Noel and many more like him continue to feel welcome and supported as they begin to explore or reignite faith
- Pray for Natalie, Scott and the team at Newry to feel strengthened, encouraged and filled with the Holy Spirit as they reach people with God's love
- Pray for evangelists to be refreshed, renewed and inspired as they take the gospel into the most difficult places

**PRAYER
POINTS**

COME, PRAY WITH US!

'I really felt united in prayer at God's throne...'

Our first Online Prayer Breakfast of 2026 took place in January and it was a real joy to meet with so many of you from across the UK and Ireland. These gatherings remind us just how deeply prayer underpins everything we do at Church Army and how powerful it is when we come together to seek God's heart.

We would love you to join us for the next Online Prayer Breakfast. It is a simple but meaningful space to connect, to hear about frontline ministry, and to pray together. It allows us to pause, give thanks and lift before God the people and communities we serve – all of our work is made possible through your faithful support.

In January, our CEO, Matt Barlow, joined us as we introduced our new Director of Engagement, Emily Petty. We also heard from Ema, who leads the team at Church Army's Ruby Project, about their work offering practical and spiritual support to women impacted by the sex industry. Her passion and compassion shone as she spoke about sharing God's love with every woman they meet, and about lives being changed through hope, dignity and prayer.

Liz, a long-standing Church Army supporter, joined us for the breakfast and shared how meaningful she found the experience.

'It was wonderful hearing from someone working hands-on in the project,' she said. 'You could really feel her heart for what she was doing and the impact our prayers have on their work. She shared a powerful story of a life changed – it was so powerful to hear.'



Liz continued, *'I really felt united at God's throne with so many people from across the country. I left the meeting feeling energised and inspired, and encouraged to pray more effectively on my own. I can't wait to join the next one.'*

The Bible reminds us that 'they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer' (Acts 2:42). The early church understood the power of gathering together before God – and that same spirit is at the heart of our Prayer Breakfasts today.

Each gathering is an opportunity to thank God for you, our faithful supporters, and to seek his wisdom, blessing and encouragement together. Your prayers truly make a tangible difference in the lives of the people we serve.

Our next Online Prayer Breakfast will be on the 15th April. We'll be hearing about Church Army's vital work with young people through our Bradford Centre of Mission.

Email onlineevents@churcharmy.org or call **0300 131 9200**, and we will send you the link to join us. We'd be delighted to welcome you.



CARRYING EASTER HOPE THROUGH EVANGELISM

This year, many Christians across the world will celebrate Easter over the first weekend in April. Like many, I will join in the joy of Easter Sunday, but there is always a moment in Holy Week that stops me in my tracks.

I find Good Friday particularly challenging. Each year, I reflect on the unbearable suffering Jesus endured, not only on the cross but in the days leading up to it. He knew betrayal was coming. He knew denial, rejection, and brutality lay ahead. Hauled through the streets and forced to carry the weight of the cross, he faced scorn, violence, and deep emotional torment. I cannot begin to imagine the depth of that suffering, and as I reflect on it, I wrestle with sadness, anger, guilt, and sorrow. And yet, in the midst of it all, I also feel immense gratitude and hope, because I know what his sacrifice means for us.

I wasn't brought up as a Christian, but when I began exploring faith, the cross became a turning point. I never doubted Jesus existed or that he suffered – what I didn't understand was why he endured it. Then someone said something that changed everything: if I had been the only person on earth, Jesus would still have died – just for me.

'In that moment, my life changed, and I became a follower of Jesus.'



Over time, I began to find healing and hope, learning that God has a plan and that even in suffering, he does not abandon us.

I discovered the life-changing love of Jesus not through church, but through someone who patiently walked alongside me as I explored faith. That is what Church Army evangelists are doing today – reaching those who are searching, suffering, or feeling overlooked, and reminding them that God meets us in our pain and brings hope beyond it. Through the resurrection, Jesus defeated death, showing us that darkness does not have the final word.



Church Army evangelists are sharing this hope with those who need it most – and they can do this because of you. Through your prayers and generosity, you are helping more people encounter the life-giving love of Jesus and the hope of Easter. Thank you.



Sarah Waller
Editor

A PLACE THAT SHAPED SO MANY

The Wilson Carlile Centre has, for many years, been far more than just a building for Church Army – it has been a cherished home. Sadly, significant financial pressures led to the organisation's restructuring, including the difficult decision to leave the Centre. As we recently said goodbye, we do so with deep gratitude, remembering it as a place of calling, formation, and community.

Named after our founder, Wilson Carlile, the centre stood as a significant part of Church Army's commitment to our mission.

It was a place of learning, prayer and discernment – a place of belonging where people found their tribe and like-hearted individuals prepared to become commissioned Church Army evangelists. Beyond formation and training, it was also a space shaped by everyday moments: conversations over coffee, generous hospitality in the much-loved Wilson's Café, shared worship, laughter and friendship.





Now that we have relocated to new offices in Sheffield, we can look back at our time at the Wilson Carlile Centre with deep gratitude for all that has been nurtured within its walls. For many in the Church Army family – supporters, staff and evangelists alike – it will always be a place of precious memories and meaning. It is right to pause, to give thanks and to honour what has been.

Scripture tells us that, while buildings can shape and support our life together, they are not where God ultimately dwells...

“...the Most High does not live in houses made by human hands” (Acts 7:48).

God’s presence goes with his people wherever they are called. With gratitude for the past and hope for the future, we trust that God is guiding Church Army, whose mission has never been rooted in bricks and mortar, but in people – prayerfully supported, sent and led by God into communities across the UK and Ireland.



MORE THAN WORDS: A LIFE OF EVANGELISM

Evangelism has always been the beating heart of Church Army. For nearly 150 years, people from all walks of life have been called and sent to share the good news of Jesus – bringing God’s love into the darkest places.

That mission continues today through our Evangelists-in-Training. Already called by God, they spend three years deepening their discipleship and developing their gifts, preparing to serve as pioneering evangelists for today’s world. This journey is only possible because of the faithful prayers and generosity of you – our wonderful supporters.

One of these evangelists is Becca McCreery, who began training in 2024. Her story shows us that evangelism isn’t a programme, but a way of life.

Meet Becca

‘Since becoming a Christian, evangelism has come quite naturally to me – I talk to anyone and everyone about my faith. I knew I wanted to work for God, but I didn’t know what that should look like. I was involved in lots of different things, and I’d been to plenty of evangelistic events, but nothing felt like it was sticking.

‘I spoke with my vicar and said, quite honestly, that I wanted to serve God but didn’t know how. I did know that I didn’t want to become a vicar or consider ordination – I just wasn’t the right fit. I might be a little too rebellious in spirit for that, and I knew I’d feel confined. Not long after, my vicar handed me a Church Army leaflet, and I just knew straight away: this is what I’ve been looking for.



'From there, everything happened quickly. I spoke to my Diocesan Director of Ordinands, attended a Church Army Discovery event on Zoom, and began the discernment process. It's a really thorough journey. I spent time at a Centre of Mission to see what Church Army looks like on the ground. That process is so important – not just for Church Army to discern whether you're the right fit for training, but for you to prayerfully explore whether this is truly where God is calling you.'

'One of Church Army's core values is being risk-taking, and that immediately spoke to my heart. Making faith accessible to people who wouldn't normally step into church, reaching beyond the four walls, being innovative, and walking alongside those who are hurting and broken – that's my passion.'

'I'm halfway through my training, and it's incredible how present God is in everything. Often, I'll learn something in training and then find myself using it almost immediately in my ministry. I'm really excited about what lies ahead, seeing how God continues to work through this journey.'



We would like to thank those who donated and prayed for our Christmas Appeal. Thanks to your generosity, more evangelists like Becca will be trained to share the gift of Jesus.

Pray that Becca's coffee morning will continue to flourish and that the Holy Spirit will be at work in those who attend.

Pray for wisdom and clarity of thought as Becca discerns where God is calling her.

Pray for God to open up new and creative opportunities for Becca to connect with more people and share his love.

**PRAYER
POINTS**

ARE YOU CALLED TO MORE?

You can't quite explain it, but the feeling won't go away. A persistent question, a sense that God might be calling you to more – even if you're not sure what that 'more' looks like yet.

For many of Church Army's Commissioned Evangelists, that's exactly where their journey began. A desire to serve God more fully. A longing to share God's love with others. And, often, a quiet uncertainty about whether they were really the 'right kind' of person for ministry – let alone evangelism.

'I thought an evangelist was someone like Billy Graham,' says Karen, now a Commissioned Evangelist, '...and I was nothing like that. But I knew I was being called to something. Then I went to a Church Army Discovery Day, and everything fell into place.'

The truth is, there isn't just one type of evangelist. Church Army evangelists come from every tradition within the Anglican Church and from a wide range of backgrounds, experiences, and educational paths. What unites them is a shared passion to see lives and communities transformed through the love of God.

Discerning a calling to ministry can feel daunting, and many people wrestle with doubts: Am I academic enough? Could I balance training with family or work? Am I the right type of person? These questions are often part of the calling itself. Church Army's discernment exists to help you explore your calling honestly and prayerfully, discovering whether God may be shaping you for life and ministry as a Church Army evangelist.

Neil Thomson, Commissioned Evangelist and Church Army's Vocations Chaplain, regularly walks alongside people at this stage of their journey.



'People come to Church Army in all sorts of ways,' he says. '...some have spoken with their vicar, some

Neil Thomson CA

already know a Church Army Evangelist, and others simply come across us online. What they share is a sense of being called to ministry – even if they’re still working out what that means.’ Neil encourages those who feel that quiet nudge, to start with conversation.

‘If Church Army sounds like it might be right for you, speak with your minister or vicar. And if you know a Church Army Evangelist, they can be a great source of encouragement and insight.’

One of the most accessible ways to begin exploring is through a Church Army Discovery Event. These online gatherings bring together people who are exploring what it might mean to train with Church Army and become a Commissioned Evangelist, as well as those who are not sure what ministry God is calling them to. It is a chance to hear real stories, ask honest questions, and gain a deeper sense of who Church Army is and why we exist.

Commissioned in 2021, Paul Ogunyemi is now a prison chaplain. For him, training with Church Army was transformational. He tells us:

‘My evangelist training with Church Army has been a great help with my ministry as a prison chaplain. The training gave me the ability to consider other people’s opinions and to listen and always respond with gentleness and love.’



Paul Ogunyemi CA

Perhaps your own journey is just beginning. Perhaps you’re still unsure where God might be leading. But sometimes the next faithful step isn’t a decision – it’s simply a conversation.

Your Church Army journey could be just one Discovery Event away.

To find out more, visit www.churcharmy.org/discovery or contact our chaplaincy team on **0114 551 2605**.



YOU CAN SHARE GOD'S LOVE IN THE DARKEST PLACES

*“To come here and feel like you're worth something – that you're seen and that you matter – means more than I can say...” – Cindy**

Church Army's Ruby Project offers safety, dignity and hope to women affected by the sex industry.

Through trauma-informed care, the team provides practical and spiritual support via street outreach, drop-in sessions and community spaces. We see the resilience and inherent value of each woman we meet. In the midst of the complexities and hardship they face, we are committed to greeting them with compassion, respect and the love of Jesus, shared in words and in action.

Ema, Project Lead, shares one recent moment:

‘A woman new to our drop-in was overwhelmed as we shared Bible verses with her. Tears streamed down her face as she heard, for the first time, how deeply God loves her. It was a privilege to witness the power of God's word at work.’

Your partnership makes this possible. Because of your generosity, women who might never otherwise encounter God's love are welcomed, valued, listened to and supported.

‘To come here and feel like you're worth something – that you're seen and that you matter – means more than I can say.’

*‘People don't understand what Ruby Project means to women like us. We don't generally have the normal things in life: a safe place to be, community, people who care about us. But through the Ruby Project, we do.’ – Cindy**

With your continued support, more women like Cindy can encounter hope, healing and the transforming love of Jesus through Church Army.

*name changed to protect identity

Ways To Give

Post



Cheques can be made payable to 'Church Army' and sent to:

Church Army
Pennine Five Campus
Block 5, Level 7
41 Silver Street Head
Sheffield, S1 2DD

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Call **0300 131 9200** to speak to us in person and make a donation by card over the phone or to increase your monthly giving

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BEAUTIFUL CHAOS: MAKING SPACE FOR FAITH

When Bobbie first walked into Church Army's St Helier Centre of Mission in London, she was a young mum searching for belonging – for herself and for her young family. What she found was a community that welcomed her exactly as she was, and a journey of faith that would change her family's life.

Meet Bobbie

'I didn't believe in God,' says Bobbie. 'Through my teenage years and being a young adult, I went through some trauma, and I became an atheist. But when my daughter was born, something changed. Her dad and I wanted her to grow up with faith – with community and belonging.'



Their first visits to some churches felt difficult. Traditional settings weren't always welcoming to young children. But St Helier was different.

'Nobody shushed the kids. People smiled. It felt warm, homely – like we belonged,' Bobbie remembers.

That culture of welcome is shaped by Church Army evangelists like Rachel Marlow, who understands first-hand how hard it can be to engage with church life as a parent of young children.



'After becoming a mum, I realised just how difficult it is to be part of a worshipping community with a baby; getting out of the house is hard. Babies are noisy. And not all churches make space for that,' Rachel explains.

When Bobbie told Rachel she longed to explore faith further but couldn't attend the scheduled Alpha courses because of her children, Rachel sensed God nudging her to respond differently. *'I said, 'Let's do it together. I'll bring my baby, you bring yours, and we'll make it work.''*

Rachel Marlow

What emerged was a mum-and-baby Alpha course, with some other mums and their young babies joining too. It became a space filled with toys on the floor, snacks on hand, the Alpha videos playing, and interruptions fully welcomed.

‘One mum called it ‘beautiful chaos’, Rachel says. ‘Some weeks we watched the whole video; other weeks only snippets. But God was still at work.’

For Bobbie, this space was transformative. She tells us:

‘Every week I’d leave feeling my faith had grown stronger. Rachel created a place where I could ask questions without fear of judgement – even in the middle of babies crying and a busy, hectic life.’

Bobbie went on to be baptised, alongside her daughter, while pregnant with her son, Jacob.

‘Church Army helped me find my faith...’

‘It’s given me strength, confidence and hope – not just as a Christian, but as a person and as a mum,’ Bobbie says.

Today, the group continues to meet as a discipleship community – still chaotic, still full of children, and deeply meaningful.

Through your prayers and generosity, Church Army evangelists are able to create spaces where faith can grow naturally and flourish. Thank you for helping make room for people like Bobbie to encounter Jesus, right where they are.

- Pray for the resources and provisions needed for our work to continue
- Pray for creativity and insight for evangelists across the nations as they seek innovative and thoughtful ways to enable people to experience God’s love
- Pray that many more young families and people like Bobbie will be met with kindness, encouragement and support as they begin their faith journeys

**PRAYER
POINTS**

A LIFE OF MINISTRY REMEMBERED

Looking back on lives of faithful service matters. It reminds us to give thanks, to learn, and to recognise how God uses ordinary people – supported by prayer, generosity and encouragement – to bring extraordinary hope to others. Bill Henderson’s story is one such life.

Born in Bootle in 1932, Bill grew up during the hardship of the war years. School ended early, and opportunities were limited. He only encountered church through Sunday school, which he often skipped to play in the park. Yet, as his wife Marilyn later reflected, God was already at work, shaping a future Bill could never have imagined.

Bill became an apprentice organ builder, travelling the country, learning his trade. One day, after repairing a Catholic church organ, he decided to stay for Mass, which Bill found unremarkable, but a young priest encouraged him to ‘give God a chance’. As a gesture of goodwill to the priest, Bill joined his local church youth club and met his first girlfriend, a committed Christian. But challenged by her lifestyle, Bill ended the relationship. One Sunday in church, in a last attempt to connect with God, Bill prayed a simple, honest prayer: ‘If you’re there, God, reveal yourself to me.’

Nothing happened, and so Bill decided never to go to church again. But walking home, Bill passed a small mission church, and outside stood a Church Army officer, warmly welcoming people inside. Drawn in, Bill heard the gospel clearly for the first time – and gave his life to Christ. Marilyn would later say that this single, faithful act of welcome changed the course of Bill’s life forever.



***“He never stopped being a Church Army Evangelist –
right until the end.” – Marilyn***

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Bill began sharing his story with local young people, and many came to faith. Several friends soon joined him in training with Church Army, responding to the same call. Leaving behind his work as an organ builder, Bill discovered a new purpose: helping to build lives rooted in Christ.

Training was not easy. Studying was a challenge, but Bill's passion for the gospel sustained him. Through Church Army, he learned that God equips the willing, not just the qualified. He became a Church Army officer and, later, a vicar, serving faithfully across the country.

Much of Bill's ministry unfolded in rural Yorkshire at a time when churches were declining and hope often felt thin. Yet together, Bill and Marilyn brought new life. Marilyn, who stood beside him through every season, remembers how prayer, perseverance, and the steady encouragement of fellow Church Army Captains and Sisters carried them through moments of doubt and challenge.

Marilyn shares, 'When times were hard, or doubt crept in, God always sent people to remind Bill of his calling.' And there were many signs of God at work: families came to faith, tradesmen repairing church buildings left with hearts renewed, and one couple, told they would never have children, were prayed for by Bill and later welcomed eight children into their family. Each story affirmed what Bill and Marilyn held onto: Jesus transforms lives.

Even when illness forced Bill into early retirement, his calling never faded. He continued sharing his faith wherever he went, and Marilyn cared for him faithfully until his passing. As she says with fondness, *'He never stopped being a Church Army Evangelist – right until the end.'*

We are grateful to Marilyn Henderson for sharing Bill's story with us. What became a lifetime of service began with one Church Army officer and one moment of welcome.

As we give thanks for Bill's life of service, we're reminded that, when God calls an evangelist, lives are transformed. By continuing to pray for and support those God is calling today, we help others to encounter the life-giving love of Jesus.



SHARING JESUS, STARTING WHERE WE ARE

What do you imagine when you think of an evangelist?

Often, we may think of a lone preacher standing before a crowd, sharing the gospel. This image makes sense – it's how evangelism has been practised, from the early church right up to today, and it's how many of us encounter the work of an evangelist.

In Acts 2, in the New Testament, we see Peter doing exactly this. He stands before a huge crowd on Pentecost and, through the power of the Spirit, shares a powerful account of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Thousands come to faith.

But, for many of us, this picture of the evangelist can feel a little daunting. Most of us won't find ourselves in the same kind of role as Peter.

While there's plenty we could explore about whether that approach to evangelism is still the most helpful today, that's not what I want to focus on here. Instead, I'd like to focus on the belief that all followers of Jesus can learn something important about sharing the gospel from Peter's words on Pentecost. We need to look closely at who he was speaking to.

In Acts, they are described as being from all over, but they all had something in common; they were all Jewish. Before Pentecost became the church's birthday, it was a Jewish festival marking the end of spring harvest and remembering when God gave Moses the Torah. It was a pilgrimage festival, with Jews travelling from far and wide making the journey to reach the Temple in Jerusalem.

Peter was preaching to a Jewish crowd at a Jewish festival in the sacred Jewish city. No wonder everything he said came straight from the Hebrew Bible! Peter spoke in cultural terms that his listeners understood, and they responded.

So here's the question for us: what do we have in common with our friends and neighbours who don't yet know Jesus? How can we talk about his life, death and resurrection in ways that connect with them?

Whatever we use to point to Jesus will only show part of who he is. But we can help those new to faith to put these different images together until they start to see the whole picture.



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