

Mountain top experiences from a church in the valley

Abertridwr is a small village just outside of Caerphilly in South Wales. It is predominantly a working-class community and has a population of around three and a half thousand people.

Our Community Church has been using the EE training programme since March 1983 and as a direct result many, many lives in our community have been touched and changed. There have been disappointments of course, which are to be expected in evangelism, but there have also been many successes. We get so excited by the blessing of people coming to the Lord. Here are just a few of the countless stories that could be told.

The first person who came to the Lord through EE in 1983 was Cheryl. She was married with two children and typical of so many people today. Her marriage had run into difficulty, and she felt that there was something missing in her life, but didn't know what it was. Then, one Wednesday afternoon in May an EE team visited her. When the gospel was presented, it made so much sense that she asked the Lord into her life. From that day to this, she has never looked back. She has gone through the programme herself, and has had the joy of leading others to Christ. Cheryl is currently one of our prayer co-ordinators in the church.

One evening a team visited the home of a young couple, Ken and Ann. Ken wasn't at home, but after making friends with Ann, the team presented the gospel to her. The Lord opened her heart in the same way that Lydia's heart was opened in the Bible. When asked, 'Are you willing to put your trust in Jesus Christ, repent of sin, and receive God's gift of eternal life?' she enthusiastically said, yes. Then, just as she was about to pray a prayer of response, the door opened and in walked Ken. 'What's going on here?' asked Ken. The leader of the team explained to him that the gospel had been shared with his wife, and that she was about to pray. Ken remarked, 'Well, before she prays you had better tell me what you've told her'. The gospel was then presented a second time, and the team had the joy of leading both husband and wife to the Lord. Today Ken is a leader of one of our house groups, and they are both going on with the Lord.

Then there is Brian. Brian was a spiritualist medium who was in constant demand throughout South Wales and the West country. He was always fully booked to go somewhere at least six months in advance. He had practised as a medium for a number of years, then one day he decided to stop. He says: "*At that time I didn't know why, but now I know that the Lord was in it, he was preparing me for what was going to be a life-changing experience.*"

Subsequently, Brian married Margaret – a member of our church. She trained in EE and many times Margaret persuaded Brian to receive a visit from a team so that they could practice what they were learning. He soon came to know the most of the presentation and would correct a trainee if he or she made a mistake. He called himself a "professional" listener. But God says "His word shall not return to him void" and without knowing it Brian was being brought under conviction. He now admits that many times after a team left he would feel quite uncomfortable, but didn't know why.

Although Brian had stopped being a medium it was still in his mind and spirit, and he couldn't shake it off. His marriage eventually got into difficulty and began to go down hill until they were legally separated. Just a week before filing for divorce an EE team visited them. Again the gospel was presented to him but on this occasion it made sense! In his despair, Brian reached out and took the gift of eternal life. He renounced spiritualism and all that he had practised, and asked the Lord into his life. The Holy Spirit worked in Brian that day, and he just wept and wept as wave after wave of God's love broke upon him. In fact he wept for many days as the love of God touched his life. Today, Brian has a great compassion for people who are hurting, and has a deep desire to help and care for such people.

One humorous and unique story involved a visit to the home of a middle-aged couple. They were very friendly and gave the team a warm welcome. The evening visit was going well, when suddenly the door burst open and in came their son. He was very distraught because his wife-to-be had run away. There was such a commotion. It resulted in the mother, father and son rushing out of the house. The mother turned as she went, and said to the team, close the door behind you when you leave. They just looked at each other in amazement. But again this humorous story has a happy ending. The wife to-be returned home, and the couple got married. But most importantly, the couple visited, namely Don and Margaret both came to the Lord, and are still worshipping with us today.

Then there was Julie, she was a drug addict and alcoholic. Left to fend for herself from an early age, she was suspicious of everyone, she never knew the meaning of true love. If anyone tried to get close to her in her mind there was an ulterior motive behind it, and they were probably after something. Her philosophy for life was simple, do it to them before they do it to you!

She is a single parent, with three children, and one of them, a lovely little girl, is disabled. One big hang up Julie had was a hatred toward all men, this was understandable because they had so often used and abused her in the past.

Then one day she was visited by Jean, a member of our church who worked for the Social Services. She sought to help Julie in the bringing up of her children and visited her regularly for eighteen months. During the course of one visit Jean heard screaming and cursing coming from the back of the house. She rushed around horrified to find Julie about to hit her neighbour over the head with a hammer because of something she had said to her daughter. Jean stepped in and calmed the situation down. She told Julie that she attended church and invited her to come. Julie attended church the following Sunday for the first time in her life.

Eventually two teams went to visit her on a Wednesday evening. One team was allocated the task of looking after the children, the other had the responsibility of presenting the gospel to Julie. It was a bizarre evening; all sorts of people

kept coming and going, with Julie leaving us at regular intervals to go into the kitchen. We found out later that those 'excursions' were to smoke a 'joint'! But the incredible happened! The gospel was presented and she agreed that it made sense. She was then asked if she was

prepared to repent of her sin, turn away from her destructive lifestyle and receive God's gift of eternal life. To the team's amazement she said, 'Yes'.

As you can imagine she brought much 'baggage from the past' with her into the church. She needed a great deal of help, and many hours have been spent with her as bit by bit all the rubbish of her past life is being removed. She's now showing to her friends old and new, that she is a new creation in Christ, and that the old had gone and the new has come'.

Another blessing and spin-off effect of EE is that it can unearth an evangelistic gift in a person. One such person is Cynthia. She was one of the first two people trained at our church. As an active Sunday School superintendent and youth worker she was very reluctant to stop these activities in order to be trained. Eventually she was persuaded to do so. On completing the programme she had a new found passion, a desire to share her faith with others. This she has continued to do for nearly sixteen years, and has led a number of people to the Lord.

These are just a few success stories, there are many more and as a church we thank God for Evangelism Explosion. It does make a difference, and brings a great deal of excitement and freshness as a result of the "new life" of those coming to faith.

Since we started EE in 1983 we have completed nineteen local church programmes and held ten Leaders Training Courses. During this time seventy five people from the church have been trained, and well over two hundred people have attended the Leaders' Training Courses.

Many in our church are now able to confidently share their faith with others and through EE they have been taught how to effectively disciple these new believers. Our church has grown by about six hundred percent, largely through this effective tool, and we shall continue to use it in the future.

Rev Bryan Alexander,

Bryan lives with his wife Jean and one of his daughters in Abertridwr, near Caerphilly, where he is the senior minister of the Community Church. Bryan is also a member of the Board of Directors of EE(GB).