

CHRIS' BLOG

Hello there!

It's been a while since my last post mainly down to the hectic Christmas and New Year season and beyond. But here is my next update! But I have been adding to the blog slowly but surely to give you this latest blog.



PART 1: Christmas and New Year

Christmas and New Year just gone seems so far away now but it was none the less a busy time here at Kingston URC. The major task this year for me was in helping to write and co-ordinating the church nativity. It sounded a simple enough task when I said "yes" and consequently I have now learnt the true hardship that is endured to make a nativity happen. We thought this year it would be nice to try and make our nativity as inclusive as possible by letting our brigade companies take the lead. This proved successful as they had their own ideas to make the nativity modern and bang up to date. Including Mary's dream which was in actual fact an MSN conversation (a conversation typed between two computers via the internet) between God and Mary. This went down a treat and was enjoyed by all. (Even if it did take up to a hour to do 15 minutes of script in various rehearsals.) Within the same service a lot of other things happened including the induction of new elders, a 90th birthday celebration of our GB Company and my commissioning as a BB officer. This marking the end of months of training and the beginning of a new chapter in my BB life. (So that's 15 years down and at least 40 more to go!) Also over the Christmas period we did all our traditional activities including our carols and mice pies service. Within this service we pick out carols at random sing them then learn and dwell upon their meaning for us today. This completed with mince pies and of course tea and coffee as no service is complete without it.

At Roehampton we did our traditional busking at various underground stations to fundraise for the Armagh adventure which proved a great success. Which this time included Waterloo, Hammersmith and Westminster.



The most interesting of which was Westminster as we got to see all the MPs coming out of the houses of parliament and all the workers from the city making their way home. As well as, this it was very surreal as one child who was around 6 years old came up and sat down in front of us and listened intently despite all the chaos of a Christmas rush hour around her. She wasn't going to move despite whatever her mum said, and told her and all around to be quiet as she wanted to hear the nice people sing about the baby Jesus. Afterwards it made me think and reflect upon our attitudes to our faith not only at Christmas but all year round. Just like the little girl shouldn't we just stop think, pray and praise God for all he does even in the most difficult and inconvenient times in our lives. As nothing is possible without him.

PART 2: January and February

The start of a brand new year and another rollercoaster ride to endure with peaks, dips, dives and highs. At KURC this year one of our aims is to install a shower for not just general use but for homeless people in particular with a rise of homeless in the area via property repossessions etc. The reason repossession increases homelessness here in



Kingston is due to an increase in demand for rental properties. Consequently those who on the fringes of poverty are forced out of their homes and there is nowhere near enough council housing or shelter to accommodate these people. So they greatly appreciate the chance to have a shower and have a decent meal. Neither of which they may not have had for at least a day or more. But I am glad to say we have raised enough money to start work and nearly reached our target to pay off the remainder.

As well as this we have seen a need with our neighbouring churches to provide shelter and consequently have started the "night shelter" ministry. The majority using it been victims of the current downturn having been made homeless and unemployed. This operates via a rota system with each church taking a couple of nights at a time.

From a youth worker's point of view it has opened my eyes further. As more often than not the people coming in are parents and because of their homelessness they have their children taken away from them under law by social



services. This been due to the parents been deemed incapable of looking after their children due to a lack of basic resources. In recent months social services in the area have admitted that they haven't got adequate provision to look after the increase in children. More often than not the children are shifted to the other side of London with little to no contact with their parents for weeks. So during the school holidays including over Christmas social services have been asking charities and organisations with youth services including ourselves to take in children into holiday clubs etc. This in order to help cope with the needs of the young people and children in care. Of which we here we have been able to help but over the half term in February have had a significant increase of children and young people, and our holiday clubs were at full capacity. During February half term I met one young person who had been moved. I had never seen a young person so joyful to be playing a game of "risk" (a board game). As to her it was a chance to forget about her problems of the world. To just relax with people who cared and meet and socialise with other young people that weren't as worried as her. As she left that day she left happier than when she arrived through such simple things. That day I had been on Jury service and adjourned early for most of the day. I thanked God for that and having the chance to work with a young person like her. As it had challenged me to think of how many of the simple things in life we can do to glorify God. Do we glorify God 100% of the time and if not how can we?

During the last couple of weeks on February 22nd I had one of the biggest surprises of my life. I went into church that Sunday as usual for eleven o clock. At Kingston we have two services in the morning we have a traditional service at ten o clock and a contemporary service at eleven thirty of which I play at every week. Normally the ten o clock service is finished and starts coming out as I arrive and come in to prepare for 11:30 service. But today a visiting preacher was over running which made me anxious as I had a bit to do but couldn't until the service had come out. So I sat in the foyer looking through the glass at the preacher and thought "I recognise her but I've never met her personally." I then heard a distinct Californian accent and looked at the service sheet. It was no other than the "Revd Roberta Rominger" General Secretary of the URC. I then realised what may be about to happen and as the service finished Lesley our minister confirmed it. She approached me and said "Ok Chris, Roberta is coming to the eleven thirty as well and we have a tight turn around so let's keep



it cool." The fact Lesley was nervous even after twenty five years as a minister in the URC said it all. This had to go well as it was such a rare occasion. I then realised all the worship songs/hymns to be played that morning had to be played on the keyboard due to the pieces specific needs, which in turn made me even more nervous. (As the keyboard is not my primary instrument nor is it my most comfortable to play and nor my top choice to lead worship on. In short I was in for a tough morning.) The service went well, of during which we got to ask Roberta questions about the URC in general and where she wanted to take it. I'm glad to say her answer was simple with genuine passion and belief. One which I and most would agree with which gives me hope. It was simply this. "To grow not through strategies, planning and by means of man. But through pray, God's will and the conviction of the Holy Spirit." Although she stressed afterwards that strategies and planning should still play a part but seeking God's will through pray must be first and foremost in these times of decline not just in the URC but the church as a whole. (Plus if we look at church history decline is a good sign as it means a revival may well be on the way.☺)

PART 3: My studies

My studies continue to enrich and enhance my ministry and spiritual life. Before Christmas we looked at mission in a biblical and contemporary context. We looked at how we came to mission as a concept as the church in the first place and its history from the bible to now. In particular we looked at how it had been spread to Britain and through the British Empire. Consequently we looked at church history here in Britain and how the majority of modern day traditional denominations. This included the Church of England, the Methodist, the Baptists and our parental denominations to our current status as the URC. It never ceased to amaze me whilst studying this portion of church history how our principal methods of mission have not changed since the times of Paul. How that, the majority of the time when a new denomination was formed it was formed from being rejected by the predominate power in the land or predominate church. This in turn gives me hope for our denominations as the URC, because as a denomination we are so young and have so much potential in accordance with historical patterns. (As well as in faith as well which is even more exciting!) Mission as a topic has been my favourite and most enjoyable so far as more than anything it's a people topic.



The reasons for this been that the academics cannot pin it down quick enough to study it. As mission is constantly changing from one form to another in order to meet people's needs and to provide a platform for the gospel. So the core values such as the preaching of the gospel stay the same. But its expression is in constant renewal which is great as it meets the people where they're at and not where facts from a text book or a study say otherwise. It's all about been down to earth and making the truth real so that people have a chance of finding God's love through Jesus Christ and living an eternity with him. This in turn making this topic the most enjoyable due to its showing of the potential of growing God's kingdom through the Holy Spirit.

This term we have been studying "Ministerial Development" which incorporates looking at church leadership structures as well church growth and expressions of church as part of it. Whilst studying this it has become more apparent to me that we need to thinking more about how to reach out of the church and making church where people are as opposed to expecting them to come to us as they have done in decades gone by. As not only does history show it works but Jesus did it himself, as he worshiped at the temple, but he also ministered preached and worshiped with those outside the temple. Then most of Pauls ministry was outside the temple as well all of which help lead to where we are today. We need to ask ourselves the vital question what do we do outside our church building as a church for our community and to spread the gospel? We were shown many examples of this including Starbucks style cafes set up by church and church members that were real working businesses but were also church where new comers worshiped. In many cases they had communities in them bigger than the church that planted them. Another classic example was church in the pub once a month over a full English on a Sunday morning followed by Sunday morning sports such as football and rugby for families to partake in. I feel these kind of ideas definitely give food for thought. Is there this possibility within our group/individual churches?

PART 4: The Present

At the moment I continue to serve at Kingston URC where we are faced with challenges as well as receiving many blessings. Our major challenge comes in the shape of finance, as like many we cannot escape the current financial climate of the world, which in turn is hitting us hard. Recently at our AGM we were shown



the projected budget for the next financial year which left is predicting a deficit of £21k. This in turn meaning that we would have to find the money by either cutting ministries or being bold and giving more from our own pockets which are already stretched. This in turn is a problem I think we can solve but only by the means of prayer, selflessness and a willingness to give God what is his. On reflection of this trail of thought should we not do give God everything not just financially but with time and gifts. Then if we don't why don't we? How can we go about correcting it to glorify God?

Our youth work continues to grow from strength to strength, mainly through the Boys and Girls Brigades. At present we have around 40 children and young people attending brigade weekly, which is a vast improvement from two and a half years ago when the brigade had around a membership of 15. As with any success there come challenges which are to maintain the momentum and grow in all departments including most critically at the moment leadership. At current we are at maximum capacity and need to recruit a minimum of 4 new leaders to maintain our growth and keep up with the demand from young people and their parents for the brigades on a Friday night.

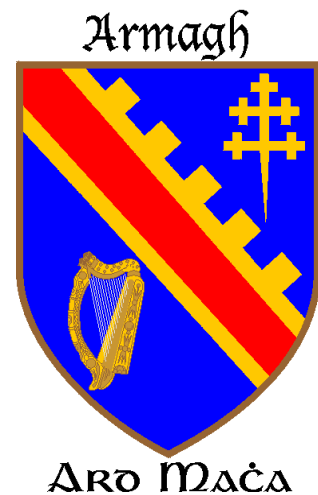
Our 11:30 interactive service continues to grow in strength as we now have an average congregation of around 20 people each Sunday and 30 on communion Sundays. This has also in turn has changed our churches membership state with the church now starting to gain in number as opposed to decline.

As a church at KURC we have been looking of ways to improve our ministries in particular to the homeless within the Kingston area. Last year an idea was proposed to put a shower in our church to be used primarily by the homeless, but also as a means to wash for the many that stay overnight. This including the night shelter ministry, youth sleepovers and many other ministries, so that the whole church community may be better equipped to serve during the night and meet the needs of those staying over. This has now I glad to say been put into its final stages and is now on schedule to be ready by early summer, which will be great timing as more and more ministries start for the summer season.

Away from my life at KURC I also continue to be a part of the Southlands Chapel at Roehampton University which is Methodist based chapel but largely ecumenical. Within the next couple of weeks we will be going to Armagh in Northern Ireland as a chaplaincy.



The reason we will be going is to stage the first leg of the venture to promote the opportunity to come to London in the summer. The Armagh venture is a joint venture between the chaplaincy at Roehampton and two secondary schools in Armagh, one protestant and one catholic. The whole aim of the project is to give the opportunity to sixth form students of the two schools to come to Roehampton for a week in June and explore their identities in a safe place. As well as encourage them to befriend their opposite numbers in peace and see the similarities they have in a shared and unified identity as citizens of Northern Ireland.



The troubles in Northern Ireland are still rife despite the peace process, but more often than not attacks happen underground undetectable by the authorities until it's too late. This in turn leaving a great tension and sense of wariness between protestant and catholic communities. Last time I visited Northern Ireland I was told many stories of these attacks by staff, pupils and the public alike. The story I remember the most though was of a family who had moved into a new area of town which had been purposefully built on the outskirts of the town and had no protestant or catholic label attached to it. This in line with an initiative to build new communities on a new neutral territory to live in peace. The family moved to the house but other Protestants found out about this and found out that the builders who had built it were Catholics. Consequently the Protestants warned the family to move out and go elsewhere, but the family refused and stayed. Then the next night their house was burnt down to the ground not by the Catholics but the fellow Protestants for buying from a firm that had hired a local catholic builder, which they had seen it as betrayal. This I sorry to say was not a tale from history but from a week before we had arrived with the fresh remains of the house still there for all to see. This in turn says why the Armagh venture exists and it's consequently why I look forward to it with excitement, knowing that the little we do could be the difference in these young people's lives. But also with a sense of humbleness and respect knowing what I am more than likely to see and witness in light of the recent killings in the country. In particular the Policeman who came from the area.



As far as my future goes I am glad to say that the Lord has heard my prayers and directed me to my next post of ministry. As of August this year I will be starting a new phase of my ministry as the "Youth Pastor" at "Epsom Methodist Church" on a full time basis. Here my job will be to co-ordinate the church's youth work and provide pastoral care for all the young people within the church and its fringe activities. This includes one of the largest scout groups in the country, a guide unit as well the church's own youth work programme. This bringing in around 200 eleven to eighteen year olds on a weekly basis. Or around 500 if you include children from five years old upwards. Although my priority will be the eleven to eighteen year olds. My initial contract is for three years with a view to an extension dependant on funding. I look forward to my time here and what God will get up to within my ministry. As if nothing else I have learnt is that God never does what you expect him to do nor tell you to do what you might have planned. As I remember once upon a time I was only meant to live in London for ten months, which God has now turned into at least six years in total since I moved from Middlesbrough in September 2006. (But I'm glad he did as although I miss my life, friends and family in Middlesbrough, I have grown in God immensely and realised that it's all about God's will and not mine and that he can do so much more if I let him.)



(www.emc.org.uk - Epsom Methodist Church)



PART 4: Points for prayer-

Prayer is a vital part of our daily lives. Here in London and at KURC we need prayer just as much as anyone else as it is only by God's grace that our ministry thrives. So if you wish to pray for myself and the various ministries here at KURC, as well as wider issues in London I would greatly appreciate it.

- For all those who are increasingly been made homeless in the capital.
- For the people of Northern Ireland to continue moving forward in peace despite the recent increase high tensions.
- For our mayor Boris Johnson as he faces difficult decisions everyday in light of the recession affecting many Londoners.
- For the increasing number of people who are taking their own lives seeing no other solution to their problems stemming from the current climate here in London.
- For a stop to gun and knife crime which continues to rise everyday with more and more innocent lives been wasted.
- For the homeless on London's streets, in particular the Polish and those from other eastern European countries who sleep rough in desperation for work to feed and provide for their families in their home nations.
- Premier radio as it faces hardship (Premier is the capitals Christian radio station that changes lives here and nationwide through MW radio, the internet and freeview.)
- For KURC as it faces a potential deficit of £21,000.
- For the children and young people split from their families due to the recession.
- For my continuing ministry and transition from KURC to Epsom Methodist Church in the summer.
- For the youth work at KURC and all its other ministries.



Website Links-

- www.emc.org.uk - Epsom Methodist Church
- <http://kingstonurc.org> - Kingston Upon Thames URC
- <http://www.roehampton.ac.uk/southlands/armaghventure/armaghventure.html> - Armagh Venture, Roehampton University
- www.premier.org.uk - Premier Radio

AND FINALLY.....

I hope this blog has been really interesting and encouraging. If you want to keep up with all that happens with myself down here in Kingston then look out for regular blogs on the group website. Thank you all for your continued support and prayer, I really appreciate it. Until then good luck with Lent and have a great spirit filled Easter!

So until my next blog God Bless

CHRIS WHEELER

(Kingston upon Thames URC)

