

Street Pastors

The Practitioners' Conference

12–14 November 2009

Emmanuel Centre
Marsham Street
Westminster
London
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Acknowledgements

The board of trustees would like to thank the conference planning team, Revd Les Isaac, Christine Bongo, Jonathan McGill, Jo Norton, Gabi Hofer, Jake Isaac and Eustace Constance.

We would also like to express our thanks to Revd Peter Loo, Senior Pastor at the Emmanuel Centre, and to the Centre's Marketing and Operations Manager, Jon Tan. To Chris and Jenny Orange and Jake Isaac, who led us in worship at our evening celebrations and the speakers at those events, Revd Dr Kate Coleman and Oliver Nyumbu, we are very grateful. We also want to acknowledge the work of the production team, lead by Jake Isaac, with Head Sound Engineer Anthony Espree and assistants, Liji Morrison and Marvin Reid, as well as the dedication of all the staff at Ascension Trust.

We are indebted to all the speakers and workshop leaders who took part in the conference. Our thanks go to the Rt Revd Christopher Chessun, Professor John Pitts, Boris Johnson, Mike Royal, Tony Winter, Alison Murray, James Duce, Ben Stansfield, Steve Rawlins, Wendy Thomas, John Simons, David Rayner, Revd David Shosanya, Deputy Assistant Commissioner Rod Jarman, Councillor Steve O'Connell, Andy Turner, Steve Smallwood, Superintendent Andy Pratt.

Introduction

The Practitioners' Conference was a timely opportunity for learning and reflection in the life of the Street Pastors initiative. Taking place at a time when the number of active street pastors in England, Scotland and Wales is approaching 4,000, a few weeks before a master licence to set up Ascension Trust Scotland is signed, and coinciding with the visit of street pastor volunteers from the first international team in Antigua, there was much to be explored and celebrated by the 500-plus delegates who gathered in Westminster

With speakers from the Metropolitan Police, central and local government, leaders of the Christian church and faith-based organisations, the Conference endorsed the work of street pastors in our towns and cities, developed theological and sociological perspectives and drew together specialist information. Through a programme of workshops, delegates could contribute to key themes and gain relevant resources for their own practice and the management of their local Street Pastors teams.

When God gives us something to do it is not just 'a good idea', it is his will.

Revd Les Isaac

Les Isaac, CEO of Ascension Trust, co-founder and pioneer of the Street Pastors initiative, emphasised to the conference that in Street Pastors we see God using his Church. Though Les often finds himself in the spotlight, Street Pastors is not simply his 'good idea', but God's will for his *ecclesia*, his called-out ones. That is why, when officers at Scotland Yard have asked, 'Why didn't we think of this?' the reply from

Revd Isaac has been, 'Because you are not God!' That is why, when chief executives and directors have concluded that what has happened with Street Pastors is impossible from a business perspective, the answer has to be that the Lord is building what is happening today and what has happened over the first six years in the life of the initiative.

The Church's response to the problems of our communities, Les Isaac told the conference, must be based upon time, love and consistency – the three most expensive commodities in our twenty-first century society. People need our time, and when it is given in a consistent way, trust and credibility begins to be built. Yet if God is calling us to do anything, it is to love people equivocally. We are not Christians because we have earned the title, but because of grace. God's grace has been applied and administered to our lives. It is difficult to get a person to understand that God loves them, if they are not first seeing that love in us. Revd Isaac encouraged delegates to go back to their cities and be consistent; to go back with the love of God, to serve and not to judge. Go in the name of Jesus.

Keynote speakers

1. Facing reality

Street pastor volunteers engage with people of all ages in practical and compassionate ways on the streets of Britain. They face the reality of twenty-first-century life in this country and enter into it as ambassadors of kindness and hope. In choosing to be part of their neighbourhoods and communities they bring the good news of responsible citizenship and the Christian faith into that reality.

Keynote and plenary speakers over both days of the conference grounded the thoughts of delegates in the social, economic and demographic reality of modern life in Britain. John Pitts, Professor of Socio-Legal Studies at the University of Bedfordshire, pointed out that our society has moved from relative equality to extreme polarisation in the space of thirty years. He described the implications of economically inactive neighbourhoods where there are high levels of social need and the bridges into mainstream economic and cultural life have been broken.

In these neighbourhoods, Professor Pitts argued, crime is repetitive, symmetrical (victims and offenders are similar in terms of age, ethnicity and class) and under reported. Young people don't tend to 'grow out of crime'; instead anti-social behaviour and drug-related violence become embedded in individuals and social networks.

In making these connections between the social landscape and violent crime, Professor Pitts articulated his view of street pastors as potential advocates to politicians on behalf of disadvantaged communities. The gang lifestyle is a powerful, seductive model, Professor Pitts argued, and with individuals on the fringes of gangs

adopting the style and emulating the behaviour of those in the gangs, more and more children and young people are having to make an accommodation for themselves with the gangs in order to find a safe 'position' and protect themselves.

Revd David Shosanya, Regional Minister for Mission with the London Baptist Association and co-founder of the Street Pastors initiative, argued that in the face of this institutionalisation of anti-social behaviour and violent crime, street pastors and churches need to create alternative 'institutions', to naturalise a process through which offenders and those at risk from re-offending can be re-socialised. Revd Shosanya tackled the question posed by sociologists and criminologists and voiced at the conference by Professor Pitts: what would it take to change the circumstances of people living in very dangerous situations—in deprived communities, in gangs or on the margins of gangs?

Using two case studies presented to the conference, Revd Shosanya also described the different circumstances of two young men known to him, both now in prison. He ended each narrative with the challenge, 'What does this young man need?' In answer, Revd Shosanya argued that in the Bible we see God dealing with criminals by taking them out of the context where they are vulnerable—the places in which they have been socialised. God gets them into a safe space. Revd Shosanya positioned street pastors in this transformational dynamic, stating that street pastors and churches had the potential to become 'another society' which could re-socialise and protect individuals who are vulnerable to reprisals or re-offending. Cain, the murderer of his brother Abel in the book of Genesis, describes himself as being 'driven from the land' by God. Therefore, we can see that there is a precedent in scripture for this re-location as God takes Cain away from the scene in which he had committed his crime, to protect him from reprisal attacks.

Street pastors, Revd Shosanya suggested, have to muster the courage to create places of refuge—homes, churches and cities.

It is humbling for me to know that whatever public debate there may be around the question of what makes a good city, street pastors make a good city.

Rt Revd Christopher Chessun, Bishop of Woolwich

The Bible, in both its overarching vision of the world, as well as in the microcosmic detail of individual lives, shows us that the world has moved from Creation into un-creation. God invites us to join him in the process of re-creation.

2. A human infrastructure

More than one speaker called the conference to consider what makes a good city. Different types of cities were discussed—cultural cities, political or administrative cities, industrial or commercial cities. The Rt Revd Christopher Chessun began by outlining his lead responsibility for urban issues in his capacity as Bishop of Woolwich and Urban Bishop of the Diocese of Manicaland.

In a city like London with its growing diversity and anonymity, Bishop Christopher spoke of the pressing need to make connections between people which are life enhancing. We must understand what it is that binds people together. As Christians we have our lives bound together in Christ, but we must have a wider concern about the well-being of others.

In answer to the question, 'What makes a good city', Bishop Christopher drew on the findings of the 'Faithful Cities' report produced by the Commission on Urban Life and Faith (May 2006), citing strong grass roots organisations and providers of facilities for communities, as key to the process of binding people together. Such groups provided local leadership that was committed to wider localities.

Bishop Christopher encouraged the conference by referring to the value of the 'sign' that street pastors represent. To the wider Christian community they are a wonderful sign of hope and action. To the people they meet on the streets, their uniform is a sign of mutual greeting. External things matter greatly, he said, especially if they are matched by inner love and grace.

I come today to give thanks for all that you are doing as practitioners, to say to you what in fact you are communicating as you look into the face of everyone you engage with: Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Rt Revd Christopher Chessun, Bishop of Woolwich

Boris Johnson, Mayor Of London, brought his characteristic brand of optimism and good humour to the conference, receiving warm applause from delegates as he encouraged them with his commitment to the Street Pastors initiative in London. As he narrated the recent (widely reported) incident during which he had encountered a group of youths harassing a young lady, the mayor drew attention to some of the obstacles to voluntary engagement in our society. In particular, he referred to the frailty of a responsible adult's authority over children and young people. The mayor asked the conference, 'What would have happened if I had caught up with the youths I was pursuing on my bike?' He alluded to the parallels between his own fear of intervening and the lack of authority that teachers face in the classroom. As questions and comments from the auditorium were addressed to Mr Johnson, the 'forest of regulation' that made it difficult for volunteers to contribute their time and skills through community groups was highlighted as a particular frustration.

The mayor described the gender ratio of volunteers such as street pastors as being one man to every two women. By the same ratio volunteers will also more commonly be people from faith groups. His comments in support of a

society which does not cast such automatic suspicion on adult males who want to work with and help children and young people were enthusiastically received by the conference.

A city like London, he added, needs more than a healthy infrastructure. It needs more than a clean river, investment in transport links and the regeneration of deprived areas. The mayor commended street pastors for the ways in which they invest in people. What counts, he concluded, is human infrastructure.

3. Effective communication

The effective communication of the role that street pastors fulfill was a recurring theme of the conference, drawing attention to this area as one which is of critical importance to ensure the sustainability of the initiative. Street Pastors' co-founder, Revd David Shosanya, encouraged delegates to put a cost upon the job that street pastors do, enabling funding bodies and Local Authorities to calculate the money that is saved when street pastors are deployed. Presentation and demonstration are vital and, as Councillor Steve O'Connell, Cabinet member for Safety and Cohesion, pointed out, Street Pastors' Co-ordinators and management teams need to 'show', not just 'tell', local councils what they are doing.

3.1 Full evidence

Information was given on progress that Ascension Trust is making in the area of data collection, drawing on the expertise of social scientists and criminologists at Plymouth University and in partnership with Spurgeon's College. A national study is being planned, which will gather information which can be used to demonstrate the impact and value of the work of Street Pastors. Dr Peter Stevenson, Director of Continuing Ministerial Development at

Spurgeon's College, leader of the multi-disciplinary team which will undertake this project, described how, with the rapid growth of the initiative, it is important that we have a clear picture of what is happening nationally so that Ascension Trust can discern how best to proceed. The Practitioners' Conference, Dr Stevenson argued, offered a rare opportunity to begin to gather information from a wide range of people involved in Street Pastors. Delegates were invited to complete a Research Paper which asked preliminary questions about the scope of the national study and enlisted participants' support in the process of observation, interview and feedback.

3.2 Gathering good statistics

Steve Smallwood, Co-ordinator for Street Pastors in Eastleigh and Statistician at the Office for National Statistics, began by explaining why street pastors need statistics. Factual information, he argued, can be used both internally and externally; in terms of management and planning, to support bids for funding, to facilitate the successful presentation of Street Pastors to other agencies and potential partners, and to enable partners such as the police and local councils to monitor the work of Street Pastors. Numbers, the conference was told, are good publicity – a number is worth a thousand words.

Statistics – the flow of information – begin with street pastors on the streets. Steve Smallwood showed the conference some of the different records currently being gathered by teams, ranging from the number of hours on the street to the gender, ethnic or age breakdown of contacts to the numbers of bottles collected on a given night or the numbers of items (such as flip flops) given out. From this discreetly gathered data team leaders can produce a report for one night which can then be collated by the Co-ordinator to represent months and years in the life of the team.

4. Structures for growth

Penny Carballo-Smith, Legal and Policy Advisor for Ascension Trust since November 2008, outlined to the conference the process of research and consultation which is enabling Ascension Trust to make its first steps towards regionalisation.

Penny explained that Ascension Trust first consulted with the Charity Commission's Mergers Unit, the NCVO's Collaborative Working Unit, franchising law specialists and charity solicitors Bates Wells & Brathwaite in order to plan a strategic and effective approach to regionalisation. Ascension Trust also sought to learn from the experiences of other large charities that had already been down this road, including the Salvation Army and Victim Support.

The process of regionalisation began with setting up a regional head office in Scotland. It was vital to do this as early as possible because of the different charity legislation enacted in Scotland. Considerable time, effort and expertise has been invested in the process of setting up the Scottish regional head office, since the intention is to use this as a pilot to guide and inform regionalisation throughout the rest of the UK. The Scottish regional head office was launched on 22 January 2010 and a master licence agreement was executed on the same day between Ascension Trust and the Scottish regional head office, which will be called The Ascension Trust (Scotland).

During 2010 Ascension Trust plans to roll out a programme of regional governance, with the Trust retaining oversight of branding and quality control and introducing a new tier of management for geographical clusters of Street Pastors teams. At this regional level, support and training can be shared by teams in the area and the set-up of new teams can be facilitated.

The team at Ascension Trust (Scotland), and the chair of the board of trustees, Sandy Scrimgeour, received the prayers of the conference.

5. The government, faith and community cohesion: working with faith communities

David Rayner, a member of the Cohesion and Faiths Unit in the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), addressed the conference about the government's involvement with faith communities. Government, he said, is interested in faith groups as local community organisations. David Rayner emphasised the fact that central government does not see itself as the holder of a blueprint for community cohesion, but the facilitator of support for local cohesion. Key decisions and priorities are made locally with a local diagnosis.

David Rayner outlined the ways in which central government works in support of local cohesion, drawing delegates' attention to various publications which could be of use to Street Pastors teams as they make a case to local authorities for the partnership between the Church and government agencies.

The key message about partnership working brought to the conference in this session was 'knowledge is power'; it is imperative that street pastors are familiar with the core values that drive the government's engagement with faith communities and keep up-to-date with relevant policy documents (often published online). David Rayner suggested that this approach will help to make street pastors more aware of local sources of funding, pointers to good practice and the advantages of partnership working, and this knowledge can then become part of a 'business case' presented to local government for funding and support.

On the subject of funding, Councillor Steve O'Connell indicated that a 'hard-headed' approach was essential when Street Pastors management teams were lobbying councils and police contacts for financial support and help with training costs. A Cabinet Member for Safety and Cohesion, London Assembly Member for Croydon and Sutton and Chair of Metropolitan Police Authority Finance Committee,

Councillor O'Connell told the conference of his first encounter with Street Pastors in Croydon. He described Croydon as the biggest nightlife centre outside central London, with a high number of pubs and as a consequence very many vulnerable young people. Councillor O'Connell made it clear that when he saw street pastors at work in Croydon, it was 'a wonderful thing to behold'. The police and council can only do so much, he said. Young people, many of whom are anti-authority, know they have a friend in street pastors.

Councillor O'Connell praised street pastors for putting themselves in many difficult positions on the streets, saying that they were uniquely able to handle those difficult positions in ways that police officers were not.

6. Police and voluntary sector groups

Deputy Assistant Commissioner (DAC) Rod Jarman, gave a presentation which focused on the challenges to policing in the twenty-first century, asking the fundamental question, what do the concepts of 'community' and 'cohesion' mean when there is massive population growth and mobility? DAC Jarman added the police perspective to the dynamics of partnership, one of the key themes at the conference. He commented that the police have traditionally been cautious about working with voluntary sector groups and have resisted people other than uniformed officers going out on the streets. Yet this fear of vigilantism has given way to a new degree of self-confidence among police authorities which has enabled them to view groups like Street Pastors as an asset rather than a liability.

DAC Jarman referred to an attitude of distrust extending through the state which claimed that people of faith will not be interested in doing anything other than preaching. There was a warm reception for the Commissioner's own response to this view: street pastors have proved that their faith is the

thing that gives them the strength to do good things for other people.

In another session, led by Superintendent Andy Pratt from the Lancashire constabulary with colleagues from the Metropolitan Police and the Christian Police Association (CPA), ways in which the police are trying to engage the whole Christian community in neighbourhood policing were discussed. Initiatives such as 'Church watch' (currently being piloted in Hounslow), were outlined. This scheme promotes a stronger relationship between churches and local officers in the light of assaults on church staff and theft or vandalism of church property. The value of the 'Adopt a cop' project was stressed, as a way of communicating the support of local Christians for police staff. The *Cops and Robbers* magazine, featuring real-life stories of criminals who have become Christians, has been trialled in custody suites in different parts of the country.

The conference also heard how the role of the police chaplain is undergoing a programme of enhancement in London boroughs to increase support for officers, to engage local churches and street pastors in community safety and to facilitate participation in faith forums.

Workshops

7. Good practice

James Duce (Aberdeen Street Pastors) and Alison Murray (Enfield Street Pastors) led this interactive session, discussing and reflecting on good practice for street pastors. This cross-pollination produced an array of mechanisms and ideas that are working or evolving in diverse locations all over the country.

The session began with a reminder that the essential role of a street pastor is to understand people and build relationships. Best practice for a team of street pastors begins when this core value is upheld and protected. Street pastors should ask themselves, what makes a street pastor effective or distinct? Predominantly a street pastors' responsibility is to listen to people on the streets and to the wider community, and then to respond to what they hear with love and practical help.

The challenge to cultivate a culture of consistent listening can be expressed on two levels, firstly, listening at pavement level to the people we connect with and the issues they are raising. Secondly, listening to partner agencies, police, council and community groups. Delegates were encouraged to evolve in excellence, reflect as a team and communicate within the team context.

8. Gangs

Mike Royal, National Director of The Lighthouse Group and Tony Winter, Co-ordinator of Manchester Street Pastors, described the invasive 'culture' of gangs on our streets and outlined a triangle structure of gang affiliation. At the base of

this triangle are young people with links to a gang through peer groups, and for these individuals there was a significant need for early intervention and preventative work.

Mike Royal went on to advise the conference about the kinds of intervention that street pastors and churches could provide. He presented a model of 'open' youth work, with churches spending quality time with people and where young people felt that they could become known. He referred to the value of meritocracy based principles – good behaviour bonds, incentives, diversionary and positive activities. School Pastors was also considered a successful intervention. Mike Royal drew attention to the need to engage parents in these preventative measures, adding however, that such involvement was out of the reach of some parents who needed support themselves: a struggling child often means a struggling parent.

Birmingham Reducing Gang Violence (BRGV), a partnership between police and community groups, was cited as an example of the development of a set of wrap around services delivered by third sector organisations. The response of the Church, as a provider of a new set of peers for individuals at risk of gang involvement or for those who have come out of a gang, was included.

Tony Winter, ex-gang member, now Co-ordinator for Street Pastors in Manchester and part of Xcaliber (Greater Manchester's police response to gun and gang crime), credited the police with the brave decision to make themselves more 'transparent', bringing about a change in the way they worked and related to troubled communities.

Building relationships with strategic individuals was an approach recommended for street pastors. The right person, it was noted, would be someone with whom a relationship could develop in a one-to-one environment away from the gang context. Tony Winter encouraged the conference to be alert to individuals who were aware of the vacuum in their

lives and with whom it would be appropriate to share the Christian faith.

The need for some Street Pastors teams to have training on gangs was also mentioned. Tony Winter advised that street pastors could observe the Manchester teams and learn from them. Again, the need to harness a strategic individual with a background in or knowledge of gangs was referred to. A person, not necessarily a Christian, with a desire to tackle the problems of gangs, would be of great benefit to street pastors.

9. Serving the community

Steve Rawlins, Deputy Director of Pecan, a charity that delivers projects for vulnerable groups, alerted street pastors to the challenge of working with secular groups and agencies without losing their Christian edge. Key areas of preparation for the work of Street Pastors as they serve their communities were outlined. Firstly, the importance of consulting the community and developing partnerships. Partnership working was firmly linked to the credibility of Street Pastors teams, and delegates were encouraged to think about the different ways that partnerships can be positive.

In these interactive sessions, delegates were given the opportunity to contribute models for Christian action around the country that were working, that were at the planning stage, or were simply dreamed about. What are the resources that are needed? Finance, people, skills, premises? Finally, Steve Rawlins spoke of the importance of developing a faith-led transformational action plan.

10. Effective fundraising

One of the significant action points arising from the conference, as has been already described in sections 3.1 and 3.2, is the need for the collection and presentation of data and evaluation. Andy Turner from the Church Urban Fund

Xchange, also added weight to this theme, as he outlined the qualities of a successful bid for funding. The workshop contained plenty of practical advice for preparing a proposal for funding, emphasising the importance of clear, passionate and energetic written communication, the formulation of a unique selling point, the gathering of qualitative evidence and the definition of outcomes and objectives.

11. Mobilising prayer for Street Pastors

Wendy Thomas, National Prayer Co-ordinator for Street Pastors and John Simons, National Director of the Crosswinds Prayer Trust, led this session, inspiring the conference with innovative ideas for developing prayer for Street Pastors teams and the challenge to earnestly lift not just our street pastors, but our cities and our nation to God in prayer.

Three layers of prayer were outlined: personal, local and national. This encompassed the personal prayers of an individual street pastor, the role of a prayer co-ordinator for each team, prayer pastors praying during each night of deployment, small group and church-based prayer support, and the development of prayer links with national Christian organisations. Many in the audience contributed models of good practice for the relationship between street pastors and prayer pastors from their contexts. The potential for harnessing the internet and networking sites was also an area of interest to the conference.

Recommendations

1. Evidence and statistics

The challenge facing Ascension Trust is to put systems in place to harness and prioritise the power of statistics. The board of trustees recognises that the Street Pastors initiative needs the leverage that uniform, national data can provide. Increasingly, clients and partners will expect statistical information from Street Pastors teams. The key components of this recommendation are:

- **Standardisation.** The development of a central system so that data collection is standardised between teams, ensuring that evidence is comparable and consistent, and that information is collected using the same categories as are used by the national statistics office.
- **Identification of desirable information.** An annual or quarterly audit could be used to collect a broader range of information. For example, it would be beneficial to know how many trained street pastors there are nationally by age and sex; the numbers of street pastors in training or the number of trained volunteers who are inactive but still resident in the area.
- **Development of record-keeping techniques and materials.** Bespoke record sheets printed in a small notebook could be useful. Could data collection be part of a street pastors' training?

2. Street pastors' involvement in police community training programmes

Deputy Assistant Commissioner Rod Jarman raised the possibility of street pastors being involved in the training of junior officers. He referred to the challenges facing Response Team officers who find themselves moving from one incident to another without having the time to understand the issues facing a community. DAC Jarman's comments form the basis of our recommendation:

- **Development of the opportunity for conversation between Response Team officers and street pastors.** Street pastors can answer the question, 'What is it like to live here?' The IPLDP (Initial Police Learning Development Programme), already involves some community training programmes, but it may be possible for officers in training to spend time with street pastors.

3. Every area should have the support of a prayer team

- **How is prayer co-ordinated while street pastors are out?** Practical advice could be helpful to many. For example, prayer teams could be encouraged to gather together the names of pub and club doorstaff, the name of the duty inspector for the night, details about places of safety and places of risk.
- **Alternative methods of communicating prayer needs could be used.** Tweeting and texting may not suit everybody, but they could be part of a creative approach to prayer support.

4. Volunteering

Ascension Trust believes that young people and children need adults to engage with them in creative, practical and responsible ways. It is a key recommendation arising from the conference that analysis of the process of volunteering as

a street pastor is essential to the sustainability of the initiative. This can be achieved through qualitative and quantitative approaches.

- **How effective is our recruitment procedure?** What is the key to getting someone to volunteer as a street pastor? What explanations are there for the variations in numbers of trained volunteers between teams?
- **Length of service.** What factors effect the retention of trained street pastors? What effect do the policies of central government (e.g., CRB requirements) effect the supply and morale of volunteers?

5. The city of refuge

Revd David Shosanya's message to the conference about the part that Christians, churches and street pastors could play in providing alternative homes and societies for those wanting to leave a gang or those at risk of gang involvement, received a strong response from delegates. Therefore the board of trustees recommend an ongoing process of feedback and reflection on Revd Shosanya's central question:

- **What would it take to change the circumstances of people living in very dangerous situations—in deprived communities, in gangs or on the margins of gangs?**