

Text from Chrysalis - Street Pastors issue

1) Minister's Leader article (Tim Searle)

## Community Spirit

Chandler's Ford is a strange place. That was my first observation on arriving here in the summer of 2008. Strange, at least to me, because I had moved from a Devon market town which had a discernable centre surrounded by suburbs. Chandler's Ford on the other hand seems to be a collection of smaller units, villages almost, that have merged into a sprawl over the last 50 years. These smaller centres seem to have retained their identity to the extent that when talking about the top of town it's more likely to be described as Hiltingbury or even Ampfield rather than Chandler's Ford. Then in the middle there is Fryern, Oakmount and Miller's Dale, and to the south there's Valley Park, Knightwood, Velmore and the industrial area. I've often wondered where this elusive place 'Chandler's Ford' actually is amid the other villages which have acquired its name.

Valley Park where I live is no different. In fact despite its relative youth it feels like one of the more self-contained of the villages. I live within walking distance of a school, church, community centre, park, pub, shop, barbers (sorry ... salon!), chip shop, vets, dentists, doctors, nursery and leisure centre. With the rise of the online experience you don't even have to venture out to Asda if you don't want to. And there is the village attitude to our shared community life. We talk to neighbours, keep watch over people's homes when they are away, look after pets, share clippings, gossip and even have the odd street party here and there, or at least a BBQ at the Vicarage.

The community spirit often found in such places is a powerful and important thing. Yet it also produces its own set of problems. Village communities can become rigid and insular struggling to tolerate those who don't quite fit the bill or toe the line. It can often be a difficult environment for young people to grow up in. Wherever young people congregate on a Friday night, it is soon descended on by the authorities eager to protect local residents who think that youngsters will only cause trouble. Sometimes we are all guilty of a 'not in my backyard' mentality. We're not interested in the cause of the problem; we just want it to go away.

This is where the Street Pastors come in. Some of their most valuable work has come from walking alongside those who feel rejected

and disenfranchised by society. They don't do it to preach but to provide opportunities to listen. Very often, all people need to feel valued again is a sense of their own voice being heard. If you think about it, this is a very Christ-like model as can be found in the gospel accounts. Jesus spent relatively little time in the temple and synagogues, instead choosing to come alongside people where they were, at their level, out in the community.

We must continue to try and build that community spirit that is so important, but let's try and take everybody with us, learning to listen rather than exclude.

**Tim Searle**

Minister

Chandler's Ford United Reformed Church

*...and also a member of the Chandler's Ford team*

2) Fridays, no Flip Flops

It's late on a Friday evening and you're walking home from an evening out. There's a lone streetlight up ahead and in the pool of light you see a large, rather rowdy group of young people, right in your path.

They're not doing any harm; they're just having a laugh with their mates (you hope). But things look a bit boisterous nonetheless. The chances are that you pass them by, and carry on with what you were doing: minding your own business, and keeping your eye contact to yourself.

I'd guess you'd be less likely to walk right up to the group and try to engage some of them in conversation? However, if you were a member of the local Street Pastors team, you might well go and do exactly that.

Street Pastors was set up initially in inner London, back in 2003, a voluntary initiative organised by the local churches. Its aim was to try and help combat some of the issues that were ravaging communities, such as violent crime, drunkenness, drug abuse. Small teams of Street Pastors started to go out into their communities on Friday and Saturday nights, and soon started to make a difference, with reductions in crime seen in those areas. They're not the Police; they're simply there to listen, to care and to help. Things are a lot quieter around here. There aren't the same sorts of city centre issues in Chandler's Ford (no night clubs for instance, so no flip flops required) but there's still a need for Street

Pastors, on Friday nights. To find out more about these *creatures of the night* (and not least, what are the flip flops for?), turn the page.

Jan Moring

### 3) Interview with a Street Pastor

*Chandler's Ford Street Pastors is manned by around fifteen volunteers from a variety of local churches. They work in small teams of three to four members, and each team goes out one Friday a month, from around 8pm to midnight. They are also supported by a team of Prayer Pastors. Jan Moring chatted to Norma, Richard and Denise from Chandler's Ford Methodist Church, and to Dexter from St. Francis' Church, to find out more.*

'Me and my big mouth!' Norma laughed when she told me about the meeting where she'd first heard about Street Pastors. She'd remarked what a good idea she thought it was, but, 'I'm sorry I'm too old to do it.' The answer came straight back: 'You're not!'

Norma enjoys the role: 'I've always liked people', and believes that many young people don't have anyone who will simply listen to them. 'I get the feeling they've never really spoken to anybody older than them. I don't think kids sit down and eat with their parents much, so they're not really used to talking about life.' Would Norma recommend being a Street Pastor? 'Absolutely! It has dragged me into the 21st century, and made me more aware of what young people face these days. But young people are young people no matter what generation. I still see the same things that concerned me when I was young. People are people. They've all got the same problems.'

Dexter, from St. Francis' Church, sees the role as: 'To be there, and to care, and nothing else - it's as simple as that really.' Street Pastors offer practical help: waiting with someone who might be feeling threatened, until a taxi arrives, say. But most of the help they offer is simply in listening. Dexter recalls a 40 year old man he met around 2am one night: 'He'd just lost both parents and was feeling anti everything. And he just talked it out with us. A month later he came back and said thanks for listening.'

Dexter is a team leader at Chandler's Ford, but also a team member at Eastleigh. He explained the differences between the two areas, one rural, one town. 'In Chandler's Ford we drive to pockets of busyness. For example we'd normally find young adults (aged 12 - 18) at Hiltingbury Rec or at Knightwood.' In Eastleigh there are clubs, so they work until 3am. There, you might see young women who, after an evening clubbing, can no longer walk in their high heels. This is where the flip flops come in: Street Pastors offer them to protect bare feet from broken glass.

Richard and Denise are one of two married couples in Chandler's Ford Street Pastors. They enjoy it too: 'You get such a lot out of it. All the time you're meeting new people.' The main issue they come across with the young people they meet is alcohol, some drinking quite heavily. 'It's not excessive - any rumours of drunken marauders is not the case.' As Street Pastors, they can help ensure that they don't come to too much harm. As Denise remarked: 'They always look out for their friends - if they're sober enough to do so.'

To anyone thinking about becoming a Street Pastor, Dexter has the last word: 'It will change your life. I don't see a gang of kids as a threat. I don't pre-judge anyone, particularly on the streets. Now I'm far more aware, and more receptive.'