

Pastors aim to tackle crime with the power of prayer

by **Stef Hall**

A CHRISTIAN project will see 24 street pastors introduced on to Preston's streets before Christmas.

The team, which will be officially inducted in the carol service at St Walburge's on December 7, will start their patrols on Friday, December 12.

Working in teams of six one night a week, they will target those in need in the St Matthew's and St George's areas of the city, which are affected by crime including prostitution, drugs, and anti-social behaviour.

Original plans for the trained teams to patrol on both Fridays and Saturdays have been thwarted by a lack of willing volunteers – with only half the number of pastors church leaders had hoped for.

But church leaders are hoping once the public witness their work it will inspire more volunteers to come forward.

The Rev Chris Drury, a minister at Fulwood Free Methodist Church who is chairing the scheme, said: "We did not get the 50 we wanted but we are hoping to build on what we have.

"The project is not just about tackling prostitution, there are also drugs and anti-social issues in those areas.

"I believe the project will help reduce crime – this has happened in every other area with street pastors. If you have a presence in an area you can help people avoid being perpetrators of and victims of crime – for example sending drunken people home in a taxi before they commit anti-social behaviour. The police have taken all the team through personal and street safety training. The biggest form of self defence is walking away."

The new team's remit includes streets in Preston's red light areas.

They will attempt to mix with prostitutes, residents, revellers, traders and others in areas affected by the sex industry, drugs and anti-social behaviour.

Pray

The volunteers will give comfort and, where appropriate, offer to pray with them.

Under guidance from police, the council and the church, they will be deployed in areas where a Christian presence is considered useful.

Street pastors are an inter-denominational church response to urban problems. The project began five years ago in London.

There are already 1,000 street pastors in the country and the project is growing, with a team already introduced in Lancaster.



CHRISTIAN CRIME SOLDIERS: Chris Drury who is leading the Street Pastor scheme