

GOOD NEWS STORIES



EKKLESIA 2021

Revd Andrew Pottage

It was with some anticipation that I looked forward to attending this year's Ekklesia Conference after finding last year so helpful. This year, it was branded as a roundtable discussion conference as it had moved online. The theme was 'I will build my church ...' Given that we are in a pandemic, and as lots of questions have surfaced about the future of our churches and mission etc, I thought this was a helpful theme.

There were helpful talks on being the church that Jesus is seeking to build, engaging with the media, 'being church' in the new normal, confidence in the gospel, mental and emotional wellbeing, preaching to a hybrid audience, the church on the margins and the future of youth work. After each talk there was a roundtable discussion, some were based on areas, others on denominations or church groupings and there was even one for MET members chaired by the Revd Derek Balsdon. For the two evenings, there was a talk with interviews of leaders from various kingdom-building initiatives. On the first evening, the Revd Joel Edwards gave a talk on the great liability, discussing an agenda for change and considering the challenges of combating discrimination. On the second evening of the conference, the final talk was a celebration of 20 years of Share Jesus International and Andy Frost gave a timely message on what God is saying in this moment.

Overall, the conference was engaging, uplifting, and encouraging. If you have not attended before, I wholeheartedly recommend you do so in the future, whatever role you hold in the leadership of the church. All the talks are available online under the Ekklesia tab on sharejesusinternational.com.

The Revd Andrew Pottage is a Methodist Presbyterian based in North West London.



GOOD NEWS TRAILS

Hilary Balsdon

Unable to run our normal children's ministry work for much of 2020, we decided at Wellspring Methodist Church, Congleton, to run a Nativity Trail for Primary school aged children, something we'd never done before. Our aim was for something of the Good News of the Nativity story to be shared with people who wouldn't normally hear it.

Using knitted Nativity figures, we printed large photos of the various characters of the Nativity Story. We then asked 13 different households on the estate adjacent to our church if they would 'host' one of our photos in their front window for the weekend before Christmas. Some of these were homes with whom we already had connections, others we just knocked on their door and asked if they'd help us - no one said no!

On the days we ran the trail, those participating came to the church car park, with their parents/carers, and we gave them a Trail Sheet, on which were small versions of the Nativity photos. They simply had to walk around the estate, looking for the photos, and when they found one, to write down the address at which that Nativity character was 'hiding'. It took people about an hour to complete, and everyone said how much they enjoyed it. When they returned with their completed sheets, they received their 'prizes' - A Nativity Storybook, an 'I completed the Nativity Trail' sticker, and of course sweets/chocolate.

Hilary Balsdon lives in Congleton, is a Local Preacher and Church Steward, and has been passionate about work with children and young people for most of her life. She is married to Derek Balsdon, the MET Development Worker.



THE LORD DIRECTS OUR STEPS

Ruth Meredith

The LORD directs our steps, so why try to understand everything along the way?

Proverbs 20:24

Around 2010 we were living on the border of Wales and Cheshire and looking for a local church. We ended up in a tiny village Methodist chapel with around 20 elderly members in a hamlet called Crewe by Farndon. Sometime later the circuit superintendent made official visits to all the small chapels to review them and he admits that he expected us to want to close. It appeared hopeless, with an elderly congregation mainly living out of the area, but my husband and I felt God was pointing out possibilities.

The chapel was small, in reasonable shape and in the nearest two villages they were building hundreds of new houses, which were getting closer to the chapel. There were a lot of young children locally and we started a Saturday morning club called Mustard Seeds. In 2017 we were appointed as lay leaders.

We had spent time praying that God would show us how to reach out to the community. We prayed and did what we thought God was telling us to do next.

Things began to move in surprising ways; a lady who lived in the tiny village asked to get married in the chapel; she later became a Christian and wanted to start a toddler group in the chapel. We got the opportunity to rent a field across the road from the chapel and I was inspired to turn it into a Bible garden. Another strand was that we bought a second-hand marquee for a local under 5's group, deciding it was something we should support.

Our chapel may be in the middle of nowhere, but it is on a very quiet lane which is great for walkers, runners and cyclists and during the first COVID-19 lockdown we spent that time planting the Bible garden and talking to passers by about it. We have a children's outdoor play area in the field amongst the fruit trees, sensory garden, vine, olive, palm, myrtle, pomegranate and cedar and signs explaining where they are mentioned in the Bible together with challenging messages.

We have used the field and the marquee to keep our mother and toddler group going as a support group over the past few months, and it has been very well attended. At a time when there is nowhere else to go it is really valued. Each week we have a Bible story and sing Christian songs. As a result two young families have started to come to our Sunday services.

We are trying to recruit a worker/minister now to take God's work forward. Incidentally the superintendent retired and joined our congregation.

I do not think I would have imagined any of it happening or made a plan for any of it to happen but when I look back I can see that the Lord has directed our steps.

Ruth Meredith is a lay leader with her husband Adam and lives in Crewe by Farndon, South Cheshire Circuit