

Stories of Hope



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SCOTLAND

2020 will forever be remembered for the COVID-19 pandemic. The impact on every part of Scottish society has been without precedent. The health, economic, educational, and social challenges to our families, communities and nation continues to be severe. This has been a tragic and painful year. And yet this is a story not without hope. When Scotland went into lockdown in March, local churches began to see and respond to needs in their communities.

In over 180 locations, often in partnership with others, support networks were drawn up and projects were established to support the most vulnerable and isolated. Existing services were re-purposed and staff and volunteers were redeployed. New projects started to deliver food, phone the elderly and isolated, support those homeless or claiming asylum, and connect with children and young people who were struggling with their mental health. For many, these services were literally a lifeline – often the only contact in a day when all other normal support networks and buildings were closed. The church was a beacon of hope in a time of crisis.

This short report tells that story. One that has been replicated in communities across Scotland from Dornoch to Dumfries and Glenelg to Glasgow. A story that has seen almost 100 projects bringing together more than 3,000 volunteers to deliver between them more than 200,000 individual acts of support. Truly 200,000 stories of hope.

“Two hundred thousand stories of hope”



Background

This report came out of a conversation with the Scottish Government to try and understand the impact of the pandemic on churches and their activities. Between May and July 2020 the Evangelical Alliance ran an online survey to understand church-based projects taking place across Scotland. This was publicised to Evangelical Alliance member churches and networks as well others with an interest in this area. The results therefore reflect that most respondents are Evangelical Alliance member churches or organisations. However, there are also a number that are not from within the Evangelical Alliance network or the evangelical tradition. The full datasets have been shared with the Scottish Government.

Delivering hope in times of crisis



Between May and July 2020

Discovering hope in COVID-19

Carol's story – Dumfries

I contracted Coronavirus in March and took it very badly, ending up in hospital. When I was discharged I was referred to the local church to get help from their free food delivery service. I don't have the internet at home and even now still don't have the strength to carry shopping home myself.

I live on my own with only my budgie for company, so this service has been a lifeline for me. As well as the food support I've been able to phone someone from the project every day for a chat, and they have been able to help me with some of my other mental and physical health struggles. People have often mistaken me for being in my sixties, but now I'm told I look more like my true age of 46.

My physical and mental health have improved so much over these months, and I'm now trying to give up smoking and am looking to move to a new house. I honestly don't know how I would have coped without the church this year, and I now consider them to be friends.



Sarah's story – Dundee

Having moved to Dundee just before the lockdown, after coming out of a women's refuge, I was very isolated. All alone and hit by food shortages in the first few weeks of lockdown, I didn't know how I'd provide for my child. Then a leaflet for City Church Dundee's community outreach was popped through my letterbox.

I called the church in case they knew anyone who could help me put up blinds (I didn't have any up for four weeks); within an hour they were here to help. It was a huge relief and gave me a sense of hope in a really difficult time. Since then, the church has made every effort to support me and my child.

I am so grateful for the support, and I am sure that as a Christian myself, I will be able to repay the kindness one day. I believe we evangelise through our actions, bringing people closer to Christ. When we give unconditionally and with compassion, we are on the path that Christ chose for us. The spiritual seeds sown during lockdown will undoubtedly turn into big oak trees one day.

Demonstrating hope across Scotland

Dornoch Free Church, Dornoch

At the beginning of lockdown, the first thing Dornoch Free Church did was offer their building for use by a local COVID-19 resilience group, enabling them to host meetings between different faith communities and the local government. These meetings facilitated continual discussion and new partnerships, with people listening and sharing with one another.

As well as this, the church began to consider the needs of isolated people. They compiled a list of people to phone and ensure those who were isolated had someone to talk to, and someone to encourage them if they were feeling anxious. The church also began a 'street buddy scheme' to reach an area of 1,200 households that were self-isolating or shielding. They even set up a foodbank to support the most financially challenged. In every way they could, the church tried to support those who were struggling to access amenities, essentials and support.

River of Life Church, Dumfries

During lockdown River of Life provided almost 650 food parcels, reaching over 800 people. In addition, its daily food drop-in enabled people to access surplus food donated by local supermarkets. Every day people would come to collect food, for themselves or those self-isolating, vulnerable or too frightened to go out. Approximately 300 people from the town and surrounding area came to pick up food during this time.

River of Life recruited over 30 volunteers, preparing food, packing food parcels and delivering to homes in the community. Each delivery enabled a chance to find out how people were coping and offer them support and contact. A telephone helpline was also set up. Partners included Lidl, Tesco, M&S and Dumfries and Galloway Council.

City Church, Dundee

City Church saw very early on that many people had used the few resources they had, whether that be financial, emotional or relational support, to get through the first few weeks of lockdown. The church put flyers through 1,000 local homes, offering support, and set up two designated phone numbers for local people. 700 people have subsequently been supported with doorstep deliveries and more support.

As part of the wider Dundee food insecurity network, the church has also helped in a city wide response. This network, involving 12 churches and a number of other community groups, as well as Dundee City Council, NHS Tayside and other statutory bodies has ensured that more than 57,000 meals have been delivered to those who need them the most.

Vine Church, Dunfermline

When lockdown began, Vine Church saw a need in the community to create a project that would provide 100 meals a day, seven days a week, ensuring that no one would have to go without a good meal every day. They gathered a group of 25 volunteers from both the church and the wider community, who gave their time to enable the project to thrive throughout lockdown.

The church received referrals from various community groups in the local area, as well as from headteachers, social workers, the local addiction service, criminal justice and social work units and various youth projects. By partnering with such a wide group of agencies, they were able to reach the most vulnerable in the area, maximising the impact and number of people who were able to receive support. This all required huge effort, but many people benefitted from the care and thoughtfulness of the collaboration between the church, community and government and council agencies.

For full list of projects see page 12

Partnerships

One of the key features identified in the response was the level of partnership between churches from different traditions, wider community groups, and local statutory agencies.

Supermarkets, community councils, businesses, NHS boards, housing associations, voluntary support groups, and foodbanks have all worked with churches on the ground in these projects. In addition, 11 local authorities were identified, sometimes by multiple projects, as providing emergency funding for weekly support costs.

Two thirds of projects (65) were in partnership with at least one other organisation, with 234 additional groups listed beyond any churches involved. Almost half (42) mentioned partnership with non-church based community groups, with nearly a quarter (21) listing their local authority as a direct partner.

It is abundantly clear from these partnerships that any notion of churches somehow existing in a bubble separate to their community is misguided. On the contrary, it is apparent that in many areas the church is a cornerstone of community response, offering the gathering point around which other community groups, statutory agencies and other organisations can meet. These formal and informal partnerships offer a model for engagement as Scotland moves through the pandemic in the coming months and beyond. It is vital that these relationships continue and that churches are recognised for the key role they play in communities across Scotland.



234
unique partnership
organisations



65
partnerships with at
least one additional
organisation



21
partnerships with
local authorities



42
partnerships with
non-church
community groups

Conclusion

This report has shown a remarkable story of the church in action in Scotland despite the restrictions of lockdown. It has highlighted how the church has been a cornerstone of community response, with local authorities and community groups seeking partnership in a time of crisis. It has revealed what is possible when the resources of the church are harnessed and released for the good of the community. It has demonstrated the value of the Christian community as a force for good in today's Scotland and as an indispensable partner to government in the work of social renewal.

This should come as no surprise. It is in the DNA of the Christian faith to serve others, following the example and teaching of Jesus; and the church has been engaged in supporting those in society who are the most vulnerable and marginalised for centuries.

But this year has also shown a fresh way for the church to live out its faith and work with others to see Scotland flourish, and the opportunities that exist to partner with others to meet local need. It is important that these lessons are learned as Scotland continues to move through the pandemic.

For the church this means continuing to look outwards, recognising that serving the community is a vital part of living out the gospel, and also that unexpected opportunities may arise to work with others of goodwill.

For the government (and statutory bodies), this means recognising the vital contribution of the church in today's Scotland and putting in place long-term partnerships to build positive relationships rather than ignoring the contribution the church can bring.

Final word: Hope and renewal

Christians seek to live out faith both by trusting in Jesus and by trying to follow the example that He set. Jesus lived in sacrificial love. His was a risky love that meant He engaged with people of every sector, rich and poor, the discarded and the outsider. Whether that was to hug a leper or to chat to a woman at a well, Jesus continually encouraged the possibilities of hope. While He was not afraid of criticising and critiquing power, Jesus also called people to a radical vision of a new way of humble service and forgiving love.

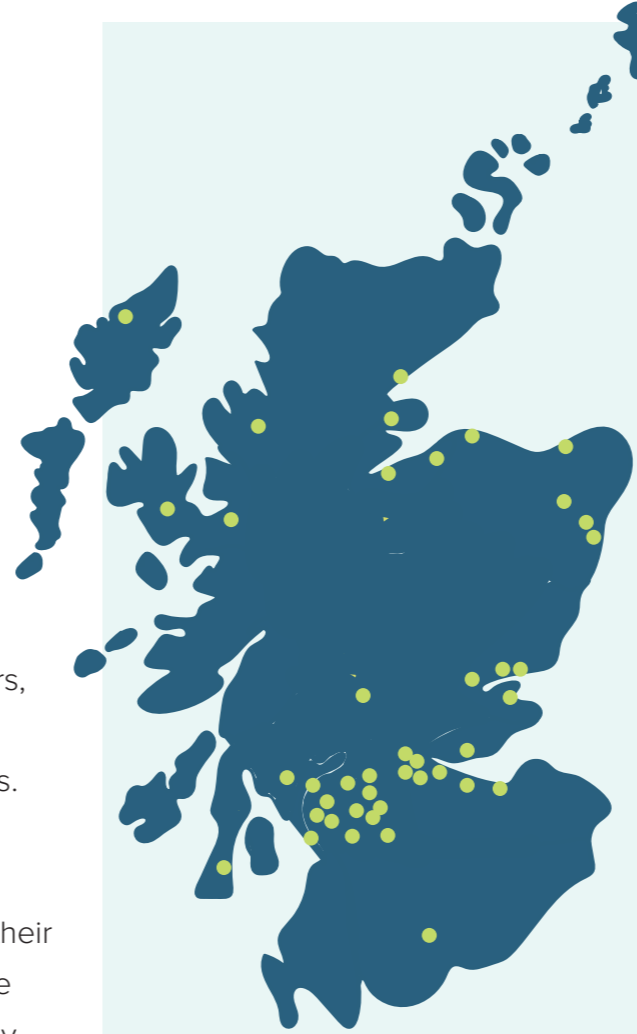
The church in Scotland today follows this example as we engage in places of need and difficulty, working in partnership with others or leading where required. We want to work together to see a nation of justice, mercy, hope, and a new start for those in despair. Working together to see people lifted out of brokenness, fear and hopelessness, and to see our communities and nation find recovery and renewal.

We hope that these examples are encouraging and demonstrate the ways in which Christians are engaging in communities up and down our land, from our city centres to our smallest villages. Using the local community links that

already exist between churches and communities we were able, alongside others, to find the points of most need and help in whatever ways we could in this time of crisis.

These stories allow us to see the care and commitment of thousands of Christians for their local communities. They give insight into the countless volunteer hours being given up by people of faith each week. They are stories of hope in a season of unremitting bad news and an encouragement for us all of what is possible when love, faith, kindness and generosity are lived out. They provide a signpost to the sort of community life and society that is possible, and a way to navigate this season, however long it should last. Finally, they show the life that is in the church in Scotland today and the spiritual, physical, mental and emotional lifelines that these Christian communities are. At local and national levels, they show exactly why the church is an indispensable partner to government in renewing and rebuilding Scotland over the coming months and years.

**Evangelical Alliance Scotland and Serve
Scotland December 2020**



**Aberfeldy, Dull and Weem,
Grandtully, Logierait and Strathtay
Church of Scotland
Alness Baptist Church
Bethany Christian Trust
Bethesda Christian Fellowship
Bishopbriggs Community Church
Blythswood Care
Bruntsfield Evangelical Church
Calderwood Baptist Church
Callander Baptist Fellowship
Campbeltown Free Church
Catalyst Vineyard Church
Central Church
Christians Against Poverty
City Church Dundee
Cornerstone Christian Fellowship
Cross Free Church of Scotland
Culduthel Christian Centre**

Appendix of projects

**Denny Baptist Church
Destiny Angels Edinburgh
Destiny Church Glasgow
Dornoch Free Church
Dundee COVID-19 Food Insecurity
Network
Dunvegan Christian Fellowship
Dyce Parish Church of Scotland
East Kilbride Vineyard
Edinburgh City Mission
Edinburgh Vineyard
Elim Christian Fellowship Paisley
Fernielea Gospel Hall
Fintry Parish Church of Scotland
Found Church Larbert
Gateway Community Church
Glasgow City Mission
Glasgow Elim Church
Glen Aros Church
Glenelg & Inverinate Free Church
Govanhill Free Church
Greenview Evangelical Church
Hebron Evangelical Church
High Blantyre Baptist Church
Holy Trinity Wester Hailes
Home for Good
Hope Church Greenock
Inverness Foodstuff
Junction 42
Kidron Project
King's Community Church Aberdeen
Kingdom Vineyard St Andrews
Kirkintilloch Baptist Church**

**Kirkmuirhill Parish Church
Loch Ewe Church
Lossiemouth Baptist Church
Mustard Seed Edinburgh
Newton Mearns Baptist Church
Parkhead Nazarene
RCCG Beautiful Gate
RCCG Fountain of Love Aberdeen
RCCG Jesus House (Torry)
RCCG King of Glory Edinburgh
RCCG Open Heavens
Re:Hope Church Royston
River of Life Church Dumfries
Ruchazie Parish Church
Seaton Community Church
Sheddocksley Baptist Church
St John's Church Linlithgow
St Stephen's Comely Bank
St. Silas Church
Stenhouse Baptist Church
Stirling Baptist Church
Stirling Free Church
Stirling North Parish Church
of Scotland
Tayside Christian Fellowship
The Mission Church
The Potter's House Stewarton
TLG
Trinity Church Perth
Turning Point Church Moray
Viewcare Project
Vine Church Dunfermline
West Lothian Food Network**

**“Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and
thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.
Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God. ”**

Matthew 5:3-8

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