

IMPACTING AND TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES THROUGH THE LOCAL CHURCH

Matt Bird

MATT BIRD, CEO OF THE GLOBAL NETWORK NAYBA, CALLS ON CHURCHES TO RISE TO THE CHALLENGES OF THE DAY, TAKING THE INITIATIVE AND USING THEIR UNIQUE POSITION TO HELP LIFT THE BURDENS OF THEIR NEIGHBOURHOODS.

History shows that communities are transformed when churches take the initiative to provide services and opportunities for society. Whether it is education, health or employment, many of today's social provision has its roots in the church. Whenever there was a need across communities, the church stepped up to help.

Until the church intervened in the 18th century, the UK's working children were not educated; it was then that Sunday schools were established. These schools were the precursors to a national system of education that are now part of everyday life. They have empowered children from all neighbourhoods to access better life choices.

As society changes, churches need to keep pace to reflect the local need. We are uniquely placed to help our communities. Over recent years, the number of food banks has increased and debt advice from Christian organisations has helped thousands.

Without churches deciding to help transform their communities, such initiatives may not have happened. If they had, it is likely they would have been provided at a cost.

Former British Prime Minister Boris Johnson praised UK churches for their role in supporting their communities during coronavirus lockdowns. This example proves how the actions of the church can transform communities.

Many churches attempt to reach neighbourhoods but end up frustrated when they find it is not as straightforward as they expect. Simply providing a building as a community asset is not enough in today's world. Instead, churches may want to consider what is necessary for their individual community with its unique requirements.



This is why NAYBA exists: to provide churches with practical help and resources to equip them to better love their neighbours and transform their neighbourhoods. In doing so, we are helping Christians carry out Jesus's command to love our neighbour.

CARRY EACH OTHER'S BURDENS

In his letter to the Galatians, the Apostle Paul writes, 'Carry each other's burdens so you will fulfil the law of Christ.' Paul

is asking us to make the burdens of others lighter.

The Cambridge dictionary describes a burden as: 'A duty or responsibility that is hard to bear.' As Christians, we are expected to step up to carry the burdens of others because within us dwells the love of Christ.

Our worldwide communities have always faced burdens, whether that's in times of international crises, such as wars, or less seismic but nevertheless life-changing events that create heartache and hardship.

Just getting through life can be a burden to many people in our communities. At the moment, our communities face economic hardship in the UK through the cost of living crisis. Energy bills are to rise by 80 per cent, with the average annual bill rising to £3,549.

In a poll carried out at the end of August 2022, almost one third of the UK's adults say they will have no choice but to turn to credit cards to keep the lights on this winter. Many elderly people say they will have to choose to eat or heat!

We are called in such times, where burdens increase, to step up and double our efforts for the sake of our communities. In Matthew 5:42, as Jesus delivers the Sermon on the Mount, he challenges us: 'Give to the one who asks

you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.'

A MORDECAI MOMENT

As we emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic, I felt that God was calling the Church to step up and serve our communities as society faced two enormous challenges: mental health and economic crisis. This was, and still is in light of the cost of living crisis, the Church's Mordecai moment.

In an article, I wrote:

"Mordecai was a relative and guardian of Queen Esther, a Jew placed in the Persian royal palace after becoming the wife of King Xerxes. After discovering the king was going to allow his highest official to wipe out the Jews, Mordecai approached the queen.

He challenged Esther, saying, 'For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?' (Esther 4:14).

As a result, Esther stepped up and, after bravely approaching the king, the Jews in the city of Susa were saved.

I believe God is saying to the church today that it was created 'for such a time as this'. We must not remain silent because we can bring relief and deliverance during this crisis. But if we do not grasp this opportunity, the Church's relevance will diminish and die."



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REACH OUT

The impact of the pandemic still weighs on our communities and a double whammy of rising food prices means we must stand ready for 'a time such as this'.

Following the publication of that article, NAYBA launched two initiatives to improve local economies: the Spirit of Enterprise Course and Mind Your Own Business projects. The course shows churches that they can become a driving force in helping encourage entrepreneurs through enterprise.

Following this, churches across the UK are now running Mind Your Own Business projects. This helps churches reach out

to the unemployed in their community who may be interested in starting their own business. It offers practical resources that can be helpful to anyone starting a business whether they are believers or not.

As a result, dozens of businesses have now been launched and, by these enterprises working together, they are increasing the well-being within their communities.

We are called to love our neighbour and, while being a listening ear is necessary, it is more powerful for the church to provide the resources that ease burdens within communities.

There is an old adage about giving a person a fish and they will eat today, but teaching them to fish means they will eat for a lifetime. This practical approach from churches will transform their neighbourhoods and communities. And we all know what Jesus achieved when it came to fish!

Matt Bird is a global speaker and social and business entrepreneur who has spoken in 50 countries to more than a million people and authored sixteen books. He is the Founder and Chief Executive of the global non-profit NAYBA whose mission is to help local churches love their neighbours and transform their neighbourhoods. Currently NAYBA partners with churches in 20 nations across 4 continents. Matt is also an executive coach who enables his clients to achieve significant business goals, become published authors and impactful public speakers. When he is not travelling he lives between London, UK and Noto in Sicily, Italy. You can find out more at www.CoffeeWithMatt.com.

