

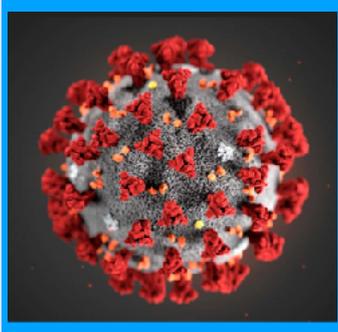


Plymouth Street Pastors

- taking Love to the streets

What's it like to be a Street or Prayer Pastor? – like to know more? Take a look at our video <https://vimeo.com/371183632>

Newsletter April 2020



Coronavirus lockdown

At the time of publishing, the UK remains in lockdown so that the night-time economy and thus our patrols are not currently operating. However, we hope that these testimonies from the past year will inspire and encourage you, and we look forward to resuming our patrols soon.



Tears

We were talking to a street sleeper who was telling us that his estranged wife had suddenly decided to deny him access to see any of his 3 children after he had spent time with his daughter for her birthday.

As we listened he began to cry, then apologised for doing so. We re-assured him that rather, we were honoured that he trusted us enough to cry in front of us and hugged him as we left. We made sure we told the Prayer Pastors so that he could continue to be prayed for and prayed for him ourselves as we continued our patrol. Overall it had been quite a quiet night but if he turned out to be the only reason we'd been there, that was fine by us.

Speechless

I recently gave a talk about Street Pastors to a WI after which a lady came up to talk to me and said *I'm speechless*, (which I thought a little funny given that she spoke the words) but what she meant was that she had never heard anything like it; she was really gobsmacked to hear of people voluntarily giving up their comfort on a Saturday night, so many Christians/churches working together and the amazing examples of answered prayer which I'd mentioned.

I was so pleased that here was someone who maybe for the first time was hearing about a God who is alive and real, who cares and who answers prayer in such awesome ways.

Prayer opens the door!

On our first patrol of the night we met a middle-aged lady on Union Street - she was drinking with a small

group of men, but didn't really want to stay with them. She told us that she had been unlawfully evicted from her flat in Devonport and was staying at the George Hostel. She seemed quite vulnerable on her own and so we offered to walk with her to the hostel. She was very upset about her life, her alcohol problem, difficulties with her partner and disagreements with her neighbours.

When we got to the hostel the staff would not agree to let her in - they reminded her that she had broken the rules, assaulted a member of staff and caused trouble. She was told she had to find somewhere else to stay for the night.

We prayed and rang this in to Prayer Pastors and tried to help her find a doorway or other shelter for the night - offering her a scarf, hat and space blanket. She was not keen to settle down and asked us to walk her up to Drake Circus Mall, as she had stayed there before. We explained that Drake Circus was too far away for her to walk in the state she was in. It was difficult to know what to do - so I just prayed quietly as another StreetPastor tried to persuade her to settle down in the shelter of the hostel porch.

The power of prayer could be felt at that time. After a short while, the hostel staff member came out and said that if our lady promised to go straight to bed and not cause any trouble, she could come in. He checked her bag for alcohol (she had already drunk all that she had) - and with her promise to behave, he let her in. Praise God!! We reported back to the Prayer Partners who joined us in our praises and thanks to God!



New Recruits

We'd like to say a huge welcome to our new Street Pastors, who completed a compact training course in January and were commissioned in a service at Emmanuel Church on 25th January. Left to right in the photo are Steve Brown, Andy Wheeler, Dina Santos, Lee and Jack Rickard.

After their first night's patrol I asked Dina, Andy and Steve to let us know how it went.

Dina replied: *Being a Street Pastor can be a little physically demanding for someone not used to walking! I was surprised how welcome and liked the Street Pastors are in Plymouth. When greeting us, one lady said how she felt more secure with our presence on the streets. Praying for people and seeing the results is very encouraging, especially when you leave the comfort of home on a rainy night!*

Andy's reply: *The time finally arrived for my first street pastor duty, after a month of intensive training and a visit as an observer. I arrived at base to don the blue uniform and offer my help to people on a Saturday night.*

There is a certain amount of nervous energy leading up to going live: will I come across someone I can help with the skills I have or more importantly will I need a miracle to get that person out of the predicament they are in? Will I be able to remember all the important stuff I've spent weeks learning, or like a rabbit in headlights will I freeze at the wrong moment? And most importantly, what would the weather do, as I've just found out our coats may not be as waterproof as was originally thought?

I needn't have worried, I arrived to help check the bags, listen to our team brief, and several uplifting (amazing, if fear inducing) stories, before being prayed out on our first shift. Apart from disagreements about what constituted a flip-flop emergency - bleeding, blisters or intoxication, cobbles and high heels - the Barbican was quiet, probably because storm Dennis was directly overhead and only the brave, foolish or desperate would want to be out.

The door staff were pleased to see us, the Police checked on our welfare several times and quite a few people wanted to thank us for our service. Towards the end of the evening we were approached by a young woman who claimed to have left her phone in a bar, but the door staff didn't want anything to do with her as she had only been in the foyer so couldn't have left it there. We were at an impasse, so asked for prayer that her friends would come and find her as she was becoming quite forceful with a door staff member. Prayer delivered, friends arrived, support given, no phone recovered and a young woman heartbroken because of the loss, but I only know of one who can fix that.

Enlightening, positive experience, if you want your mind expanded, your attitude adjusted, and a huge opportunity to share God's love, come and join us.

And **Steve** said:- *Earlier in the evening, I spent an hour just resting in God's presence preparing for the night. I was excited that it was my first patrol but a little apprehensive. The team, not surprisingly, were fantastic and I was made to feel very welcome and just mucked in.*

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On our way to the Barbican I had a conversation with a Welsh fireman whose mother was a Street Pastor and he couldn't sing our praises highly enough. Then we came across a couple of young ladies, who were in good spirits, nurses from Exeter who had won an award [sorry I can't remember what it was for]. As they didn't know Plymouth too well they were a little lost, so we sorted them out with directions. As they weren't used to wearing high heels, their feet were sore and uncomfortable so we parted with a couple of pairs of flip flops for which they were very grateful.

On the way back I became aware of an argument between boyfriend and girlfriend on the other side of the road, so we stopped and observed. After about 5 minutes the boyfriend went on his way, abandoning the girl. We were just about to make our way over to her, when some "dark shadows" appeared and went to the aid of the girl – it was one of the other teams, so we continued to make our way back to base. We stopped a little further down, watching a stand-off between some doormen and some youths. I stood there praying silently and the Police turned up about 5 minutes later. Phew!

As with most patrols [so I'm told] we had our fair share of rain. This didn't dampen my spirits as it is evident that Street Pastors are needed just to keep an eye out for those who become vulnerable and need a bit of friendly support and help.

Let's not get complacent

Week after week and month after month we Prayer Pastors listen to requests and pray and it's easy to become almost complacent about the incredible answers we get from our amazing God.

One night I was praying when a call came in at 3.37 am asking for prayer for a young lady who had lost her bag, and with that her keys, her cards, her phone and her money.

I started to pray as usual, but then had a very clear picture in my mind of the street with the Street Pastors and the girl, and then in the distance could see someone walking towards them. As the picture unfolded, the person came up to them and said they were a friend of the girl and would make sure she got home safely. At 3.44 am the phone rang and the Street Pastors reported that while they were waiting with the girl, a person approached them and said, *I am her friend and will make sure she gets home safely!*

Another "Arrow" prayer answered

Probably because of the very bad weather in the evening, it had been a mostly uneventful night. Driving home, I found myself thinking 'I wonder what, in particular, we were there for tonight?'. Then I remembered an incident which almost went unnoticed but was potentially of great significance in eternal terms. Especially when I remembered, with thankfulness, how God had been active in the conversation.

We were accosted by a middle-aged man who, in a slightly confrontational manner, asked if we could advise him. He was a service veteran and had been living in a caravan for five years. The lack of adequate heating or hot water was getting difficult to bear. Could we tell him how to go about getting a house?

I really did not know how to answer this question and sensed from the team's silent, intent look in my direction that none of them had answers to hand either. Arrow prayer sent, I said 'What have you tried so far?'

Two miracles rapidly ensued. He seemed to have a 'light-bulb moment' – God's inspiration for certain - saying 'I know, I will contact the Service Benevolent fund. We all paid into it and now they can help me.'. We rapidly endorsed his brainwave and I handed him a Resolution card saying 'This is help for veterans, especially if they have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder'. It felt a little risky to say it but he immediately took the card, saying 'That's the British Legion logo'. After a slight pause, he went on 'Yes, my wife and kids divorced me after the Falklands and I ended up in some trouble'.

He broke away from the uncomfortable memories and turned to head back into a club saying, 'Now I'm off to enjoy myself'. But after a few steps, he turned back to thank us and give me a hug. I returned it on God's behalf. It was all His work!

Being an inspiration

We met a guy who works as an ambassador with a charity for youth homelessness. He had been a student in Plymouth 5 years ago and told us that Street Pastors had inspired him into this role!

Not all of us can do great things. But all of us can do small things with great love

Some more “thank you”s...

Good morning, just really wanted to say thank you, I was walking home last night after a party. I was slightly drunk and had taken my high heels off to walk home, some pastors walked past me, asked if I was ok, would I like flip flops to walk home, be safe. In this day and age this act of humanity and kindness really touched me. Thank you for being there xxx

Thank you for all the key work you do keeping our streets safe at night. Doing a class project, think you guys are pretty cool

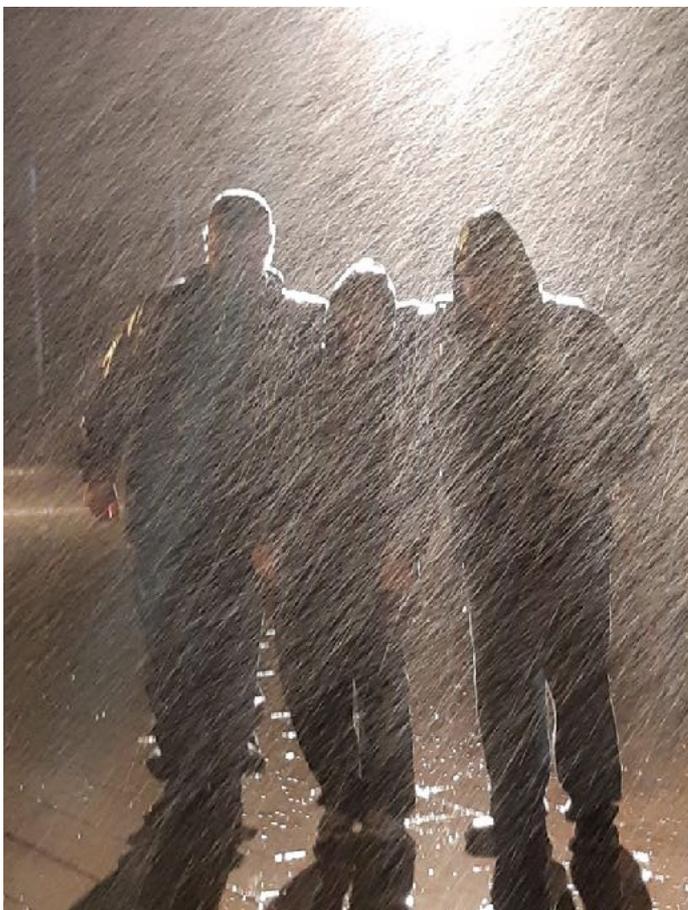
Thank you for your support that enabled my 18 year old step-daughter to get home last night. You were able to find a contact number and a family member was able to go pick her up. Thank you for being there

Thank you to the kind people who looked after my son celebrating his 21st last night! You do such great work and are appreciated

Panic attack and Hyperventilating

We were called to a night club to assist a young girl having a panic attack, as she'd realised she was drunk and was hyperventilating at the thought of her mother beating her up when she got home, and this was in turn bringing up memories of her father trying to choke her when she was 12 years old. I watched, feeling God's love for her, as our ladies hugged and reassured her and the panic subsided.

I was so grateful when we got her much calmer; safely with a friend to get a taxi back to the friend's house for the night. An hour well spent and again I came away thinking “*What would have happened to her if we hadn't been there?*”



Talking about Jesus, more answered prayer!

Before we left base, one of our Prayer Pastors prayed that the teams would have good conversations and the chance to talk about Jesus

That evening one team met two separate people who both asked us directly about Jesus - one chap on Union Street came up to us and said "I want you to tell me about Jesus" - he was a Christian from Israel and wanted to check that the Jesus we show on our patrols of the streets was the same Jesus that he knew. We gave him a “Knowing God” booklet to help him understand.

Later that night we were supporting a young woman on North Hill who in various ramblings asked us to tell her about God - why do we need God? Why can't we do what we do without God? We spent time telling her of the love of God and that what we do is to show the love of Jesus.

Both these individuals had questions and were seeking to know more about God - we had time to answer them and to show them the love of God.

Just caring

We were on North Hill when we saw an 18 year old man, who we think had been drinking, walk into the road without due care, straight into the path of car driven by an older lady. Thankfully when the ambulance attended they declared the young man to be OK, but the team stayed to support the lady driver as she waited for the Police to attend. She was very anxious and upset about what happened even though it did not seem that she was at fault, and she appreciated the support of the Street Pastors while she waited.

Rain stops play? No way!

The picture here is of St Helens Street Pastors, out on patrol in torrential rain despite which they were all still smiling and happy. We're so grateful it never rains in Plymouth! *Er, might just need to double-check that one!*

Right place, right time (again)

A young lady approached and asked us if we could walk her home. She said she had fallen over so many times and wasn't sure whether she could get home. She had bruises on her face and a huge bump on her forehead, swollen eye and a busted lip. We were happy to walk her home and took turns to support her. She was extremely apologetic and also very thankful to us for our help. When we got to her door she asked us if we could take her to her room and so we did. She then requested if we could sit and talk to her for a bit. She shared a bit of her story with us and mentioned that her father suffers from Parkinson's.

It was God's plan that we were there at the right time, otherwise we wouldn't have met her and she probably wouldn't have got home that night. She probably would have spent the night out in the cold where she'd be vulnerable and at risk. Thank God!

A "coincidence"?

We were talking to a young man with Down's Syndrome who had unfortunately not realised he needed to save some of his money for his taxi home. He had a few pounds and, having asked the Prayer Pastors to pray, we took him to a taxi rank in the hope that maybe a kind-hearted taxi driver would take him home for less than the normal rate.

Our hopes proved unrealistic as our conversation with a taxi driver merely confirmed that he didn't have enough money for the fare but as we were talking to him, a young man who knew the lad passed by and asked us what was the matter. We explained the situation and he immediately gave our man a £10 note! Problem solved; another miracle to thank God for and a reminder that we are not alone when we walk the streets!

And another??

We found a smart phone on the Barbican. It was locked and there was no easy way of checking who the owner was, so we planned to hand it to the Police.

Later in the night, having not yet come across the Police, we were in Union Street by

Wetherspoons. The phone rang, so we were able to answer it. It was a friend of the owner, who was with him. They were directly across the road, so he only had to cross over to collect his lost phone!

And yet another???

As the streets were quiet we had stopped and had a pleasant chat with a man, cracking a few jokes and as a matter of course, rang the Prayer pastors to let them know after we had said goodbye to him, not thinking much more of it.

A few minutes later we were approached by two ladies who were looking for their dad. He had "escaped" from sheltered accommodation nearby and they were worried because he had Alzheimer's and other age-related difficulties. They had no idea where he was and didn't even know where to begin to look. We didn't think we had met anyone like that, but we asked for a description anyway. It turned out to be the very man we had spoken to just a few minutes before!

*We were able to tell them we had just spoken to him and point them in the right direction to catch up with him. As the ladies left, I remember thinking to myself *What are the chances that the only guy we had spoken to in the last half an hour, just happened to be someone who was being looked for?**

And a fourth one????

We spotted a young girl in a bus shelter, sitting held upright by a much older man and vomiting profusely. The man said "I am getting her sobered up enough to come in a taxi." But it rapidly became apparent that he did not know her, so concern about her safety was escalated.

The young lady was too drunk to communicate at all, but did manage some sips of water. It looked as if this would take a long time and the Prayer Pastors were alerted. Then - a God-incidence? - her phone rang and one of the team was able to answer it. It was her father, concerned and trying to find out where she was. On being told the situation, he promised to sort out transport and come and collect her which he did some time later. In the meantime the "helpful" man who had been with her suddenly left and got into a taxi by himself - not only a "God-incidence" but also another "What would have happened to her if we hadn't been there?!"



Been there, done that?

When you've been a Street Pastor for a long time, you can make the mistake of believing you've seen and done it all, even to the point of thinking you might know how God is going to answer prayers in a situation – wrong!

We were with a young lady who, having the latest technology, had all her money on her iPhone. Unfortunately even iPhones need charging and hers was out of battery, so she had no way of either phoning her partner as she couldn't remember his number, or of paying for a taxi.

We radioed CCTV who suggested taking her to a nightclub as they might have a phone charger there. Ah, that was unexpected and it was going to be a new way as to how the Lord would answer our prayers – wrong again – we took her to a club and explained, asking the owner if they had a charger. He simply pulled £15 out of his pocket and gave it to her for her taxi fare – sorted!

No future, no hope

I was out the other Saturday night when we came across a rough sleeper, usually a reasonably cheerful man. That night he was quiet, low and subdued. Listening to him, he told me he felt there was no future, no hope.

I offered to pray with him and he readily accepted. So, as sometimes happens, I found myself holding the hands of a homeless soul, amid all that rubbish and debris of disregarded burger wrappers and beer cans, while the noise of Plymouth night life sounded all around. Yet all seemed so quiet, so peaceful and still to me. What prayers can be voiced, raised, for a man who had nothing except the contents of a carrier bag and who felt he had no hope, no joy, no happiness, no future, no safety?

So, I prayed that our Father would give him somewhere safe for the night where he would be sheltered, where he could find some peace and some happiness in his future. When prayers were finished the man turned to me and said he didn't know if he would ever find peace and happiness while he was alive, but had suddenly realised that there was a future where there would be peace and safety, where he would be loved. Perhaps not on this earth but in another world, eternity. He realised there was something more than this life on earth. Please Father, let him find some happiness and peace on this earth before he is with You in Heaven.

Finances

We are very grateful for the generosity of SO many people and organisations, whether by single donations or ongoing support, and would like to acknowledge gratefully recent grants and gifts from Compton Ward Councillors, The A C Ballard deceased Trust, Best Bar None, The Eliza Tyeth Will Trust, Ringmore W.I., St Jude's Mission Partners Group, Uplands Charitable Trust, Castalla Community Church Alicante, Ridgeway Methodist, Plymstock United Reformed Church, Plymouth Ladies Probus Club, Thursday Infinity Group, Oreston Probus Club, Pilgrim United Reformed Church, Stoke Methodist Church, Saltash Wesley Tuesday Circle, Coads Green WI, Sir Joshua Reynolds WI and Plympton Wives

If you would like to donate, please visit our website – www.plymouth.streetpastors.org.uk - or if you would prefer to send us a gift via the post, cheques payable to "Plymouth Street Pastors" may be sent to our Treasurer: Mr. C James, 8 Hazel Close, Birdcage Farm, Plymouth PL6 6HL. In addition, we can now receive 4% of what you spend when you shop at Sainsburys. To register for this arrangement, please see <https://www.raisewithsainsburys.com/?cid=26222>

Thank you again everyone – we simply couldn't do it without your support!

Not a busy night? Wrong!

Recognising it was not over busy for some of the teams, the Prayer Pastors made a point of praying there would be people truly wanting to talk to the Street Pastors about their faith and concerns they had. So it was particularly encouraging to hear one Street Pastor say as they were leaving at 4 pm that they had not known a night like it for people coming up and openly sharing about the issues they had with faith due to experiences in their youth, and some being clearly open to looking again into who Jesus is.

A word in season

We came across a man lying on the pavement who told us that he was fine; it was just that he'd decided to go to sleep there! All our efforts to persuade him otherwise fell on deaf ears - he was adamant that he wasn't going to move.

We felt we had no choice but to leave him, despite our concerns about what might happen to him via possible muggers or the weather. We came back to the same spot a couple more times - he was still there refusing to move



On our fourth attempt I prayed and the phrase "Your wallet is vulnerable" came into my mind. I said that to him and he immediately got up and walked home!

"Does things to your head"

We were talking to a man who had been in the Army. I asked him how long he had served and he got a bit more serious. He said *8 years but I had to get out. It does things to your head.*

I asked how he was adjusting to life now and he said *Do you want to know the truth, it'd be easier if I didn't have to live my life after what I've seen in Afghanistan.* He also said a friend of his had committed suicide.

I asked what support he'd got, to which he replied that he only keeps going because his family loves him. Unfortunately we didn't have time to offer to pray with him because he was keen to catch up with his mate but obviously we called it into the Prayer Pastors.

We thank God he has a supportive loving family. It is such a privilege that people trust us enough to open up to us like this.

Southend Street Pastors – a message of thanks from the Chief Constable

Thanks to the Street Pastors who this weekend identified a vulnerable young girl who was at risk from a predatory man. You make a difference.

What prompted the Chief Constable of Essex to say this?

It followed a conversation that the coordinator of Southend Street Pastors had with a rough sleeper who had contacted the team to ask for a sleeping bag.

He turned up at our base with a young girl claiming she was his daughter. We know this guy and he hasn't ever mentioned a daughter so I was immediately suspicious.

During the course of the conversation the girl told me she was 12 and had run away from her foster home the day before and slept in the rough sleeper's tent on the Friday evening.

Many alarm bells rang during the course of this conversation, not least that she didn't once call him 'Dad'. The police eventually arrested him.