

ISSUE 53 / OCTOBER 2022

VOX

FAITH ■ LIFE ■ REALITY

SPECIAL EDITION

Finding Faith Tour *2022*



“WITHOUT WATER, LIFE IS DIFFICULT”

~OMAR, 29 FATHER OF FOUR LIVING IN SOMALILAND

In the Horn of Africa, more than 20 million people are facing starvation from the worst drought in over 40 years.

Crops suffer. Diseases increase. Livelihoods decrease.

Tearfund Ireland has provided clean water for people in Somaliland. There are still thousands more in need.

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Photo: A boy in drought affected Somaliland seeks water.
Credit: Tearfund Germany



Miracles in the Mess

One of my husband's paintings hangs in our hallway. It is a powerful and arresting image depicting the story of Jacob

wrestling with God from Genesis 32 - a story of struggle and intimacy, of brokenness and blessing that seems so perfectly to capture our journey of faith.

The prophet Habakkuk is another favourite character of mine. In Hebrew, his name can mean both to wrestle and to embrace. It reflects his search for answers and eventually his decision to find hope and strength in God despite his difficult circumstances.

This sense of beauty for ashes, faith that clings on in the face of suffering and a hope that overcomes hardship was so much in evidence

during this year's Finding Faith tour. People who follow Jesus are not immune to the realities of life but it is often in those dark valleys that

we experience the intimate presence of God and His powerful intervention in our lives.

While we are still wrestling with how to continue with the ministry of VOX without key team members, we also know so many around Ireland need to know that God is in His holy temple Habakkuk 2:20. So here's a special edition of the magazine

bringing together the stories from the 2022 tour.

May you find encouragement, inspiration and hope in these reminders of God's faithfulness.

Blessed are
the walking
wounded...
the empty-
yet-rejoicing...
the weak who
are strong.



Ruth

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NATIONAL PRAISE DAY 2022

Monday 31 October from 4 – 8pm at Betania Church, Powerstown Road, Dublin 15. Enjoy a feast of worship and praise with six choirs and worship teams from different churches and denominations along with soloists and times of prayer and encouragement. Admission free. Children's ministry provided.

ART EXHIBITION FUNDRAISER

Calling all artists! Tearfund Ireland will be holding an art exhibit fundraiser this November. Centring around the theme, "*Behold, I make all things new*" (Revelation 21:5), Tearfund is looking for artists of all kinds (sculptors, mixed medium, painters, photographers, etc.) to contribute pieces of their art to help raise funds for programmes in countries such as Ethiopia, Cambodia, and Lebanon. This provides a great opportunity for artists to showcase their work and help transform the lives of the most vulnerable around the world. If you would like to participate or for more information, please contact Amanda Prather on: amanda.prather@tearfund.ie or call 01 878 3200.

LEADERS REFRESHMENT DAY

Thursday 24 November 10am - 3:30pm at the Irish Bible Institute, Ulysses House, 22-24 Foley St, Dublin 1. Living Leadership and the Irish Bible Institute are delighted to provide a day for leaders and their spouses (if applicable) to reflect, refresh and renew their focus on Christ and His service. This free event will provide teaching, support and prayer for leaders along with encouragement from Cassells Morrell on the topic of "Mind Yourself". One-to-one pastoral support will also be available as required. A former participant commented, "Prioritise and make time for these days of refreshment - you will be blessed, refreshed and encouraged." For more information visit www.livingleadership.org/ireland.

ARC IRELAND CONFERENCE

Friday 4 to Saturday 5 November 2022 at ODEON Point Square, East Wall Road, Dublin 1

The Association of Related Churches (ARC) Ireland's annual conference in November is an opportunity to connect and build relationship with other Christian leaders passionate about seeing a thriving church in every community across Ireland. The conference provides an opportunity to worship, to learn and to receive resources for ministry and to build connections with others. This year's speakers are Peter Haas from Substance Church, Minnesota and Ps Julius Rwotlonyo, Watoto Church, Uganda. To find out more visit arcireland.org or book on Eventbrite.

CHRISTIANS AGAINST POVERTY COMING SOON TO IRELAND

Work is underway to launch Christians Against Poverty Ireland (CAP Ireland) and the new steering group is now looking for the right person to lead the organisation. Christians Against Poverty started in the UK in 1996 to help those weighed down by debt; parents who couldn't feed their children, families facing eviction and people living without hope. Working through local churches CAP helps release people from poverty and debt into lives of fullness and freedom.

On a few occasions in the past ten years various people have considered setting up CAP Ireland. In September 2021, a small steering group was formed with the aim of establishing the charity in the Republic of Ireland. In May 2022, CAP Ireland received approval from the CAP International Governance Board. The next stage of the journey is to recruit a CEO and to get other volunteers and churches onboard so CAP Ireland can officially launch in 2023. Given the current financial pressures many in our country are facing with rising living costs and a shortage of affordable rent/houses CAP is a great (and timely!) channel to equip local churches to give practical and spiritual support to those most in need.

Find out more at www.capireland.ie.

NEW YOUTH DIRECTOR

Gerard Hanley is the new Director of Alpha Youth for Alpha Ireland. Gerard has been running Alpha and Alpha Youth with young people for many years with schools and youth groups, gaining a reputation as one of the most effective youth ministry leaders in Ireland.

Originally from Galway, Gerard now lives in Dublin with his wife Katie and son John. Having played football for Irish age group teams and in the League of Ireland, Gerard encountered Jesus on a school retreat in 2005. This started a journey which led him to leave his football aspirations to one side in favour of a vocation to full-time youth ministry. If you are interested in creating or developing the youth ministry in your parish or school you can contact Gerard for advice at gerard@alphaireland.org.





STUDY THE BOOK OF JONAH

Starting 14 November 2022. The Irish Bible Institute is offering a four-week online course on the book of Jonah. While a familiar tale, this action-packed story is quite different to many Sunday School retellings. Jonah is far from simple and has some uncomfortable lessons for us today. The course costs €50 for participation only or €70 with an assignment and award. Find out more about this and other online courses at IBI by visiting: www.ibi.ie/online-courses.

MAKE A CHILD SMILE

The 2022 Team Hope Christmas Shoebox Appeal aims to deliver as many gift-filled shoeboxes as possible to children living in extreme poverty. Team Hope is calling on parents, children, teachers, families, churches and communities to build-a-box at home or online to help them reach their goal of 200,000 shoeboxes this year – bringing joy to children in 13 countries across Africa and Eastern Europe.

It has never been easier to build a shoebox. All you have to do is find an empty shoebox, wrap it in Christmas paper and fill it with gifts for a boy or girl aged between 2 and 14, give online or attach a €4 donation and bring it to a local drop off point before the deadline of Tuesday 8 November – or you can build-a-box online



by donating at www.teamhope.ie.

Team Hope CEO Peter Heaney said, "I've seen and heard first-hand the impact that receiving a shoebox can have. A gift of simple things, such as stationary or clothes, can help children in their schooling in countries where these items are difficult for some people to afford. But more than that, receiving a shoebox helps children experience some of that intangible joy that childhood is all about."

NEW CEO FOR TEARFUND IRELAND

The Board of Christian aid and development agency Tearfund Ireland has announced the appointment of Sean Copeland as the new CEO. Sean joined Tearfund Ireland in May 2018 as Business Development Manager and took on the role of Acting CEO in August 2019.

"The Board has been deeply impressed with Sean's stewardship of the organisation during his time as Acting CEO. His management, leadership and focus on team building while facing several challenging circumstances demonstrate his skills and dedication. Through it all his faith in God, commitment to the Church and compassion for people have been evident and we look forward to working with Sean in the times ahead," said Paraic O'Toole, Chair of Tearfund.

"Building on solid foundations, I count it a privilege to lead Tearfund Ireland into its next phase," Sean said. "My time as Acting CEO provided opportunities to learn, deepen relationships and influence new approaches. At a time of immense challenge and difficulty around the world, we have an opportunity to bring hope and restoration through practical action."

Tearfund Ireland is part of the worldwide family of Tearfund organisations. Expressing delight at Sean's appointment, Matthew Maury, CEO of Tearfund Australia and Chair of the Tearfund Family group, added, "[Sean's] experience and leadership will contribute to greater impact across our shared work of putting the love of God into tangible action for those facing poverty and injustice."



FAITH AND MEDIA STUDY HIGHLIGHTS MARGINALISATION AND STEREOTYPES

The largest-ever study into the portrayal of faith and religion in the media conducted by global market research company HarrisX has captured the views of 9,000 global citizens as journalists and editors in 18 countries covering the world's major religions. While 82% of respondents described themselves as faithful, religious or spiritual, most expressed concern that media coverage often perpetuates faith-related stereotypes rather than protecting against them. "Ultimately, the research points to a clear global deficit in coverage, treatment and quality of understanding of faith and religion in modern media," a HarrisX spokesperson said. Find out more at www.faithandmedia.com.

Key findings:

- 63% said high-quality content on faith and religion is needed.
- 53% believe that the media coverage actively ignores religion.
- 56% agree that there should be more nuanced coverage of complex religious issues.
- 61% said that media coverage often perpetuates faith-based stereotypes.
- More than 80% feel that faith groups need to provide a greater variety of spokespeople.
- Journalists and editors agreed that that editorial coverage on faith and religion has become more marginalised.



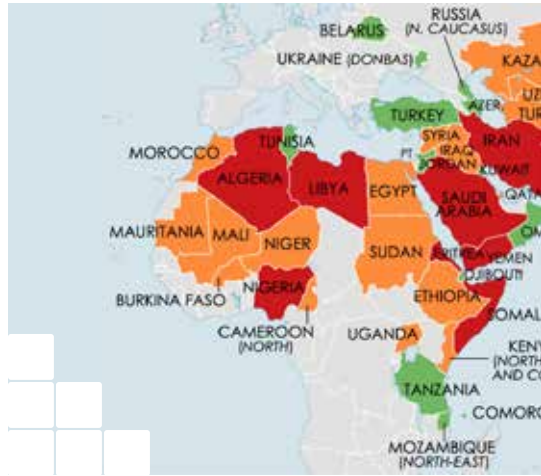
Christians At Risk Of Increased Persecution

Church in Chains exists to be an Irish voice for persecuted Christians. In this special report for VOX magazine, they look at the current situation for the persecuted church around the world. Visit www.churchinchains.ie to find out how you can get involved.

Reports from various parts of the world reveal that the persecution of Christians is on the increase. There is violence amounting to genocide in Nigeria's Middle Belt. A dire situation faces the church in Afghanistan living under the Taliban. The Iranian government is seeking to stop the growing church while more states in India have introduced anti-conversion laws. And there are ever-tightening restrictions imposed on Christians in China as part of the Communist government's campaign to control religion. In some countries, the increase in persecution is decimating the church, while in other countries, the church is growing.

The campaign of anti-Christian violence in Nigeria is not new but it is expanding to several states where there had been no previous attacks. The continuing government inaction both at state and federal level to combat the violence has led many to conclude that it is sympathetic to the activities of the Muslim militants. In recent years, Nigeria has been the country where most Christians have been killed (over 4500 in 2021).

In recent years, the church in Afghanistan was reported to be one of the world's fastest growing churches as thousands came to faith in Jesus,



especially from the Hazara ethnic minority. Many have since fled the country knowing that they were on a list of Taliban targets but some have remained – meeting in secret and nourished in their faith by Christian satellite television.

Iran poses a good example of a church that is both suffering and growing. Although estimates are impossible to verify, it is thought likely that up to one million Persian-speaking Iranians are now Christian – up from 500 at the time of the Islamic revolution in 1979. However, the church also continues to suffer with underground church leaders being arrested and imprisoned while many other Christians are forced to flee the country under threat.

Attacks in India by Hindu militant mobs against Christians have risen in recent years as state and federal governments have either been inactive or in many instances supportive of the militants. State governments led by the Hindu nationalist BJP party have been increasingly introducing or strengthening anti-conversion laws which militants often see as a green light to pursue attack in remote rural areas. A regular feature of such attacks is that the badly-



beaten Christian pastor is dragged to the local police station where, instead of the militants facing charges for assault, the pastor is charged under the anti-conversion law.

China has introduced new religious regulations every year since 2018, with the stated aim of bringing all religions into conformity with Chinese Communist Party ideology. The effect on churches has been ever-more stifling – the ban on children under 18 attending church has been strictly enforced; church buildings are forced to have a portrait of President Xi and the Chinese flag and to sing patriotic songs as part of their worship. Sermons are closely monitored and must include praise of the Communist Party. The 2022 regulations seriously limit Chinese Christians’ use of the Internet with various words including “Christ” being banned. Churches that refuse to accept these regulations are severely persecuted.

In view of this increased persecution, the challenge for us as Christians in Ireland is to think about what we can do to help our persecuted brothers and sisters. Later this year Church in Chains will publish the latest edition of its Global Guide – a booklet that details the


up-to-date position in the 60 countries where Christians face persecution. To obtain a free copy, email info@churchinchains.ie

Irish Emergency Alliance

Tearfund Ireland is one of seven Irish international charities that forms the Irish Emergency Alliance*. These charities come together to respond to the world’s worst emergencies and natural disasters by providing fast and efficient humanitarian assistance to those most in need. The seven agencies have programmes in 85 different countries. The Irish Emergency Alliance launched its first appeal in September 2020 in response to the global Covid-19 crisis as well as an appeal for Ukraine in March 2022.

Most recently, in September 2022, the Irish Emergency Alliance launched an urgent Horn of Africa Hunger Appeal. Over 20 million children, women and men, nearly three times the population of the island of Ireland, are facing starvation in Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia. After four failed rainy seasons over the past two years, these countries are facing the worst drought in 40 years. Harvests continue to fail and nearly 9 million livestock have died. More than 1.5 million people have been forced to abandon their homes, often walking for days in search of food and water. To learn more, go to: www.irishemergencyalliance.org

* ActionAid Ireland, Christian Aid Ireland, Plan Ireland, Self Help Africa, Tearfund Ireland, Trócaire and World Vision Ireland make up the Irish Emergency Alliance

An aerial photograph of a two-lane road winding through a lush landscape. The road is paved and has a white dashed line down the center. A red car is driving on the road. To the right of the road, there is a large green tree. The surrounding area is a mix of green grass and yellow wildflowers. A white sign with the word 'SLOW' is visible on the right side of the road. The overall scene is bright and vibrant.

After two years conducting interviews over Zoom, WhatsApp and telephone, VOX editor Ruth Garvey-Williams was finally able to climb behind the wheel for our 10th annual Finding Faith Tour. From 16 - 23 May, she travelled across the island hunting down stories of faith, life and reality and asking, "What is God doing in Ireland today?"

Over the course of seven days, she travelled a total of 1899.7 km through 29 counties (stopping in 22 counties in both Ireland and Northern Ireland). It was a great privilege to interview 53 people from a wide range of different churches and church backgrounds including Apostolic Faith Mission, Baptist, CCI, Church of Ireland, Methodist, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic and Romanian Pentecostal as well as independent evangelical and independent Pentecostal churches.

From a small shop front to a new purpose-built sanctuary that can seat well over 1,000 people, it was a joy to see vibrant expressions of faith from Ballincollig to Greencastle and from Sligo to Wexford. In this special Finding Faith Tour edition of the magazine, we are delighted to share the stories Ruth collected to encourage, challenge and inspire you.

Finding Faith Tour 2022

In the Neighbourhood

One of the great joys of the Finding Faith Tour is hearing stories of faith, life and reality around the country. Here are some of those stories.

PAYING RESPECTS – Dublin 1

Pastor Gerard Chimbanga leads Praise Tabernacle Church in Dublin 1. His international congregation meets in a former chapel. They have been seeking God about how to reach their neighbourhood.

For a long time, we have been praying for a new building but God said, “You won’t move until you have done everything you need to do here.” So we began to ask, “Why are we here?” The real sense is that we need to open our eyes to see what is near us.

One night we had planned to have a Gospel





Choir sing at the church. We had distributed flyers all around the neighbourhood but nobody came. Then we discovered that the wife of one of the neighbours had just died. Everyone had gone to the wake. So we said, “Our choir is not as important as that. Let us go where the people are.” So we walked over and shook everybody’s hand and expressed our sympathy for the man’s loss.

If we lock ourselves away and do our own thing, we can never reach Ireland with the Gospel. We have got to break down barriers. The pandemic affected everybody but we need to move closer to one another and recognise that we need other people.

During lockdown we had our first funeral as a church for a young man from Zimbabwe. What touched me was that when the hearse arrived, all the neighbours stood at their gates to pay their respects to us and to this man’s family and friends. That was so powerful. Can we have the same attitude?





MORE THAN A FOOD PARCEL - Navan

Originally from South Africa, Marlene moved to Ireland in 2001. She knew something was missing in her life and connecting with Open Arms Church in Newbridge felt like coming home. When she moved again to Navan in 2011, she was delighted to find a new home at Lighthouse Church and now volunteers to run a ministry collecting and delivering "Food Cloud" donations.

For the last two and a half years, I've been doing Food Cloud. We collect food that the supermarkets are going to throw away and deliver it to 18 families in Navan and Trim. We collect it on the day and drop it straight to people's homes. Then once a year, we do the food appeal

to make up 30 Christmas hampers for people.

It is not just the food. I usually stop for a little chat with people and make a connection. There are a lot of single mums. Sometimes we will have a clear out and give away good quality toys or other items that they need. People appreciate it, especially with prices going up. It's a helping hand in dark days. That's when I realise why I'm doing it.

I don't know how people make it without Jesus in their life. I can't. He is always there and He never lets us down. Hopefully through the Food Cloud, people can see that through me.

BUILDING CONNECTIONS, BUILDING CHURCH - Cavan

In 2023, Cavan Baptist Church will celebrate its 30th anniversary as a congregation and the 20th anniversary of its current building. Pastor Ivan Watson reflected on how the church has built connections with their community.

St. Patrick's Day has been a great way of having a connection with the town. Each year we put a float into the parade. The very first year, our theme was about St. Patrick and one year we created Noah's ark. We have won best float for some of our creations.

We had been trying to reach out to the community in one of the rougher housing estates in the town. Then in 2017, a team from CEF came and we did a Lego club in the community centre. The centre manager was really touched to see how the children responded and the way the team connected with them. There was an open door for us to go back and just before the pandemic, we had planned to start a weekly Lego Bible Club. We have been able to start that now and we are seeing around 30 children coming each week, with half of those from the local housing estate.

Jesus is my Saviour

and my Lord. My reason for living to glorify Him. That passion for mission has been there since I was child through the missionary stories of people like CT Studd and Hudson Taylor. Over the years we've tried to be realistic. It is not about us, it is about the Lord. Jesus is building His church!

[Editor's Note: Cavan Baptist Church has seen evidence of Jesus at work as doors opened for them to support the establishment of a new church congregation in nearby Belturbet.)





STAYING SALTY – Ferrybank, County Waterford

After recently celebrating their 10th anniversary Ferrybank Christian Community Church were reflecting on their calling to be “salty” when VOX magazine editor Ruth Garvey-Williams visited during this year’s Finding Faith Tour. Here is a taste of what Pastor Colin Holmes shared and a few examples of how this small multi-cultural church is putting it into practice.

“Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer anyone.” Colossians 4:6

We’ve been reading the book *Stay Salt* by Rebecca Manly Pippert (who also wrote *Out of the Saltshaker*). Sometimes we can believe that Europe is “hard ground” for the good news of Jesus but this book challenges that notion.

The gospel transforms our hearts and minds, so that we might share it with others, being confident in God and not ourselves. It is about displaying Christ’s love, declaring God’s truth and demonstrating God’s power.

For me the best story was the one the author shares last. Her brother had made many mistakes in adult life but she prayed for him. At one point, he felt down about his regrets. She shared with him the grace of the gospel and he found forgiveness. For the first time in her life, she knew her brother belonged to Jesus. Five days later he was killed in a car crash. That story stood out to me because it showed how vital it is to share our faith.



- ◇ The Christian Union at the local college ran their first mission week. Students began asking their friends, “Do you believe in God?”
- ◇ One church member started a bible study in her workplace and seven people are now coming along.
- ◇ Someone approached Gideons to provide a box of Bibles – she is leaving them where people can pick them up!
- ◇ A neighbour noticed how a church member was always happy when she came home from church – her smile was her testimony.
- ◇ Another church member realised, “When God prompts you to connect with someone – listen to Him. He knows what He is doing.”





FAITHFUL WITNESS – Athenry, County Galway

When they moved to Athenry several years ago, Sean and Julia O'Mahony were delighted to be able to start Athenry Gospel Centre – a small church fellowship that now meets in the local community centre.

Athenry is a lovely little town. You get to know all the local people. We are 'blow-ins' so people want to know who we are. When we started off we ran Gospel concerts and we invited different people in the community to come and sing. 350 people came to our concert in aid of cancer care. At the end, we sang "Amazing Grace" because everyone knows it. The local Athenry school of music invite us to sing at their concert every Christmas.

There is a cross in the centre of Athenry that has been there for 800 years. We do outreach there on a Friday each week, giving out free books and offering to pray with people. It can be slow but local people see us there regularly and we are trying to sow the seeds of love and kindness. We don't get discouraged. One man regularly goes across to the market and buys a box of blueberries for us!

When things get difficult and discouraging or seem hard, we are learning to trust Him. Jesus is our rock and He is much bigger than we think!



HOPE MAGHERAFELT – County Londonderry

As the CAP debt centre manager for Mid Ulster, Ruth Carson is committed to lifting the burden of unmanageable debt from people's shoulders. She works with Hope Magherafelt to bring practical help and hope to people in her community.

In 2019, the Food Bank in Magherafelt and the local CAP (Christians Against Poverty) centre were combined under the banner of Hope Magherafelt. People came looking for food but underlying that immediate need many were facing money worries and debt.

The vision of the charity is to give that holistic support, helping to

transform the lives of people in our community by caring for their physical, mental, emotional and spiritual wellbeing. We are a Christians charity and our heart's desire is to see people set free (Isaiah 61).

People are able to receive food parcels once a week. Eventually, the hope is to have a café where they can come and enjoy a cuppa and a chat, as well as receiving essential food and toiletries. For those who are struggling with debt, we visit to help understand their needs. We create a budget and, if they sign up with us, one of our befrienders will support



them as they journey towards becoming debt free.

I have always had a heart for mission but I thought that was on mission trips to third world countries. I had the opportunity to work for Care for the Family for ten years in their Northern Ireland office but I wanted to do something more hands on and community based and so that is how I came to be involved here.

It has been hugely challenging. Now I am going to see people in their own homes. I am seeing the needs of people first hand and uncovering the layers.

People have so many different needs. I find it totally overwhelming at times. I see now that the mission field is right on our doorstep. That is really the journey that God has brought me on.

My heart is very pastoral and this work is very much drawing alongside to hear people's stories and to remind them that they are not on alone. Our work is open to people of all faiths or no faith but as a Christian charity, at times, we have the opportunity to pray with people. It is all about restoring people. I love that I work in a charity that is all about the heart of God!





HUNGRY FOR GOD - Wexford

Colette O'Doherty is the Director of Religious Education and Youth Ministry for Ferns Diocese. Based in Wexford, her remit is much wider as she is seeking to provide opportunities for young people to encounter Jesus.

When I first started in the role, we decided to set up a youth group called Spirit. I'll never forget going into the first school to invite them. There were 120 students in one hall. I was nervous about the reaction about a faith based group because our diocese doesn't have a good history. The idea was to run for 40 weeks from September to May with a programme of personal and spiritual development.

We did not want to tell young people what to believe but rather to give them the space to think about God and the opportunity to decide for themselves. When I presented the idea, there seemed to be a lot of young people nodding so that gave me the courage to ask if anyone was interested. Immediately all 120 hands went up. That was the moment I realised that young people are open to faith. The media peddles the myth that teenagers don't care about God.

When we eventually started the group in Wexford, 145 young people came once a week right up until Covid hit. We were giving them space to discover who they were and what was important in life. And they came back each week for it.

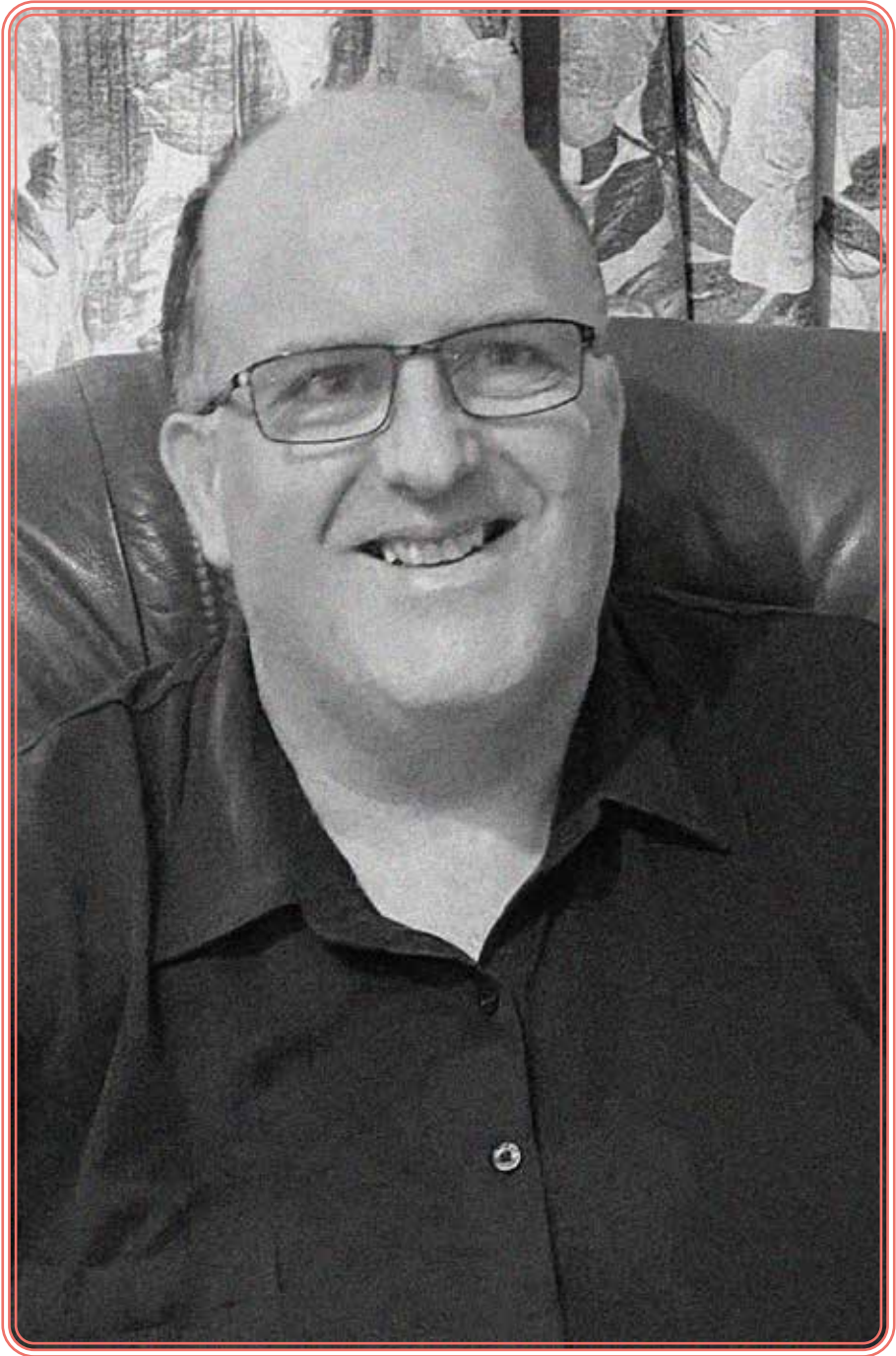
But when everything locked down, we didn't want to try and run something

online. Instead we took the opportunity to reflect as a diocese about how we could develop youth ministry. Out of that grew the Way Forward project – an exciting three year plan to help bring young people into a relationship with God by attracting Faith Reps in every parish – people with a heart for God and for young people. And so far 45 people have signed up!

God has made it very easy. It feels like He is laying out the red carpet for us and as we keep our eyes fixed on Him, He is doing the work. There are some days I can come in and I get all het up about things. Those are the days, I get in my own way. I forget that God has this.

When I look back and wonder how did all this happen, I realised I cannot take the credit because it is not me. My job is to keep looking towards God as He leads the way.





THROUGH Learning Contentment CHRONIC ILLNESS

Rev Baden Stanley has been a Church of Ireland Rector in of Bray for the last 24 years. He shares a little of the “roller coaster” ride of faith and ministry in the face of chronic illness and more recently the impact of long Covid.

In 2003, I was diagnosed with Fibromyalgia (FM) – it appeared out of no-where. Fortunately I seem to get it for a couple of years and then go into remission.

I was doing really well for ten years and we ran some Christmas Tree Festivals and two Narnia festivals (we like anything that tells a story). There was a lot going on in the parish but then in 2016 the FM flared up again. For two years I had an incredible sense of peace and I felt I was learning so much. I came back out of it and we did another Christmas Tree Festival.

When Covid hit, like a lot of churches, we worked really hard to make the connection points with people in the parish (things like Mother’s

Day deliveries). We did so much to keep people going and tried all sorts of creative things to connect with the parish. Then in January 2021, a family member started to cough and we all got Covid. Although we had a rough couple of days, thankfully our symptoms were fairly mild. But then two weeks later the FM pains started again.

My reaction was “Oh no!” I had taken huge chunks of time off during my last flare up so I went to the doctor and he told me about “long Covid” – the symptoms are very similar. The way of dealing with FM is through pain management with daily exercises etc. but by the end of the June, it was clear that wasn’t sustainable. There are no words to describe the fatigue. I was physically

exhausted. Thankfully my parish is supportive and I was put on indefinite sick leave. It seems Covid triggered both FM and long Covid for me.

I suffer from severe brain fog. From July to about Christmas I struggled with frustration. We had done so much during the year before and now this. Unlike in 2016, this took the socks off me spiritually. For the first few months I felt like I had shut down communication with God. I wasn't living – I was existing. I had meds to help me sleep and meds to help me wake up. Long Covid attacks the central nervous system and my voice was quite badly affected. For most people, long Covid starts to plateau after a few months but my situation was complicated by the FM.

My archbishop connected me with Zest Life and I was blessed because my counsellor suggested taking little walks in nature. Gradually those nature walks became worship walks and God began to rebuild and restore me. We are talking again and I'm listening.

I don't have a theology of suffering as God's plan but I believe He does use suffering for growth, so the last few months have been much more restorative and humbling.

While what I was going through was ghastly, yet it is nothing compared with everything else that is going on out there.

I have been able to refresh myself with the knowledge that God is still in His kingdom. He has a purpose and plan.

The verse, "*His power is made perfect in weakness*" has been important. I'm quite a driven personality, someone who is idealistic and a perfectionist. But I've been learning to surrender and acknowledge that God knows what He is doing. His timing has no relation to mine. I think I'll have words with Him about that when we get to heaven.

There is so much beauty in creation. I'm a very creative person and I'm getting so much space to listen to Him. I'm not a poet at all but poems keep coming to me and they seem to bless people.

I'm learning that creativity needs space. In the stillness, we find the heart song of God. God speaking and I'm just a scribe. I have learnt that there is a story to be told that honours God.

I have this idea about an online community called a "Cracked Pot" community. So often God speaks through our brokenness. We are not defined by our failure. People are struggling but we need not focus on our weakness but rather on what God is saying. The focus becomes on simply being community.

[ED Note: fibromyalgia (FM) is a chronic medical condition. Symptoms can include widespread pain and fatigue.]



Finding Faith Tour 2022

SPIRITUAL JOURNEYS

While every stop on the Finding Faith Tour is important, two stand out visits were in Cavan and Limerick.



PRAYER JOURNEY – Adare, County Limerick

Stephen Cardy heads up www.family.ie, a charity providing support to families across Ireland through radio programmes and podcasts. In recent years, Stephen's faith has been enriched by taking a daily prayer journey.

With an underlying health condition, Stephen and his wife Margaret had to be extremely isolated during much of the pandemic, but morning prayer walks helped to sustain him. Every morning, Stephen leaves the house at around 6.45am (come rain or shine) and he usually spends an hour in prayer.

Walking slowly around the garden, Stephen stops at different trees and shrubs, each representing a different prayer focus. Walking and praying helps him to avoid distractions and ensure that his mind does not wander.

There are individual trees for each of Stephen's children (all now adults) and for his wife Margaret, but also particular trees and shrubs representing

his neighbours - he prays daily for 60 households in his immediate area.

His focus gradually moves outward to encompass friends, churches and church leaders from across Limerick and further afield. About halfway through his walk daily walk, Stephen lingers at three tall trees at the front of his property, which for him represent the Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit). Here he finds comfort and strength in God's presence, sometimes even kneeling down or resting against the tree trunks.

His prayer journey continues to encompass each of the 32 counties of Ireland as well as extended family and many others. "I was conscious I was starting to get frustrated and I didn't want to end up as a grumpy old man," Stephen shares. "The person who steps back into the house after that hour each morning, is not the same as the person who steps out."



FRUIT MAZE – Annagh Social Farm, Derrylin, County Fermanagh

A working farm on the Fermanagh / Cavan border has been in Simon Bullock's family for generations. Today it has been transformed into Annagh Social Farm – providing meaningful work and social interaction for young adults with physical and intellectual disabilities.

Jennifer and Simon Bullock have two sons (young adults) with learning disabilities. In response, they have created a social enterprise that is having a huge impact on those who attend week by week.

The impact of Covid lockdowns on those with learning disabilities was far reaching, with many suffering significant distress, anxiety and mental ill health. But in the beautiful natural surroundings of Annagh Social Farm a transformation has taken place.

From feeding the animals and

helping out with the day-to-day farm chores to creating up-cycled furniture, stunning artwork and bio-diverse experiences, those who come to Annagh Social Farm are supported to flourish physically, mentally, socially and spiritually.

The Bullocks have created a fruit maze (using fruit bushes instead of the traditional hedges) that enables visitors to slow down, breathe and meditate on the nine fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22 (love, joy peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self control). A journey to the centre of the maze and out again mirrors the profound journey Jennifer and Simon have taken to care for, support and empower the young adults who attend the centre.





Finding Faith Tour 2022

My STORY



GOD FOUND ME (Navan, County Meath)

Vlasta is originally from the Czech Republic. She came to Ireland in 2004 with her now ex-husband and her eight-month-old son. They planned to stay for one year and then go back but God had a different plan.

I do not have any faith background and I was living in a communist country. But when I was six or seven years old I found a metal cross. I remember hiding it under my pillow because it gave me a special feeling.

When I was 15 years there was a revolution and everything opened up. We went to the cinema to watch the Jesus movie. It touched me so deeply. I knew that it is true that God is real but I still didn't go anywhere.

But then God found me in Ireland in 2014. I was walking here in Navan and passing by Lighthouse Church, which did not even look like a church. My youngest son started to go to school and he had an SNA called Gaby. When she mentioned Lighthouse Church I realised I was passing by there.

At that time, I was completely alone. I had no friends or family. When Gaby mentioned the church, she did not invite me but I believe that God invited me. I asked, "Can I come to church?" She replied, "You are welcome."

I knew that it was the right place. It was a safe place. I was crying and crying every single week. It was amazing. During the worship, the words on the screen were talking directly to me. But I still did not know what faith meant. I didn't know anything.

Gaby offered to look after my boys while I did the Alpha Course but even then, it did not happen overnight. It was a journey. Eventually I was baptised and I truly felt that this is for me but six months later I suffered through a deep depression.

For the next four years, I was battling suicidal thoughts. My past is a story of heartbreak and abuse. I lost my first child. My ex-husband was very abusive. And my youngest son was born with a severe heart condition. During my depression, I felt so alone but somehow I knew I was still connected to Jesus. That is how I discovered that God is here for me and He is in control because I didn't have anybody else. I experienced such a great miracle. I was healed in Jesus name and my faith is the strongest it has ever been.

I know that without God I would not be here. He is my strength. The peace and joy I have in my heart is something that really surpasses all understanding.

COACHING FOR CHRIST (Aoghill, County Antrim)

Steve Crawford grew up with no church background but an encounter with God 24 years ago changed the whole direction of his life and work.



Growing up I lived just a couple of miles outside the village and went to a small country primary school. I did not go to Sunday School or anything but I remember a primary school teacher who gave Bible talks and those came back to me years later. I had an experience with God when I was 30 and my wife Allison became a Christian at the same time. We started going to church but I knew nothing. I believed in God and I knew Jesus came and died but the Bible was totally alien to me. I was trying to figure out who Jesus is and after a while I stopped going to church because it was too distressing trying to get my head around it all.

One morning we went to a different church. The man at the door led us up to our seats. People were smiling at us and made us feel welcome. The preacher talked about the great men in the Bible and their flaws. That struck me. I was trying to be perfect but nobody ever said I would be perfect. That is when I started to work out my faith.

We got baptised in the August and in September I was reading in Genesis 12 about the call of Abraham. That impacted me in a great way because I knew God had something for me to do. What struck me particularly was the phrase, "Leave and go to the land I will show you..."

I was a painter and decorator by trade. I had always played football and I

was coaching football. Suddenly, I got a phone call asking me to go into schools and get paid to coach the kids. But I prayed “God that is still not for you.” Then He said quite simply, “Do it for me then. Coach for Christ.”

That was a lightbulb moment. Even though, I was insecure and pessimistic, I knew it was from God. I looked for in my Bible and read Isaiah 60, “*Arise shine your light has come.*” A friend who was working in the youth centre told me, “Go for it!”

From there the journey started. I had been playing football with friends who had become Christians and we were having a Bible study together. They bought into the vision - Coaching for Christ. We began to do things at youth clubs and barbecues - coaching football and sharing the Gospel. People just wanted to be part of it.

At the moment we go into 16 schools and we have a Youth Academy, coaching 300 children every week. Each of the coaches are role models for the young people and we do a Bible talk at every session.

It has been a great roller coaster over the last 18 years but we are seeing God doing amazing things. There are nine full time coaches and all of them are sold out for God. We share the same heart purpose to see people using the gifts God has given them to serve Him.

I was praying this morning and thinking how we are still just ordinary people. I don't know much but I know a God who does. I keep saying, “God you are amazing because I can't do any of this.” The whole team is so humble minded. We know it is God because we haven't a clue!



Finding Faith Tour 2022

LIVINGSTONES

Over recent years, congregations around Ireland have moved into new church buildings or found new ways to use their existing building for the benefit of their community. From a dazzling purpose-built sanctuary in Blanchardstown to a tiny shop front in Sligo and from an old army barracks in Cork to an imposing Victorian church in Belfast, VOX editor Ruth Garvey-Williams visited many of these churches to see for herself what God is doing through the body of Christ on this island.



WE BUILD BY FAITH Betania Church, Blanchardstown, Dublin

Started with a small prayer meeting in 2010, Betania is a Romanian Pentecostal Church that has grown to be one of the largest churches in Ireland with 600 adults and 600 children regularly attending Sunday services. This year, they opened their purposed-built sanctuary.

Having outgrown their first church building, the congregation at Betania church began to pray for the land to build a “house of prayer for all nations.” They were inspired by a visitor to one carol service in their church who told them, “I remember when we were packing Bibles to be sent packed to be sent to Romania and now those Bibles are coming back to us in Ireland with arms and legs.”

In 2015, Fingal County Council was allocating land for different purposes in the community, and the church was delighted to be able to purchase land and receive planning permission for a new church.

Pastor Avram Hadarau remembers a meeting with their architect who asked about their budget for the building. “We looked at each other. We don’t have a budget because we build by faith,” they told him. “You are crazy!” was the response!

And yet despite all the challenges of a pandemic, banks unwilling to loan money to a faith group and the rising cost of building materials, the congregation is now celebrating the completion of their stunning new building. Church members, many of whom are tradesmen and women, donated hours of their time often completing a full day at work and then



spending their evenings and weekends working at the church.

It was a labour of love as people poured heart and soul into creating excellence. One beautiful feature is the growing olive tree that has been planted in the centre of a foyer!

Pastor Avram recalls another meeting with the county council when some people were complaining about their project. A council employee spoke up in their defence, “At the end of the day, your gods are not as strong as Betania’s God.” “What a testimony that people can see God is behind what we are doing. That encouraged me a lot,” Pastor Avram said.

Another confirmation came this summer during a Christian conference that was hosted at Betania. A visitor told them, “My children go to school near your church. Six years ago, my daughter had a dream of a cross in the empty field where your church has been built.” Today, the large cross on the outside of Betania church is clearly visible to all the neighbouring areas!

“These last years have been very hard,” Pastor Avram added. “There has been a wave of depression and desperation across Ireland. But we have a big hope [as God’s people] and we have to share it.”

“OUR BUILDING BELONGS TO THE COMMUNITY” Ballynafeigh Methodist Church, Belfast

The first Methodist church building in Ballynafeigh (on the Ormeau Road in Belfast) was a simple chapel opened in 1838. By the end of the 19th century, the congregation had grown so rapidly that it was replaced by a corrugated iron hall and eventually by the impressive Victorian building that still stands today. At its opening the church was described as a “centre of light and blessing in the neighbourhood.”

Yet over the years, the congregation began to shrink. More recently, Minister Rev John Alderdice, along with pioneer mission workers Jill and David Hines have a vision to revitalise the mission of the church by opening the building as a

resource for the local community every day of the week.

Prayer, hospitality and generosity are the foundation stones of this work that has led to a weekly Community Meal, the development of a Community Choir, a community garden and use of the facilities by wide range of local groups including a Cinema Club and a women’s crafting group that welcomes and includes refugees.

“There is a John Wesley principal of giving it all away. What do we have in our hands? We have a building. If the building is closed and empty throughout the week, then the space is wasted. If you are happy to give it away and not get



hung up on ownership [there is so much potential]. Are we willing to open up 'our' building and serve our community?" David said.

"How can we use this building so it becomes everybody's space [not just ours], where people feel comfortable and safe?" Jill asked.

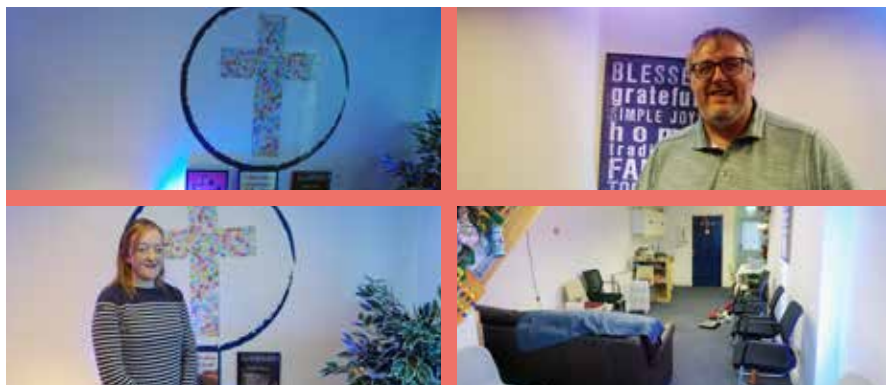
Starting a community meal, they encouraged guests to feel a sense of ownership. Many people join to help clear up afterwards. The meal is free but people donate what they can afford. This has created a wonderful sense of belonging. "One man comes regularly to our community meal. He helps set the tables and he feels he can invite people here as well," Jill said.

And the various projects are already making a huge difference. Connecting

people with a sense of community and belonging and engaging with a very different way of "being" church. There are many challenges as this congregation wrestles with the old and the new but there is a sense of hope and energy. "It is about situating the church back in the community, a worshipping congregation that is a light and blessing in the neighbourhood," John explained.

"We are creating a community where kindness of heart and simplicity is at the centre of everything," David added. "It is this idea of the Emmaus Road... travelling with people on the journey of faith. Questions start being asked. It is not rushed or pressured. Jesus said, '*Abide in me and you will bear much fruit.*' Can we calm down a bit in order to be more fruitful?"





COMING HOME – ReCentre Community Church, Sligo

One of Ireland's newest churches is ReCentre Community Church in Sligo. Supported by the Church of Ireland and Church Army, this vibrant and creative expression of church focuses on relationships and community.

While meeting online during lockdown provided mutual care and support, there was a strong desire to find a permanent 'home' for the church to meet, explained Alan Williamson. Discovering a shop front sandwiched between a chip shop and Chinese takeaway in the centre of the city, everyone joined in to paint the walls and create a welcoming space.

"We moved in at the start of October 2021 with just ten people and now meet with about 20 each Sunday although there are more children than adults," Alan said. It is a "messy" church family – people of all ages – coming together to worship Jesus.

When anti-social behaviour was directed at the new church in its early days, Alan developed a "ministry of crisps." Groups of young lads would knock

on the door and Alan offered each of them a bag of crisps - a simple gesture of kindness and care that helped to develop relationship and trust. At Eastertime, the church handed out crème eggs.

Hospitality and inclusion are important values at ReCentre and the leaders have a special concern for those society often ignores or excludes, "This is a safe space where a lot of different people have come from all different situations and found refuge."

Founding member Sally Siggins, is an archaeologist with a value and appreciation for architecture and antiquity but she ponders the challenge of ensuring that churches focus on the people who come along and not merely on beautiful buildings and artefacts.

And while it has been so important to nurture and care for those who have joined the ReCentre community, their heart is also outward looking – with a desire to bring the hope of the gospel into the neighbourhood; inviting others to "come home" to the Father.



TRANSFORMED - The Carraig Centre, Ballincollig, Cork

Exploring a building on a Zoom screen and seeing it in person are so different! While it was a joy to share about The Carraig Centre in VOX magazine in 2021, there was something special about stepping through the doors of the old army barracks in Ballincollig during this year's Finding Faith Tour.

The local Church of Ireland parish has transformed the old stable blocks into a thriving community centre and modern church sanctuary.

Church members, Bill and Janet Lane showed the size and scope of the project (large parts of the building have yet to be developed). Even on a Saturday afternoon, there was plenty happening. A Lego club was taking place in one of the rooms and the art teacher was packing up after an art class. More and more community groups are making use of the space (there is a big shortage of community facilities in Ballincollig) and the church congregation is growing as well.

Church members created a beautiful garden at the rear of the property; a

tranquil space filled with flowers and shrubs that has become a popular spot for fellowship and connection, as well as benefitting the local environment [Ed note: *it is filled with pollinator plants*].

Through a recent project the church helped to support Ukrainian refugees arriving in the area. Parishioners, members of the local community and the Mothers' Union donated 90 welcome bags (most of which were in handmade cloth bags) for the Red Cross to give to Ukrainian children when they arrive. The bags contained a cuddly toy, colouring book and pencils and some bubbles.

Another 60 bags of toiletries and essentials were prepared and given to a local Polish organisation supporting the refugees.

While it is a such a tremendous resource to the community, The Carraig Centre is clearly a place of worship. The prayer room gives testimony to the commitment local Christians have to seeking God on behalf of their community.

MIRACLES

A recurring theme from this year's Finding Faith Tour was the experience of God's miraculous intervention in people's lives. Here are a few of those stories.

NAVAN, County Meath

Vlasta is a single mum with two children and her youngest son has a serious heart condition. Here she shares two stories of God's miraculous intervention over the last year.

In April my youngest son nearly died. It is tough when your child is sick. I was helpless. It was a Saturday night and he had a clot that was blocking his aorta. The doctors could not even operate. We all prayed so hard and God told me, "the clot is gone." I stopped crying and I experienced such peace in my heart. I know it was from God. He did a miracle. I got the report that the clot had disappeared. Now I'm prepared for

anything. We still do not know if he will survive but God knows the day and the hour of our death.

Because of my son's heart condition, I need a car that is reliable and last year I experienced God's provision. I had saved money but the person who was going to sell me a car, sold it to someone else. God told me, "Go to the garage and I will provide a new car for you." But I was laughing, "That is not possible." But I went to the garage and within a few hours I had a brand new car at home! It was another miracle!



NEWCASTLE WEST, County Limerick

Princy and her husband Jino moved to Ireland just before lockdown. As a qualified nurse and nursing instructor, Princy was working as a staff nurse throughout the pandemic. Here she shares a story from earlier in 2022.

On 5 April, I felt a burning sensation on my tongue while I was having my breakfast and when I looked in the mirror I could not smile. It wasn't a stroke but something called Bell's Palsy, a weakness in the facial muscles on my left side. It was really hard. I couldn't drink properly. I couldn't hold a cup. At first I was depressed and then

I prayed, "Lord, by your stripes I am healed. You made me in my mother's womb." As I prayed, God was reminding me of so many Bible verses. I said, "Jesus you gave me this smile and I'm not going to let the devil snatch it from me." I was so hesitant to go in front of others but I did not want to take a single day of leave. I was thankful for the masks at that time because no one could see what had happened to my face. And after two weeks I was fully recovered. By God's grace it was a mild version of Bell's Palsy and now I have this testimony to share!





ATHENRY, County Galway

Twenty years ago, Sean and Julia remember a dramatic accident that could so easily have taken their lives. Today Sean often tells this story to people he meet as he prays for miracles in their lives too:

We were travelling on M1 motorway going to see my mum with our four children in the car. I hit black ice and the car spun around. There was a 30 foot drop at the side of the road. Julia shouted out, "Jesus save us." We were spinning out of the control. The kids were screaming and then just at the last minute, the side of the car hit the crash barrier and we came to a stop. When the emergency services arrived they told us, "You are lucky! The last two drivers we picked up today were dead."

In the last three or four years, I lost my fear of sharing the Lord with people.

I'm retired now so my full time work is for the Lord. I've come to the town today to share the Lord and while I'm here, I have a cup of coffee. I go to the petrol station to share the Lord and while I'm there I'll get my petrol. I offer to pray for people a "miracle prayer."

I ask them, "If you could ask God for a miracle today, what would you ask for?" I step out for God and I expect God to step out for me. If I pray for healing I have nothing to lose because most people do not expect anything. People are so open to pray and I tell them, "God is amazing. He loves you so much." It is so exciting to see people healed and give their hearts to Jesus. Showing kindness opens people's hearts. I really believe God will save people and do miracles if we are bold enough to step out in faith.

THEMES

Every year during the Finding Faith Tour, we are on the lookout for significant themes – recurring or “stand out” words, ideas, concepts and Bible verses that are expressed by different people, in different parts of the country and from different church backgrounds. One question we often ask is, “What do you think God is saying to His church?” But more often than not, the common themes emerge without any prompting. Time to take note, perhaps?

SOWING SEEDS



MAGHERAFELT, COUNTY LONDONDERRY

Some days I wonder, “Lord am I making any difference?” We believe that what we do is helping people take steps along that journey. For some, there can be a lot of steps and sometimes we don’t know the end of the story. I remember the Ray Boltz’ song, “Thank you for giving to the Lord.” We will never know until eternity what has been the results of seeds sown. I do love the heartbeat of what this charity does.
– Ruth

NEWCASTLEWEST, COUNTY LIMERICK

When I was teaching in India, I used to start my class with a prayer and I shared

the gospel with all my students. I do not know what they will be doing now but I think we have sowed the seed. There will be a reaping - the fruit will come one day. Now I have a found a little way of reaching some of them through my WhatsApp status. I share scripture and thoughts from the Bible each day and I have around 70 people (mostly my former students) following me. - Princy

AOGHILL, COUNTY ANTRIM

As leaders we need to realise, the impact that we are having. We are beginning to understand the importance of sowing seed; we don't have to see the fruit. There are times that we will walk the journey with people. But other times, when we will not get to see it. I had an experience with God when I was 30 and I wondered where that came from. Only recently, I realised that the seeds were sown by a primary school teacher. That lady would not have known that the Bible talks she did spoke to me all those years later.

- Steve



NAVAN, COUNTY MEATH

My boys are far away from God. I would love to see them follow Jesus but all I can do is to be the right example. I never give up . I know that seed is in them. They will see why my faith was so strong.
- Vlasta

LONGFORD

I have a horticultural background. The seed work has been done. The first shoots are beginning to grow. We are just at that stage; it is not yet time for the harvest.- Simon



PERSEVERANCE AND GOD'S TIMING

CAVAN

I still feel Covid has been a sifting time for some. Some people haven't come back but there have also been new people coming in. I'm preaching through Revelation right now and we're seeing the Lord on His throne but His people are suffering. They overcome by the word of their testimony and the blood of the lamb. There is a need to persevere but the overarching assurance is that Jesus is building His church. This is our hope.
- Ivan



LONGFORD

Yesterday, we were 10 years in Ireland. I thought that in 10 year things would move on. Are people listening to the gospel? Are people getting it? Or are they filtering it through a nominal lens? I'm wondering how long does it take to get through to people? I'll be speaking on Colossians 2:6-7 for the next few weeks: *"So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness."* We need to continue as we started. We need to keep going! - Christiaan



NAVAN

What one word do I have for the church in Ireland right now? Perseverance! - Luci

"The Lord's time is like the time of the tide, which no human power can either accelerate or retard. Though it tarry, wait for it." - John Newton



LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

ATHENRY, COUNTY GALWAY

Wherever we go we bring the light of Christ. For me Ireland is not dark, it is full light because Jesus shines through us. - Sean

PARISH OF THE TRAVELLING PEOPLE, DUBLIN

There is phrase in my mind. "The brighter the light the darker the shadow." Ireland of 2022 is a very young country and there is youth and energy and huge potential but there is also seemingly a rush to throw out our heritage. We noticed that with the controversy over the new maternity hospital. The idea that there might be a faith element is unwelcome. That presents a good example of the shadow. I think I'm more aware of human vulnerability working in this parish. The brighter side is that when people live their vulnerability, their faith seems to be stronger. I've seen evidence of that among the Traveller people. The welcome that I receive when I am visiting families is so warm. - Paul

"Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. Lift up your eyes and look about you..."
Isaiah 60: 1- 4a



NORTH INNER CITY DUBLIN

To the wider church, I feel God is saying we need to become more relevant. There are people who confess to be Christians in every sphere of life. Can we be in that place where we are [where God has placed us] and shine for Christ? The last two years has been so confusing. Can we open our hearts to be the Jesus that people see? Can we ask, "How would Jesus do this?" - Gerard

BACK TO NORMAL?

BALLYNAFEIGH, SOUTH BELFAST, COUNTY ANTRIM

It would be easy to default back into an attractional model of church. There are perceptions of what it means to be a church leader. We benefit from having pioneer mission workers. For as long as we need it there will be the traditional Sunday morning service, but we need to situate the church back into the community. - John



PARISH OF THE TRAVELLING PEOPLE, DUBLIN

I think this is a beautiful world we have been given but I'm concerned that humanity seems to be rushing back to the old ways after the pandemic, making a mess of the beautiful world we've been given. - Paul



WE NEED EACH OTHER

NORTH INNER CITY DUBLIN

We need each other. Ministry is very lonely - some people will not appreciate what you are trying to do. Ministers need each other. We need to form that circle of trust and encouragement. What kind of people are we going to be? God is calling us to come together and embrace one another. if we lock ourselves away and do our own thing, we can never reach Ireland. We have got to break down barriers. We need to concentrate on the things that unite us. There is strength in unity - Gerard

ARKLOW, COUNTY WICKLOW

I was preaching on teamwork this morning. *"How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!" Psalm 133:1.* We need each other. - Michael



I'd like to eliminate the word 'denomination'. - Rob

FAITH AND JUSTICE

JESUIT CENTRE FOR FAITH AND JUSTICE - DUBLIN

Our overarching aim is to work towards creating a fair and equitable society for everyone. Faith works itself out through justice. I think that a faith that doesn't do justice is very malnourished. You can talk about human dignity but unless you consider how you see and champion human dignity in those society reject, it is just theoretical. As we struggle to see human dignity in every person we encounter our sin and our instinct to exclude and marginalise others. Where does the idea of mercy fit in collectively? How do we become a society that is merciful and fair? When you bring social justice issues into contact with someone's faith, things start to happen. That is not to say that everyone will be involved in prisons or provide homeless services but it is about awareness and understanding. For some it may be prayer, for others it will be walking alongside those who are excluded. - Keith



PARISH OF THE TRAVELLING PEOPLE, DUBLIN

Racism and discrimination are alive and well in Ireland in 2022. Life is a terrible mess and you wonder sometimes where everything is moving. Accommodation, education and employment are three key elements for Travellers. On average the life expectancy for a Traveller man is 15 years shorter and 11 years shorter for a Traveller woman. There are small steps in the right direction but social systems do not always help. There is a lack of understanding of Traveller culture and people will still call Travellers names or simply assume they are all the same. Some families are welcome and integrated into local parish churches but for others that that is not the case.

SAFE SPACES

THE SEXTON'S HOUSE - MANORHAMILTON, COUNTY LEITRIM

The Church of Ireland's Manorhamilton group of parishes recently took the generous and courageous step of transforming the Sexton's House next to the church into a shared space for the whole of the local community. With support from Peace IV and the Church of Ireland Priorities Fund, this light and airy building is now available for use by community groups in Manorhamilton.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This idea of shared spaces and safe spaces was a recurring question throughout the Finding Faith Tour. Many asked, "How can Christians in Ireland talk through the difficult questions of faith, life and reality lives without fear of judgement or condemnation? How can we create dialogue even in the face of disagreement and difference?" Across the island, leaders are wrestling with how to be faithful to God's word and the leading of the Holy Spirit, while engaging with the reality of ministry in a broken and hurting world. Many expressed concern that they are having to struggle with these questions in isolation because of taboos and "no go" areas. Can we learn to engage the tough questions in grace-filled conversation and even loving disagreement? Or will we draw lines to judge, condemn and cancel one another?





RESTORATION

They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations. Isaiah 61:4

ARKLOW CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY CHURCH, COUNTY WICKLOW

St Mary's Chapel was a place of worship in the centre of Arklow for hundreds of years but for the last 35 years it has been boarded up and abandoned. After buying the derelict convent chapel in 2020, Arklow Christian Community Church set out to renovate and restore it, taking great care to keep the original architectural features. This has been a story of faith and the remarkable provision and faithfulness of God.

There was a sense of bringing the building back to life and so it was fitting for the congregation to move into the building on Easter Sunday this year (resurrection day) but the building is just a small part of a much larger vision of renewal and restoration.

Pastor Solomon and his wife Tricia overflow with joy as they speak of their church members and their continued commitment to serving their community. Once a month, this church chooses a different local project or community group as a focus for prayer and giving.

At the start of June, people from across the community gathered to celebrate the official opening of the church – celebrating together everything that God has done.

“Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.” Isaiah 58:12

OUR STORY

Originally from Canada, Bill and Janet Lane found a home in Ireland when they arrived over 40 years ago. Their journey across the Atlantic Ocean was also the start of a spiritual journey as God began to work in their church in Ballincollig, County Cork.

GOD'S OVERWHELMING LOVE - Bill Lane

I grew up in a church-going family in Canada without a sense of what faith was. Janet and I met as teenagers in the church choir. We came to Ireland in 1980 and Janet looked around for a church to join and we found a home at St. Peter's, a welcoming church. When we moved to Limerick in 1987, we missed that church community and we never really settled. But while we were away we heard that strange things were happening in the church. Eventually we moved back and we found that people had changed. [I thought] they were taking their faith much too seriously!

Harold Miller was the Rector and he arranged for a group to come down during Holy Week. I had been away but I arrived back in time for the Good Friday service and God just touched me. It was one of those transformational

experiences of God's overwhelming love.

We started the Alpha course which really helped me to make sense of my heart experience. I realised that I knew about Jesus but I hadn't really acknowledge Him as Lord. In 1994, Harold and I went over to Toronto and had a powerful experience of the Holy Spirit. That gave me such a hunger for the word of God. I could not read anything except the Bible for about ten years.

Alpha has been formative and a significant part of our church community but one heartache for me was seeing people's faith come alive on Alpha and then see them drift away again. We developed Growth Groups to help people go deeper. We've always said our mission is to make disciples for Christ. We want to see God's kingdom come.



CHOCOLATE CAKE AND BUTTERSCOTCH SAUCE - Janet Lane

I grew up in Toronto in a loving but dysfunctional family. I was taught about God but then my dad became an atheist. Christianity became a “no go” topic in our family.

When Bill and I came to Ireland we started looking for a church. We wanted to bring our child up in a Christian home. We got a great warm welcome in St Peter’s but I was questioning things. In 1990s, I went to a Christian worship conference. At that time, I was going to church and I believed in God but I didn’t have a really deep faith.

I remember hearing a talk and a man said, “I know I need God...” I remember thinking, “I could do without God. I don’t really need Him.” But during the worship time, we were singing a new song and the words said, “I need you.” Suddenly God touched me and I thought, “Actually I do need Him.” I began to remember times in my life when I needed Jesus, both through good times and bad. At that moment, I felt as if the bells should be ringing.

But then Bill went to Toronto and I was so frightened. I thought something was wrong with him and I was worried it would separate our marriage. Bill said, “God loves our marriage and I believe that this is of Him and it will only help to strengthen our marriage.”

I had loads of questions. Then

eventually Bill said, “If this is of God, you should see that I show more of the fruit of the spirit in my life.”

Over the next few years, I could see those things growing in Bill’s life. I was still searching so I went to a quiet day in Blarney. A nun was leading a reflection on the 23rd psalm. I felt really out of my comfort zone but I went anyway. At one point they said, go to any corner of the room, just be quiet and pray. I thought, how do you pray for 20 minutes?

I had a Bible and as I started reading the second verse all I could think about was food. I was so hungry and I wondered, “When are we getting a snack?” Then I thought, “I’m so unspiritual.” But suddenly I read the verse, “*I will prepare a banquet for you...*”

Into my head came a picture of chocolate cake and butterscotch sauce (my two favourite things). Then I felt God was saying to me, “If you were the only person at that banquet table I would prepare your favourite dessert for you.” My heart just melted.

Over the next 10 years, God used that same image in powerful ways. At one time, my mum had tried to commit suicide. Somehow I was bumped up to first class on the flight over. I was distraught but the dessert was chocolate cake and butterscotch sauce. God was letting me know He is real and He cares.





Just

Connecting with Creation in Carnagarve Forest



Thirty years ago Liam and Joyce Burns planted a forest on a ten-acre plot of land belonging to Liam's family. Today Carnagarve Forest between Moville and Greencastle in County Donegal has reached maturity and Liam and Joyce welcome visitors to the forest "to connect with creation, with yourself, with your friends and with God."

Cutting paths through the trees, they have created a beautiful and tranquil space that they are keen to share. This is a place to breathe. A place where God's beauty is displayed in the filigree lace of the canopy overhead, the symphony of birdsong and splashes of colour revealed in the undergrowth.

Breathe

“Be still and know that I am God.” Psalm 46:10

A network of paths and clearings invite visitors to wander through the emerald twilight, pausing to reflect at benches or log stools or to take advantage of a range of activities. At the edge of the trees, it is possible to catch glimpses of Lough Foyle in the distance.

“We were intended by our creator God to relate to the fullness of His creation,” Liam explains.

Scout groups, couch surfers, a local “wellness café”, environmental groups and church groups are among those who have accepted the invitation. Find out more or book your visit at Carnagarve Forest Friends Facebook page.





Bringing help and hope to the inner-city

East Belfast Mission embraces the messy ministry of transformation

East Belfast Mission (EMB) has been supporting vulnerable people from communities across East Belfast for over 200 years, bringing help and hope to people who are homeless, unemployed or struggling with their mental health. There has been a Methodist witness on the Newtownards Road since 1826. From the earliest days the desire to be involved in outreach goes back to the soup kitchens of the early 1900's which have developed into the current EBM projects.

In 2012, EBM moved into a £23m state-of-the-art building known as "Skainos" – from the Greek work for "tabernacle" or "tent". VOX editor, Ruth Garvey-Williams visited the Skainos Centre during this year's Finding Faith Tour and was astonished at the sheer size and scope of the ministry.

A small church congregation meets for worship here each week and Skainos also houses a 26-room homeless hostel, the Refresh café (a social enterprise that also delivers 250 meals-on-wheels every weekday), a community garden and a

whole range of supports and services to address poverty, unemployment and disadvantage.

Turas - the Irish language centre in East Belfast led by the courageous and inspirational Linda Ervine (MBE) is also based in the Skainos Centre. "Turas" meaning journey or pilgrimage in both Irish and Scots Gàidhlig aims to connect people from Protestant communities to their own history with the Irish language. It is based on the belief that the language belongs to everyone and that it can be a means of reconciliation.

Rev Brian Anderson is the Mission Superintendent. He shares how EBM is seeking to bring "renewal and transformation" in one of the most deprived and disadvantaged inner-city areas of Belfast. A prayer room overlooking the community speaks volumes – it is the engine room of the work here.

Brian admits ministry at the margins of society can be "messy" but it is also immensely rewarding as the team at EBM sees the kingdom of God made visible in the lives of the people they serve.





WHAT'S THE STORY?

Launched in September with a nationwide advertising campaign, “What’s the Story?” helps participating churches to reach out with the good news of Jesus using high quality video resources.

John McCarthy, one of the organisers, told VOX, “This is an exciting day for the church in Ireland. These are state-of-the-art Irish resources for the church to reach out and do what Christ wants us to do.”

The team carried out research to find out what questions Irish people are asking about faith. Narrowing down the findings to six key questions, “What’s the story?” then created high quality videos of people sharing their stories on the topics of guilt, atheism, suffering, death and our purpose in life.

Additional resources tackle more detailed answers to tough questions with a range of apologetic videos and

there is also a special edition of John’s Gospel that churches can distribute.

Throughout September and October, an advertising campaign on billboards and in national newspapers will point people to the website www.whatsthestory22.ie where people can find participating churches in their area.

“The joy of ‘What’s the Story?’ is that it is up to the local church how they want to use the resources,” John explained. “CEF is also providing high quality resources for children to be used in Sunday Schools or children’s clubs.

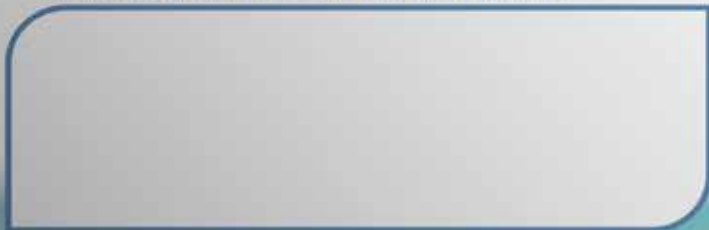
You can support the initiative by subscribing to the YouTube Channel: www.youtube.com/WhatsTheStory22 and by passing on the website address to others: www.whatsthestory22.ie. If you are interesting in participating in the initiative please email: whatsthestoryireland@gmail.com for details.



WHAT'S THE STORY?

FIND ANSWERS TO THE BIG QUESTIONS OF LIFE

1. **GOD:** Is there anybody there?
2. **Guilt & Shame:** Will I ever be good enough?
3. **IDENTITY:** Does my LIFE really have PURPOSE?
4. Is there HOPE in the face of DEATH?
5. **CHRISTIANITY:** Part of the problem or the solution?
6. Can we make SENSE of our SUFFERING?



whatsthestory22.ie

Finding Answers | Connecting People



REALITY

YOU'RE NOT LOST
YOU'RE HERE

Church:
**LET'S TALK
ABOUT PORN**

Pornography use is widespread in our communities, and we need to talk about it.

A recent study conducted by NUI Galway shows that almost 60% of teenage boys in Ireland see porn before the age of 13. By the time they reach the age of 18, that percentage has risen to 99%. This isn't just a young person's issue though. In a report by the Men's Development Network, more than 70% of under 45-year-olds surveyed use porn at least once a week.

Decades of research illustrates the physiological and neurological harms pornography use can have. In adolescents, porn hinders the development of healthy sexuality and increases the risk of depression. In adults, it distorts sexual attitudes and social realities. In families, pornography use can lead to marital dissatisfaction, infidelity and divorce.

But before we embark on a mission to change culture outside of the church, it's worth asking ourselves if it is an issue inside the church. Research suggests that 64% of Christian men and 15% of Christian women watch pornography at least once a month (Proven Men Porn Survey, a survey conducted in 2014 by Barna Group for Proven Men Ministries).

Ian Henderson, CEO of Naked Truth Project, a charity seeking to open eyes and free lives from the damaging impact of porn observes that, "Wider society is beginning to acknowledge the harms of porn, with mainstream campaigns highlighting exploitation, age verification laws being debated and medical research building a case for it to be seen as a public health issue. Within the Church though, we're still struggling to talk about it. Is it partly because leaders don't feel equipped to help people?"

This is why Naked Truth Project has launched a Church Membership Programme to help churches tackle the issue of pornography. Tim Parks, Naked Truth's Church Engagement and Ireland Lead says, "We live in a pornography saturated culture that is shaping our understanding of sex and preventing many church members from living in the freedom to which Jesus calls them. Many are wearing masks but under the surface are filled with hurt, shame and doubt. At Naked Truth, we believe that churches can not only rewrite the stories of their local communities but can help to transform an increasingly pornographic culture.

"We know it can be difficult, and messy, to talk about porn. But what if we don't? Our hope is that Church Membership will give church leaders and pastoral teams from all denominations the understanding and confidence to bring both a pastoral and missional response to all those struggling with porn use."

Naked Truth member churches will be equipped to tackle the issue of porn in an informed and responsible way, through training for youth teams, expert advice during parent workshops, online training for pastoral teams, access to consultation with Naked Truth recovery experts, exclusive resources to facilitate in-person support groups, and sermon and small group materials to break the stigma.

Contact Tim at tim.parks@ntproject.co.uk, or learn more and sign up by visiting: www.nakedtruth.training/church-membership



Amazing Grace 250

On 1 January 1773, in a small church in Olney, England the congregation sang a new hymn written by their minister to illustrate his New Year's Day sermon. The sermon entitled "Faith's Review and Expectation" looked at the past, the present and the future for a believer in Jesus Christ.

Two hundred and fifty years later, *Amazing Grace* is the world's best loved hymn and one of the most recorded songs of all time but it also has a strong connection with Ireland. At its heart, *Amazing Grace* tells John Newton's dramatic testimony. It recalls his

encounter with Jesus during a storm in the Atlantic Ocean and his arrival in Lough Swilly, Co Donegal in April 1748 "*the hour I first believed.*" It charts his experience of God's grace in all the changing seasons of life, "*through many dangers toils and snares,*" and looks forward in confident hope that "*God who called me here below will be forever mine.*"

As 1 January 2023 falls on a Sunday, why not consider including the hymn *Amazing Grace* in your Sunday service on that day?

COMING SOON: "FOREVER MINE" THEATRE TOUR

In this anniversary year, there will be an opportunity for audiences in Ireland and Northern Ireland to discover more of this remarkable story. *Forever Mine* is an original stage play and costume drama exploring the two great loves of John Newton's life - his love for God and his love for "Polly" (his nickname for his wife Mary). Based on their love letters and on letters, diaries and historical writings, *Forever Mine* is a true story of separation and reunion, death and new

Amazing
Grace
1773-2023
250



life, loss and redemption. Although set in the 18th century, this moving narrative will resonate with modern audiences.

While focusing on Polly and Newton's love story, *Forever Mine* acknowledges John Newton's continued role in the slave trade for six years following his conversion. It traces his slow journey to repentance and his later work supporting the campaign for abolition as mentor to William Wilberforce. In the process, *Forever Mine* elevates the lesser known voices of the abolition movement such as black writer Olaudah Equiano and the poet William Cowper.

Featuring a cast of professional actors with experience in both secular

and Christian theatre productions, *Forever Mine* will tour church and theatre venues in March and April 2023. The tour is being organised by Living Breath Productions (livingbreath.co.uk) a video and theatre production company. If your church or local theatre would be interested in hosting a production of the play, please contact forevermineproduction@gmail.com for more details, follow us on Facebook (Forever Mine) or visit www.amazinggrace.ie/forever-mine.

If you are unable to host a show, why not consider taking a group from your church to see "*Forever Mine*" at a venue near to you? The itinerary will be published on the website as it becomes available.



It's so good to have the opportunity to recommend some good listening once again. With the lifting of the pandemic restrictions there has been a rush back to studios by groups and individual performers, and a deluge of new music releases. I have been sifting through albums, separating the chaff from the wheat, to select the very best of music.

I Heard A Song I Can't Ignore

MISSION HOUSE

The song writing partnership of Jess Ray and Taylor Leonhardt was born out of a community of friends who gathered each week to share a meal and worship together. They wrote songs for the community to sing and take with them for the week ahead. In the few short years they have been working together they have written and recorded some of the most authentic and heartfelt worship music I have ever heard.

Their new album is an absolute delight. It is the follow-up to their self-titled EP released last winter and contains eight songs of sheer beauty. The album opens with *Your Eyes See Me* and the lyrics, "Your eyes see me when I'm hidden, Your eyes see me when I'm broken hearted. Your eyes see me when I'm hidden Your eyes, Your eyes see me" and is followed by seven songs that flow seamlessly, bringing comfort and assurance that even in the toughest of

times we can rely on God's protection and love.

Jess and Taylor explain, "Now more than ever, we feel the truth of Jesus' words, 'In this world, you will have

trouble.' There's no denying the struggle of being human. Yet it's precisely in the middle of that trouble that we hear His promise, 'Take heart, I have overcome the world.' There are these surprising gifts we find on our hardest days: comfort, peace, and hope that come

from the presence of a God who walks with us through sorrow into joy."

It is hard to pick any one track as

a standout track but *Behold* raises my goosebumps a little higher than the others. It is a song of breathtaking simplicity and a melody that will stick in your head.

It assures us that despite the decay and destruction all around us at present, God is making all things new. This is a must-listen to album.



Friend in the fire

EMMA GRANT

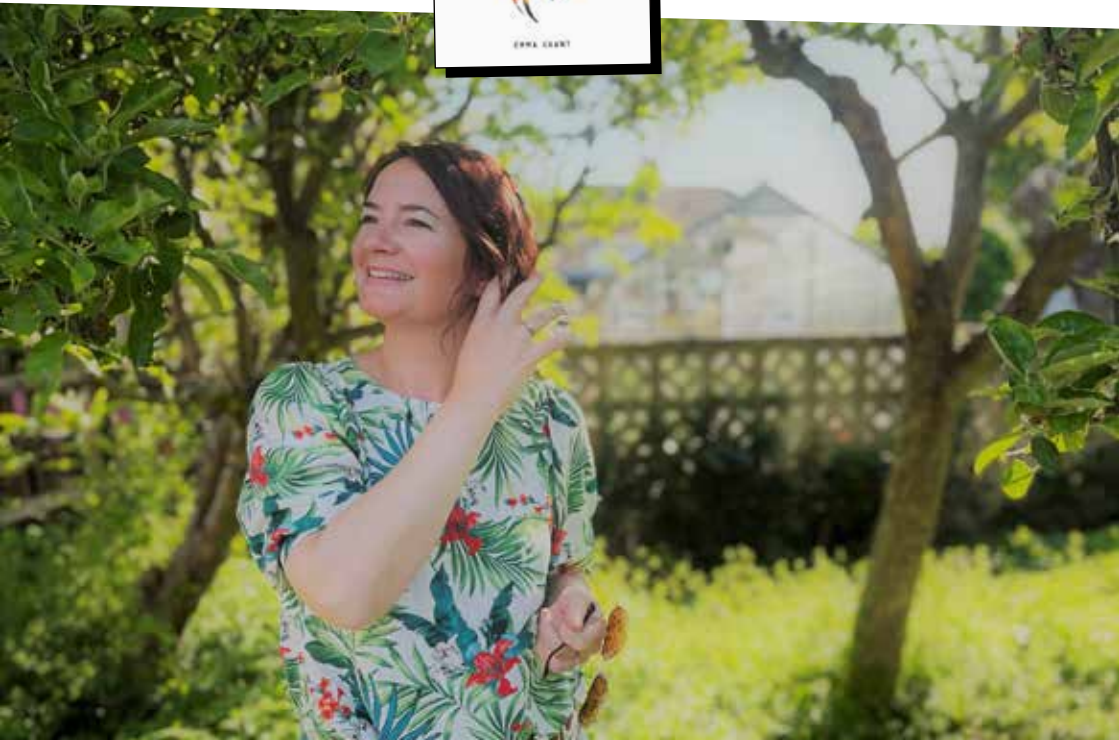
Back in 2020 I had the pleasure of interviewing and reviewing a Liverpool-based Christian singer/songwriter Emma Grant about her album *Influencer*. This album contained a track called *Staying for Love* which received widespread acclaim for dealing with the topic of domestic abuse. I absolutely loved the album, and as I subsequently got to know Emma Grant, I realised what an important songwriter she is. Unfortunately, I have had to wait almost three years for some new music from this artist but I am glad to say that she is back with a bang. The new album is *Friend In The Fire*. It is all her own work, funded by

her fans through kickstart and produced independent of any record label. This is an album of the highest quality. What you can expect is an album that deals with real issues facing us as Christians today.

The album contains just five tracks. There are no fillers. I am reluctant to choose a standout track, as I absolutely love every one of these songs but her duet with fellow Liverpoolian Ian Yates called *Companion In Sorrow* is a truly beautiful song.

Friend In The Fire is an album for the times we are now living in, and I urge you to give it a listen.

www.facebook.com/emmagrantmusic





Healer

CASTING CROWNS

It is hard to believe that four years have passed since *Only Jesus* was topping the Christian music charts but the latest offering from *Casting Crowns* has been well worth the wait. Anyone who attended the Ireland Worships event at the SSE Arena in Belfast back in June would have heard them perform songs from the album, and some of the songs are now featuring prominently on the UCB Ireland playlists. It is a relatively short album but what it lacks in quantity it more than makes up for in quality. Writing songs as proclamations of faith is the cornerstone of *Casting Crowns*, and this new album is no different.

The album opens with *Desert Road* backed by a beautiful choir, offering a gospel flair to the track, Mark Hall sets the album's trajectory with a declaration

of faithfulness to Christ through the difficulties of life.

Scars In Heaven is the album's strongest and most compelling song for me personally. I had great difficulty choking back the tears as I heard the words, "*There's not a day goes by that I don't see you. You live on in all the better parts of me. Until I'm standing with you in the sun, I'll fight this fight and this race I'll run. Until I finally see what you can see.*" It is a song about grief, but it is also a song that holds out Christ-centred hope for those who are grieving. "*The only scars in Heaven are on the hands of those who hold you now*"

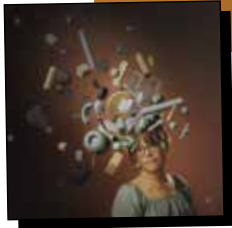
Healer is a timely and heartfelt collection that invites God to be just that in our lives.



What makes it through

SARAH GROVES

A couple of years ago, just before the world shut down, I had the pleasure of attending Hutchmoot in Nashville, USA – the annual gathering of an incredible bunch of creative people. Singers, musicians, songwriters, artists, painters, writers who come together to share their talents, learn new ones, share fellowship and good food and give thanks to God for the talents He has gifted them. It is organised by The Rabbit Room, an organisation founded by the singer/songwriter and author Andrew Peterson. The name is taken from the name of the snug in an Oxford pub where J.R Tolkien and C.S. Lewis used to hangout. While there I got to hear one of my all-time favourite Christian songwriters Sarah Groves perform.



Earlier this year she released a new album called *What Makes It Through*. It is a reflection on events of the last several years. Working on both the interpersonal and communal level, the songs of *What Makes It Through* speak to the hard work of what it means to arrive at something like truth and reconciliation. It is a truly amazing album, and if you are serious about your music and looking for something that is deeper than skin-deep then I would urge you not to miss this album.

Listen to Vincent Hughes on UCB Ireland online www.ucbireland.ie on the UCB Ireland app and on Saorview from 1 to 4 Monday to Friday email the show vincent@ucbradio.ie or call Vincent on 01 4299899 and follow him on instagram @vhughes1303





HOPE FROM THE MARGINS

Church History Informing Mission Today

By Laurence Graham

As the church loses its former position of influence is there any hope for its future? Many feel as if the church is increasingly marginalised in Ireland and across western Europe. But there is hope. During its first three centuries the Church was small, under pressure and marginalised yet it grew.

Based on extensive academic research, Laurence Graham, examines the ways in which the early church went about mission both within the Roman Empire and beyond. These lessons are then applied to mission in Ireland today through the lens of over 25 years ministry experience in local churches - big and small, old and new.

The conclusion? Yes, the Church today is increasingly marginalised. But from the margins Christians can still demonstrate and share hope. Laurence is the Superintendent Minister of *Dublin Central Mission* and General Secretary of

Irish Methodist World Mission Partnership. After college he worked in agricultural development and youth work in Haiti and Antigua before returning to Ireland and (much to his surprise) being called by God to train as a Methodist Minister. Before Dublin he and his wife Karen have served in Longford, Cork and Kerry.

Christian Leaders from across the denominational spectrum have welcome the latest book from Praxis Press.

From Evangelical Alliance Ireland, Pastor Nick Park observes that "*Laurence Graham is not just an observer of church mission, but a practitioner*"

Fr Kieran McDermott of St Mary's Pro-Cathedral in Dublin says, "There are many reasons for recommending this book – the historical narrative is lucid and accessible. The treatment of how 'mission' and 'methodology' adapted in various historical, religious, social and political contexts and its application to evangelism today, is honest and thought provoking.

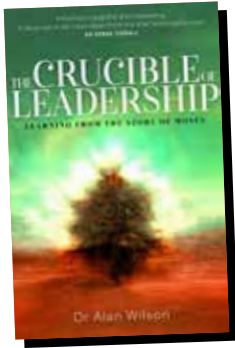


Laurence Graham recognises a shift as the churches move from a place of power and influence to a post-Christian society struggling to connect with a younger generation.”

Rev Dr Sahr Yambasu, Former President of the Methodist Church in Ireland commented, *“this is a book that inspires hope for Christian mission on this island and beyond.* Dr Graham reminds the Church of its call to live authentically. As he rightly argues, the main means by which the early church grew was ‘the attractive lifestyle that Christians demonstrated incarnationally, the quality of the Church’s common life, and their attempts to reach out to meet the social needs of others.

OUR VOX VERDICT:

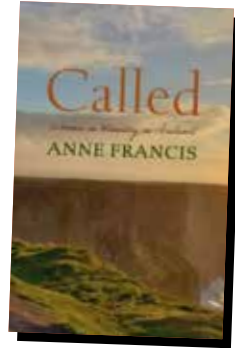
Hope from the Margins is a fascinating journey through the panorama of church history exploring how Christians have shared and demonstrated the good news of Jesus Christ down through the ages. But this is not a history textbook. By pondering how the past can inform our present and future, Laurence Graham’s timely and essential book draws from his years of experience of grassroots mission. *Hope from the Margins* is an inspiring and thought-provoking «must read» for anyone passionate about finding authentic, contextualised approaches to Gospel ministry in contemporary Ireland.



The Crucible of Leadership

By Dr Alan Wilson

In *The Crucible of Leadership - learning from the story of Moses*, Alan Wilson looks closely at the highs and lows of Moses' life and ministry to draw out important lessons for Christians in leadership. This engaging book, illuminated with biblical insights and personal illustrations, draws out vital principles for wise leaders. From foundations and formation to finishing well, *The Crucible of Leadership*, focuses on character rather than charisma, on integrity and identity rather than skills or techniques. Enriched as it is from the author's own wide and long experience of leadership, the tone is gentle and humble pointing always to the central place of a relationship with God at the heart of the leadership journey. Highly recommended!



Called: Women in Ministry in Ireland

Dr Anne Francis

Called is a "rich, informed and nuanced" narrative sharing the stories of women in Christian ministry in Ireland. Presenting the findings of her careful research into the experience of women, Anne Francis' book is by turns poignant, sensitive, humorous and challenging. Her analysis brings penetrating insight into the underlying issues facing those who seek to be faithful to their calling while navigating theology, tradition and power alongside the practical realities of relationships, family life and economics. The result is a work that is both inspiring and painful to read. It will resonate with the experiences of so many women who are seeking to love and follow Jesus and to serve in obedience to the call on their lives. This essential read will lift the veil, giving us a glimpse of what it would mean for every member of the body of Christ to be released and empowered to flourish for the benefit of all.



LEAVEN AT LARGE

BY SEÁN MULLAN



Just around the corner from the front of Trinity College lies a shop that looks like it dropped straight from the pages of a Dickens novel onto the Dublin streetscape. The building sags in the middle like the waist band on the suit trousers of a serious stout drinker. One of the windowsills is so slanted it looks like a wheelchair access ramp for disabled pigeons.

On such an unpretentious building, the words over the shopfront make a surprisingly bold declaration. The premises, the words declare, is home to “The Irish Yeast Company.” The words struck me when I first saw them. That this little place

supplied yeast to all of Ireland seemed a bit of a stretch. All the bakers? All the brewers? But unlikely though it is, once upon a time, the business name did have some basis in reality.

A couple of generations back the little shop housed a business that had seven sales reps on the road covering the country with supplies of “live” yeast. In the forties and fifties when sugar, yeast and other baking necessities were in short supply these reps were responsible for leavening the loaves of Ireland. Customers ranged from the presidential bakery in the Áras to the village bakery in Ballydehob.

But by the time the shop closed in 2016 it had

become a tiny business selling cake decorations, run as a solo effort by the owner who had worked there for sixty years. The building sold in 2018 and the plan is to absorb it into the pub that sits beside it. The sagging building is protected by a preservation order; but the business wasn’t.

The Irish Yeast Company is now dearly departed. Irish yeast, on the other hand, is still thriving. Yeast remains a much valued, much-used product at the core of many enterprises. But no-one has a monopoly on it. Yeast is widely available and even if it wasn’t, it’s not too difficult to produce. A former prisoner told me once how he produced yeast



for making alcohol in his prison cell. I won't share the recipe in case a copy of VOX ends up behind bars, but it involved white sliced pan and boiling water.

Yeast has a long history. It was around long before The Irish Yeast Company. It was one of the metaphors that Jesus of Nazareth used when He was trying to explain the mystery of God's governing activity in the everyday world of human beings. The Galilean teacher seems to have enjoyed the idea that an insignificant amount of yeast could have a significant impact on a large amount of dough. A tiny portion added to the mix would effortlessly transform the whole batch.

But enthusiastic as He was about the metaphor, He showed no interest in establishing The Galilee Yeast Company, either metaphorically or in reality. He didn't seem all that worried about hiring a salesforce and expanding the business. On one occasion, a man who wanted to join His small team, was told to go home and start his own operation.

Another encounter, this time with a woman, puzzled His team who thought they had sussed out how the business worked. In their eyes the woman was neither a suitable customer nor a potential sales team member. She was the wrong gender, the wrong ethnicity and the wrong religion. She also had a collection of questionable moral values. Yet the man from Nazareth gave her enough good stuff to set up her own franchise in her own village. Soon she was recruiting more

unsuitable people!

Like some of those early Jesus followers, church congregations, denominations and Christian organisations can make the same mistake that The Irish Yeast Company made more recently. They imagine they somehow have a monopoly on the governing activity of God. The temptation to believe that increases if their efforts seem to be effective and successful. But yeast doesn't recognise monopolies. It leavens the loaf no matter who owns it. The governing activity of God neither offers nor recognises exclusivity contracts.

Interviewed in 2016 when the shop on College Street business closed its doors for the last time the 91-year-old owner described the shop as a time capsule, like "a set from Strumpet City." Time moved on. And the yeast business moved on as well. But The Irish Yeast Company stayed where it was. It no longer trades in yeast, or anything else.

Seán Mullan has been working in church leadership for many years. He has developed a project in Dublin City Centre called "Third Space".



Need some help with your children's school fees?

The Secondary Education Committee (SEC) grant is available to help Protestant families attend Protestant Secondary schools. We can help with tuition and boarding fees.

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Join other Christian leaders and their spouses (if applicable) from across Ireland for a Refreshment Day

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2022

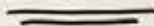


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