

Churches Together in Barnstaple

Annual Report for period to August 2024



Following a period of inactivity, in the summer of 2023, a small group of local leaders who had been praying together, felt prompted to write to local church leaders with a view to formally restarting the work of 'Churches Together in Barnstaple' (CTiB), sensing from God, that the focus of this work needed to be on building relationship, prayer and mission.

The invitation was extended to congregations in the parishes adjoining Barnstaple Town, as well as to a number of local Christian agencies that are involved in prayer and mission. These include Christians Against Poverty (CAP), Freedom Community Alliance (FCA), Street Pastors, North Devon House of Prayer (NDHOP) and the Hospital Chaplaincy team. In all, 15 congregations and agencies responded positively expressing a willingness for CTiB membership (full list attached) and on 6th September 2023, their appointed representatives met together to elect an Enabling Group.

The elected group comprised of a mix of leaders and others from member churches/agencies, all with a heart to explore together opportunities to strengthen local unity. They are:

- Paul Taylor (Chair) - Trinity
- Roger Bartlett (Secretary) – Freedom Community Alliance / Street Pastors
- Magnus Proctor (Treasurer) – St Johns' Newport
- Gary Owen – Two Rivers MC
- Rachel Keenan - Trinity
- Paula Clarke - Grosvenor
- Phil Pugsley – Christians Against Poverty (CAP)
- Jim Ware – North Devon House of Prayer
- Joanna Pay – St John's Bishop's Tawton

In the past year, the group has met seven times in total. They have built relationship sharing communion and worshipping together as well as seeking God in prayer and through their discussions to determine how to encourage the work of unity. This is a brief summary of what they have been involved in:



South West Awake on the Strand

The group has arranged monthly united prayer breakfasts at Trinity attended by between 12 and 20 individuals each month. These have been vibrant times of prayer and worship that have been a great encouragement to those attending.

They have secured insurance and taken on the responsibility for organising a small number of events including 3 local gatherings linked to **South West Awake** – a collective act of prayer around the SW footpath on 29th June. Locally, more than 45 people from 11 different congregations met for what was a precious time of prayer together.

In response to the general election, the group organised an **Election Hustings** event on 23rd June at the Freedom Centre. It was attended by parliamentary candidates and about 90 local Christians who were able to ask questions, raise awareness of the work of Christians locally and pray for the candidates.

CTiB has supported the fantastic work of the local **Try Praying Street Team**, providing resources to use as part of their regular ongoing sessions offering prayer to those they encounter in Barnstaple Town Centre. Team members also recently joined with Barnstaple Street Pastors to provide a very visible Christian presence at the Pilton Green Man festival in support of church members from St Mary's, Pilton.

The group has provided regular communication to both CTiB members and non-members (about 95 individuals in total) promoting the work of unity with a monthly email and restarting the CTiB Facebook Page providing details of up-coming events and activities to participate in and to pray for. Looking forward we are exploring options for developing a website which we feel will provide a focal point for all CTiB

information; enable better promotion of events, potentially a booking capability and will help improve coordination generally.

Amongst the activities CTiB was able to promote were some Christmas events including the Christmas Day Lunch; Carol singing during late night shopping; The Nativity Trail and the Barnstaple Toy Box appeal which led to 1400 presents being donated for 500 local families living in poverty. Looking forward, CTiB is looking to take on more of the coordination of these activities and, through them, to encourage non-church goers to attend a local service at church.



Election Hustings @ Freedom

CTiB have promoted a number of **CAP events** such as their 10th Anniversary and their Christmas Party that saw many guests make decisions for Jesus for the first time. The CAP Big Quiz raised more than £2200, and there was an evangelism training day arranged by CAP with Mark Ritchie.

There have been a number of '**Men of Devon**' events including an evening with Steve Legg on 16th Jan which attracted about 160 guests; a **Homes for Good** event in February encouraging Christians to consider fostering and adoption and a **Pickwell Foundation** interactive theatre event called 'Desperate Journeys' aimed at raising awareness of the plight of refugees.

Over the **Pentecost weekend** (19th-21st May) CTiB promoted **Love South-West** which this year was organised by local Church Leader Tim Gilbert. The weekend included a wonderful evening of united prayer and worship at Grosvenor on the Friday with Sarah Yardley (Creationfest). On Saturday churches were encouraged to bless their local communities practically in some way and use the Sunday as an invitation to newcomers to 'Come to Church'. Going forward CTiB is considering taking on the organising of this annual venture and develop the above themes.

The group has sought to support the work of our local Christian agencies promoting opportunities for Christians to help as they arise. Following the open day at the 'Hub on the Strand' in May, the group has written to the leaders of One Life Church offering CTiB support with the inspiring vision they have to develop the property, which will provide a fantastic facility for the town.

The group believes that the work of unity is not about 'short term activity' but is a life-long commitment to 'journey together' in love and to work together, not just for the blessing of the local church, but to see our community transformed by the power of God's Holy Spirit. We feel this work is only just beginning.

In recent weeks, Christchurch, Bear Street has joined as a member congregation and we are keen to encourage others to do so as they feel prompted. We recognise that we are all very different in our styles of worship and in some of our doctrines, but we are united in the truth that 'Jesus is Lord'.

As we look forward, we recognise that, so far, we have not been able to connect with and support our local church leaders in the way that we would have liked. Our heart is to serve them in their ministry rather than adding additional burdens and we are keen to listen to them about how we can better support them.

If re-elected, the group is keen to develop the monthly united prayer meetings and look at other opportunities for collective prayer and worship. We hope to make more of the opportunities presented by Christmas, Easter and Pentecost, and also want to provide events that will help to equip the church to reach out to the local community with the gospel of Jesus.

In terms of CTiB finances, a small number of transactions have been made over the year leaving a current balance of £5676.70 with £1677 restricted for the purposes of supporting an act of public united worship as previously took place in the Pannier Market. Our treasurer, Magnus Proctor has seen his life circumstances change since he took on the role and would like to step down. We are incredibly grateful to him for overseeing this transitional period for CTiB and hope to identify and appoint a new treasurer in September. If you know of someone you feel would be willing and suitable, please do let us know.

Thank you all for your support and prayer for this precious work. God bless you.

Roger Bartlett – On behalf of CTiB Enabling Group