***“6Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? 7Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?” Isaiah 58v6-7***

I’ve just got back from Kenya, with a team of 39 from Cheadle, to the Open Arms Village in Eldoret, where you may remember I went 7 years ago. It has been an incredible experience. These words from Isaiah were particularly challenging in one of our devotional meetings, as God was highlighting whether the motive of His people, and so us, was more about ritual or righteousness. Isaiah spoke of the motive in the peoples fasting, which had no heart for God. He said the best fasting was to have a heart which worked at freeing people from wickedness, oppression, sin, injustice, hunger and help them to come out of darkness and into light. Our trip to the slums of Kip Karen in Eldoret was about us helping to do just that. And whilst there, God challenged each one of us mentally, emotionally & spiritually. We have all come back changed by God. ☺

seriously, with God’s help and guidance.

**Prayerletter 29**

**October, 2014**

**As I begin to share with you some of the many things God has been doing through my ministry in the last 12 months, the verses above remain such a central motivation for all I am involved in and the opportunities I am regularly presented with. I hope you have fully grasped that this has only been possible because God has been at the centre of me personally and everything I do and He has graciously brought you into a partnership with me, in the gospel, in practical, prayerful and financial terms. For this reason I constantly thank God for you. He has gifted me with the heart and skills and brought you to me with the support and resources. Without your wonderful support and our partnership none of this would be possible. From the depths of my heart, thank you ☺ Schools:** **Warren Wood Primary:** I have been involved with Warren Wood for about 6/7 years now in delivering Bible Explorer Lessons to the year 5 & 6 children. I generally visit every other year and have all the children together (about 100 of them). Before Christmas last year I had them for a 10 week block, which was the first time I had done this. It was amazing to do 5 BX Old Testament lessons, followed immediately by 5 BX New Testament lessons ☺ It was an incredible experience and the comments I received from staff were amazing!! At the end of the last lesson we ran through the signs and words for the whole storyline of the Bible and it was very emotional for me to see how well they had remembered. **LBHS:** The last 12 months in Lady Barn have been another confirmation of the depth of relationship I have with the staff and children. The assemblies (4 at Christmas & 3 at Easter) have again been received by the children and staff with huge enthusiasm. I believe it is a unique situation for a school to be so positive in wanting so much input on a biblical and spiritual level. My relationship with the Headteacher, Head of RE and in fact the rest of the staff too, has been so firmly established that I now consider them friends and colleagues. I am received in school with a warmth that almost suggests that I am a staff member, rather than a visitor ☺ During the school year I completed 21 lessons with Year 2, on the life and ministry of Jesus; 33 lessons with year 5 (Bible Explorer – Old Testament) and 33 lessons with Year 6 (Bible Explorer – New Testament); 16 lessons with the Year 3’s, on the Bible and the ‘Big’ picture story. Here is a comment from the Head at LBHS: *“In all respects, we have come to see Mark as more than a visitor to the School. He has become a part of the family ethos and is highly valued as a colleague and teacher.”* I am in the process of preparing for this years Christmas assemblies.

**CPS:** Cheadle Primary also continues to be right at the heart of all I do, and has a very special place in my heart. I am continuing to co-ordinate and deliver monthly assemblies for KS1 & KS2. The children and staff are always excited by our presence in assemblies. Again, Praise God! I had 5 lessons for the Year 5 class on the OT Bible Explorer; and 5 NT Bible Explorer lessons, for the Year 6’s, before the summer break; My input into sports lessons has also increased, particularly basketball & lacrosse. Finally, I continue to support the leadership of the school through the Governing Body (17+ years now) and as part of this, I chair the Learning & Teaching Committee and am on the ‘Raising Standards’ group. It was a huge encouragement & blessing when we recently received an excellent OFSTED report and to have been a part of that. Being at the heart of forming & establishing the vision for the school is an amazing privilege and one I take very

**Reviews & Update**

**St. Paul’s, Stalybridge:** My relationship with St. Paul’s has probably spanned about 12 years now and they are a very special school to be involved with. Over that time I have developed a strong relationship with both the Head and Deputy Head. In July 2012 the Head retired and I was very relieved and excited to find out that the Deputy Head had been appointed as the new Head. This has ensured that I continue, to be involved in the school, both in delivering Bible Explorer lessons to both the year 5’s and 6’s, and a weekly after-school Pop Lacrosse sports club. Like with LBHS & CPS, the welcome I receive from staff & children is wonderful and their appreciation of all I do is openly spoken. Here is an extract from comments made by the Head: *“We have all learnt so much in a fun and enthusiastic way. Mark’s energy and passion for what he does never falters. I would* *recommend his input into any school. He always shows warmth to the school beyond that which he is directly doing, which means a lot to us, as it reflects the ethos of our school.”* I am at present in the middle of delivering the BX New Testament lessons to about 100 children in their years 5 & 6.

**Holiday Bible Clubs: The Time Machine –St. Mary’s, Cheadle:** During the week leading up to Easter, we had another amazing Holiday Bible Club week, looking at the ‘Big Picture’ of scripture, from ‘Creation’ to ‘Sin’ to ‘Promises’ to ‘Christ’ and His ‘final Return’! With God’s help and guidance, the programme came together and it was another fantastic week. Both children and leaders picked up what we were trying to do and teach and we had so much fun. God was working in a great way. It was also another wonderful time on the Good Friday afternoon, to lead and speak at the All Age Service, building on all that we had been doing during the club.

**Due South Venture - Queens College, Taunton:** As usual the summer came very quickly and the first week of the 6 week break, has traditionally seen my involvement in a Venture. It is now more than 25 years, since I went as a leader to my very first one, at Tockington Manor near Bristol ☺ The Summer wouldn’t be the same without the opportunity to serve in this way and Due South was the usual mix of multiple activities, amazing fun, incredible spiritual blessing and healthy tiredness from giving so much. This year, Stuart & Lucy handed on the baton of overall leadership to Mark & Becky and the transition was seamless, praise God! The future looks very bright as the ongoing development of the Venture is beginning to be taken on by a younger generation.

**K’Wray Venture:** In May, I led the K’Wray team again, up in the Lake District. What a faithful God we have! It was the 9th year of this fantastic week away with 8-11 year olds from North West Partnership churches. We had a good number of children, including 5 from St. Mary’s, which was a massive encouragement to me. Even the weather was reasonably kind to us. However, we had the challenge of a regular theme for K’Wray over the last few years, in that we had a new venue to cope with, AGAIN! This year we were at Casterton School, Kirby Lonsdale. The school was great and gave us more facilities than we have had so far. However, this year we will be going to yet another venue. Please pray that this will be our last move and Lancaster Royal Grammar School, will be our permanent home for many years. My role is as Overall Leader of the Venture, and I also deliver one of the talks, as well as supporting the team with training and overall wisdom, as we try to train younger, less experienced leaders, whilst ‘on the job’. We taught from Luke 24 onwards and the emphasis was about ‘Being Certain!’ about Jesus’ death and resurrection. The children understood and were engaged in an incredible way. We have already been fully focused in the process of planning for next May! The theme will be Judges.

**DYNAMOS - St. Mary’s:** It is more than 3 years since I began this new after-school venture for primary school children. One of the main aims of this group was to establish a group that was Bible-centred, fun and would offer a bridge between, particularly Cheadle Primary School and St. Mary’s Children’s work. It has been so encouraging to see God working through the group and bringing together a wonderful team, who faithfully serve the children each week. We alternate KS1 & KS2 each week and have a core group of regulars for both groups. The numbers have grown over the last couple of years and a large percentage of the group, are not churched. The children’s enthusiasm and faithful attendance has been such an affirmation of what we are trying to do. We are continuing to learn about God’s Big Picture, and seeing what an awesome and wonderful God we have, through His story. At present we are working through Acts and seeing the ‘Spread of the Gospel’, through Peter & Paul. It is exciting to see the children grasp that God’s Grace is for ALL and that we need to share the gospel with everyone! We now average 12-16 children in the KS1 group and a similar number with KS2.

**JUICE Puppets:** I am still leading this weekly puppet ministry, with some very exciting plans for this Christmas. We have about 18 puppeteers and after the amazing effort they put in at the Cheadle Victorian Christmas Market, last year, and the services, we are now preparing for it again, as well as other events. At Easter they were also involved in St. Mary’s Holiday Bible Club.

**Primary Saints Sports Club:** Each week I continue to coach, encourage and develop sports skills with between 7 & 10 KS2 children, in a variety of sports. My aim is to establish good sporting habits, as well as an excellent attitude to both winning and losing.

**Leadership Training:** As most of you will know from the last 13 years of Primary Focus, my heart isn’t only about ministry to children, but also to equipping, supporting, training and encouraging leaders of children too. For more than 20 years, I have been training and equipping leaders, of all ages. It is a passion I have, planted by God, and as I get older, I feel that God is increasingly prompting me to develop this side of my ministry further. In the last 3 years, I have been involved in delivering a number of individual church events, especially for leaders of Primary aged groups, through the ‘NW Youthworks’. These are called, “the Basics”. In November I am delivering another one for churches in the Blackpool area. Please pray that I have wisdom, as I try and develop a training package, to ‘pass on’ my experience, gained from over 38 years in children’s & Youth ministry.

**Website:** Please check out my website, where you can see this latest prayerletter together with my **up to date Diary**. View the ‘Newsletter’ option, put in the word **supporter** and the password **pr1f5**. It’s worth checking out monthly as I regularly update my diary. There are also some resources in the ‘Resources’ section, including a couple of Holiday Bible Clubs. Check these out by going to the ‘Resources’ option, putting in the word **resources** and the password pr4f0.

**Family:**

**Christopher & Rebecca –** It is hard to believe I have a 30 year old! The Tomlinson’s in Warrington are doing great. Judah is now 3 and Ezra 1, and they are growing up very fast. Christopher is well established in the Police and really enjoys his work. I ask very little about what he experiences, just whether he is ok, and recently he had his first broken bone ever, when he broke his finger; **Laura & Conrad –** February seems so long ago now, but Laura & Conrad’s wedding in Canmore in the Rockies, was incredible. It is very hard to put into words how wonderful our time there was. The day was very emotional and it was a joy to be able to spend four more days with them and both families after the wedding. We stayed in and around Banff afterwards. They are doing very well back in Edmonton and have officially applied for residency, so please pray for a successful conclusion;

**David & Chantel & Gracie-Lea –** David & Chantel are doing really well as parents, and it has been a steep learning curve. They also have 2 children – Gracie who is 2 ½ and Connor who is 7 months. David has recently set up on his own as a gardener and is doing really well, though it is challenging starting up on your own. Please pray for them all;

**Jamie –** Jamie has just celebrated his 21st birthday and has a number of challenges at the moment. You may remember he decided not to return to Sheffield Hallam University after his first year and instead sought full-time employment. He has had a couple of jobs, which didn’t quite work out and so is in the process of looking for a permanent job at the moment. Two weeks ago, he came off of his bike and took the full impact on his shoulder. Thank God he didn’t land on his head! However he has multiple breaks of his clavicle, which has now been pinned. He is recovering well, but it has obviously made looking for a job a little more challenging. He is top of the family league for broken bones now ☺

**Personal –** How can I summarise in such a short space all the things that have happened, even over the last couple of months!! I managed to sell Grange Avenue and moved out on the 17th July. It was a huge relief and weight off of my shoulders. The house had been overwhelming for me for several years. I bought a lovely house in Edgeley. Much smaller and very cosy, however several delays from the vendors meant I only managed to move in on the 19th September!! Two months of being without a home would have been an impossible challenge if it hadn’t been for Ian & Lesley Ashworth, who took both Jamie & me in for all that time. We had a wonderful and blessed time with them and their family. It is very hard to find the appropriate words to express how wonderful they are and how thankful we are. ☺

Another exciting challenge happened in August when Helen & I joined 38 others from St. Mary’s to go to the Open Arms Village in Eldoret, Kenya. You may remember I went in 2007, at the invitation of David & Rachel Gallagher, the founders. This trip was unbelievable and stretched me physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. It was overwhelming to see the village completed, after seeing just rough ground 7 years before. We did a 5 day Medical Clinic, including a sports and children’s programme, in the slum area of Kip Karen; we visited a children’s remand centre and the Open Arms Feeding Programme, at Kambi Teso. It was a life changing trip and God blessed us all incredibly.

It wasn’t only life changing spiritually either! Whilst there, on the second Monday I proposed to Helen and she said ‘Yes!’ As I have written in previous prayerletters, she is wonderful and a huge blessing. God has been very gracious to us both. We are now planning for the future and have set a date to get married – 17th October 2015 ☺ Now the plans begin!

Please continue to pray for us and for our children. As I finish, thank you all again for all your encouragement and support. Your partnership is priceless. Please continue to pray that I will display Godly Wisdom in every area of my life. God Bless



**PRAYER:**

* For God’s wisdom, faithfulness and vision;
* Family – Christopher, Rebecca, Judah & Ezra; for Laura & Conrad in Canada & their residency application; for David, Chantel, Gracie & Connor and David’s developing gardening business: Jamie – for healing, God’s guidance, employment & the future;
* Helen – for all our plans for October 17th 2015; for making wise decisions; that we find time for us in all the busy-ness;
* Finance – that God would provide sufficient support & His peace to remain faithful & trusting in tough times; for wisdom in making godly decisions;
* Schools – for the many lessons & assemblies that I do, that I remain fresh & creative and develop new ideas; for wisdom in my leadership responsibilities;
* Ventures – for K’Wray next May, coping with another new venue, my overall leader responsibilities & for the team;
* Training – that I continue to develop my plans and successfully start to ‘pass on the baton’ of experience;
* Diary – for all the busy-ness! For energy and wisdom in balancing my time appropriately; that I will manage to balance the many responsibilities I have, spend quality and quantity time with God and take time off!

**THANKS & PRAISE:**

* God’s grace, love, provision, guidance & faithfulness;
* Helen – for our engagement, & our deepening relationship & love;
* Family – For Christopher, Rebecca, Judah & Ezra; Laura & Conrad in Canada; David, Chantel, Gracie & Connor & for David’s gardening business; Jamie that God protected him in the accident;
* Kenya – for God’s challenge & blessing whilst we were there & the amazing things we were able to do;
* Dynamos, Juice Puppets & Primary Saints – for establishing these activities and developing the children in faith & service;
* Schools– for the many lessons & assemblies & especially the great relationship with LBHS, CPS & St. Paul’s;
* Bible Explorer – for so many opportunities to share this excellent resource, teaching God’s ‘Big’ story;
* Support – the Ashworth’s in providing a home for us; God’s development of Partnerships – especially with YOU, my faithful prayers & supporters;
* Finance – God’s provision, especially in selling & buying a new home; the financial support I received enabling me to buy, which in worldly terms doesn’t make sense;

My Overseers fulfil the role of supporting, challenging and encouraging me in my ministry. They help me to stay focused on God and the aims and vision of Primary Focus, and give me advice when needed. They are also my accountability group. **They are: Steve (Chair) & Jan Mealand, Ian & Lesley Ashworth, and Hedge (Richard) & Anne Smith.** Please contact them on any matter concerning me or Primary Focus.

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**Prayerletter 20**

**April, 2009**