

Confidence

Preface: Strange Times

Achi Raz/flickr

PCC member during the Covid-19 pandemic

The first thing I felt when the churches were shut was a sense of loss and grief. For a while I was angry with the hierarchy who shut my church against me. Then our vicar suggested we could phone some of the parishioners and our neighbours and see how they were and if there was anything we could do to help. I got on the phone and everyone was so grateful – I was talking to people I barely spoke to at church.



And after a while, you know, I found I was really gaining confidence in talking about faith. It came naturally, not because I was thinking about it, but because the people I phoned were leading me to places where- I just did it! People were asking me to pray for them. People were asking where God was in all this. And I did pray for them. And I did find God there and said so. I would have gone to church and said 'Happy Easter' to everyone. I would never have done *this*, or thought to do so.



Anthony Easton/flickr

Minister during the Covid-19 pandemic

I'm not a person who likes to be stuck at home. I like people and I like to be out and about and in people's homes. When I stand up to give the Word, the buzz in the room matters to me. I miss

everyone very much. I long for hugs and handshakes and to put the hand of healing on people. My head, hands and heart are hurting for the people I love.

And that's cut my confidence a bit, I don't mind saying. I wonder what it's all about and whether I have what my Lord wants from me in a situation like this. I've been trying to adapt to streaming worship with my people but it's not really me. I keep thinking, 'when this is all over' but a bit of me thinks we will have to change and become something different. Will I be confident about going forward, saying 'God knows'? I don't know. I'm praying. I'm on my knees with this.

Part 1. Confidence

‘But blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him’. (Jeremiah 17:7)

Introduction

Confidence, etymologically, means to ‘have full trust’ (Latin *confidere; confidentia*) or to be fully trusting in the good will or veracity of another. In its original usage in English, then, confidence is transactional, the test of a relationship, a leap of faith between individuals or communities. Confidence is amplified and confirmed by that trust being verified; it has reciprocity. In later usage, the idea of confidence has also retracted to the individual, having faith or trust in oneself, in one’s abilities, - ‘self-confidence’. This is the background to meanings of confidence in modern rhetoric.

Confidence in Scripture

However, in Hebrew, the word *baTach* בטח (and variants) means confidence, or ‘boldness’ but also carries with it connotations of trust, security and safety, in which nothing is hidden waiting to spring out and entrap people. For example, we can feel this in Isaiah 32:17: ‘The fruit of that righteousness will be peace; its effect will be quietness and confidence forever’. In Psalm 65.5 ‘O God of our salvation you are the confidence (*mibTach* מִבְּטַח) of all the ends of the earth’. With God, we can feel safe; human agency, with its power interests and hidden agenda, is not as trustworthy (cf Psalm 118.8-9) and Psalm 20:7 ‘Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God’ (cf Chronicles 32.8). Confidence within Scripture looks at reciprocal relationship with God, it does not automatically mean becoming outgoing, self-assured, eloquent or extravert; its divine connections provide something which enriches the subtle abilities of any personality type, even if individuals think they are utterly without ability or simply unworthy (Jeremiah 1. 6-8; Isaiah 40.6).

It is perhaps not surprising then that confidence, as described in the New Testament, is intimately related to the trustworthiness of God. For example, in 1 John 5:14, ‘This is the confidence [parrhesia] we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us’. Our faith can be strengthened and supported by being sure that we are heard by God when we pray. Ephesians 3.12 also talks about the role of boldness [parrhesia παρρησία] and confidence [pepoithesis πεποιθις] in the ‘approach’ to God.

Furthermore, against a background of difficulty, stress and persecution, confidence *in God* is what enables Christians to continue in their faith and consolidates an eschatological vision of vindication and safety. For example, 1 John 4:17, ‘This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgement: In this world we are like Jesus’ and Hebrews 4:16, ‘Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need’ and Philippians 1:6, ‘being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus’. The reciprocal relationship between believers and the God of Jesus Christ makes human beings mirrors of God’s purpose for human beings and of God’s own trustworthiness and righteousness: 2 Corinthians 3.3-4: ‘You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. Such confidence we have through Christ before God’.

Confidence, self-confidence and *missio Dei*

So, in thinking about confidence in evangelism contexts we have to distinguish between confidence in God and the building up of faith that results from that, and the *self*-confidence of Christians and the whole Christian community to engage in worship, service, witness and evangelism. One of the pitfalls for us is to assume that faith-sharing is reliant on self-confidence somehow abstracted from a trust-relationship with God. In an increasingly individualised world, self-belief and self-confidence is lauded, which, while creating a sense of empowered and entitled leadership, opportunity and breakthrough, may also contribute to over-confidence and an arrogation of power and truth which actually points away from God. We have learned a great deal from critiques of missiological history about colonising people's heads with 'our' truth and about the backlash from control of narrative which effectively excludes what God is doing with the recipients of mission. A great deal has been done, particularly since the advent of *missio Dei* theology to redress the balance and make mission and evangelism about the activity of God in the world, not the sole effect of human evangelistic endeavour. However, one criticism of the five marks of mission is that worship of God as an outflow of faith and confidence in God, is not included, although implicitly it is supposed to underpin them all, taken as read.

Confidence includes humility

Mission in Bold Humility (eds Willem Saayman and Klippies Kritzinger) collects appraisals of David Bosch's book *Transforming Mission*. Mission then, holds boldness and humility in tension; we obtain our boldness and courage from God while at the same time acknowledging that we are not God and God alone knows the secrets of the human heart. Such confidence is not arrogant; rather it is characterised by the urge to liberate, support and encourage others to move forward themselves into God-encounter. In some contexts, humility can be hard to learn, but it is essential that people do so. For example, this can be particularly exposed in roles like military chaplaincy; some candidates for chaplaincy have presented themselves expecting evangelism to be characterised by intense, even bullying, leadership, because they imagine this is what military life and faith is like. Typically, such individuals cannot cope and have unlearning to do and a need to develop a greater emotional intelligence. Chaplaincy trainers are aware that people who have such a limited view of evangelism require a wider range of skills or they may become liabilities on deployment into stressful and complex situations.

Also, confidence in evangelism does not carry an automatic expectation of success; fruit of confident Christians may be witnessed much further down the line in terms of space or time. Confidence in mission and witness leaves its impression indelibly, but its fuse may burn slowly.

Contextual confidence

Confidence in evangelism also relates to context. In some contexts, the confidence we may feel to proclaim the gospel starts to break down. It is important to acknowledge this, since, in unfamiliar or difficult contexts, confidence in evangelism may require others to go along and to help negotiate relationships. Evangelism may feel easier if in the context of people like oneself. Faced with people from other backgrounds or social circumstances or in localities which are unfamiliar or not well understood, evangelism can falter or fail. People who are unsure of their faith path may also cling to confident evangelists, falling away again when the energy and confidence of leaders and mentors

reduces or is turned in another direction. Further, our confidence may stem from being sure that people who know who and what we are talking about. We may struggle to articulate what we want to say to those whose language and experience is wildly different. Sometimes it is important to know when silence works as witness in itself. Again, what is contextually confident may not be transferable to other contexts, or may not be transferable to contexts in which people are not 'like me'.

Confidence can also arise out of hopelessly broken and disjointed, rather than smooth and articulate, contexts. For example, one particular church is growing well because everyone within it is broken in some way. The congregation is not articulate and strong but confident in mutual solidarity and concern for others. How is that measured, honoured or even perceived from outside that context? This raises the question of where we perceive confidence in evangelism in contexts of ambiguity and doubt. We run the risk of controlling the narrative around confidence and setting guidelines for evangelism which can exclude the uncomfortable, struggling places of Christian life. This requires that we have a nuanced missiological view of what growing churches can look like.

Confidence can fail where people compare themselves to confident and competent people rather than being self-accepting. That can lead to a culture of 'fake it till you make it', but this means people are living a lie. It can be healthier to stay in the brokenness, confident in the confidence God has in us, despite our failings and lack of certainty. But admitting we are not confident can be an uncomfortable place to begin sharing faith.

In some contexts, both women and men can struggle with confidence. Evidence from theological training sometimes shows that men *appear* more confident and engaged (even if they aren't) and women students spend more time in introspection and self-doubt. Such students are sometimes not supported or their contribution legitimated and this can carry on into ministry. In congregations there can be problems with church tradition and the role of women, where women expect (or are expected) to remain passive and allow male leaders to carry the evangelism banner. There are questions of incarnational identity here which themselves relate back to confidence and trust in God and in the truth of one's calling to follow Jesus and to serve God.

Confidence and Virtue theory

We also need the range of language within virtue theory for Christians to inhabit. Depth, stability and enrichment relate to confidence in evangelism. Personal courage, fortitude and commitment to social justice contribute to the development of moral character which shapes and deepens confidence. Confidence is not one of the classic virtues but yet emerges from them. When we use the words 'in confidence' or 'keeping confidentiality' we mean, 'you can trust me'. This ability to inspire trust and honour the stories of others, in turn enriches the confidence others may place in a person's witness or testimony. Belief that one who proclaims the gospel is someone who will behave ethically and properly is important; notwithstanding that we all fall short.

Confidence and Community

Confidence is also a characteristic of communities, churches, fellowships, groups and agencies, not merely a personal characteristic. It can be hard to follow Jesus on one's own; support and accompaniment contribute to the confidence of a group, especially where there is mutual

exploration of 'what transformed my life'. Evidence from feedback from the 2019 Lent course on *The Mystery of God*, showed an increased willingness to explore, share and contribute as the series went on, with many people talking about how they came to faith for the first time and asking for more resources to enable the conversations to develop and continue. Community confidence is being addressed in a number of creative and engaging ways, such as Oxford diocese's Parish Planning Tool and personal discipleship plans, helping people to grow and become less fearful about discerning God's call to them in a variety of simple ways, related to Partnership for Missional Church. In the wake of the COVID-19 restrictions, we now have to learn more about the results of online services and outreach, both in terms of interest from people who would not normally attend church and also in terms of discipleship and nurture outside the gathered community. It might be the case that online prayer and worship creates confidence both in the providers and in the recipients. The question then becomes how that confidence translates back into congregational life. Conversely, those who have struggled with technical issues and with the technology generally, or felt distanced or lost by the lack of a congregation or a fellowship, might find this has impacted on their confidence generally. A number of clergy have reported struggling during the pandemic restrictions with the loss of human contact in pastoral situations and especially end of life situations where they would normally expect to offer the last rites and comfort the families.

Nourishment and being carried in the faith journey

But what do we think confident Christians would look like or be like and are such expectations realistic? A survey of a number of Christians from a range of denominations suggested that perhaps we would expect to see 'confident' Christians expressing in their lives a continued and recognisable trust in God which is first developed throughout a person's faith journey in the context of the community of the Body of Christ, however that is expressed. This witness, which points others to God, might be expressed in proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ, but equally might be expressed in a faithful life of teaching, or prayer, or silence, or social action or care for creation, or any combination of missiological 'marks'. Such confidence would be nourished by the sacraments and scripture, by prayer and worship, and be expressed in the daily life of being disciples. External factors can shape how confidence in faith develops, such as the current emphasis on climate change and the threats to the life of the planet.

However, many of those Christians surveyed thought that confidence would be somehow linked to absolute propositional statements which would themselves bolster personal confidence in evangelism: walking the walk and talking the talk. Some Christians even talked of confidence in evangelism forming a kind of protective layer, either because of expectation of God's wrath, spiritual warfare against the forces of evil, or as an insurance against doubt and existential anxiety. This has become acute in some independent churches during the COVID-19 epidemic. Yet opinion has been divided over the case of John Chau, for example, who believed he was called by God to witness to the isolated Andaman islanders who summarily killed him when he 'invaded' their territory <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/feb/03/john-chau-christian-missionary-death-sentinelese>. Was he deluded or a saint? Was this the imperative to make disciples of all the nations in action or simply insensitive and foolhardy incursion? What else should have happened?

Others thought that confidence in God does *not* mean that nothing bad can happen to Christians or that Christians have some kind of superior existence or morality which excludes others; rather,

confidence in God means trusting that the dark times and times of suffering and doubt in human life can be weathered and perhaps overcome in time. The over-used 'Footsteps' story may be clichéd but many of the Christians surveyed instinctively pointed to the rightness of it as experienced in their own lives, an as experiences of God's presence and help which add to confidence and trust. Or to quote Proverbs 3.26, 'for the Lord will be your confidence/and will keep your foot from being caught'. Christians also offered stories of life-enhancement, transformation and change, walking with and recognising God alongside them. This suggests that how people feel is significant – it is not all about propositions. Saying nothing can be confident. Truth and feeling are also central to gospels. Simple faith such as uttering even a child-like prayer in the presence of others, can be a powerful witness and testimony, answering need.

Confidence in faith and the Church

The clergy and Christians surveyed also thought that we might also perhaps expect that confident Christians have confidence in the basics of Christian theology, in the narrative of salvation offered to all and confidence as a Body to gather around the Creeds. Most agreed that this does not mean that confidence is based on unquestioning acceptance, or advanced understanding of Christian theology, but contains the ability to explore, encourage, question and be puzzled by the mystery of God. Asked, what does that mean in practice, some suggested that we might see Christians being able to say that following Jesus shows us that God is faithful, speaks truth, is just and requires us in turn to seek justice for others. We might see Christians being able to express confidence in the Body of Christ and in the Church as expression of that Body and demonstrating confidence in an eschatological reality.

Whether we *do* actually see that is another matter. There are plenty of experiences and events which sadly undermine confidence in the Church and the Church needs to acknowledge and to address this. Moreover, we might need to have the humility to understand that other parts of the worldwide Church do this better and without difficulty, being alive, joyful and fully engaged with the issues of the day. Where do we learn about confidence from the worldwide Church and allow ourselves to be challenged by the witness of those who do not live with our comfortable expectations?

We can then ask whether these kinds of things are pre-requisites for being 'letters from God' to the world. God's confidence in us is reflected in the divine content we both speak of and live out for others to 'read' in us and recognise in us. If that is true, then we need to ask whether the Church is doing enough to equip people theologically *in what we actually believe and why*, against a wider, global background and to enrich and nourish them communally in churches and develop and deepen what it means to be a Jesus follower in everyday life, come what may.

Undermining confidence

What kinds of things erode confidence in God and undermine a sense of God's trustworthiness, leading to people hiding their lights and holding their tongues, or even disappearing from Church altogether?

We know from research done into the spirituality of people who do not go to Church (e.g. Hay and Hunt 2000) that many people suppress their sense of trust in God because their faith stories or

experiences of God do not match the expected language or presentation that is acceptable within the Church. Individuals have reported being humiliated, laughed at, corrected or overruled, even if they still felt their hearts burning within them and a clear sense of call or direction from God. The reciprocity of the trust relationship is denied by others and can even extinguish the light of faith for ever. Yet other people have been hurt by insensitive pastoral behaviour by either or both lay people and clergy and gone elsewhere. Lack of inclusion, care, or welcome by Christian individuals, groups or communities for whatever reason can block the idea that the love of God in Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit is offered to all unconditionally. Power relations can be unequal and divisive and abuses of power in the Church (not just the scandals) may drive faith underground. This is as true for clergy as it is for congregations. Love and trust in God can be undermined when clergy are ganged up on and abused by individuals or even whole congregations, undermining their leadership and ability to preach, teach and occupy servant leadership.

Pressure from internal and external sources also has a role in undermining confidence. The pressures of juggling mission and maintenance are well known. Pressures to meet targets and to make things happen and pressure to perform and to be seen to be performing distract from the loving walk with God that should drip-feed confidence. Pressures on communities can lead them to make golden calves as confidence in God is eroded and they look for quick fixes and easy wins. Confidence and trust in God should not be results or numbers driven. To proclaim the gospel is as much about a *declarative* love for God and sureness of standing in God's love as it is *purposive* in seeking to bring others to Christ. But we tend to assume proclamation is only useful in the context of evangelising others. Would we be prepared for evangelists who bring no one to faith? (The 72; the talents; the soils?) Is a perceived lack of confidence addressed by us in terms of programmes and protocols, and should we learn from Pentecost where the 'programme' of appointing Matthias and keeping the show on the road is overcome by the arrival of the Holy Spirit while the disciples were at prayer?

Five marks of mission and contexts

Do we actually have confidence in evangelism itself? Evangelism is an expression of trust in God's faithfulness but also of the freedom offered by living in Christ's way. To this extent, evangelism and faith-sharing flow naturally from confidence in God and in the knowledge that it is God's story that accompanies us in whatever way we express it before others. However, the five marks offer entry points for everyone. For some, confidence in God might be best expressed through the fifth mark of mission and the urgency of addressing climate change in God's creation, rather than in 'simple' proclamation. Paul offered contextualised messages depending on his audience and lack of confidence in expected modes of evangelism may be because the expectation cuts across the natural flow of a person's confidence in God.

'Fog'

We also know however, that various kinds of societal pressures create what we might term 'fog' for religious narratives. The expression of confidence in God is also subject to 'fog' and what we might see as reluctance to engage or poor ability to share faith might well be not 'lack' of confidence but the effects of social obfuscation of meanings on communities as a whole. The effects of

individualisation, post-materialism, globalisation, polarities of conservative/liberal viewpoints, changing and developing social constructions and conceptual diversity all have effects on trust and also generate anxiety. Evangelism is not immune to these effects in everyday life, affecting both opportunity for faith sharing and introducing complexity into the placing and demonstrating of trust in God. 'Fog' scrambles ideas of things like metanarrative, truth, ethics, purpose and so on. It becomes more difficult to see clearly, and to say what we mean, when all meanings are challenged and subject to change. For example, a recent article on grief suggested that people who continue to text loved ones after death is an attempt to recreate religious rituals which would formerly have given comfort and allowed the grieving process to work itself out

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-49941840> . Further, our churches may find themselves obfuscated by confusion about how to adapt to changes in society, and unable to bridge the distance between contemporary discourse and biblical and ecclesiastical languages. Recent controversies over things like golf courses and helter-skelters in cathedrals (confident and brilliant missional ideas/desperate gimmicks) demonstrate the difficulty faced by leaders and decision makers. Our confidence can be tried and twisted in the social media, and therefore digital evangelism has a particularly significant role to play in providing tools for Christians to set out our stall clearly in the marketplace of fast-paced opinion making, not to mention turning over tables.

'Fog' can also be created in large amounts by the Church. In particular, anxiety created by comparisons with other churches or other styles or ways of being church can become a major distraction from the uniqueness and strength of being a presence in every community. Work done by the Faith and Order Advisory Group on Witness, testifies to the importance of place, risk, vulnerability and commitment in very local, context-specific locations, where confidence in God in a place may be expressed in something as simple as turning the lights on and opening the doors and trusting God to illuminate the next step.

All of this suggests that viewing people as being afraid to evangelise, or evangelising and 'getting it wrong' is unhelpful, if, as we have suggested, confidence in evangelism is inextricably related to confidence and trust in God.

Visible Discipleship and Social Action

Work recently done on 'Visible Discipleship' <https://srnet.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Visible-Discipleship-SRN.pdf> invokes the theology of Matthew 5.16: 'In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven'. Confidence in God allows the light of Christian faith and Christian action to shine before others, invoking response and leading the 'others' to look towards the Father in heaven. Social action and pursuit of social justice becomes more than just 'ordinary' good works in that these become expressions of confidence in God's option for those who have least and whose cries are heard by God (such as in the story of Ishmael). Yet Matthew 5.15 invokes the possibility of hiding one's light, so we have to ask what conditions make Christians hide their lights and so erode their confidence. Do we really believe that God walks with us? That God answers prayer? That we are really sent out in the power of the Spirit? That Scripture informs us and 'works' for us?

Conclusion

We have seen that ‘confidence’ as we understand it from Scripture relates to confidence in God, specifically that God is faithful, just and true. When we experience that faithfulness, justice and truth in our own faith journey, that inspires confidence in us to be freely and unashamedly known as Christians and to express that faith in word and action in daily life. Conversely, confidence in God and in the gospel can be undermined by a lack of really knowing what our faith is about (apologetics), by societal pressures and confusing contexts (sociology of communities), by deep faults and rifts within our ecclesial communities and by the pressures of expectation from within the Church.

This suggests that *the desire to share to faith* and concomitant confidence in evangelism is enhanced by:

- Christian communities which allow space to explore what we believe and why, allowing room for doubt and difficulty and encouraging rather than condemning.
- Christian communities which seek to understand the beliefs and spirituality of people of other or no faith and which seek to discern what God is already doing in the power of the Spirit outside the Church.
- Proper attendance to our faults and rifts within the Church with a purpose of acknowledgement, repentance and forgiveness. An understanding that we will fall short and are always seeking to do better.
- Replace fears and pressures of expectation with joy, praise and delight in the clergy and congregations we have and all they are doing.
- *And especially:* willingness to listen to different voices and not to own the narrative of evangelism in favour of one particular demographic. We need a willingness to listen to diaspora voices, gang leaders, those with mental health problems, children and young people and people from other faith backgrounds whose expression of what God has done in and with them, both challenge and change the Church in uncomfortable ways. The confidence of these different groups does not ‘look like’ what we most easily associate with confidence in evangelism.

All of these scenarios come with risk. The easy route is to shut down exploration and invoke unquestionable dogma; to ignore those who are not yet of the faith; to cover up our faults and wrongdoing with silence and excuses; to generate fear and concern and place pressure to perform. To resist these paths takes courage – and, ironically, confidence in God. Whatever we will risk for the clear light of the gospel: this is mission.

One of the things we noted was that our material was for people like ‘us’, theologically literate people with a track record in mission and evangelism. So we agreed that what our paper lacked was ‘alternative’ voices from people who wouldn’t necessarily be asked about their faith in God or their own views on showing or sharing that faith. So we tried to sit at the feet of people who are often overlooked as evangelists: children, people with learning difficulties or mental health issues, people from the fringes, people who are less articulate and educated, and people who live in danger. We asked, in a variety of ways, including in sign language where appropriate, ‘can you tell me what gives you confidence to tell people about your Christian faith, your faith in Jesus Christ?’ In one or two

cases it was only appropriate to listen. And we have also listened to voices about bad or unwanted evangelism and to those whose life circumstances have knocked or wrecked their faith. So in Part 2 we have some voices from people talking about confidence (or lack of it) in Christian faith.

Part 2. Testimonies

The carpenter with learning disabilities making nativity figures



(Signs) Jesus and Mary. In the home. You feel love. You feel sure. Blessed. You feel it pour out. Yes!

Photo: Optictopic/flickr

The drag artist

You can't do a drag act and not be confident. Because people bitch about you, your shoes, your eyelashes. When you put on the gorgeous dress and the shoes and the makeup it has to be perfect and you have to look great and perform great. We speak the truth to each other; called 'spillin' the T'. So when I talk about Jesus, I'm spillin' the T about him. Some people say I can't be a Christian and a drag queen. I can. Jesus don't care. Jesus is in my life for all alternatives. So don't tell me I can't talk about Jesus. He wore a dress, right? (laughs) YEAH, he did.



Photo: sergio santos/flickr

The ex-addict

One night I was dealing drugs to this guy and the guy faded out and I saw Jesus. I was selling smack to Jesus! He gave me money but I don't know where it came from. What I saw was he was just sucking up the drugs into his body and his arm was full of track marks. Everywhere, man. But the drugs just disappeared and he was the same. That was a vision, that was drugs, but that's my confidence. He can just take it all. You can give it him. That's what I tell people now. I saw it and it changed me.

Photo: Sara Amaro/flickr



Tube evangelist

God tell me to get on the carriage and testify to his judgement. Them that hear no word. Those people are going to hell. Not my fault. I'm telling the truth of the Bible. That's no lie, lady.

*Photo:
Susanjanegolding/flickr*



Dream-interpreter-evangelist

People tell me their dreams and I tell them what they mean. I have to trust that God is helping me tell the right things. I'm not one of those people who... who make things up. If I get nothing I say so. But I tell people. I'm praying right now for you and that will help me tell you the right things. I don't say you will be lucky or get rich. I say, when you dream, your mind is reaching

out to deal with stuff and this is what could be happening. But then I say, say a prayer and the answers you seek will come. Would you like to pray with me? Some of them do. Some don't. But God knows them.

Photo: Bigbirdz/flickr

The depressive (to online cell)

Depressed person

Everything is so dark now. I can't deal with it. God's just gone. Can you pray? I can't.

Cell participants.

...We are here for you. Prayers.

...I am praying right now.



...We are holding you in prayer.

...Love and prayers.

Depressed person

You have to pray for me I can't.

Cell participants:

...We will hold you in prayer before God. God won't let you go.

...Trust. Don't worry about anything else.

Depressed person

Thank you. I trust you.

Photo: Ryan melaugh/flickr

Christmas shop worker (1)

One of the things I love about Christmas work is the chance to talk to people about the Christmas story. Yes, they buy penguins and robins, but they also buy dekkies with Mary and Joseph on them. And I say, how lovely is that? That's the holy family. And they say, 'what's that then?' And I tell them the story a little bit. That's what gives me confidence, that they come up here with Mary and Joseph and baby Jesus. And I get to say that it's holy. It's something else, not penguins.



Photo: Maurits verbiest/flickr

Christmas shop worker (2)

I got confidence to say a little bit because they come in here for a coffee with all these bags and they're tired and broke and they want a bit of Christmas cheer. And I say 'did you remember the frankincense then?' and maybe they will laugh. And sometimes there will be a conversation about what it's about. If not, I give them coffee or tea and a smile. Maybe we'll chat next time.



Photo: Gordonplant/flickr

Care home worker

Well, it's difficult. Because the people here... we're not supposed to Pressure them or put ideas in their heads. They can't judge for themselves you see. A lot of them wouldn't understand, anyway. You just have to love them as best you can, ever when they are shouting or moaning or frightened. You have to be professional, get the job done. But what I am confident about is that God is with me when I'm working. God's doing it when I'm washing and feeding and when I'm fed up and want to get cross. And I know they know it in me, through me. Confidence in my faith is washing someone's face, washing their hands.



Photo: WorldSkills uk/flickr

The dog groomer with autism

I wouldn't ever talk to anyone about that sort of thing. I don't talk about that. But I like dogs. And I like grooming dogs (I like doing the feathers and giving baths). And I think God likes dogs. So when people say their dog has died, I say their dog has gone to the rainbow, to heaven. I am sure of it. Because if God likes dogs, he would make sure they were groomed every day. And when I die I am going to do that in heaven. I tell people that. They say thank you.



Photo: Mark/flickr

Migrant family's child

My mum don't speak no much English. But I speak good English, don't I? My mum goes to church a lot but she don't know how to talk about it, so when she wants to, I do it. So I said, my mum goes to church and she's really good at it. And D... 's mum said, 'I will go too cos there's something good on'. They went to the church and got me some cake. And D's mum said she would come back. So I like talking for my mum!



Photo: Unicef/flickr

Gang teenager

The confidence is this. God watches on me. That's what I say. So I'm here.

And do you say that to others?

All the time. But they all say it. We are, like, the righteous. God is fighting for us on the street.

Do you think that's right?

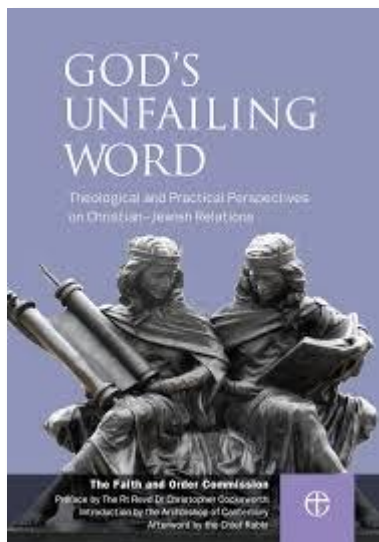
We have to say it. But that's not me. I think like God saves in another way. And I'm the proof of that.

Photo: Garry Knight/flickr



Mencap carol concert teenager through helper

I can't talk to anyone, but I can sing! When I sang just now, that's when I can tell everyone what it means. The baby Jesus is born! I can sing! (Sings beautifully).



The Chief Rabbi

The enduring existence within the Anglican church of a theological approach that is permissive of this behaviour (evangelism) does considerable damage to the relationship between our faith traditions.

God's Unfailing Word 2019



Neighbour

When D died, I was standing by the grave and I didn't know what to think. This chap from your church, he came up and said something like, just give your life to Jesus. I said, I'm a widow, what good's that going to do me? And he said, Jesus will make it better. I said, no it won't and I walked off because I was really upset and I didn't want to have a stupid conversation like that. And J and A (churchwardens, also neighbours) came round and made a cup of tea and

brought sandwiches and they didn't say anything about God, just that they were sorry about D and here was some stuff if you don't feel like cooking. I prefer that sort of Christian to be honest. They were kind.

Photo: Anne Richards

Neighbour (2)

*The vicar said we should all be more confident in being a Christian so I thought I **would** be a bit more confident about it. So I said to him, I will give it a go when I go down to the RAFA on Friday. And he said, you will be careful what you say to your mates, won't you? And I said, what do you mean? And he said, you do go on a bit. And I thought, so do you and your bloody sermons! But when I got down the RAFA I didn't say anything. I thought if I report back he'll just think I did it wrong. Leave it to the experts.*

Photo: Alper Çuğun /flickr



Part 3. Simple boosts for confidence in evangelism



Rolf Dietrich Brecher, 'Listening'/flickr

This is a simple resource based around the five themes in the theology of evangelism [assuming 'normal' social interactions are operative]. These are:

Pursuing the human – determining who is best placed to understand what it is like NOT to be Christian

Making Community – being part of a Christian fellowship or congregation equips people to begin meaningful relationships with others

Creating new news – supporting Christians at home and work in situations which are specialised, unusual or rapidly changing

Honouring memory – valuing and building on a person, group or community's history and journey

Being the face of love – the visible discipleship of going the extra mile in Christian service and love for others

Theology of evangelism	Start	Reflect
Pursuing the human	pray for another person, or for a group of people that you know	<i>why</i> do I want to share my faith as a Christian with other people?
Making community	think about your best relationships - count your blessings. Review your day and give thanks for people you met and those you spoke to.	<i>why</i> do I want people to be part of my church/worshipping community/fellowship
Creating new news	think about the situations in the world you know little or nothing about and which may confuse or concern you. Trust God to lead you.	<i>why</i> do I want the Good News to reach people who live lives very different from mine?
Honouring memory	reflect on your life as a Christian - who has helped you. What have you learned from difficulties?	<i>why</i> should I be interested in people's stories and faith journeys?
Being the face of love	how could you be of service to others who need you? What does it mean to be selfless?	<i>why</i> should I show my faith in works of love, kindness and service?

Theology of evangelism	Simple starts	Heartening
Pursuing the human	smile at a person you know	stop and talk for a few minutes
Making community	say a few words more when encountering people you don't know when out and about	build a relationship. Go back to places you regularly visit and pick up conversations where you left off.
Creating new news	be a bit more supportive of people	check up on people who need support and pray for them, or offer practical help
Honouring memory	say, tell me about....	Spend time getting to know a person's history and journey
Being the face of love	do something kind for others	establish something in your community that helps others

Theology of evangelism	Building	Confidence
Pursuing the human	offer something about your faith	Discern when to show or speak of Christian faith. See God present in every encounter. Know what to do with both positive and negative responses.
Making community	make an invitation to something non-threatening eg	Create growth and plan ahead to sustain and nurture new

	carol service, church social event	Christians and enquirers so that they remain in community
Creating new news	talk about what people need to become evangelists in novel situations	Stay ahead of the game in anticipating people's support needs. Ask, 'what next?'
Honouring memory	review a person's own spiritual journey with them or walk in faith and offer to go forward with them, helping with any obstacles	Build faith journeys, make the sacred history of your church together. Deepen devotion, participate in the sacraments, Celebrate, and help others love God in worship.
Being the face of love	give your actions in community a Christian face - this is the motivation and witness	Actively work on welcome, inclusion, social justice in the community and the Church as place of peace and reconciliation. Be the place people turn to. Make safe spaces. Protect all, people, places, and God's creation.

Theology of evangelism	Learning and improving
Pursuing the human	find ways to deepen your own faith and life as a follower of Jesus and to understand how to communicate it appropriately and sensitively with others
Making community	work together to understand how Christians can include others in groups, overcome differences and disagreements, learn tools of reconciliation, respect and peace making and create porous, inviting boundaries for group activities. Also learn how to let people come and go.
Creating new news	work together on understanding the spirituality of people outside the church, especially those who live in demanding and difficult to understand jobs and other situations. Understand how people are affected by the political climate, legislation, local situations, how they may have been hurt by church or by Christians. Understand the implications of conversion from other faiths or cultures.
Honouring memory	learn more about how to support people with difficult past experiences, including abuse perpetrated against them. Understand the psychological components of background. Find ways of responding with love to people's pain. When is challenge necessary?
Being the face of love	develop a heart for justice and a way of understanding 'visible discipleship'

Theology of evangelism	Renewing and Reviewing confidence	Numbers
Pursuing the human	Have we inspired trust in people who are not Christian?	Count contacts eg occasional offices
Making community	Have we seen growth in numbers and/or spiritual growth within the community?	Count attendance figures
Creating new news	Have we been supportive of others sharing faith where they live and work? Have we sought to understand the circumstances and difficulties of others?	Count remote contacts (eg colleagues at work)
Honouring memory	Have we created memories and history for our Christian community?	Count numbers at services eg Christmas
Being the face of love	Have we reached out to others and followed Jesus in caring for them?	Count attendance at peripheral Christian events eg fetes, clubs, social events and initiatives
COMMIT	CELEBRATE	GIVE THANKS

Afterword: lockdown

Where did it all end and begin?

The disciples were shut in for fear of reprisal after Jesus died on the cross. Their Lord was alone, locked in, silenced, humiliated, crucified, dead. The hopes and promises were stopped in their tracks.

But the truth of God's salvation burst out, unstoppable. It burst out of the grave's tight bindings; it burst out of the tomb, shoving the stone aside, letting in heaven's light to the darkest places. The blazing truth of it, the reality of it, was revealed to the women, burst in on the disciples, Jesus appearing offering words of evidence, comfort and peace. And giving them the task of speaking God's truth to others, showing it to others. The worst of the world cannot contain, change or halt God's love. God's truth cannot be hidden, broken, locked up or destroyed. The Lord is risen indeed.

Out of this: proclamation, teaching, loving in service, changing the world in pursuit of God's kingdom, honouring the creation for this age and all the ages to come. Out of this, the witness of Christians living and dying. An inextinguishable hope in bewildering times. Our Confidence.