

How to ...

Visit your community

This 'How to...' guide was written by St Luke the Evangelist, Brislington and reports on their 'Special Offer' project through which they sought to reach out into their community through prayer and visiting every house in the parish.



Introduction

Connecting with the community is not a new idea for us at St Luke's church in Brislington where we began a programme called Special Offer nearly three years ago. We are a group of ordinary people whose lives have been touched by our extraordinary God. This report has been written perhaps to encourage others to do something as simple as we have, and to let God do His work in and through us for the sake of His Kingdom and love.

What is Special Offer?

Special Officer is a plan to visit every house in the parish in three years.

We have had a growing concern with how we can bless our locality and community, how we can reach out with God's love in a way which is accessible and helpful, but also distinctive.

The idea for Special Offer grew out of this concern to share God's love and from our parish strapline 'Sharing God's love'. It felt important to go to where people are, in their homes, to make an offer that we will pray for something they want us to pray for – that is the special offer.

One of the ways the challenge presented itself was in Luke 13:18-21

Jesus said therefore, 'What is the kingdom of God like? And to what should I compare it? It is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in the garden; it grew and became like a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches'.

And again he said, 'To what should I compare the kingdom of God? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.'

(Luke 13:18-21)

- What are we doing to grow the mustard seed in such a way that the whole parish (locality) can come and find refuge?
- What are we doing to leaven the parish so that the whole parish rises, is lifted up?

With this in mind, we decided to create a team of people to visit every household in the parish and to offer to pray for people.

The Special Offer is two things: primarily prayer, we offered prayer and just that – not there and then, but in the following week. We also gave a leaflet about the activities of the church.

When the door was answered we talked and left a leaflet. If people were out, we just left leaflets.

We had a new email address setup - prayers@stlukesbrislington.org.uk, which one or two people used if they were out and wanted us to pray for something.

We knew from the training sessions that there would be people who would be rude/dismissive etc. We needed to be thick-skinned about that, although many more people were grateful to us for having gone than were rude.

What we did

- **Initial flier** – in the week before the planned visit, a member of the congregation took the first leaflet to the houses we planned to visit. (See Appendix 1) This leaflet includes an opt out (put this picture somewhere we can see it and we won't call)
- **Plan** - A member of the team took responsibility for the administration, working out how many houses we could visit and where we should go. This was based on how many of the team could join us on the given Saturdays.
- **Saturday morning** - Whoever could do the visiting that week met in church. We hand wrote 'Sorry we missed you' and dated some of our leaflets in preparation for those houses who would not answer the door (See Appendix 1). Meeting at 9.15am in church, we prayed and shared scripture together. We usually finished our visits before noon.
- **Visits** – always one person to the door. One person stayed with the clipboard keeping track of where we had been and what response we had received. They were also responsible for extricating people if we got stuck. Often we had four visitors, two down each side of the road, and the person on the clipboard became vital for coordinating.
- **At the door** – 'Good morning, I'm Name from St Luke's church. We left you a leaflet in the week explaining that we are going to pray for your road next week. I just wondered if there is anything we can pray for, for you or your family or friends, or the community, or country, or in the world?'
- **After the visits** – we gathered back in church again and gave our prayer requests to our administrator. These were made anonymous and typed up by the administrator to be ready and in church by the 8am service on Sunday morning. (See Appendix 2 for some examples of the prayer requests) ready for members of our various congregations who had pledged to pray for the gathered requests.
- **In church** – both on the Sunday before we went out, and the Sunday after we had been, we asked the congregation to pray for us. There were also people who agreed to pray daily for the prayer requests we gathered.
- **The whole process** was evolutionary, we learned from every Saturday.

"It has been a privilege to walk the walk around every road in the parish. I can still remember them and walk them in my mind, and also remember some of the people I've met and their prayer needs. So prayer will continue."

Some practical tips

- Someone should be tasked with typing up the prayer requests over Saturday afternoon to email to the clergy so that they can be printed and taken to the morning service.
- When writing up a request for others to see, simply use a single initial in place of the person's name.
- We managed to visit approximately 77 houses in just over an hour with two people knocking and one spare.
- Timing is difficult to get right. Lots of people were still in bed – no answer and bedroom curtains shut, but also, some people were just leaving to go out!
- The opt-out card in the window worked really well, but you must make sure you look for the card as you approach the house.

Final Stats from visiting

Over fourteen Saturdays during the 3-year period, we visited	2852 houses
Doors opened	944
Prayer requests taken and prayed for	353
Do not call notices	379
No answer	1529

"It was a great privilege to be part of Special Offer, as people were on the whole very receptive and many were very encouraging and grateful that we were willing to do this. People were very open and trusting about what they wanted us to pray for, and shared some very intimate and personal things. However, it was quite an undertaking, and at first it was really 'scary', but once I got going the scariness reduced - a bit!"

Where next... Three ideas

1. The PCC felt it would be a good idea to reinforce our praying for the parish by **leafletting** the whole parish during November, reminding them of our visit, saying that we will go on praying for them, and including the details of our Christmas services.
2. We have produced a **prayer diary** for members of the church to use which helps us to pray for the roads in the parish on a weekly basis.
3. **Open Days:** We are considering inviting the entire parish (700 households at a time) to a series of open days in St Luke's. Invitations, with the name of people's road written by hand on would be delivered:

Have you been to St Luke's lately? The church has been redecorated and tidied up. Perhaps you would like to come and see what we have done. You and others in your [name of road] are invited to a special open day on [date]. There will be activities for children, Tower Tours, Questions Corner, and refreshments.

Appendix I

This is the flier we delivered to everyone we were going to visit and the church information flyer that we gave to people:



Hello
from St Luke's Church,
Brislington

SPECIAL OFFER!

We are going to be praying for your road next week and we will be coming round on Saturday morning to ask if there is anything you would like us to pray for.

It could be something personal, local, national or international. We can't tell you how God will answer the prayers we pray, but we do promise to pray.

If you'd rather we didn't call, just leave this postcard prominently somewhere we can see when we come back round on Saturday, and we won't call. Alternatively email your prayer request to prayer@stlukesbrislington.org.uk

Yours,

Debbie Dewes (Vicar)



Mission

The aim of our church is 'Sharing God's love'; something we do together between us, and also try to do further out into the community and the world.



Faraj Hanna and the Deaf Church in Cairo

Activities within the church

There are various opportunities to help, get help or join in at St Luke's: we have jolly bell-ringers, an enthusiastic choir, a lively Mother's Union branch, creative flower ladies, teams of cleaners, a bereavement team, people who specialise in pastoral support and much more...

for instance... lots of people love to sing! And at St Luke's, music is an important part of our worship. Our **Choir** meet on Thursday at 7.30pm, three times a month. We always welcome new singers into our choir. If you, or your children, enjoy singing and would like to come along and find out more, either come on a Sunday, or drop in on any practice night.

All the details of our activities, contact names and numbers can be found on our website:

www.stlukesbrislington.org.uk

Greetings from your local parish church

St Luke's, Brislington



COME AND JOIN US

Sharing God's Love
St Luke's, Brislington

We have links with:

- a project organised by the Community of the Sisters of the Church, which runs in the St Paul's area of Bristol, and have volunteers going every week to help with their food distribution. We provide food and give money
- Julian House and the Crisis Centre, two other centres of help and support for those who are having a hard time
- further afield with supporting friendships in various parts of the world

At least 10% of our church money is designated to be given to support our Mission projects

Appendix 2

Examples of prayer requests gathered from visits.

We met a number of people who came to St Luke's at some time in the past. Pray that they would re-make contact.

We also met some who said they were new to the area and looking for a church – pray that they would come to St Luke's.

As usual health issues tend to be top of a lot of people's thoughts.

A man asked us to pray for the health his mum SH which was causing concern

That V's health would continue to improve

Pray for P and his elderly mum BF who is in hospital with cancer. She should be coming home, but only for palliative care

J's health issues

H who has painful health issues

Good health for the family – being thankful for two beautiful granddaughters

The man with shingles which has gone into his eye

S who is having a bad patch healthwise at the moment

Recovery of full health following surgery

J with mental health problems

In-law with cancer

O to overcome illness

J has been in ill health and is due to have more tests

A daughter just diagnosed with breast cancer

T's mum poorly with heart problems

Wife just out of hospital – very thankful

A friend who is ill

G who is diabetic and has good and bad days

Daughter recovering from leukaemia

Sister D caring for her husband full time following strokes

Good health for everyone

The lady and her daughter and family with a complex family court situation

Those less fortunate than we are

G is grieving for a much loved Aunt

The man who is grieving

For those feeling lonely and isolated

Safety for a son travelling around South America