

# CENTRAL

# NEWS

News Letter from the CENTRAL BAPTIST ASSOCIATION



Spring 2020



We have over recent editions explored what in the Mission Review we called 'fruitfulness indicators', in the hope

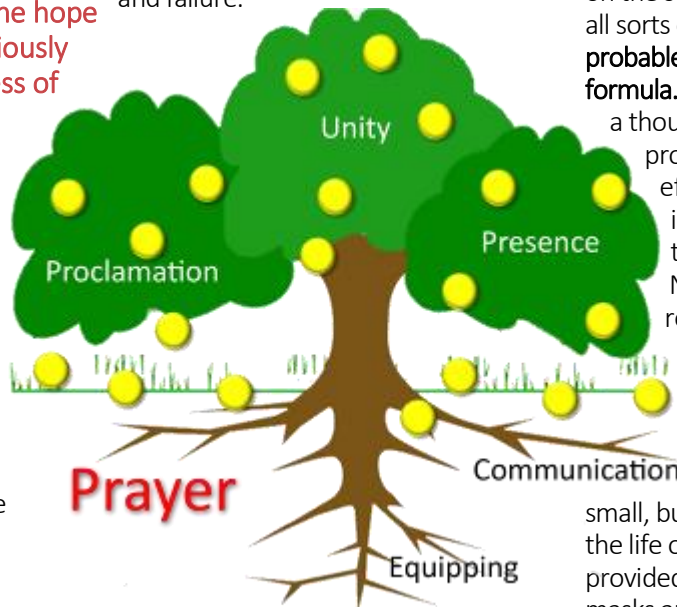
that many churches will seriously reflect upon the effectiveness of their mission.

We introduced the image of a 'fruitful' tree as a way of unpacking these indicators. The green foliage represents how the world encounters each church's mission through its proclamation, presence and unity. In this issue we begin to look at the brown root system of the tree - that which feeds, enables and supports the more visible aspects of mission through prayer, equipping and communication.

**We begin with prayer.** We are going to hear some stories of what prayer looks like on the ground, and these will hopefully inspire. **But first a personal reflection...**

**In theory we are all convinced that it is vital to pray** (we KNOW that we SHOULD pray for our mission and that effective mission doesn't happen

without it), but in practice many find it SO HARD to do. Why should something seemingly so important be so difficult? For many, this struggle can lead to feelings of inadequacy, disappointment and failure.



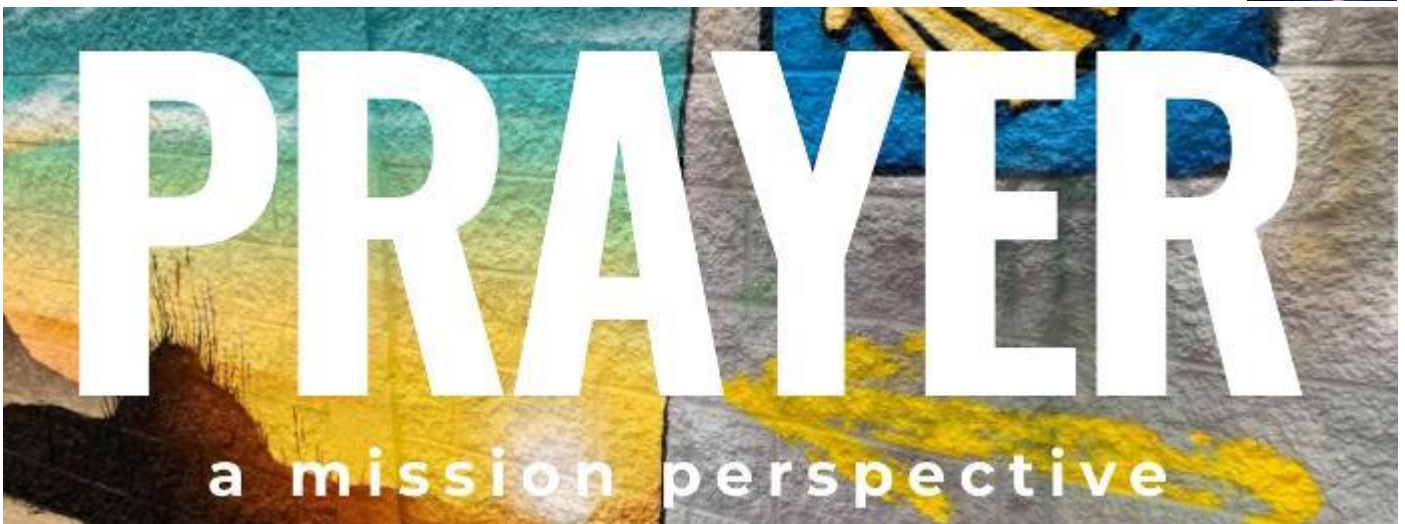
To counter these feelings I wonder if we need to release this gift from the stranglehold of earnestness and duty by encouraging creativity, adventure and imagination in prayer. And alongside this to take seriously the verse that says 'in him we live and move and have our being'? A thought that hints at the whole of life being a prayer, every activity potentially filled with a beautiful connection with the living God, and

where prayer isn't something worked up, but simply something we live in. How do we encourage such?

There are of course many books written on the subject of prayer which provide all sorts of ideas and challenges, **but the probable truth is that there is no magic formula.** But knowing that, I would offer a thought on what in my own ministry

proved to be one of the most effective ways of energizing and inspiring folk to pray. Namely that old friend **prayer triplets.** Nothing glitzy, just the simple, regular practice of meeting together with two or three others to talk and pray. Maybe it was something about the challenge, banter and bonding that comes from the small, but it was also where real life and the life of faith rubbed shoulders. It provided an opportunity to take off masks and talk honestly and openly, and to pray about what really mattered. In church we can so focus on the big ideas, the latest popular mission venture, that we miss the point that for most people the biggest challenge is to connect faith with their life beyond the church bubble.

Colin Pye



# Lessons from the Camino

# PRAYER

a mission perspective

*“This is what the Lord says, “Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.” (Jeremiah 6:16)*

It is not surprising that this verse from Jeremiah was on my mind as I prepared to start walking the Camino de Santiago in September 2019.

Over many centuries, pilgrims have set out for what is believed to be the burial place of James, brother of John and disciple of Jesus. There are many ancient paths that converge upon Santiago del Compostela. My chosen route was the Camino Frances,

beginning at St Jean Pied de Port in France. There are many crossroads, although it was hard to get lost, so well-defined was the main trail. And I did hope to find rest for my soul during the second part of some overdue sabbatical leave.

I started my Camino on September 5<sup>th</sup>, and so began a journey of 30 days during which I walked an average of 18 miles a day to reach my destination. The phrase ‘a life-changing experience’ is overused, but I think it is true of my trip. I want to share three lessons learnt that continue to feed my faith and witness, and that relate to the mission of the church.

### Every step a prayer

Like many, I am not as disciplined in my prayer life as I could be, yet I do have a prayer life. On the Camino, I learnt to regard every step as a prayer – and at 1.1million steps that is a lot of prayer! There were moments of great joy, especially walking in the dark before sunrise,



praying for colleagues, my church and new friends met along the way, and feeling a part of the God-given community that is the human race. Each of us, individual and church, needs to find our own way to pray, but we do need to cultivate the habit.

### Everyone loved by God

There is a tremendous camaraderie amongst pilgrims. I have many new friends with whom I hope to stay in touch. There were some, though, who tried my patience immensely: raucous snorers in my dorm, cyclists

that didn’t ring their bells, early risers who woke me up (think 4.30am!), and even the walker I followed for a time who had very squeaky shoes! I was reminded that despite their foibles, and despite mine, God loves all people equally. We should not merely seek out people we like or people like us, as we share the love of God.

### Every pilgrim with purpose

On the Camino, both journey and destination are important, but pilgrims wouldn’t make the journey were it not for the destination in Santiago. We shared that in common, though some will return

several more times to complete the journey. I found myself longing for the church to remember our common purpose. In Spanish, Jesus says in John 14:6, ‘Yo soy el Camino - ‘I am the Way’. Individual Christians and churches will have different opinions on what it means to follow Jesus. Sometimes, we may oppose each other. I long that we celebrate our diversity in unity, gathering

around Jesus who is the Way to our Loving God. In so doing, we may share with a world in need the rest for our souls that Jesus gives to us!

**Tim Edworthy: Minister of Well Street Church, Buckingham**



### CYBER SECURITY

What can your church do to protect themselves?

Some Baptist churches may feel (and be) vulnerable to cyber threats. But did you know there are a number of measures you can take to prevent a cyber-attack? The BIC web site <https://tinyurl.com/yx4t9y8q> has a few tips on reducing the risk of a successful attack on your church, such as effective Malware & Password protection, Educating /training staff, Safeguarding data, Avoiding phishing, Destroying before disposal and more.



# raising the profile of

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The Biblical precedent that we are to “pray continually” (1 Thessalonians 5:17) can often feel like an impossible ideal rather than a practical reality. Drawing from Jesus’ example of praying early in the morning, alone on hillsides and with intense fervency, the consensus is that prayer is an essential part of our spiritual lives. Prayer is about authentic communication with God, a reciprocal process of sharing our thoughts **with** God and hearing **from** God. It’s giving space for silence and word - for tuning ourselves into what God has to say to us, perhaps more than what we might have to say to Him.

However, the reality is that we can often find prayer difficult, frequently not knowing what to say, how to say it or perhaps even to say it at all and it can be tricky to know how to hear from God. Prayer meetings can be poorly attended and I wonder if the way we pray in church has set a

precedent for “how” to pray that just doesn’t work for everyone? Do people think “I can’t pray” because “I can’t pray like **that**”? Scripture records that the disciples actively sought instruction on how to pray from Jesus, yet they continued to find it tricky, even falling asleep

mid-prayer. Jesus clearly demonstrated the value of prayer,



so what can we do when prayer can often be a struggle?

Over the past year at Bunyan Baptist Church we’ve endeavoured to raise the profile of prayer through a number of different



ways. There have been pop-up prayer meetings linked with a sermon series on prayer, a week of prayer with an interactive prayer room and a prayer resource called the “Travelling prayer box”. The box contained suggestions for ways to pray based on our theme verse

for the year (1 Thessalonians 3:12) with the idea that these would inspire and equip those who used it to pray as individuals or groups. The prayer ideas in the box used images, music, art and objects inviting people into prayer focused on looking and listening. Those who used the box said that they found it helpful to use these ideas as a change from the usual “gather as group, take your turn” kind of prayer.

Our hope is that exploring different ways to pray, alongside developing our discernment of God’s voice, will ultimately motivate us into both practical action and prayerful experience as we go about our daily lives. For as we draw closer to God in prayer we are more able to be agents for His grace wherever He calls us to be. In this year, when there are likely to be many puns about having 2020 vision, we hope to keep our eyes on Jesus by continuing to be open to deepening our experience of prayer. As it is through this that our eyes will be opened to what God is doing around us, in us and through us.

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**Associate**  
**Minister,**  
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**Stevenage**



# in a Chaplaincy Context

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It's 9.15am on Monday and the Methodist Superintendent Minister, WLM's CEO and other staff at our Central Office who choose to, are meeting for our shared weekly prayers. At the start of the working week, irrespective of our various responsibilities, praying together we are acknowledging our dependence upon God, in Christ, as by the Spirit we seek to fulfil our mission 'to empower people affected by homelessness, poverty and trauma to live more fulfilling lives'.

Later on Monday, and I am on the tube, heading towards Finsbury Park, going to eat lunch and spend some time in the day area with the residents at WLM The Haven, our work with people living with chronic alcohol dependency. As I travel, I turn my mind to the people I will be meeting: remembering conversations from last week, aware of what's been happening there in-between my visits, and alert to one of the residents having a birthday this week. I hold the staff team and residents before God, praying my way into the couple of hours I will be with them, trusting that God always goes ahead of me. I try to make this my practice whichever of the WLM services I am going to in my chaplain's role.



On alternate Wednesday's at WLM Katherine Price Hughes Hostel, working with men just out of prison you will find me leading a meditation group. After some initial breathing exercises, we might have a poem, the table will have a visual focal point, and we hold ten minutes of



silent contemplation before coming back together as a group and sharing any reflections if people want. People of all faiths and none may come to this group so what is led is not specifically Christian prayer, but I say that for people of faith they may want to use the time of silence for prayer to God. Beyond the group itself I have all sorts of interesting conversations about the nature of prayer, and rich sharing across faith traditions about our understandings of prayer. Many of the men tell me its easier to pray when in prison, fewer distractions! This shared half hour that is respectful of the Other, human and divine, provides both a holding place and is a springboard to more.

These, then, are some of the ways that prayer weaves into my chaplaincy week. At other times I create space for prayer

together as we remember loved ones in the season of All Saints and All Souls, as we celebrate Christmas sharing a carol service, or as I respond to someone's request to 'say a prayer'. There is also my personal prayer: that often wrestles with God at the injustices in the housing

market and the benefits system drawing on the Psalms; that weeps at many of the stories of brokenness and hurt I hear. But also prayer that delights and rejoices at people's resilience, their insights, their creativity, and their faith. As I pray into, through and about my work, I am changed, in my reading of scripture, my vision of God, my following of Christ.

By Ruth Bottoms:

WLM Chaplain (for more info on WLM please see website: [www.wlm.org.uk](http://www.wlm.org.uk))

*For the last seven years Ruth Bottoms has been WLM Chaplain, working across the WLM Services that variously work with people facing such issues as homelessness, chronic alcohol addiction, or being just out of prison.*

