

FCC CONNECTION

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The Fellowship of Churches of Christ

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GLOBAL COMMUNITY CHURCH CELEBRATES GROWTH



Global Community Church [GCC] has been a hub of growth and excitement in March. We have enjoyed having the Hlawndo sisters with us. Their family launched GCC in 2011 and having them home from Mizoram has been incredibly refreshing.

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Additionally, GCC celebrated the children with a baby dedication Sunday, followed by 2 baptisms. It has been a busy but very blessed time.

The church gathered in David and Teresa Fittro's home for 2 baptisms on Sunday 13 March. Some of the 20 people gathered had never witnessed a baptism and for some, it had been years since they had been in a church gathering. It was an amazing opportunity to witness God's work.

The 2 men who were baptised have had very different experiences in their journeys. Rob has attended GCC for several years and has been considering his relationship with Christ for some time. Phil has come to know Christ and began attending GCC very recently. He was introduced to Jesus through a dog-walking discovery group.

Celebrate with us the new lives – of our children and those who have been baptised! If you want to know more about GCC, please see our website: <https://gccbrum.com/>.



THE CRISIS IN UKRAINE

FCC is related to many congregations in Ukraine and in Poland. The churches in Poland are working round the clock to help those who have come to Poland as refugees. In the last few days Martin Robinson, our National Moderator, spoke on the phone to two leaders in Poland who gave an indication of the work that FCC churches are undertaking with Ukrainian refugees. These two individuals who we count as good friends have been to the UK and their work is known to us.



Marek Charis is a former ForMission MA student and ministers along with his wife Zofia and their family at the Church of Christ in Lublin which is very close to the border with Ukraine.

Andrzej Bajenski (in the picture on the right) is the National Head Pastor of Churches of Christ, Poland. He sends this message to our FCC Churches.

Greetings from Warsaw

21 days of war in Ukraine are behind us. From the very first moment, the things that are happening just beyond our eastern border have completely changed the course of the lives of not only millions of Ukrainians, but also of Poles.

Over 2 million refugees crossed the Polish border. Warsaw, Krakow, Wrocław, Łódz and other large cities have become hubs for hundreds of thousands of refugees seeking shelter, accommodation, and food. Warsaw alone hosts over 400,000 newcomers, mainly women with 2-4 children.

In these tragic moments, I am sharing the good news about the great openness, compassion and commitment of our churches and society. Tears of regret and compassion are mixed with tears of joy in helping and supporting. God touches the hearts of Polish society.



Our 5 larger churches in Warsaw and many smaller ones all over Poland are in the first line in helping. All rooms, except the main meeting rooms, are covered with mattresses for temporary overnight stays. Meals are served, clothes are distributed, and photocopied documents are needed to obtain residence and work permits. Many families also open their flats for refugees. Some congregations rent apartments, especially for families with many children.

Our Church ministries, such as the charitable Doing Good Mission, are working at top speed and we hope they will endure doing good. Currently, they arrange Children's Corners in large halls converted into night shelters for many thousands.

Some of our churches have become relief leaders in their local communities. Over 180 young people found shelter in our Ostróda Camp. Nearly 300 in Camp Zakosciele. Small churches host several families. Many volunteers go to the border with Ukraine, taking necessities and bringing refugees from the border.

We know that the UK has also opened up to refugees from Ukraine, but if some churches of Christ wanted to support us in helping us in this absolutely overwhelming challenge, which looks more like a marathon than a sprint, we will of course be grateful.

Blessings to you and the British congregations.

Andrzej Bajęński

How can you help in this crisis?

The Sanctuary Foundation #BBCBreakfast led by Krish is asking individuals, community groups, churches, to register their interest in becoming a sponsor of Ukrainians arriving in the UK. The Sanctuary Foundation is a partnership between charities, churches and other agencies that has been set up in response to the unfolding humanitarian disaster in Ukraine.

It is led by Dr Krish Kandiah, who has been heavily involved in Welcome Churches.

Find out more below:

<https://christiantoday.com/article/hundreds.of.uk.churches.sign.up.to.support.ukrainian.refugees/138306.htm>



Dr Krish Kandiah

WHY UKRAINE MATTERS TO CHURCHES OF CHRIST



A Church of Christ in Donetsk, Ukraine, in 2003 | Photo by Erik Tryggestad

The Eastern European nation, now under siege by its Russian neighbours, has been fertile soil for the fellowship. As one young Ukrainian put it, ‘Christianity is the greatest treasure we have.’ Congregations related to FCC in Ukraine are scattered across the nation of 44 million souls. Some church members are internally displaced in their own nation. Some have started new lives in Europe and the U.S. Others live under Russian rule in the occupied Crimean Peninsula or under pro-Russian separatists in the self-declared republics of eastern Ukraine.

Russia’s latest incursions into Ukraine have caused additional disruptions and displacement among the nation’s Churches of Christ.

As Christians around the world — including church members in Russia — pray for the safety of their brothers and sisters in Ukraine, here’s some background gleaned from four reporting trips to Ukraine and dozens of interviews with Ukrainian believers during the past two decades.

How did Churches of Christ begin in Ukraine?

The Eastern European nation, once part of the Soviet Union, has deep Christian roots, dating back to the Byzantine Empire in the 900s A.D. During the Soviet years, many Ukrainians remained loyal to the Ukrainian Orthodox church.

As communism began to collapse in the region in the late 1980s, Ukrainians already were familiar with the work of Churches of Christ through ministries including Eastern European Mission, which smuggled pocket-sized New Testaments and Christian literature under the Iron Curtain

from its printing facility in Vienna, Austria. Ukrainian-born evangelists including Epi Stephan Bilak helped distribute the contraband. Bilak, who was supported by the Minter Lane Church of Christ in Abilene, Texas, broadcast a radio program, “The Messenger of Truth,” into Eastern Europe from Switzerland.

Missionaries including Tim Johnson journeyed to the capital, then known by its Russian pronunciation, Kiev (“KEE-ev”), by most Americans. The missionaries worked with groups of believers who met in basements. Some had family members detained or killed by Soviet secret police, Johnson said.

Johnson and his wife, Darla, planted the Nivki Church of Christ in Kiev in the early 1990s. A year later, after Ukraine declared independence from the Soviet Union, more missionaries came — including students from universities associated with Churches of Christ. Mission teams from Lipscomb University in Nashville, Tenn., worked with infant congregations, planted new ones and launched a campus ministry.

Bilak and his family returned to Ukraine and planted the Old Park Church of Christ in the western Ukrainian town of Ternopil.



Photo by Erik Tryggestad | Sasha Prokopchuk baptises Roman Onischenko in the Black Sea during the annual Crimea conference in 2011.

Why was Ukraine so receptive to the Gospel?

At first, the novelty of American preachers — rarely seen in the Soviet world — drew big crowds across Eastern Europe. Evangelists from Churches of Christ found the eastern, Russian-speaking region of Ukraine to be particularly receptive.

The Soviet Union paved the way for this receptivity, said Evgen Sosnovsky, a miner from the eastern Ukrainian town of Dobropole. During the Cold War, those who disagreed with state-enforced communism were given two choices — exile in Siberia or labour in the coal mines of Ukraine’s Donbas region, Sosnovsky said. As a result, Donbas became the homeland of what he called “free thinkers.”

Sosnovsky became a Christian in 2002 and took the Gospel into the coal mines of Donbas. To reach the coal, miners had to squeeze into small elevators for descents that could take up to an hour. Sosnovsky used the time to conduct Bible studies. Soon, he was ministering for a church of 30.

In the eastern Ukrainian city of Donetsk, churches were planted and grew quickly. The Petrovsky Church of Christ in Donetsk had more than 400 members by the mid-2000s. Its minister, Sasha Prokopchuk, once served in the Red Army. He launched a television ministry and began conducting annual retreats in Crimea, Ukraine's peninsula on the Black Sea. In waters once patrolled by Soviet submarines, he baptised souls into Christ.

'Christianity is the greatest treasure we have'

The awakening wasn't limited to eastern Ukraine. Across the nation, Ukraine's political leaders called for the teaching of religion as part of its ethics and morality curriculum. Eastern European Mission, which once smuggled Bibles into Ukraine, began printing colourful, hardcover children's Bibles in former communist nations and distributing them in Ukraine's public schools.



Photo by Erik Tryggestad | Students in Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine, wave and hold some of the thousands of children's and teen's Bibles that the Eastern European Mission provides for ethics and character education.

In 2011, *The Christian Chronicle* visited schools in the western Ukrainian city of Ivano-Frankivsk with representatives of EEM. Workers with the nonprofit had heard rumours that the Bibles they supplied weren't being used in the schools and were being sold. However, at each school the team visited, EEM's Bibles were displayed prominently in libraries and were found in classrooms. At Public School No. 11, school administrators rounded up students from its ethics team, which had just won a national competition based on the students' knowledge of the Bible and Christian ethics.

"The morals of the stories (in Scripture) help us choose the right way in our lives," said Viktoriya Kalynyuk, then 16. "These stories protect us from bad decisions."



Photo by Erik Tryggstad | Olesya Andrusyak, head librarian of Public School No. 11 in Ivano-Frankivsk,

Ukraine, talks about the appeal of the illustrated children's Bibles among elementary students. The students didn't grow up under communism, but their parents and grandparents did. But throughout the Soviet years, they had nurtured a love of church and the Bible and passed it on to their children.

Another student, Ihor Kozak, said, "We know that Christianity is the greatest treasure we have. Our country was part of the Soviet Union. Now the people of Ukraine can believe in the God they want. After 70 years, people want to believe in the Master who loves us."

Nickoli Plaksin, a Ukrainian who works with EEM, beamed with pride as he listened to the students speak.

"That's the future of my country," he said.

CHURCH PLANTING ON THE INCREASE

Across nearly every denomination and church network in the UK, church planting is increasingly on the agenda. FCC is represented on the National Church Planting Network Steering Group. In autumn 2021 the National Church Planting Network (NCPN) Steering Group commissioned a preliminary piece of research on a national picture of church planting, to discern how they can best facilitate, support and develop a collaborative national initiative to see a significant growth of church planting in England. The scope of this research was individual Zoom interviews with 19 people who responded to the invitation in time for inclusion, each representing a national church planting strategy for their denomination/networks. The aim with this small initial sample was to include a range of church traditions and ethnicities.

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Answers were then synthesised and analysed to draw out themes and areas for further reflection, on the following areas:

- Plans: strategy, history, metrics
- Process: models and definition of church
- Pounds: self-funding and scale of initial investment
- Place: geographical focus/mapping
- People: demographic groups, identifying and training leaders
- Partnership: local research, ecumenical perspectives

The full report with findings and quotes under each of these areas is available. To request a copy, email martin.robinson@mission4.uk

Church planting does not always mean the creation of a completely new church. It can also mean the significant revitalisation of an existing church. FCC is currently working with a number of our local churches to produce revitalisation. The Riddings Church, mentioned in the February newsletter, is one example of that work. What follows is the story of a local Church of England parish that is currently experiencing revitalisation as part of the C of E's Fresh Expressions programme.

GOOD THINGS FOR GOSPORT

Painted on a wall in Christ Church, Gosport is the phrase, 'Good things for Gosport'. Revd Ray Driscoll shares the journey of launching a new family service, reaching out to the community through lockdown, supporting local primary schools and starting a 'Love Gosport' campaign, all centred on the vision that God has good things for Gosport.



I didn't grow up in a Christian family or go to church when I was young. As a teenager, I started going to a church youth group – I was the awkward kid who asked all the difficult questions and asserted that I'd never become a Christian! But one year at Spring Harvest, it all became real and I made a commitment of faith. That summer, my small Baptist church let us run a holiday club for the local kids as I wanted to do something for the community and since then I've always been involved with church life and youth work. I ended up training and working as a youth worker and I'm now an ordained pioneer minister in the Church of England. I grew up on an estate in Surrey and have always had a heart to minister in more deprived areas. I'm married to Nic and we have two sons.

In August 2020 after my curacy ended, I came to join the team at **Harbour Church** on the South Coast in Portsmouth. The Bishop of Portsmouth had invited Harbour Church to play a part in the revitalisation of Gosport, a town which is on a peninsula just across the harbour from Portsmouth. Research had found that 99.3% of Gosport had no meaningful connection with the church. This statistic gave us a real incentive to try and do something new. We planted out to **Christ Church Gosport** mid-pandemic (between the two lockdowns) to start a new family service and help the church to reach the local community, share the gospel and grow in impact, depth and numbers. I've become team vicar of three local parishes, including Christ Church, in the south of Gosport. We are a part of Harbour Church (which is a resource church), so we work together in the vision to serve and bless Portsmouth and Gosport. As we didn't plant into Gosport with a big team, the support that Harbour has given us in terms of finance, buildings and communications has made a huge difference. We couldn't have done it without their continual generosity and this resource church model has worked really well for us. Isolation is also a big issue for vicars in contexts like ours, so Harbour gives us a community and support system, and will make us more sustainable in the long term.

We spent the first year in 2020 renovating Christ Church, setting culture, and reaching out to the community through the lockdowns. We had some development funding, so we spent time transforming the building and making it fit for purpose. The lockdowns were debilitating in many ways, but they also gave us incredible opportunities. We couldn't plant in a typical way, so we started with social transformation work. When the second lockdown hit, I'd already gathered a small team and we came up with some new initiatives. We had the phrase, 'turning heads and winning hearts,' as the essence of what we wanted to achieve. There are four primary schools in our parish, and they needed more content for home-schooling. We started producing short acts of worship every week for online school assemblies. The quality was awful at the beginning as we filmed them on my webcam, but we tried to come up with funny and interesting content, which was broadcasted out to all the families at home from these four schools. We knew it was having an impact when one of my team got recognised on the street as Lockdown Larry!

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We also partnered with one of the nearest schools to prepare freshly cooked meals for their most vulnerable families twice a week. We cooked and delivered meals for 30 families in partnership with a local food bank and another food initiative called the Trash Cafe: it felt like HelloFresh meets Just Eat! It was an amazing collaboration between local organisations. We also started a campaign online called 'Love Gosport', where we put out a positive post every day, such as a recipe or a mental health tip or a family challenge, like how to play 'Floor is Lava Obstacle Course' at home. This helped us to be part of what was happening in the community online and the 'Love Gosport' Facebook page eventually became our Christ Church page.

The narrative around Gosport has traditionally been quite negative – a single mum once said to me that Gosport is a really sad place. It's a very static and predominantly white working-class community. The economy is quite weak – some of the wards are in the top 5% or 10% of deprivation. It's got a rich naval history so lots of families have naval connections, but the Navy has now moved most of its operations elsewhere, so it can feel like Gosport has lost its heart and soul. We felt that we wanted to draw out the good in this place. Sometimes when we move to a new context, we want to go with the grain but sometimes we need to go against it. We want to do our bit to change the trajectory of people here, particularly young people, so we had the words 'Good things for Gosport' painted on our church wall.

Initially, we started as a small group online as we couldn't meet in person and by Easter 2021, 30 of us met together on Sunday mornings – we didn't publicise anything as we hadn't officially launched but people kept coming! We held a launch week in September 2021, where we built on everything that happened in lockdown. We staged a spectacular for the primary schools, we put on a gig night with a local promoter on Friday and we had a family fun day on Saturday. We were hoping for about 200 people but 850 people came along! I have photos of people queuing outside – it was unbelievable. Again, it really helped to turn heads – people often think that church isn't a place to play live music or that it's boring and not for children, so we're trying to change that perspective. One new member of our congregation, Dave, who's lived in Gosport all his life, came to church and was overwhelmed by the welcome he was given. We baptised him a few weeks ago and he's recently done a video for our next Alpha course with his fiancée Cheryl, which you can [watch here](#).

Since we launched the new family service, we've been steadily growing, with over 100 coming regularly and 30% of our congregation is under 11. We are reflective of Gosport, a beautifully broken bunch of drifting Christians, returning prodigals and people who are not sure how they ended up caught up in this new venture. We joined an existing congregation so there's also a traditional service every Sunday. To begin with, there was some uncertainty and even some underlying hostility; now there's lots of love and collaboration between the two congregations. We're finding that we enrich each other and there are wonderful cross-generational friendships – some of our 20-year-olds now go out for cocktails with our 70-year-olds.

Moving to Gosport has definitely been an adventure – we’re having to get very good at adapting and living with uncertainty. I often think ‘I don’t think we can do this’ and then someone suddenly appears to help us. We have the vision to use art in Gosport’s more deprived contexts – one of our churches, St John’s, had an amazing initiative to allow the local college to put gigs on in the building. One of the staff at the local academy trust is a Christian and suggested that the group of schools could employ someone full-time at St John’s to build a strategy around arts for two years. He asked if we knew anyone who might be interested in the role. At the same time, a lady joined our team who had turned a derelict pub in Liverpool into a community art facility. She now works with us to grow this ‘arts vision’ in one of the most deprived areas in Gosport. We’re learning that God always provides but he does it in real time so it can still feel utterly terrifying!

Until next time.

Lynda and Martin

CREATE CONFERENCE 2022



FELLOWSHIP OF
CHURCHES OF
CHRIST

A MOVEMENT OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD

CREATE CONFERENCE 2022

REFLECT, RECEIVE, REVIVE



DATES | MONDAY 9TH MAY 12.00
TUESDAY 10TH MAY 13.00

VENUE | KINGS PARK CENTRE,
NORTHAMPTON NN3 6LL

Nigel Langford – Keynote Speaker
Director of Domestic Mission, Bible Society
Nigel is a church planter and leader.

Registrations for day visitors and full board:

www.fcccreate.eventbrite.co.uk

For further information contact:

lynda.robinson@the-fcc.org

Plea: The organisers would really appreciate it if you would book your places sooner rather than later. Tickets are available by logging onto the **Eventbrite site shown in the flyer** or click **here**.