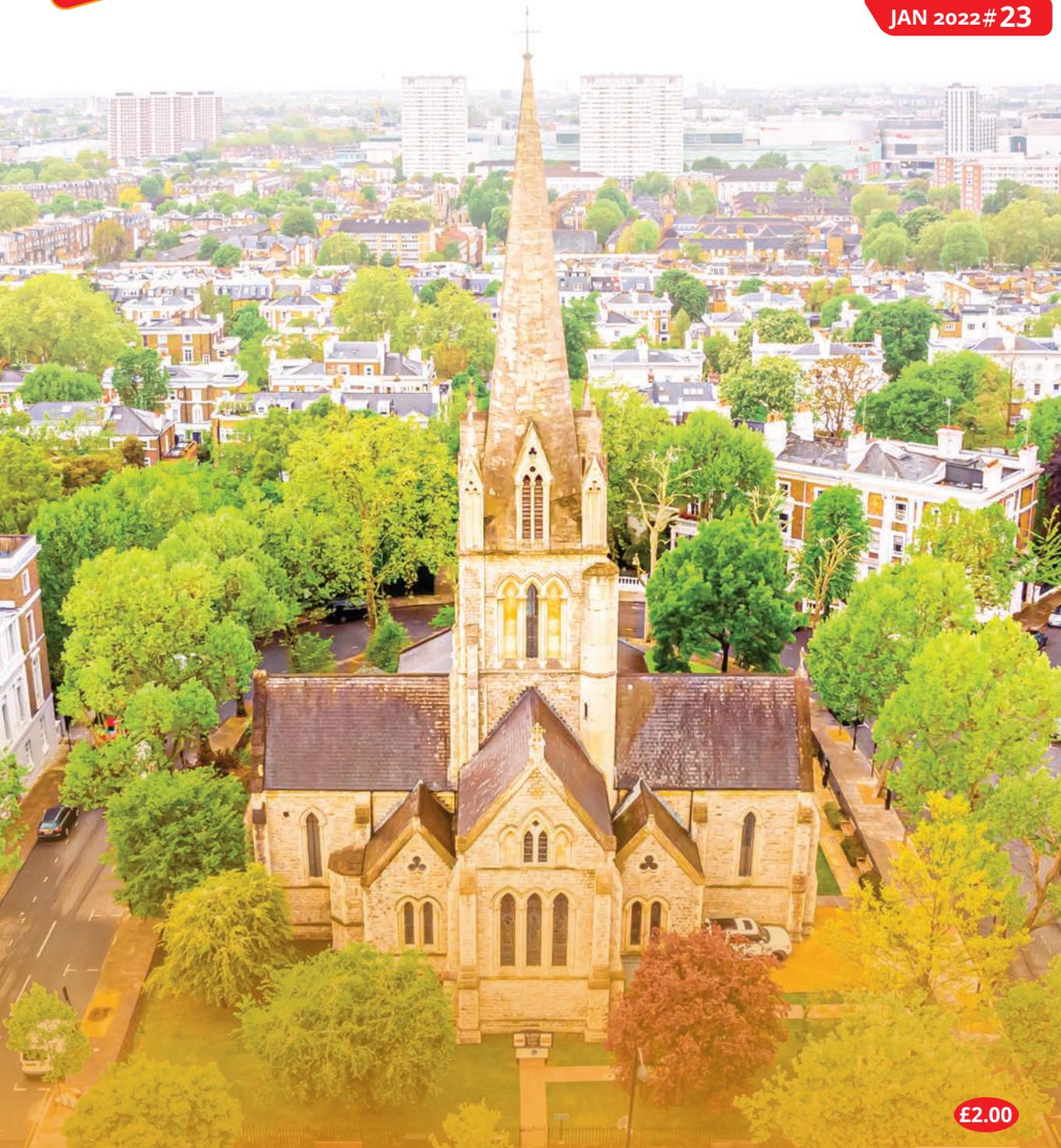


SEC COMMUNICATOR

JAN 2022 # 23



£2.00

RELEVANCE



A PUBLICATION OF THE SOUTH ENGLAND CONFERENCE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS



CONTENTS



**RELEVANT CHURCHES
BUILD COMMUNITIES**



**WHY MY COMMUNITY
SHOWED UP FOR ME**



THE RELEVANT CHURCH

EDITORIAL TEAM

Editor

Sam O. Davies

Copyeditor

Catherine Anthony Boldeau

Proofreading

Norma Borrett

News & Photo Editor

Don Roberts

Layout & Design

Peter Oppong-Mensah

03 EDITORIAL

05 THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

06 RELEVANT CHURCHES BUILD COMMUNITIES – MAX MCKENZIE-COOK

08 WHY BE RELEVANT IN OUR COMMUNITIES? – SHARON PLATT-MCDONALD

09 WHY MY COMMUNITY SHOWED UP FOR ME – SHANIQUA BENJAMIN

10 IN THE COMMUNITY OF GLOUCESTER – TREMONT JACKSON

11 THE RELEVANT CHURCH – STEVEN HULBERT

12 SERVING THE COMMUNITY: GATWICK AND REDHILL DISTRICT – WILSON LAGOS

14 NOW YOU'RE SPEAKING MY LANGUAGE – MATHEW HEREL

15 VALUES OF A COMMUNITY RELEVANT-CHURCH – MICHAEL MBUI

16 ALL I REALLY NEED TO KNOW I LEARNED IN PATHFINDERS – CLIFFORD HERMAN

18 DEPARTMENTAL REPORTS

24 NEWS & CHURCH SPOTLIGHT – DON ROBERTS

27 DEVOTIONAL – MFAKAZI NDEBELE

28 POEM – DELROY DWYER

*You can now read the SEC Communicator online at
<https://seccommunicator.com>*

The views expressed in this magazine are opinions of the writers

Editorial

The theme for this edition is "Relevance". If we intend to build communities within the South England Conference and make disciples for Christ, we will need to become relevant to our communities.

Many of our churches discovered new ways of reaching out, which have made them relevant and visible in their communities throughout the pandemic.

The words of Jesus Christ in Matthew 25: 34 -46 will continue to be a call for relevance to our communities until he comes back again to end the burden of pain.

He said, ³⁴ Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' ³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? ³⁸ And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? ³⁹ And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' ⁴⁰ And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'

⁴¹ "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the

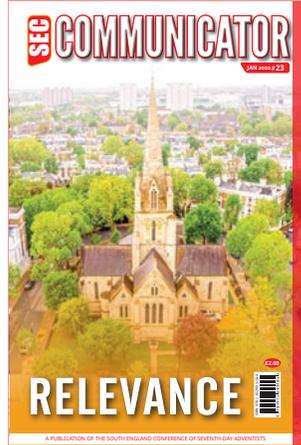
eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴² For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' ⁴⁴ Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?' ⁴⁵ Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' ⁴⁶ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

In this edition, our writers discuss the various ways in which our ministries can become more like what Jesus calls us to do; to be relevant.

To be relevant means the need to change and be creative. Changing how we have always done things depends on you and me. Barack Obama once said, "Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek." (https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/barack_obama_409128)

And finally, I wish to thank you all for faithfully reading the South England Conference Communicator since its revamp in 2017. This edition is my last editorial as I respond to a call to serve at the British Union Conference. I pray that you will continue to subscribe and read future magazine issues of the SEC Communicator.

OUR COVER



SAM O. DAVIES
Editor

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DR EMMANUEL OSEI



A Relevant Church

The words, 'relevant' and 'church', have become increasingly incongruous, particularly since the start of the millennium. This has resulted in movements towards making our congregations more 'seeker-friendly', moving from traditional to more contemporary worship and incorporating more diversity into our church services.

But moving away from 'tradition' to modernity isn't new. 60 years ago, most congregations used the organ in most worship services; then the piano was introduced. Now we use keyboards, guitars and drums in an increasing number of our services. The truth is, organs are not only considered highly traditional, they're expensive and many congregations do not have funds for either purchase or upkeep.

We throw the word 'community' around like a new ball at a netball match. Many of our congregations now have community outreach programmes. But if we look back into our history, this is nothing new. Whether it was called the Dorcas Society or the Welfare Society, the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the UK (and worldwide) has been in the community for decades.

So, what is relevance, if it isn't about change of worship style, setting or community outreach? And how do we become a relevant church, if there is even such a thing?

In 1 Chronicles 12:32, a group of people are singled out who were relevant.

'And of the children of Issachar, which were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do...' (KJV).

The children of Issachar are listed among many other tribes and groups who supported David while he was an outlaw hiding from Saul.

Throughout 1 Chronicles, we meet 'the children of Judah, that bare shield and spear...' (vs24), and the 'children of Simeon, mighty men of valour' (vs 25). We are introduced to the 'Danites, experts in war...' (vs 35). But the only tribe who is mentioned for their 'relevance' are the 'children of Issachar'.

There are certain attributes that make them relevant:¹

1. Discernment gave them inside knowledge and understanding of God's activities.
2. They were not taken by surprise when things happened.
3. They had influence as a result of their unique ability to understand times and seasons.
4. They knew what Israel should do and when it should be done.
5. The nation followed their example.

If this is the definition of spiritual relevance, can we look at our church congregation and say that they are 'relevant'?

As Seventh-day Adventist Christians, we are aware of our Bible prophecy and see God's activities in the world. We should not be taken by surprise when unexpected events happen. Due to our levels of discernment, our influence should be felt in the corridors of power, up and down this country. We should know what to do and when to do it in aspects of spiritual and church life. And as a result of our anointed discernment, people will enquire, 'we would see Jesus'.

2022 is here, and as we focus on the future, may we be agents of discernment and hence, relevant for the Father in our churches, in our homes, in our communities and throughout the South England Conference.

¹ <https://www.fromhispresence.com/anointing-of-the-sons-of-issachar/>



RELEVANT CHURCHES BUILD COMMUNITIES

You have heard that famous saying, 'If a tree falls in the forest but there is no one there to hear, does it make a sound?' This is a thought experiment designed to challenge our thinking on observations and perceptions. Similarly, we can adapt that experiment to: 'If a church meets every week, but the community doesn't know it exists, did it ever proclaim the Gospel?'

Of course, this is a provocative question that is designed to draw you in and engage you in this article. It speaks to the question of relevance and how our churches participate in the act of building communities.

The online Cambridge Dictionary defines relevance as, 'the degree to which something is related or useful to what is happening or being talked about.'¹ In its simplest terms, what we say or do must add value to those we are engaging with; but more importantly, the objects of our actions get a say in whether what we are doing is relevant or not. Let me start here: Have you ever heard the voice of God speak to you? Most of us have, while others have felt the presence of his Spirit. Moreover, have you ever noticed that when God speaks to you, he does so in your native language? If you speak English, God doesn't communicate to you in French. Why does he do this? Well, I would submit to you that he does so because he wants you to understand his message to you; otherwise, it has no value. In the same vein, when

we communicate in our communities, what we say must be understandable to them; otherwise, it is of no value.

Yet, there is a lot of struggle in building church communities that are able to be relevant, and there are a number of reasons why this is. I am going to share with you just a few:

- 1. Church is about people:** We cannot build relationships one day a week. I believe an appropriate starting point is to remember that we should be focused on people. It is people that God came to save. Furthermore, it is other people who connect to people; and if this is true (think about the dearest relationships in our lives), they were cultivated over time, and you most likely invested your time in them. We cannot be relevant and in community, if our efforts revolve around Saturdays, 10am - 4pm.
- 2. We are time poor:** We recognise that, as Christians, our time is limited. Therefore, let us recognise and honour each other's sacrifice. There are many competing priorities in our lives. This makes it difficult for us to commit to building communities when we are working longer hours and have to commit to family obligations. Consequently, when members decide to give their time to building communities, it is a sacrifice. As a result, we should honour that sacrifice. What would that look like in practice? Well,

¹ Cambridge Online Dictionary Available at: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/relevance>

if you decide to engage in an activity during the week for one hour, ensure that the activity lasts no more than one hour. Do not steal time from others.

3. We have experienced God in different ways: God has been a rock and a refuge to many of us, and we connect on a personal level with those experiences. As such, an inherent tension is formed between how I learnt to experience God in contrast to others. Additionally, we should accept that those experiences are deeply personal and help form the very core of who we are.

Adventism is a lifestyle. I remember waking up on Sabbath morning, listening to some nice Christian music, putting on my sabbath best and travelling to Church for 9am to open the doors (well, my dad did). That is personal to me, and it shapes my view of Adventism. Yet, there have been some churches that choose not to start 'Church' so early, in order to be accessible to their community. In other words, they are trying to add value and become relevant. This is met with tension, fear and anxiety within our wider church communities, because to some, this is not Adventism. You have the same tension if you try to swap the timings of Sabbath School and mid-day service.

At the heart of that last one is the issue of identity — Where does my identity as an Adventist reside? Is it in the traditions of Adventism or is it in the biblical values and principles we have cultivated over the years? What would that look like? If we truly want to be relevant, these are some of the challenges that we need to wrestle with. Relevance means adding value, and the

subjects of our actions get a say in what adds value. We must be focused on people and, by extension, build relationships. Finally, we must wrestle with our internal tension about how we experience God and how others experience him. When we begin to wrestle with these questions, two well-known passages will begin to take on new meaning:

*'For the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost'
Luke 19:10 (NRSV).*

'Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, "Follow me"' (Ministry of Healing, 143).



MAX MCKENZIE-COOK

*Community Services & Prison Ministries Director
& Diversity Coordinator*



WHY BE RELEVANT IN OUR COMMUNITIES?

If I were to ask you how relevant your church is, within your local community, what would be your reply? Do you have evidence that your church is relevant to them in 2021 and onwards? On a scale of 1-10, how much engagement do you have with your local community?

Influence and impact

In assessing the efficacy of our church in the community, the words 'influence' and 'impact', are crucial. Generally, our level of influence is revealed by the people we are able to engage with, and those we form working partnerships with, to deliver our outreach initiatives. Impact can be measured by sustainable societal changes. Both influence and impact are key in auditing and evaluating our interventions.

Responding to current issues

'Relevance' is measured by our response as a church to current issues (both nationally and internationally) and how we work with the community to support them through challenges. Also, when 'non-church' individuals turn to us for help in times of need, the church becomes 'relevant' to them, especially if what we have to offer meets their needs.

During the pandemic and particularly during the lockdown, several of our churches responded in practical ways, meeting the needs of the community.

Our churches may have been closed for our regular services, but thankfully, we were not closed to compassion and care, filling the deficits COVID-19 left in its wake.

The community response

"Your help has been lifesaving. Not sure what we would have done without the wonderful meals you provide for us each day. We are extremely grateful." The gentleman's eyes filled with tears as he shared these words with me. He was one of the community recipients of the 'RESTORATION Convalescence Project' I initiated during the pandemic for individuals negatively impacted by COVID-19. He had reported that his family "had a rough time with the virus". As a result, they had been left very unwell and unable to cater adequately for themselves.

Another grateful response from a lady whose family members struggled through several months of illness, following their COVID-19 diagnosis, said, "Thank you so much for caring for us! We really appreciate the tasty hot meals and the weekly shopping box. It has kept us going! The emotional and spiritual wellbeing literature were excellent. We can't thank you enough!"

We also received several requests for more religious literature.

The results

Of the numerous feedback from diverse individuals receiving help from the BUC RESTORATION Convalescence project, some were from people who had no religious beliefs. Yet, they stated that once our churches reopen, they would like to visit and worship with us! Several are also requesting Bible studies. We rejoice over these positive testimonies and pray for God's continued leading in the lives of these individuals.

In highlighting the role of the church in the community, Ellen White says:

*"Some think that if they give money to this work, it is all they are required to do; but this is an error. Donations of money cannot take the place of personal ministry. It is right to give our means, and many more should do this; but according to their strength and opportunities, personal service is required of all....As you visit your friends and neighbors, show an interest in their spiritual as well as in their temporal welfare."*1*

I applaud the work of all our churches who exemplify this commission, as they demonstrate their relevance to a needy world.

*1. The Role of the Church in the Community – Ellen. G. White



SHARON PLATT-MCDONALD

Health and Women's Ministries Director, BUC

WHY MY COMMUNITY SHOWED UP FOR ME

Don't tell me the Bible is irrelevant. / If we walked God's carefully laid path, / disparity between rich and poor would cease to be a national crisis.¹

This is a little excerpt from my poem, *Don't Tell Me*, highlighting the relevance of the Bible in the present day. Although some rituals and traditions are now void because of Jesus' sacrifice, the Word will always be relevant because its foundation is love and truth. But we, as a church body or organisation, are becoming increasingly irrelevant, making it difficult to reach and influence outside communities.

You may be thinking, "Hold on, is she saying we should act like everyone else?" Absolutely not! Romans 12:2 says: "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind..."²

However, not conforming doesn't mean not changing it up. Jesus completely changed things up and transformed this earth forever.

Changing things up means sometimes breaking away from a "traditional" Sabbath service and speaking to those who are homeless in the space where they congregate, handing out water and speaking to crowds of football fans, or inviting to a community lunch those seeking refuge and asylum. Changing things up also means collaborating with community groups focused on specific areas, such as domestic abuse, gang crime and drug addiction.

Changing things up requires thinking outside the box and breaking away from the, "we've always done it this way" attitude. It will be uncomfortable, but Jesus calls us to get uncomfortable as it leads to change beyond our imagination.

Not conforming also doesn't mean not communicating with others outside of our church community – we should be in **the world** but not of **the world**.

Getting uncomfortable has helped me to build communities outside of my church community. The main ones are currently my creative community (I'm a poet) and my Shaniqua community (chosen people from different communities). Within these communities are individuals who church members may avoid, judge or insult: Some are gay, homeless, take drugs, do criminal activities, swear regularly – but I love them, just as God loves them.

I've built worthwhile relationships and have had a positive influence, simply because I speak and act different, which people pick up on and respond to. It was through building relationship with a friend of mine (who is transgender) that he learnt not every Christian is homophobic or transphobic. Then a couple of years later, he was speaking to me about joining a church (not an Adventist one, though). There are numerous other stories I could tell, but essentially, people will be drawn to you, notice the difference in your character

and be open to hearing about God if you get out into the world and take time to speak, listen and build those worthwhile relationships. Building relationships is the key to influencing and building communities.

When I got baptised in 2019, I invited individuals from all areas of my Shaniqua community. Although not everyone could make it, my Shaniqua community really showed up for me that day – some having never stepped into a church before – because I'd shown up for them in the past, whether it was through a message, support at an event or any other way of showing them love.

Allowing God to transform me each day, and using the gifts He has blessed me with, has led me to be a positive influence in my communities. Holding the Bible in my heart and applying those principles to a 21st Century world, keeps me relevant. How will you be relevant, build relationships and show up for communities that need you?

1. Full poem can be read at <https://insidemyhead29.wordpress.com/2019/01/31/dont-tell-me/>

2. Romans 12:2 NIV



SHANIQUA BENJAMIN

Croydon Church Member, Writer, Poet & Founder of Young People Insight

IN THE COMMUNITY OF GLOUCESTER

Nestled in the South West of England on the border of Wales, sits the beautiful county of Gloucestershire, home to the picturesque Cotswold Hills, the unique town of Cheltenham and the truly sublime beauty of the Forest of Dean. Among the several towns of Gloucestershire County stands the city of Gloucester with a history dating back to 48 A.D. and a current population of 129,128, according to the latest ONS Mid-Year Population Estimate, 2019, and the Gloucestershire County Council Population Profile, 2021.

The county of Gloucestershire, particularly the city of Gloucester, has huge drug, alcohol and mental health problems. According to *UK Addiction Treatment*, the problem of drug and alcohol abuse in the city of Gloucester is "rife". The problem is increasing, as year on year the number of people dying due to addiction poisoning rises. 2020 saw the highest number of deaths since records began in 1993. Additionally, Gloucester city has the highest rate of homelessness throughout Gloucestershire County, with 17.2 people in every 1,000 assessed as homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Gloucester Seventh-day Adventist church, situated a mere two minutes' walk from the city centre, was established in 1958. In 1992, the church recognised the growing problem of drug and alcohol use in the community and desired to fulfil the biblical mission of Jesus Christ to the poor and needy (Luke 4:18). The church adopted the statement of the prophet Ellen G. White, found in Ministry of Healing page 73: 'Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with people as one

who desired their good. He showed sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He invited them, "Follow Me".'

Some of the members came together and formed the Dorcas Society, sewing clothes and other items for the people in the community. Later, the Dorcas Society grew into the Community Services, where the church opened its doors and began serving meals to those in need. Over the years, the problem of drug and alcohol addiction has expanded into a wide range of situations, encompassing mental health, addictions and homelessness. The church has equally adapted its services to meet the challenges of the situation.

Gloucester Seventh-day Adventist church is a beacon of light in the community and one of the first points of contact for Gloucester City Council in supporting people's basic needs. The church works hand-in-hand with the City Council in tackling the problems of homelessness and mental health in the city. At present, the church acts as a referral and support service, assisting homeless applicants in completing applications for accommodation. Since the start of the pandemic, the church has managed to house approximately sixty-six applicants.

Gloucester church soup kitchen is a well-known service in Gloucester city and is the only food service not to have closed throughout the entire Covid-19 pandemic. While other services closed their doors (some permanently), the church kept serving sandwiches and a hot meal three days a week. The food

shortage had little effect on the work being done by the church due to its connection with several supermarkets in the local area which regularly donated fresh fruits, vegetables and non-perishable items.

Gloucester church's keen interest in the community extends beyond the physical and mental health, to incorporate their spiritual wellbeing. The church plans to one day establish a half-way house where people can be housed and treated through a six to nine-month rehabilitation programme. Additionally, the church currently meets the spiritual needs of the community through various outreach programmes, including singing and preaching in the city centre, meeting people in the street and establishing contacts and relationships.

Gloucester Seventh-day Adventist church know that God has strategically placed us in the location we are in, to serve the community. Isaiah 58:7 says, of the service of God's people, "to share your bread with the hungry, to bring the poor and homeless into your home, to clothe the naked when you see him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood." We endeavour to fulfil this mission.



TREMON JACKSON

Pastor, Gloucester Church

THE RELEVANT CHURCH

Lesslie Newbigin, a prominent missional theologian, writes, 'It is not in dispute that true theology can only be done in the context of praxis. There can be no "academic theology," if that means theology divorced from commitment, faith, and obedience.'¹ When we observe the ministry of Jesus, we see God amongst His people; and whilst among His people, we see Him practically offering glimpses of the kingdom through healing, through compassion, through feeding the hungry, including the marginalised, and freeing those caught up in the powers of darkness. Jesus' three-year ministry creates a foundation stone upon which the Church is built. The Church is given the opportunity to be a foretaste of the kingdom, a new humanity within the middle of the old one, a sign to the world of what is to come.

Commitment to Jesus entails being committed to His community. We are not called to a building or organisation; nor are we called to a programme. We are called to a person, and we hear the voice of Jesus saying, "Follow me" (John 10:27). But what does this following of Jesus entail? When we hear the word "follow", possibly what comes to mind is the action of pursuit, of chasing after Jesus. Matthew shares, however, that it is more incarnational than that. It is obedience through praxis, an embodying of the way of Jesus (Matthew 28:19-20). We see in the Gospels how Jesus lived and moved and how many were drawn to Him. In the book of Acts, we see the community of Jesus start to do the same. Later, we see Paul

telling the community in Corinth, "Imitate me as I imitate Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1).

Being a relevant church involves a change of mindset. It involves the recognition that true community is broader than four walls allow. It means knowing your neighbour and seeing Christ in them, serving them as if they are Christ Himself (Matthew 25:40). If this call of Jesus to follow is taken seriously, then what "church" looks like begins to change. For me, church looks like a conversation in a cabin with influential Christian leaders from across many denominations on the North Coast of Devon, as we meet for a Christian Surfers leadership weekend. Church looks like standing on the shore of the sea at Chapel Porth beach with friends, as the sun goes down and the colours of the sky and the ocean meet. Church is sitting in a coffeeshop where I meet with a leader in the local Baptist church or a youth leader of a local Pentecostal church to see how their ministry is going and if I can offer any help. Church is sitting in a car with a friend, as they share their worries about their grandparents; or showing up to a

funeral of a person who was once connected to the church so that the family and friends know that we grieve too. Church is sitting in a night club in Newquay as the music blares, but at the table, the Bible is open and conversation is happening.

When we recognise that the kingdom is alive in the underprivileged, the disadvantaged and the meek, then we might find that church begins to look a little different to a traditional Sabbath morning. When we become intentional in living the incarnational call of Jesus only, then do we become relevant and the birth of "church" happens in weird and wonderful places (Acts 10).



STEVEN HULBERT

Pastor, St. Austell Plant

¹ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, Rev. ed. (London: SPCK, 1995), 120

SERVING THE COMMUNITY: GATWICK AND REDHILL DISTRICT

In June 2020 when our country was in lockdown, I started my new assignment as a Pastor serving at Gatwick Seventh-day Adventist Church (GAC) and Redhill International Seventh-day Adventist Church (RISDAC) – a district committed to serving God through the community ministries. I found the people of the district to be hands-on, and I could not be less. That is why I applied to become a police chaplain at the Reigate Police Station. Every Tuesday when I am on duty, our churches take turns to provide cupcakes for our police constables. That is my little contribution as the pastor. Now let me share our church leaders' views in community ministries

From the GAC, **Elder Wilbur Mutambara** explains that our local congregation is well known as a community church in and around Crawley town, one of the fastest-growing urban areas in the UK and also sadly known as the furlough capital of UK because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Through Health Expos and Pathfinder activities, GAC has been witnessing for years, becoming well known at most public events, such as the Mela, Black History Month and other functions. The church responded to community needs quickly during the Covid-19 pandemic, establishing the "GAC Food Pantry". GAC's Community Ministry Department realises the church's community vision through member involvement via the Women's Ministry activities, Men's Ministry and Pathfinder participation.

GAC was first introduced to the local community 12 years ago by the annual Health Expos at the Crawley International Mela Festival (attended by 10,000

people over three days). GAC participates in the community by our Pathfinders participating and Sanctify Gospel Choir singing at every possible Community event. Crawley Interfaith Network has been impressed by our support at their Homeless Meals projects. Moreover, one of our most renowned church leaders is **Sister Marilyn Le Feuvre** who lives and breathes community ministry and is ready to lead the response whenever GAC is called upon, and also serving as a committee member of local organisations. We have members involved in Diverse Crawley, Gatwick Detention Welfare Group, Refugees Welcome and Crawley Open House for the Homeless. Our Sister Marilyn was recently recognised by a letter from Susan Pyper, the Lord-Lieutenant of West Sussex, for her support as GAC Community Ministries Director and other bodies serving the community. Sister Marilyn's vision "aims to continue serving the community by meeting them at their point of need, via the various local organisations."

Alongside GAC, our grown-up church, RISDAC, was involved in cooking hot meals for the local YMCA. Still, when the pandemic hit hard, we were forced to stop cooking. However, our church members, like **Nancy**



Costa and her team, decided not to let the pandemic impede their commitment. Nancy says: "Here at RISDAC we recognise that to be truly Christian, we need to serve others as Christ did. Our continued regular community work with the local YMCA now exemplifies this, as we support our neighbours in need. This centre houses young people who are struggling with accommodation, drugs, desertion, and similar adversities. Often, the residents do not have any personal care items or clothing: That is our opportunity, where we come in. The youths in our church manage the drive, from seeking donations to delivering the final, beautifully wrapped, boxes. We firmly believe that this is the way to continue our work to the next generation.

Both churches are fully reopened and engaged with our local authorities and MPs seeking to support our community at a district level. Our local leaders and members support our community ministries.

Financially speaking as the pastor, we always see funds as limited, but when the mission starts, then the money comes in. This district aims to foster our members' spiritual gifts in becoming ministries to honour our God and His church.



WILSON LAGOS

*Ordained Minister & Chaplain Police Support Volunteer (20947)
Gatwick & Redhill Seventh-day Adventist Church*

NOW YOU'RE SPEAKING MY LANGUAGE

As the disciples followed Jesus' pre-ascension instructions and waited in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit, they saw the city getting busier and busier. Pentecost was coming: the harvest festival celebrated 50 days after the Passover. Not only was the city becoming busier, it was also becoming more diverse. Luke, the author of Acts, paints a picture of the Jewish diaspora as a coalition of diverse peoples, filling the streets of the holy city. There were people from modern day Iraq, Kuwait, Syria, Egypt, and Libya, amongst other places.

Perhaps the apostles realised that this would represent an opportunity to share the story of Jesus with people from all over the known world. But I wonder if they subconsciously began to think that people would have to hear the Gospel in Aramaic, the language native to Judea? (Perhaps if they were feeling generous, they might have made concessions for Greek speakers, as Greek was the lingua franca of the day.) Maybe they believed that people should hear the gospel in the same language in which the Scriptures had been read aloud in the synagogues for centuries.

The truth is, it's easy to think that 'the way we've done things up to now is the only way to do them'. Many of us are guilty of applying this kind of logic, particularly when it comes to our worship and spirituality. What was at one stage innovative has, over the years, become immovable and unchangeable. (Just try pitching a new start time for worship and watch the fireworks!)

Well, if any of the disciples were thinking along these lines, they were in for a surprise. As the Holy Spirit made His long-awaited debut, He didn't up-skill the multitudes so that they could hear the gospel in 'holy languages'. Instead, He gave the apostles the miraculous ability to speak in all the languages that were represented in the city. It's as if He were showing the apostles: 'The people don't change to connect with you; you change to connect with the people!' We could sum up the Holy Spirit's intervention in one word: relevance. He made His followers relevant to their audience. And there is nothing more relevant than the ability to speak someone's language.

As each church looks out at the people on its doorstep, the questions it must ask are: Are we speaking their language? Are we relevant to the people walking past our church every Sabbath? We like to start worship at 9:30, but is that relevant to them? We like to have Sabbath School first and family worship second, but is that relevant to them? We like to base all of our worship activities in this building, but is that relevant to them?

What if we experimented with adjusting our service times based on information gathered in a local survey? What if once a month, we sent a worship team to hold a service in a public space like a library, a place full of people going about their business, who would perhaps never walk into a church building? What if we tried to be more relevant?

The Jewish nation thought that engaging with their foreign neighbours would make them unclean. And then, in His very first appearance, the Holy Spirit equips the apostles to speak in 'unclean' languages to make them relevant to the world around them. The message of the Gospel could not and would not change. But the delivery? That was flexible!

As Peter preached in Mesopotamian and John preached in Egyptian, many of those gathered must have observed, "Now they're speaking my language!" What if we made relevance a core value for our churches? Maybe we'd find that communities from Portsmouth to Poplar to Peterborough would say the same.



MATHEW HEREL

Pastor for ACTS and Beckton Churches (Area 6)

VALUES OF A COMMUNITY RELEVANT-CHURCH

I was driving to the church one Tuesday afternoon when my friend Anthony called me on my mobile. Anthony teaches religion and philosophy for Year 11 students (15-16-year olds). That afternoon, the class was discussing the “role of the church in the community today”. As a church minister, Anthony wanted me to share my thoughts on the discussion. When I called back 10 minutes later, my answer was captured in the metaphor of an embassy. The church is God’s (or Heaven’s) embassy in the community. As an embassy represents the home country in a host country, so the church is God’s representative in the community.

The church, as heaven’s embassy, is the place to showcase and represent God’s presence, plans and provisions. In 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 and Ephesians 2:21-22, Paul designates the corporate church as God’s temple or dwelling place. The church serves today what the Old Testament temple and sanctuary served, where God meets people to show His love and the ways of salvation: “Let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them” (Exodus 25:8). The church is therefore the place for the community to witness, experience and inquire on the kingdom or governance (plans, policies, principles and practices) of God for their lives and communities. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 14:25, directs the church to facilitate a worship service that will lead visitors to acknowledge the presence of God in their midst.

The church can learn how to be relevant to their communities from the three key standards of embassies: being visible, valuable, and available to their communities. Jesus modelled these standards when he mingled with people, ministered to their immediate needs, and invited people to accept the plan of God for their lives.

1. The church is visible through her members’ presence in the lives and struggles of their community. Part of the church’s weekly routine must be activities that get members to mingle with their communities.
2. The church will be valuable through activities that heal, preserve, and bring value to the lives of their community. Mingling will help the church to know

what are the issues that the church can help with or how it can be an agent through which other entities can bring help to the community.

3. The church must be available to walk and work with community families and individuals in their personal and corporate journeys of faith; fitness or health; friendships or relations; and finances or careers. What happens with the first two phases will influence the response and outcome of this stage of discipleship.

Christ’s instruction in Matthew 5:13, “You are the salt of earth ...”, intimate the manner in which churches must work for and with their community. Salt adds flavour and preserves food. It aids healing, such as blood clotting; and it changes form like melting ice. To release its abilities and bring out its benefits, salt must be mingled. The church can show and share the love and salvation of God when she is willing to come closer to her communities and be proactive in their transformation.

Under the acronym BEE, the following habits will make a community-relevant church visible, valuable and available:

1. Bring the gospel to the people in order to bring the people to Jesus. Jesus directed the church to go make disciples (Matthew 28:19-20) and not to wait for the community to come.
2. Establish and grow those who respond (to the gospel claim) in the full life of Christ (Colossians 2:6-7, 2Peter 3:18). People come to Jesus to become like Jesus. The church must effectively parent all new disciples to grow in the life of Christ.
3. Equip and enlist all disciples for the mission of Christ, making disciple makers (Mark 1:17, Luke 6:40) and growing disciple-making churches (Ephesians 4:11-16)

Every disciple and church can become relevant to their communities. The Embassy and Ambassador models present clear and simple standards for the church to embrace: Being intentionally visible, adding value to the life of communities and being available for their life journeys.



MICHAEL MBUI

Personal Ministries Director



South England Conference

Family Ministries
Department Presents

CHRISTIAN
CHRISTIAN
HOME WEEK

Forgiveness is Intentional



SPEAKERS

Dr Dion Henry & Dilyn Henry

LMHC

SABBATH 12TH FEBRUARY 2022

12 NOON TO 1:30PM

 YouTube
LIVE STREAM
SECmedia


zoom

MEETING ID:

870 2683 3243

PASSCODE:

693318

ALL I REALLY NEED TO KNOW I LEARNED IN PATHFINDERS

I looked at the definition of 'relevance' in the dictionary the other day. I did it because the subtitle of the South England Conference motto for the current four-year term, 'Making Disciples - Building Communities', is 'Relevance'.

The Collins dictionary states that 'for something to be relevant to a situation or person, is for that something to be important and significant to that situation or person'. Examples in point might include whether conventional politics is still relevant in people's lives or whether knowing the details of prophecy is still relevant in their lives. Some may even question whether Jesus and a belief in God is still relevant to eighty percent of residents in the UK.

Many suggest that God is not relevant because they see no need for Him and do not ask for Him; but subsequently, they conclude that He is very relevant because we actually have so much need for him. As Christians we admit our need, because the Christian gospel about Jesus being our Saviour, Redeemer and Provider is very high in our category of relevance. However, whether people in general see their need for the Saviour is another story. I believe it is on the question of delivery, in terms of meeting people's needs so that we can recognise their need for a Saviour, where the relevance concept divides opinions.

Some believe in sermonising and evangelism campaigns, while others stand firm on feeding programmes and meeting physical needs. A third platform raises the megaphone to announce that building long lasting friendship and relationships is key to making the gospel delivery relevant. Peter Roenfeld's book, 'If you can eat you can make disciples', echoes this point accurately. In this discourse he argues that if you build genuine friendships with your neighbours and colleagues, etc, by eating with them, you build a solid platform to share your own faith and your relationship with Jesus in a non-threatening way.

I am a believer of this third model, and it is of course deeply rooted in the Pathfinder philosophy. Dig deep into each of the curriculum requirements, and you will find things like:

1. Invite a friend to at least one of your church's fellowship activities
2. Adopt a person or family in need and assist them

3. Make Friendship visits with a shut-in person
4. Visit someone who needs friendship
5. List ten qualities of being a good friend and 'practice the Golden Rule'

And the list goes on. So, when Robert Fulghum writes, 'All I really need to know, I learnt in kindergarten', I propose an amendment that 'All I really need to know I learnt in Pathfinders and Adventurers', especially in terms of how to be relevant to their community.

Therefore, Current and past and prospective Pathfinders and Adventurers let me encourage you to focus on the elements of making friends and sharing your faith when they become your friends. In the meantime,

1. Wear your scarf, wherever you can and talk about the amazing ministry
2. Invite a friend to a Camporee or Campout or Pathfinder social
3. Be innovative, and wear your Pathfinder Uniform with sash and all to a costume party. (That will get people talking)

See you at the next event.



CLIFFORD HERMAN

Pathfinder Director



SEC DEPARTMENTS



Reports & Articles

In the Guardian newspaper back in March 2021 there was an editorial, 'The Guardian view on 'post-Christian' Britain: a spiritual enigma' in which they pondered over the idea that, for the first time in a UK census, the number of people who considered themselves Christian would fall below 50%. This particular question was first posed in a census in 2001 and at the time stood at 72%, with it falling to 59% in 2011. The article concluded with this thought: 'Congregations may have since thinned out, but spiritual hunger is part of the human condition. It will find other outlets and means of expression in the years to come.'¹

Despite the fact that Christianity has been in decline in the UK for many decades, anecdotal evidence suggests that the hunger for a deeper, more relevant spirituality is on the increase. And the question that I think we should be prayerfully considering is, how do we connect with those who are seeking to fill a spiritual void in their lives but don't know that spiritual void is the absence of our God?

For many years my father was a warehouse manager for a well-known UK brand of home appliances, and he used to wear a small yellow badge on his jacket that said, 'Jesus loves you'. You had to get up pretty close to see what it said. He was asked to attend meetings in England over two days at their headquarters, and it wasn't long before someone asked him to take it off. He didn't remove it, and nothing more was said. For more than thirty years, he worked for this brand and they knew he was a Christian. When he retired, a senior executive personally spoke with him and thanked him for his faithful service and commented on the way that his faith had impacted the way he related to colleagues and customers which was refreshingly different and genuine.

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/mar/28/the-guardian-view-on-post-christian-britain-a-spiritual-enigma>, accessed 1st December 2021.

When Jesus Christ came on the first advent, he came to engage with mankind in a relational way. He came to share the hope of salvation with a hopeless generation. The Gospels share story after story of how Christ touched people's lives with love and hope. He touched their hearts, souls and their physical bodies, bringing both physical and spiritual healing.

This Advent season is an opportunity to remind our family and friends that this is not a season for going wild and spending lots of money on that which will ultimately be recycled next year or place pounds on our waists but rather, this is a time when we can share the true meaning of our Saviour Jesus Christ. People are thirsty for hope that is more than just a set of beliefs or doctrines but a way of life which makes a tangible difference, a tangible difference which does not need to be explained but that people can see being played out in our lives each and every day – played out in our work ethic; played out in how we relate to difficult colleagues or customers; played out in how we manage those crises which come along from time to time.

As we come to the end of another year, I want to thank all the church clerks, safeguarding officers and all those involved in Secretariat at the local church and in the office: Jacqui Crawford, Val Austin and Tanya Grant. Secretariat is more than just words and numbers. It is about engaging with our members in real and tangible ways, and building real and relevant relationships with church members and the communities in which we live, modelling not just Christian values but modelling the life of Christ. May God bless you all over this holiday season and 2022.



DOUGLAS MCCORMAC

TREASURY

Happy New Year! I am writing this in faith, claiming the promise of God's sustaining mercies that we all make it to the coming year. Indeed, the fact that you're reading this report now is a testament of God's love. Despite the challenges and struggles brought about by the pandemic, God has supplied all our needs. Indeed, I am overwhelmed by God's grace that He has shown and His provision in very visible and tangible ways.

As of writing this, we are still in the process of closing the October 2021 Tithe and Offerings. Up to September 2021, our year-to-date Tithe Income amounts to £12.3m. This is a 23.8% increase on the same period last year. Compared to the pre-pandemic period in 2019, the increase is 7.6%.

I can only praise God for working through the hearts of our committed pastors and workers, our faithful members, and our church treasurers who have dedicated their time to ensure that the reports are submitted on time. As of September 2021, 135 reports are outstanding, which is only 7% of the total reports expected. This means that we received 93% of the reports. This is an improvement from May, where 19% of the reports were outstanding. We are working closely with our church treasurers to assist them in submitting all reports by the end of the year.

For our last Treasurers meeting, held 4 November 2021 on zoom, 112 treasurers attended. We discussed, among other things, the banking issues with our main bank, HSBC,

which has stopped their cash and deposit services at several branches. One of our options is to apply for a deposit card that can be used in the machines inside the banks or in any Post Office branches. Indeed, Covid-19 has somehow reshaped the way we operate to be more efficient and effective. The use of technology is essential to keeping our churches buoyant. We continue to find other ways and means of improving our system of giving. Now we are working closely with our Stewardship Director and looking at a particular app that can cater to our members, not only in the area of giving but to continue to engage them in the different ministries at the SEC and in their local churches.

Another year means a year closer to Jesus' coming. Whilst waiting, we keep ourselves busy, doing the Lord's work and remaining true and faithful to His calling.

I want to end this short report with a text from Revelation 2:25 that says, 'But hold fast what you have till I come.' (NKJV)



CANDY LAYSON



CCS 2021 – Ebenezer

For all of us, 2021 started with hope and uncertainty once again, as COVID-19 continued to disrupt the lives of many in the UK and across the globe. What we have learnt at CCS, is that hope and certainty can only be found in Jesus.

Despite the challenges, CCS continued to **C**onnect, **E**ngage, **E**quip and **E**mpower members to be emotionally and spiritually healthy, and to make disciples and build communities.

Our aim has always been to make our churches and communities emotionally safe spaces. This can only be achieved by raising mental health awareness through providing ongoing training and/or workshops. Indeed, our church members have become more aware of our presence, and they are also becoming more confident in seeking mental health support. There is less mental health stigma. This is evidenced by the record number of client hours at CCS in 2021– 1050 to date.

The team of counsellors has grown to 22, including diploma students on placement. The CCS listening line continues to be a lifeline to many who are lonely and distressed. The line continues to operate every day from 8 am to 12 midnight. CCS relies on the kindness of the trained volunteers for ongoing running of the listening line. The callers have various issues, and this line has given comfort, peace and hope to many callers. Our listeners speak a variety of languages, and some come from outside the SEC. Having this diverse team of volunteers means that we can cater to the needs of the community. Offering support in their own language has been a great comfort for the listeners.

To date, CCS has delivered 103 workshops and presentations on a variety of topics relevant to the current needs of community, including the following: Depression and Anxiety; COVID's Impact on Young

People's Mental Health; Relationships and Addictions; Healing Generational Trauma; Trauma and Coping Strategies; Journey Through Grief and loss; Domestic violence; Trauma and Mental Health; Pornography and Process Addictions; Coping with Mental health; Forgiveness; Behaviour Changes/Changing Bad Habits; Living through Covid; Singles and Lockdown; Domestic Violence and Conflict Resolution; Trauma; Balancing Emotions; Culture and Mental Health; and Grief, Loss, and Bereavement, to name a few.

One of the visions for CCS in 2021 was for each church to have one or two Mental Health First Aiders. To date, 228 individuals have been trained, including pastors, church elders, youth teams and SEC directors. The Mental Health First Aid course equipped them to be the first responder to any mental health issues. The course trained them in the essential skills for mental health support, including: listening non-judgmentally; understanding methods of approach to assessment and assisting in a mental health crisis; giving support and sharing information; encouraging use of appropriate professional; providing Mental First Aid for issues like anxiety depression, panic attacks, self-harm and eating disorders, to name a few.

CCS has collaborated with other departments to equip them with the tools to deal with mental health issues in their departments and to deliver training and workshops, for example, training the youth team to establish a Youth Listening Line or setting up teen workshops, to name a couple.

In conclusion, CCS was relevant to the needs of the church and community and will continue to be relevant in 2022, as we face yet another uncertain year. We thank God for keeping us all safe and for his continued leading at CCS. In God we trust.



THEMBIE MAPIGIRE



TEENS MINISTRIES

Thank you!

The journey has been longer and bumpier than we ever foresaw. It is with thanks to God and to you – parents, guardians, teachers, leaders, elders, pastors and friends – that we have been able to make it to this point. Thank you for thinking of, and caring for, our teens' spiritual, emotional and social well-being throughout the pandemic; for supporting and encouraging them, even when you yourselves needed support. The Lord has seen and, as he has promised, will reward and bless you for this noble gesture. Thank you for encouraging them to participate in the services, concerts, retreats, presentations and conferences, organised by SEC Teens Ministries during 2021. By doing this, you have blessed them and other teens in the UK and abroad. We are thankful for our teens saying 'Yes' to the Lord, and thus blessing other teens and their families.

In September 2021 we celebrated our second Virtual SEC Teens Concert as, once more, young people from different countries shared songs that carried the precise words of encouragement that we all needed to hear in that moment. Some of us were in tears as we listened to the singing and felt the Lord speaking to us through every song. We are thankful for the young people that joined us through YouTube and Facebook and for the many that shared with us their decision to accept Jesus as their king and saviour. We encourage these teens and their families to stay tuned, visit a local church or to let us know how we can help them find one.

We are thankful to dear staff volunteers for their hard work, and generous

our
for all
dedication
support,

without which it would have been impossible to create and stream teens' services. The SEC Teens Ministries Department appreciates all of the contributions made (too many to list in this article) and recognise that we would not have been able to succeed without their help. We pray that the Lord, who sees their sacrifices in secret, will publicly reward them as he has promised.

We are grateful to the South England Conference of Seventh-day Adventists for guiding and advising us, especially during this time of crisis. We thank all of our colleagues, notably Secretary Alberto Francis, President Dr Emmanuel Osei, Executive Secretary Pastor Douglas McCormac and Pathfinder Director Pastor Herman Clifford, for celebrating the meeting with the Teens Department, thus making a Teens and Pathfinders Camp-Meeting. We especially want to thank Pastor Sam Davies (our newly appointed BUC Communications Director), for raising awareness of the teens' needs and experiences by dedicating to them a whole issue of the Communicator magazine.

Thank you, dear pastors, elders and leaders, for opening the doors (in this case, the virtual doors of your churches) so that we can share a few words of hope and encouragement with our wonderful young people, their families, visitors and the saints in general. Finally, we want to thank God who has given all of us the strength and grace to keep serving him and his children. Thank you, Lord.



JUAN CARLOS PATRICK

 South England Conference

Family Ministries Department Presents

CHRISTIAN
CHRISTIAN
HOME WEEK

Some Things

Newly Married

COUPLES

Need To Know



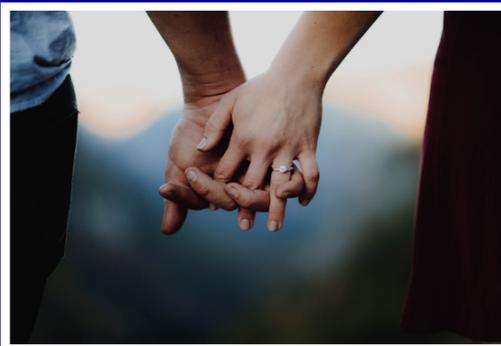
SPEAKER

Dr Curtis Fox

Ph.D, LMFT, CFT, CFLE

7 PM

Saturday 19th February 2022



 **YouTube**
LIVE STREAM

SECmedia

 **zoom**

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NEWS & CHURCH SPOTLIGHT

BRIXTON CHURCH'S CELEBRATES 60TH ANNIVERSARY AT SPECIAL THANKSGIVING SERVICE

Author: Don Roberts

Brixton Church held its 60th Anniversary Celebrations, on Sabbath, November 20th, 2021. The event featured church members of all ages and contributions by special guests from the church's past, who shared in the history and memories of the church from its humble beginnings to now the largest congregation in the South England Conference.

On arrival, attendees were handed an anniversary souvenir brochure that contained old photographs, the story of Brixton Church's early history - written by the late Elder Harold Watson in 1987, and listed ministers who served the Brixton church since 1922.

The Sabbath School study was taken by a panel of four former pastors who served as interns, Michael Salmon, Otis Lewis, Israel Williams, and Steve Thomas. Each pastor was responsible for giving the lesson summary for the different age categories. During the study, it was noted that the adult study on the book of Deuteronomy, shared parallels with the history of Brixton Church. "A group of people establishing themselves in the new land (many from the Windrush generation) and endeavouring to

keep the law and the statutes of the living God. Although some fell by the wayside because they could not find a church or felt unwelcome in some congregations, others persevered and grew together like the early church. They pooled together and over time built a permanent house of worship."

The main speakers were Pastors Errol Lawrence and Cecil Perry, whose tenures spanned the story of the church's move from its former location in Ferndale Road, to its present position at Stanley Street, after a building exchange with St Paul's parish church in 1980.

Perry used Psalms 27 and 150 as his scriptural focus during his touching and encouraging address, coloured with his customary dry-wit humour. He recounted with fondness his time as Brixton pastor, from his arrival in 1979 from Jamaica until he left in 1981 to take a departmental post in the Conference, where he would later serve as President. He also recalled the social, political, and economical changes taking place in wider British society at the time and the positive role that the church played following the Brixton riots in 1981. Perry reminded the congregation, that "Brixton Church must not just be a Seventh-day Adventist Church, it must be the church of the community." Emphasising the role of evangelism throughout Brixton's 60-year history, he reflected on the work of the church, "with many baptised, many going to their grave knowing that Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life." Perry concluded with a personal plea, "I want you to find the place that God has prepared for you. This Church is lovely. It is a cathedral. But I look forward to the cathedral that will not be in time but in eternity."

Pastor Lawrence's sermon entitled 'Don't Give Up Now', was also full of tales and recollections of his time at Brixton. His message was based on three themes identified in Hebrews 10:32-37. Lawrence began with, "Don't forget the past", where he asked the attendees to look back on the early years of their Christian walk, when they were "excited to share the faith" and the gospel. The second theme, "Don't forget the present", examined the current state of the world and the need "to be faithful to God more than we have ever been before." His final theme, "Don't forget the promise", encouraged the members not to throw away their confidence in the Bible or church, because "He who is coming will come".

Guests in attendance included the recently elected Trans-European Division, Field Secretary, Ian Sweeny, who gave the benediction. SEC President, Pastor Emmanuel Osei, was among several well-wishers that sent video messages. Osei commented on the number of many pastors and bible workers the Brixton produced over its 60 years.

Former SEC President Sam Davis and SEC Community Services and Prisons Director, Max McKenzie-Cook were among several former senior and intern Brixton pastors who were unable to attend in person, but also recorded messages in which they shared what influence their time at Brixton had on their ministry.



Others who took part during the service or sent messages of congratulations included former members who played a part in Brixton's growth and outreach activities during the 60's, 70's and 80's which led to the formation of the Peckham, Balham, Battersea and Norbury churches.

The afternoon programme was a musical celebration of congregational singing of favourites from yesteryear, and musical items performed by current and former Brixton members. Among the highlights was the singing group The Golden Chords which was formed in Ferndale Road in 1969.

Members, past and present were also given an opportunity to reflect and share memories of Brixton's history, with the telling of stories of church activities, such as coach trips to the seaside, youth club, Bible games and community outreach. One of the contributors reflected, "Our predecessors have left a rich heritage that needs to be honoured. They left us a rich history that also needs to be taught to our children."

I WILL GO: SENT TO SHARE

Author: Darell J Philip

"I will Go: Sent to Share," was the message throughout the Area 6C Week of Prayer held at the London Ghana SDA Church during 7th-13th November 2021. The week of prayer readings focused on the Three Angels Messages of Revelation 14:6-12 with special emphasis on the third angel's message which admonishes people to worship the true God of Heaven. Hosted by Area 6C's largest Church - London Ghana SDA - with a membership of over 700, the week of prayer was also beamed live to homes via YouTube, Zoom and the newly launched Area 6C website.



Each evening a video message from each of the Area 6C coordinators was shared, highlighting the plans they had for the upcoming year, as well as the progress which had been made during the current year in making disciples and building communities. In coordination with the Area 6C Coordinator - Pastor Anthony Opoku-Mensah - and Area 6C Prayer Ministries Coordinator - Elder Alex Dhlakama, - Area 6C Pastors and Prayer Ministry Leaders respectively presented the word and prayed for the requests which came in through all the various social media platforms throughout the week. Testimonies of praise and thanksgiving were a particular highlight throughout the week, including from those who had returned to the Lord and others who had been healed from illness.

The Week of Prayer culminated in a special day of fellowship with members from the 25 churches within Area 6C in attendance live at London Ghana Church or virtually through streaming platforms. It proved to be a celebratory occasion as people from various cultures, ages and backgrounds came together in one voice to give praises to the Lord for all that He had done throughout the week. In his message, London Ghana SDA Pastor, Ebenezer Jones-Lartey, reminded the congregation that the time has come when God will call out from Babylon all His people as the Great controversy between good and evil draws near to an end with the promised return of Jesus at the very door. Rousing applause and praise were given at the announcement of one visitor to the church who had indicated his desire to be baptized and to bring along his wife and children that they may serve the Lord together.

East London School of Music (ELSOM) Director, Fiona D Pacquette hosted an evening concert with support from the HACS Philharmonia and Woodwind Orchestra alongside the London Ghana SDA Choir and the incomparable voice of Chikezie Chike-Michael. As the week of prayer came to an end, Pastor Anthony Opoku-Mensah charged Area 6C Members to go MAD in their communities - "You heard me right," he smiled, "I encourage you all to go MAD in your communities, meaning, that you are called to Make A Difference as you share with others the love of Jesus and the promise of His imminent return to take all His faithful children home."

GAC-UK VIRTUAL DAY OF FELLOWSHIP 2021

Author: Japheth Obese-Amankwah

The bi-annual gathering of the Ghanaian Adventist Congregations in UK (GAC-UK) -made up of 18 organised churches and 2 church plants - was halted by the devastating effects of Covid-19. However, on November 6, 2021 the first virtual GA-UK day of fellowship was held under the theme "Rebuilding and Reconnecting."

Speaking at the event as guests of honour, Dr Emmanuel Osei (SEC President) praised God for the numerical growth and financial contributions of the Ghanaian congregations within SEC. He however, warned of the



threat of secularisation of the next generation and advised that all effort should be made to train them up to stay in the Lord. On his part, Pr. George Kumi (NEC President) prayed the Lord's blessing on the group and challenged them to continue to make evangelism their priority. Finally, Hon. Paapa Owusu-Ankomah (Ghana High Commissioner to UK) raised the concern of increased gang and knife crime among Ghanaian young people and requested the Adventist church to work with the high commission to address this problem.

Delivering the sermon Pr. Lewis Quaye (GAC-UK, Chair) acknowledged relationships have been under the strain because of Covid19 but admonished members to close ranks.

"It is now time to forgive each other and forge together with one purpose since the plan of salvation is all about reconnecting and rebuilding relationships. We therefore need to forge this vision in our home and Christian lives." said Pr. Quaye.

The children were also blessed with a sermon titled "Jump Jimmy Jump" by Mrs Charity Boakye. She encouraged the children to always connect with God by listening to His voice through daily prayer and study of their bible and Sabbath school lessons.

The youth preacher was Pr. Bright Agyemang-Baah a graduate of Oakwood College who shared his message titled "Jesus Receives Sinners." He encouraged everyone not to let their sins become a barrier between them and God because Jesus always welcomes sinners and transforms them.

The worshippers were blessed with a musical concert in the afternoon, whilst the sacrificial efforts of some past members were recognised and awarded certificates of appreciation.

CENTRE FOR HELP AND HOPE RECEIVES COMMUNITY AWARD FOR SECOND CONSECUTIVE YEAR

Author: Don Roberts

Willesden Church's, Centre for Help and Hope (CHH) was among the winners at the annual London Faith & Belief Community Awards, held on Monday, 29th November

2021, at 1 Wimpole Street, London. CHH was one of thirteen initiatives, charities and groups to win in the category of Community Resourcesfulness in Response to Covid-19. The award was presented by Lord-Lieutenant of Great London, Sir Kenneth Olisa OBE, and accepted by CHH Manager, Norma Whyte and Assistant Manager, Dennis Murray.

It is the second consecutive year that CHH has received the award. The work recognised by the awarding committee included the provision of bags of food and essential items plus the distribution of daily hot meals during the pandemic for the elderly and vulnerable in the London borough of Brent. Other areas identified included the Centre's STEPS UP education and empowerment programme which aids disadvantaged groups in acquiring skills to access employment.

CHH is one of the structures within Willesden's Community Ministries' department and celebrated its 5th anniversary in October. It was created in 2016 after the church leadership, including the then Pastor Michael Hamilton, prayed for the Lord's inspiration to start a ministry to better help and meet the needs of people within the local community. It operates from a biblical standpoint, involving the five C's of Caring: compassion, confidentiality, communication, cooperation, and commitment. The Centre is staffed by volunteers and maintained through the financial contributions of church members and items donated from local supermarkets. It also partners with other non-governmental organisations within the Borough and collaborates with the Crisis Solution Team based at the Harmony Centre on Bridge Road NW10.

Following the award ceremony, Whyte commented, "Receiving this award from The London Faith and Belief Forum, on behalf of the Willesden Seventh-day Adventist Church's Centre of Help and Hope, is indeed an honour. This has been made possible through the sheer commitment and hard work of CHH's dream team of volunteers, with whom I am privileged to work, serving our community. To God be the glory great things He has done."



PEOPLE ARE CRAVING COMMUNITY NOW MORE THAN EVER

It was a transformational week, full of activity the universe had not seen or witnessed before. The earth was described as “formless and empty, and darkness was over the surface of the deep”. But when God stepped onto the scene with a blueprint for transformation, things changed. The formless took shape; darkness was transformed into light; emptiness was filled with stars, plants, fish and animals. Where there had been a deafening silence, there were the sounds of mooring, meowing, neighing and every sound you can imagine. Stifling stillness was replaced by animated activity in the sea, land and sky. God looked and declared everything to be very good. When the Bible says *God* in Genesis Chapter 1, it refers to the Godhead—Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Genesis 1:26). You see, everything started with the community of the Godhead; and every living thing that came into being during that transformational week was created in pairs to be fruitful and multiply after its kind. The school of fish, the herd of animals and the flock of birds all lived in community.

However, something in this otherwise idyllic week stood in contrast to everything that had so far defined it. On the sixth day God said, “Let us make man in our own image” (Genesis 1:26). So Adam was created, after which “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it” (Genesis 2:15). For the first time, the Godhead looked at their work and uttered the words, “It is not good...” How can anything that comes from the hand of God be not good? Why was it not good? Was there a fault in the creation of Adam? The answer is given in the verse, “It is not good for the man to be alone.” The problem was Adam’s social isolation. Every living thing was in community except Adam. He was alone. This was not only at odds with everything God had created but with the Godhead community in whose likeness he was created. That is why God declared it not good. It was not good

then, and it is not good today. God had a solution to Adam’s social isolation. He created Eve, a helper suitable for him. The pair were instructed to be fruitful and multiply and to grow the community of humanity who would live in fellowship with God and each other.

Today, as we navigate 21st Century individualism, society thinks they can dispense with community. People in neighbourhoods live as strangers. Despite the direction society is moving towards, I put it to you that what God said at the beginning still applies – *It is not good for man to be alone*. This is not just speaking about marriage. I am broadening the concept to anyone living in social isolation.

Over the last two years, humanity has been forced into a social experiment where governments have been forced to mandate lockdowns and isolation measures to try and contain the spread of the Covid-19 virus. With the prolific use of social media, it would have been thought that lockdowns would have had little to no impact on society, given our ability to connect online. In 2021 more than 3 billion people are using social media.¹

Unfortunately, despite the phenomenal numbers, studies show that the use of technology and social media has minimal influence on a person’s feelings of isolation. “Face-to-face interactions, physical and mental wellness, and work-life balance have the greatest impact on loneliness.” The ongoing loneliness, despite these technological innovations, **clearly speak to the fact that “people are craving community now more than ever.”** Forming a community requires much more than simply gathering people together in the same place or accumulating users on an app or site. This partly explains why, despite the pervasive social media

connectivity, people have suffered mental health issues due to lack of human contact during the pandemic.

So, we have a dichotomy: God created us to live in community, however society promotes individualism, the very thing that the Godhead said at the beginning was not good. In acknowledging this craving for community, tech giants are moving beyond social media to Metaverse concepts which will create, in my view, an illusion of community which will embed loneliness. Man’s solution can never be better than what God has provided.

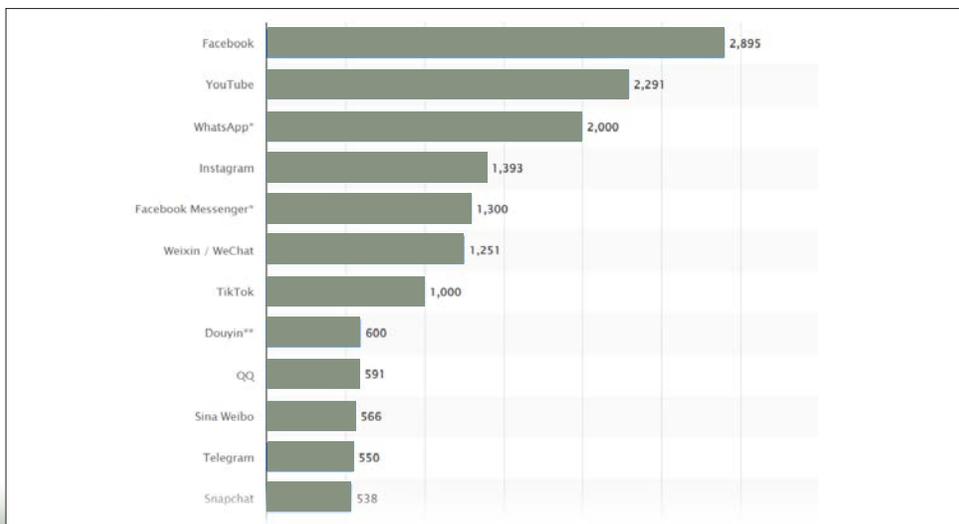
The only solution is still what the Godhead provided to Adam’s loneliness. We need ‘one another’. This phrase is found in the New Testament 100 times and was as central then as it is today to making disciples and building Christian communities. Being in community is part of God’s design to bring about transformation in our lives.

“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, 25not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:24-25, NIV).

Here’s the challenge: Most lonely people do not know how to connect to our Christian communities. What can we do to reach out to “one another” both in the church and in the neighbourhoods around our churches? How can we bring about the ‘good’ which God brought to Adam’s loneliness and create our own Transformation Week for those around us seeking connection?

I believe the Adventist mandate has never been to just offer biblical truth, which is important to bring people into relationship with God, but also to provide authentic transformative communities. At the end of our engagement with others, can we say, “It is very good” (Genesis 1:31) because we have successfully created authentic relevant communities!

¹ 103+ Social Media Sites You Need to Know in 2021 (influencermarketinghub.com)



MFAKAZI NDEBELE

Pastor, The Oasis

P O E M BUILDING COMMUNITIES

It was not much to see
Just a small, broken down factory
But from an old building in a backstreet alley
A small group with a vision set the course of history

More than the uttering of prayers fervently
Business gifts and members pledges were donated willingly
It's the readiness of minds and hearts in unity
The belief and claiming of God's promises totally

What started out as a dream for hardly any
Became a prayer, I believe for one and every
From an opportunity to a possibility
A definite maybe to a reality

That church has become a home for many
A place of worship and rest, a sanctuary
Where love is unlimited and to be neighbourly...
Is a motto adopted, and embraced wholeheartedly

Where those who visit will find diversity
The building of character, mind and spirituality
Hard pews to remind you not to get too comfortably
But still a place of refuge, and a home for every family

It's where Harry can meet Sally ...
Can settle down and marry
Where names of the past won't escape your memory
And every one you meet, they have a story

Now that would not have been
Was it not for the brethren's ceaseless praying
The sharing and getting together meeting
The Spirit's outpouring and God's divine leading

The message for then and for our learning
Is not to listen only to what we are capable of hearing
Or to be controlled only by those of sound speaking
Or to limit our possibilities only to what we are able of seeing

For faith seizes the opportunity
It goes beyond what the eyes can see
It's not believing that God can, it's knowing that He will
Knowing that without faith, it's impossible to please Him
(Hebrews 11:6)

So my question for you today is
How relevant are we to our communities?
Do they see Jesus in you and me?
Are we fulfilling our ministry?
Have we made good use of the opportunities?
Do we need to move away from the set church services?
Is it time to rethink our evangelistic strategies?
Is the knocking on doors and selling 'Focus' magazines
outdated?

The campaigns of old, in large tents overstated?
Can we meet people where they are without compromising
what we believe?
Are we ready for what we're about to receive?
God always provides an opportunity
To salvation for each and every
The early church was not perfect
It had its fair share of conflicts (Acts 15:1-19)
Some feared the loss of Moses' practices
That led to tensions and cultural differences
Was it not for the leading of the Holy Spirit
Paul's evangelistic approach, they would have opposed it
"Each Sabbath most of us will do the same thing
This habit we've mastered into an art and routine
We look forward to the church service coming to an end
Just so we can hurry outside to catch-up with our friends
We talk of the week and how it was well spent
But not of the Sabbath and the message heaven sent"¹
Well, God is not interested in sacrifices or religious acts that
have no meaning
But a relationship and service with Him that's worth knowing
"It matters not who we are, where we're from or our short
comings"
For "a good name is to be chosen than one's riches or
belongings"²
Just as a child is known by their doings
³People will know us not by what they hear as by what they've
been seeing⁴
This is a lesson about community
About God and everyone else, including you and me
What makes us distinct is L-O-V-E
It's that what gives us our identity
Lastly, a home is more than a house made of sand and stone
It takes hands to build a house, but only love can build a home
Home is a safe haven where love is shown
No other place exists where we have grown
Or where we'd rather be with family and friends or alone
So, a community is more than just a group of people living in a
particular area or zone
According to Scripture, we're better together than alone
(Romans 12:4-5).
It's putting others needs before our own.
A community is a group of people we lean on when times are
tough;
It's our friends, family, and neighbors who are there for us... for
when we need love.
Community means sharing all and bearing all together
It's putting the gospel on display, LOVING one another

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1 Delroy Dwyer, 'FRIENDSHIP: Why Do We Go To Church?' 11 August 2008
2 Proverbs 22:1
3 Delroy Dwyer, 'A Woman of Substance' 28 May 2011
4 Micah 6:8



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