

Words and actions to make Jesus known



HOPE's dream is for a growing church, showing Jesus' love and telling the Jesus story, at the heart of every community. We are working towards 2018 and a massive year of mission together in words and action to make Jesus known.

Imagine the church in the UK growing by 10%. That's a church of 30 with three new Christians; a church of 100 with 10 new believers. This goal will stretch our faith. Unless we all pray and work together, doing our part, it won't happen. But we are not working on our own. All over the country there's a sense that God is moving us into a new season – to reap a harvest.

The Talking Jesus research (www.talkingjesus.org) shows one in five of the people we talk to about Jesus wants to know more. So HOPE is encouraging every Christian to pray for five friends, colleagues, neighbours or family members, looking for God-given opportunities to help them on their journey to Jesus. Prayer is the vital first step in all we do.

Jesus said, 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field' (Matthew 9:37-38). He used the agricultural images of the day to encourage us to sow the seeds of the gospel and reap a harvest. He suggests the seasonal approach that HOPE has developed for contemporary churches to use.

A rhythm of mission

HOPE's rhythm of mission begins with prayer in Lent, the weeks before Easter. Easter is deliberately focused on outreach – a Jesus Day to invite friends and neighbours. Pentecost parties, fetes and summer Fun Days are opportunities to build on those friendships; churches often use the summer months to serve their neighbourhood in practical ways, clearing waste ground or painting children's playgrounds (with the appropriate permissions). Traditional Harvest festivals are adapted to suit local needs. Some churches give thanks to God for the work he provides. Where farming is not a local occupation, a lathe, a builder's hard-hat, a nurses' stethoscope or an office worker's laptop, might take centre stage as local people are invited to give thanks to God for his provision. Pop-up restaurants offering Food With Friends are a new initiative being developed to help foster new friendships.

HOPE is a catalyst for mission so churches can do more together with words and action to make Jesus known. HOPE isn't prescriptive, so churches are free to plan mission to use local talent and resources. HOPE offers lots of free resources and ideas on our website www.hopetogether.org.uk and through our monthly updates. We do recognise that together, with God's help, we can do so much more than working alone. Simply by using the HOPE logo, churches connect to the national campaign, with all the momentum and publicity that brings. We also appreciate that churches can get mission burn-out, so we encourage churches to work together, taking responsibility for different points in the calendar so residents of villages, towns and cities have opportunities throughout the year to hear and respond to the Christian gospel.

Reaping a harvest

For example, one village church in East Sussex uses the parish magazine to keep in touch with every household. At Christmas they hold a karaoke carols event in the village pub. Carols singers are invited to take part in New Year courses at the church such as Start, Christianity Explored or an Alpha course.

At Easter the local school holds its Easter service in the church and families are invited to all the Easter events including Messy Church and an Easter egg hunt. The summer fete brings the community together again. As well as children's games, a bouncy castle, competitions, a barbecue and fund-raising stalls, there's an art exhibition and flower festival illustrating the Christian story. The harvest supper is another opportunity to invite people in, building bridges throughout the community alongside regular church services, toddler group, senior citizens' clubs and area-wide youth events.

The church has seen three dads become Christians in the past three years. The events have provided a framework for invitational events. But the key to these young men finding faith has been intentional evangelism and one to one conversations in the pub, over a coffee or on a walk, at times that fit their busy lives. Regular groups are held throughout the year to allow people easy ways to find out about following Jesus. Church members have learned how to put their faith into words appropriately and are intentional about taking every opportunity to give a reason for the hope we have in Jesus (1 Peter 3:16).

Inviting a response also needs to be intentional; people need opportunities to make the decision to follow Jesus. And to fulfil the Great Commission, churches also need plans to nurture new believers. HOPE encourages churches to plan for growth, so that sowing, reaping and nurturing new believers are part of the rhythm of every year.

HOPE 2018

HOPE is building towards a massive year of mission in 2018 when the country will mark the centenary of the end of World War 1. HOPE developed special resources for 2014, marking 100 years from the start of the Great War. As millions of people attended church-led Remembrance events, HOPE offered churches resources to help those people reflect on God's greater love and his Son Jesus, who laid down his life for us. New, creative resources will be available for 2018.

Christmas gives churches a tremendous opportunity to celebrate Jesus' birth at the heart of their communities. Again, HOPE provides ideas and resources, particularly for events outside the church building. Working in partnership with Sports Chaplaincy UK and Tearfund, HOPE encourages churches to hold united carol services in sports stadia, pubs and community centres, bringing people together to sing carols and discover more about Jesus.

For Easter, HOPE is developing Jesus Day resources for churches to give away. HOPE is also working in partnership with One Friday (www.onefriday.info) which provides ready-made creative resources for churches to use.

Throughout the year, HOPE encourages churches and individuals to be intentional in putting the gospel into words and action sowing seeds. Let's pray that God moves to transform our country. Let's pray that the Church is mobilized to share the gospel with words and action to make Jesus known. Let's pray that our friends, family members and the people we talk to respond to Jesus.

Sign up to be part of HOPE 2018 at www.hopetogether.org.uk.

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