

Issue 28
Spring 2025

intouch

News of ministries
within the
Affinity Family



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affinity
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Church for the advancement of
Christ's kingdom.

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Director's Desk

It is a pleasure to share with you our Spring edition of In Touch magazine.

Paul tells us in Ephesians that 'our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms' (Ephesians 6:12).

The Christian life is full of joy and hope, but it is also a battle and a struggle. A fight goes on every day, both inside and outside: against our sinful nature and the forces of evil, and for the glory of Christ as we proclaim the gospel in a world that is sometimes hostile.

In this edition of In Touch, we have some great articles to encourage us to keep going in the fight. Andy Bannister from Solas gets us thinking about how we address our confused culture with gospel truth (see page 4). The message never changes, but the cultural context is changing rapidly.

On a practical level, three ministries share examples of their work in reaching people. Hackney Evangelical Reformed Church talk about their theme of Christmas Hope in an urban, multicultural context (page 8). Then, 100Fold share how micro SD cards are being used to spread seeds of hope across the world (page 13), and Wycliffe tell us about their ongoing and vital work in translating the Bible for

those who still have no written word of God (page 16).

Since we seek to carry out our work with love and care for everyone involved, it is encouraging to have some reflections on 25 years of safeguarding from experienced practitioners at Christian Safeguarding Services (see page 10).

We trust you will find this edition of In Touch encouraging and informative. I would love to hear from you with any comments or questions. You can write to me directly at director@affinity.org.uk, and our Editor's details are found on the back of this magazine.

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you.

Graham Nicholls





Dr Andy Bannister

Four ways to communicate Christ in a culture of confusion

By Andy Bannister

Our world is dominated by complex issues – divisive politics, cultural conflicts, moral confusion, and profound polarisation. How do we navigate these challenges without getting bogged down in debates or trapped in the toxicity of outrage culture?

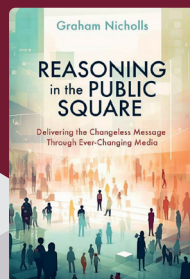
The answer lies in the approach of the Apostle Paul. When faced with a confused and hostile culture in Athens (Acts 17:16-34), he didn't retreat or lash out. Instead, he identified a bridge that could lead to the gospel. Here are four lessons from his approach that can help us engage wisely and redemptively.

1. Take time to understand

Paul began by observing the culture, studying what people valued and engaging with their beliefs. When we meet those with different beliefs, we should ask questions and listen. A friend of mine once asked his Muslim colleague, 'What do you believe?' After listening, he responded, 'I'm a Christian, and we share some similarities, but there are also differences...'

Here are four helpful questions to prime spiritual conversations:

1. Do you think there is a God, and if so, what is he like?
2. Who or what do you think human beings are?
3. What do you say is wrong with the world?
4. What do you think the solution is?



What might going to the synagogue and the marketplace look like in 21st-century Britain? Think it through with the help of the helpful insights and practical tips in Graham Nicholls' *Reasoning in the Public Square*. Available from 10ofThose.com for £9.99.

A different friend claimed total disinterest in God, but had opinions on those last three questions. Discussing those created opportunities to explore the first one.

2. Go where people are

Paul didn't wait for people to come to him – he went to the synagogue and the marketplace. We can't just wait for people to come to church.

For years, I thought being nice at work – helping colleagues, washing coffee cups – would lead people to Jesus. But they didn't connect my kindness to my faith. We need to be intentional about making our faith clear. When someone asks about your weekend, mention church, because small statements can spark curiosity.

Also, pray and watch for opportunities (cf. Colossians 4:4-5). Our job is to join in where we find God is already at work in people's lives.

3. Find points of connection

Paul built bridges by referencing the Athenian 'altar to the Unknown God'. He didn't begin by critiquing their beliefs but found common ground. In our secular world, people care about things that only make sense if Christianity is true – justice, human dignity, love, and beauty. If life is just atoms and molecules, why do these things matter?

A teacher friend of mine once asked his class, 'Who thinks it was wrong that the Taliban mutilated a young girl who escaped a forced marriage?' Every hand went up. But when asked, 'Why?' the students struggled to answer.

One said, 'It just is.'

'But why?' my friend pressed. 'If we're just accidents of nature, where do human rights come from?'

The question lingered. Later, his agnostic head of department admitted, 'I'd never considered how much our idea of justice depends on God.'

Many people care about justice, the environment, and human worth – without realising their worldview doesn't explain why. We can help them see how the Christian faith does.



4. Connect everything to Jesus

In Athens, Paul built towards Jesus. He didn't just engage in philosophy or social commentary. Many assume Christianity is primarily an ethical system, but the gospel is not good advice – it's good news. Jesus changes everything.

A student asked me how I could take Christianity seriously when so many church leaders abuse power. Instead of defending the church, I pointed to Jesus: 'I share your disgust. That's the opposite of how Jesus lived. Unlike any other leader of his time, Jesus washed his disciples' feet. And ultimately, he laid down his life for others.'

If you'd appreciate some pointers, check out *Have You Ever Wondered?* for help with 28 contemporary issues.



The student saw something different in Jesus. We gave him Mark's Gospel, in which Jesus says, 'For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.' (Mark 10:45)

- Therefore look for moments to say:
- 'That reminds me of something Jesus said...'
- 'That reminds me of something Jesus did...'
- 'That reminds me of a story Jesus told...'

The more naturally we speak of Jesus, the more others will see His relevance.

A culture desperate for hope

The early church was a tiny group of fearful believers in a hostile society. Yet they changed the world as they listened, went where people were, built bridges, and introduced Jesus into conversation after conversation.

We live in a culture longing for hope, love, and meaning. And the good news is, what people are searching for – though they don't realise it – is Jesus.

Therefore we can step forward with confidence. Not with fear, but with faith. Not to argue, but to invite; not to impose, but to show that in Jesus, everything finally makes sense.

Dr Andy Bannister is the Director of Solas, which works with churches all over the UK, sharing the gospel and equipping Christians to share their faith more effectively solas-cpc.org

"We live in a culture longing for hope, love, and meaning. And the good news is, what people are searching for – though they don't realise it – is Jesus."





Sharing Christmas Hope in Hackney

By Kehinde Omotayo

In Genesis 32, Jacob is so moved by having survived seeing God's face that he names the local area 'Peniel' (which means 'face of God'). This encounter inspired the 2024 advent theme for Hackney Evangelical Reformed Church: 'Peniel: To See God and Live'.

Our advent sermon series explored how Christmas invites us to see the face of God through the incarnation of the Lord Jesus. Our Christmas season was marked by

several events that aimed to encourage our community to make the most of this invitation.

Most of the events we held have become staples for our church in recent years. We hosted a carol service, a Christmas Day service, and a New Year's Eve crossover service to round off the season.

One notable addition was the Christmas edition of our new quarterly food bank project. We provided festive food items to about 50 people from our local area who visited the church building. It was a privilege to serve our neighbours and show the love of Christ in a practical way during a season when many face financial or emotional burdens.

Our carol service was a highlight of the season. Around 150 people attended, and members of our congregation participated in reading the nativity story. We also sang beloved Christmas carols, led by our choir. The service culminated



in a sermon from Matthew 1:18-25, where we were encouraged to seek the meaning of life in the most significant birth in human history – Jesus Christ.

On Christmas morning, around 75 people gathered to sing Christmas hymns and to reflect on a sermon from 1 John 1:1-4. The focus was on the wonder of God coming to dwell with humanity, bringing life, fellowship, and hope through Jesus.

We concluded the season with our New Year's Eve service. The evening featured extended times of prayer and singing, as well as a sermon from Colossians 1:15-23. We were encouraged to acknowledge Christ as sovereign over the past year and to trust him as Lord of the year to come. The service ended just before midnight, allowing us to joyfully count down to the new year as a church family.

This Christmas season was a time to take heart from the glory of God revealed in the face of his Son. We are grateful for the opportunities we had to share this hope with our church family and the local community.

Affinity Future Topics Survey

At Affinity, we're committed to supporting gospel-driven churches and parachurch organisations with tools that address today's challenges and opportunities. But we need your input to continue to do that effectively.

We want to hear from you. Whether you're a church or parachurch leader, a theological student or simply passionate about gospel ministry, your voice can play a vital role in shaping our ministry.

Tell us what formats you find most helpful, whether that's testimonials or articles or podcasts or webinars or in-person events. Let us know what topics you'd appreciate us covering. And give us any other feedback you think we should hear.

Sharing your opinion will take just three minutes of your time. But it will enable Affinity to serve you even better, both in 2025 and beyond.

Take the survey now:
affinity.org.uk/future





Reflections on 25 Years of Safeguarding

Twenty-five years ago, the idea of safeguarding in churches was barely on the radar. Today, it is one of the most scrutinised areas of ministry, shaped by high-profile cases, new laws, and shifting cultural awareness.

The past quarter-century has brought rapid and extensive changes in safeguarding practice. As we entered the new millennium, few could have predicted the pivotal events and reforms shaping today's safeguarding landscape. Reviewing these developments within churches and faith-based charities is both timely and necessary. While child protection was gaining attention in non-public sectors before 2000, this period

saw increasing UK government focus on safeguarding within voluntary and faith organisations. This article examines key changes, the current landscape, and future considerations.

Safeguarding children

The legal framework for child protection has evolved since the 1945 Dennis O'Neill case, culminating in the 1989 Children Act, a cornerstone of UK safeguarding law. By the late 1990s, background checks for adults working with children gained prominence, leading to the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) and later the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS).

The 2000 death of Victoria Climbié prompted a public inquiry, leading to the 2004 Children Act. Key lessons included:

- The influence of harmful beliefs, such as the perception that she was demon-possessed.
- The failure of agencies to share critical information.
- The need for voluntary organisations to collaborate with statutory services.



Following the 2002 Soham murders, further reforms strengthened background checks, culminating in the 2006 Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act. Today, DBS checks are routine in churches and charities, but they must be part of a comprehensive safe recruitment process rather than a standalone safeguard.

An increased focus on early intervention has led to tracking ‘low-level concerns’ – issues that do not meet the threshold for social care referrals but may indicate patterns of risk. This shift prioritises outcomes over rigid processes, enhancing proactive safeguarding.

High-profile abuse cases – including revelations involving Jimmy Savile (which came to light in 2012), the Roman Catholic Church, and the Church of England – led to the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) in 2014. Its findings continue to shape safeguarding policies across sectors, reinforcing accountability and survivor support.

Safeguarding in churches

Churches must acknowledge both the sinfulness of the human heart and the reality that abuse happens within Christian communities. They must consider how abusers ‘hide in plain sight’ and how organisational culture can enable abuse.

Modern safeguarding has been shaped by increasing awareness of:

- Child sexual exploitation.
- Gang-related abuse and county lines.
- Online risks, including social media.
- Violence against women and girls (including sexual harassment).
- Peer-on-peer abuse.
- Domestic violence.

The #MeToo movement, which emerged following allegations against Harvey Weinstein in 2017, highlighted the abuse of power – including within churches. This, along with the growing discussion on what is often referred to as ‘spiritual abuse,’ underscores the need for healthy organisational culture.

Scandals involving Save the Children (2015) and Oxfam (2018) have emphasised the importance of accountability and oversight. The financial collapse of Kids Company (2015) underscored the critical role of trustees. In response, the Charity Commission strengthened safeguarding expectations, requiring all charities – whether or not they engage in regulated activities – to implement proportionate safeguarding arrangements.

Further legislative milestones include the 2014 Care Act, which strengthened safeguarding for adults, and the 2021 Domestic Abuse Act, which expanded definitions to include coercive control. Churches must also consider trauma, mental health, and the impact of past abuse, seeking specialist input where needed.

Misapplications of safeguarding

While safeguarding is vital, its misapplication presents challenges. The idea that we must always believe the victim



is well-intentioned but neither biblical (Deuteronomy 19:15) nor best practice. Allegations must be taken seriously and referred to statutory services or carefully investigated, but false or malicious claims, though rare, do occur. The case of Carl Beech, whose false abuse claims led to a costly police investigation, highlights the need for impartiality and due process.

Safeguarding principles are also being misapplied beyond their legal scope, particularly concerning adults. The Care Act distinguishes between ‘adults with care and support needs’ and those at risk of abuse, yet safeguarding is increasingly invoked where no legal basis exists. In some cases, it is even weaponised to serve unrelated agendas. Justice requires both protecting the vulnerable and ensuring fair treatment for all, with safeguarding remaining a tool for protection, not control.

Building an effective safeguarding culture

This article has explored key safeguarding developments over the past 25 years. Our understanding has grown, recognising that child abuse often overlaps multiple categories and that safeguarding extends beyond children. Some adults meet statutory thresholds, while others may be vulnerable but not legally classified as at risk. Churches and charities also have a general duty of care to all they engage with.

Our perception of perpetrators has evolved. While abuse was once thought to be

committed mostly by men against children, we now recognise that adults can abuse adults, children can harm peers, and some young people transition from victim to perpetrator. These complexities have led to an ever-growing safeguarding framework.

To build an effective safeguarding culture, organisations must:

- ▶ **Think biblically** – Scripture sets higher standards than the state.
- ▶ **Recruit staff and volunteers carefully** – Implement robust, proportionate recruitment processes.
- ▶ **Provide ongoing training** – Equip staff, volunteers, trustees, and leaders at all levels.
- ▶ **Ensure accountability** – Support and challenge staff to uphold safeguarding principles.
- ▶ **Set and review clear standards** – Maintain high standards of conduct and process.
- ▶ **Identify and manage risks** – Understand and mitigate risks proportionately.
- ▶ **Share information appropriately** – Refer concerns and collaborate with statutory agencies.
- ▶ **Foster a safeguarding culture** – Encourage openness, constructive discussion, and accountability.
- ▶ **Safeguarding is not just about policies and procedures** – it is about creating a culture of care, wisdom, and accountability. We must ensure that our churches and charities are places of both welcome and protection.

Further support can be found at
thecss.co.uk.

Small Tech, Big Impact: Spreading the Gospel with Mustard Seeds



ONE
HUNDRED
FOLD

In Matthew 13, Jesus shares the parable of the mustard seed, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown, it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.'

At 100fold, we drew inspiration from this vision of small beginnings leading to a profound impact. We started with MicroSD cards – tiny yet powerful tools – and packed them with gospel content and Scripture. These cards, known as Mustard Seeds, were designed to bring

hope to people in remote, persecuted, and contested areas by providing access to the gospel on their phones without requiring internet connectivity.

From there, we developed a custom Android app tailored to each ministry partner so as to make the content more accessible and meaningful. The app can be fully customised with logos, colours, layouts, and, most importantly, the local language. Additional features include a media player that works seamlessly across Android versions, a sharing tool for spreading content, and a connection feature for users to reach ministry partners with questions.

We also addressed challenges unique to working in restricted regions. To prevent misuse (such as hostile parties exploiting digital Scriptures), we developed technology to protect the content. We also implemented measures to lock the MicroSD cards, ensuring the original content couldn't be erased or replaced, protecting against corruption or unauthorised use.

Another challenge arose when ministry partners struggled to locate resources in their languages or secure digital permissions. Determined to bridge this gap, we collaborated with over 100 ministries producing Gospel media in more than 1,000 languages. This effort resulted in agreements that gave us access to over 100,000 files, enabling ministries worldwide to distribute Gospel content effectively.



Delivering the hope of the gospel to the poor and isolated

Today, Mustard Seeds deliver the hope of the Gospel to the poor, isolated, persecuted, and war-torn while safeguarding users' privacy, overcoming content blocking, and providing materials in their languages. Over 400,000 Mustard Seeds have been distributed. While security concerns limit the stories we can share, here are a few that help illustrate how Mustard Seeds are used.

A husband and wife came to faith inside a closed country and began ministering to drug addicts. One of the addicts they helped was a thief. He would steal SD cards from people, wipe them clean, and resell them. One day he stole a memory card from this couple that he couldn't erase. The memory card – one of the Mustard Seeds we created – was full of gospel content. Through it, he got the message that God loved him. He confessed to this couple that he had stolen their Mustard Seed and they had the privilege of leading him to Christ.

Fifty Mustard Seeds loaded with gospel material in French, made their way to a Bible School in Côte d'Ivoire. Pastors from the rural areas gathered and were given one each by a 100Fold partner, Friends In Action. There was much rejoicing when they discovered that the Mustard Seed also contained the Bible and teaching in their heart language of Boule, many pastors then planned outreach activities using the Mustard Seeds.



Rosie has been ministering in Papua New Guinea since 1998, teaching evangelism and discipleship to children, ladies, and Sunday School teachers. Recently Rosie took one thousand Mustard Seeds to distribute at a youth conference and to local pastors – and she commented that she could have distributed many more!

The story of the Mustard Seed is one of overcoming obstacles to bring the hope of the Gospel to those with the least access to it. However, one of the greatest challenges remains getting Mustard Seeds into the hands of those who need them most, especially when financial resources are scarce. Each Mustard Seed costs just £6 to produce, but for many frontline missionaries and pastors, even this small cost is beyond reach.

That's why we launched the Seed Sower campaign. By sponsoring one or more Mustard Seeds, individuals, small groups, and churches can directly place the Gospel into the hands of those who might otherwise go without. And the impact doesn't end there – you'll receive

updates showing where your Mustard Seeds have been 'planted' and how they are changing lives.

Will you help sow the seeds of the Gospel today?

Learn more and get involved at
100fold.org/seedsower



A world where **everyone** can know Jesus through the Bible

Why Wycliffe Bible Translators works with such urgency to translate the Bible for the one in five people who are waiting for it in their language.

For many Ifè people, being able to read the New Testament in their language has transformed their lives

‘The biggest impact the New Testament has had,’ says Komi Sena, an Ifè Bible translator in Togo, ‘is that the number of Christians and churches has grown hugely because people can understand the word of God in their language.’ Before the Ifè translation started there weren’t many Ifè churches. ‘But now,’ Komi says with a big smile on his face, ‘almost every Ifè village has a church.’

The Bible changes lives. Many of us have experienced its power to change us personally and in our churches. But for the Bible to change lives, as it is doing among the Ifè people in Togo, people need to be able to understand what God is saying through his word. The fact that one in five people – over 1.5 billion people – around the world don’t yet have the Bible in their language is one of the biggest barriers to world mission.



Bible translator Komi Sena has seen the Ifè church grow in Togo now they have the New Testament in their language

The vision of Wycliffe Bible Translators is for a world where everyone can know Jesus through the Bible. We know that where the Bible has been translated into people’s languages, the church grows, people understand the gospel and come to know Jesus, and those who already know Jesus grow more deeply in their faith and discipleship.

Lugwere church leader James Shaine, from Uganda, explains why Bible translation is so important: ‘Being a pastor of a church when you don’t have a Bible in your language has been very difficult. It was hard to convince people to study the Bible. But now that they have the New Testament in their language it makes a difference.’

Unless we speak Greek or Hebrew, all of us who read the Bible are able to do so because it has been translated for us. For those of us who speak English, John Wycliffe – after whom Wycliffe Bible Translators is named – was the first person to translate the Bible into English.

Pastor James Shine holds the Lugwere New Testament



Wycliffe was born around 700 years ago and lived a remarkable life. He was a theology professor at Oxford University, and his study of the Bible in Latin changed him deeply. What he learnt about God through the Bible caused him to challenge the practices of the Church at the time, which led to his banishment from Oxford.

Wycliffe became convinced that having the Bible in the language of the people was essential to people coming to know Jesus. So, despite huge opposition, he and his team completed the first translation of the full Bible into English.

‘The Bible is superior to all human thought,’ Wycliffe wrote. ‘It is from God, it is true, it is the foundation for all society. Christ and his apostles taught the people in the language best known to them... believers ought to have the Scriptures in a language which they fully understand.’

That is as true today as it was when John Wycliffe was alive. Indeed, there are more people alive today without the Bible in their language than the entire world population in John Wycliffe’s time.

“More Bible translation work is happening right now than at any time in history, and a new translation starts, on average, every day.”

But we live in a very exciting time for the ministry of Bible translation. More Bible translation work is happening right now than at any time in history, and a new translation starts, on average, every day. Thousands of modern-day John Wycliffes, like Komi, are working with real urgency all around the world to translate the Bible for their people. Millions of people are receiving the Bible in their language for the very first time and through that many lives are being changed and the local church is growing.



Ifè Pastor Kodya Odah longs to be able to preach from the Old Testament in his language

But there is still much more to do. While the Ifè people can see the difference having the New Testament makes, they also long to have the Old Testament in their language. ‘I’m facing a big challenge in my ministry,’ Ifè pastor Kodya Odah explains. ‘Since I can’t speak or read French, I can’t use the Old Testament. I am praying that God helps the translation team with the Old

‘Translating the Bible is so important, because many people are not able to read and understand the Scriptures. And it does not change their lives when they do not understand it.’

Testament translation so that we can have the whole Bible. It will really help me to be able to go through the Old Testament in my teaching.’

Wycliffe Bible Translators are excited to be part of Affinity because we share the same aim to proclaim the good news of Jesus and to support the church, and church leaders like Pastor Odah, in reaching people for Jesus. At Wycliffe, we are committed to serving the church, both overseas, and across the UK and Ireland. The work of Bible translation, and of proclaiming the good news of Jesus, happens best in partnership and Wycliffe looks forward to being able to serve Affinity churches and to partnering with you as we serve God’s mission to the world together.

Bible translation is a key part of God’s mission to the world. ‘Translating the Bible is so important,’ Komi Sena concludes, ‘because many people are not able to read and understand the Scriptures. And it does not change their lives when they do not understand it.’



*John Wycliffe,
who was the first
person to translate
the entire Bible into
English*

Book a Wycliffe speaker for your church

One of our passionate and gifted speakers would love to come to your church to talk about how the work of Bible translation is changing lives around the world.

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InTouch is the biannual magazine of
Affinity. It is edited by Joel Upton.

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ISSN 2977-3598 (Print)
ISSN 2977-3601 (Online)

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