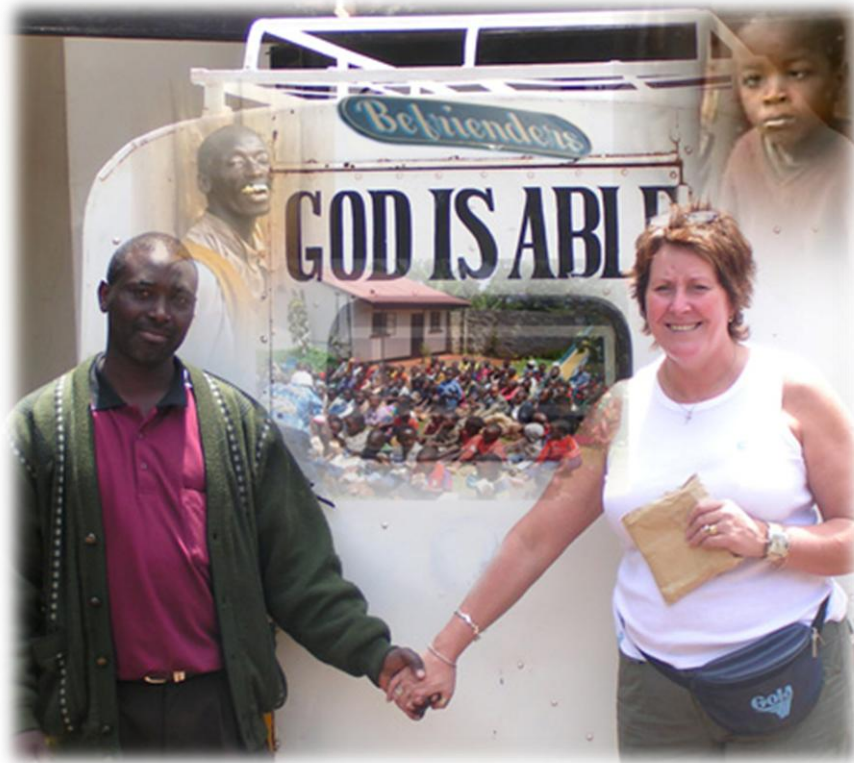


The Befrienders

Meeting the Need – Part 1



Terry Fairfowl (above) has witnessed many miracles over the years at Whitewell Metropolitan Tabernacle and will share further with the reader in an in-depth interview in a forthcoming issue of 3-in-1 The Voice later in the year, and how this remarkable work has now expanded to Kenya...but first here is a little background in this supplement as to how Terri got started in this miraculous ministry – Part II will be available in August...

INTRODUCTION

The Befrienders Ministry has become synonymous with The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Belfast, a unique and powerful ministry to the disabled in the communities of Northern Ireland.

It reminds me instantly of another Metropolitan Tabernacle, Southwark birthed through its famous pastor Charles Spurgeon. Ministries to the impoverished & orphanages for children – a 'new and innovative for its time' concept that came up against opposition for promoting a new type of faith - the practical witness of Christ, the church serving the community rather than being served...

After the first foundation stone was laid 15 years ago in an appeal by Pastor James McConnell to his congregation The Befrienders has one true and loyal friend - one lady who has led the way and allowed herself to be used by the Lord to reach, who some people in society term, 'The Unreachable'.

As society smiles and nods in approval, whilst others attend to our disabled friends and brethren in our communities, Terry and her humble team of dedicated volunteers week in and week out minister to and physically bring the disabled brethren to church every service and bible study during the weeks. This is also followed up by home visits, social visits and hospital visits.

The Befrienders Ministry is actually more than a ministry, it is like a community within a community totally integrated and accepted and has indeed like Spurgeon, set a benchmark for all other churches and organisations to learn and work alongside with, providing totally integrated and functional practical, psychological and spiritual support for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Editor



In the Beginning...

By

Terry Fairfowl

'May if you don't stop chattering I am going to crash the car!' I said laughingly, 'I can't lip read and drive at the same time!'

We were both so excited at the prospect of seeing Joni Ereckson Tada, who was coming to our church, The Metropolitan Tabernacle at Whitewell, Belfast. It was Saturday 4th October 1997.

May was 44 years old and suffered from MS (Multiple Sclerosis), I had been May's friend since well I thought at the time from 1984, when I first saw her struggling to walk down a road...as her illness progressed so did our friendship.

May came to church with me and at the beginning she had no relationship with the Lord, she came because I would wash and dress her. However, eventually she gave her heart to the Lord a year later! Gradually May lost the use of her arms and legs completely, in 1995 she went into hospital for supposedly two days, however, she developed septicaemia and her digestive system went into shock – she spent almost 9 months in hospital before being transferred to a hospice and then a nursing home. The pain, anguish and despair could not be measured what she had had to endure...

I am no Elijah but in Kings 17:34 it says *'The Lord commanded him to tarry at the brook of Cherith and commanded the ravens to feed him there.'*

Now the raven was an unclean bird to Elijah, so it wasn't a place he wanted to be but it was the place his Master wanted him to be. The Lord proved and fashioned him there. I now know this is where the Lord proved and fashioned me. This was 'my place' 'my Cherith', for he knew I would

never be good to anyone who lived with pain, anguish and despair if I had not at least tasted it for myself.

By August 1997 I was feeling so frustrated and confused. I was annoyed that no-one seemed to care about disabled people. Did it matter to anyone if they got to break bread for instance? Did anyone care if they heard the gospel? Because I had seen for myself the difference that the Lord had made to May, I wanted the same for anyone with a disability. I longed and yearned to enable them to have the same experience of Jesus that May had with Him. So I gave the Lord a time frame, kneeling down on the 14th August 1997 at my daughter Mikala's bed, I cried out in my frustration "Lord if nothing happens between now and the 14th February (Valentine's Day) 1998, then I am either in the wrong church (which was a big statement for me as I had been there since 1977!), or I was just going mad and I wasn't going to worry about people with disabilities anymore.

And so it was on Sat 4th October 1997 that May and I had heard that Joni Ereckson Tada who was as a girl, was made a quadriplegic through a driving accident was coming to the Tabernacle. Joni had written books about her accident and of her love for Jesus, of how her faith and relationship with Him had helped her come to terms with it. She had also composed many beautiful Christian songs. I had used Joni's songs and books to help sustain May in her faith, never believing we would ever get the chance to see her and hear her, and yet here we were on our way to our church to see her!

The entire minor hall which holds around 1200 was filled with every type of disability you could imagine. The organisers said it was the first time they had all met at one time in one place. The Eagle Fellowship – disabled Christian Fellowship, the Royal Institute for the Blind, Prospect (Institute for the deaf). It was a wonderful day, with the disabled brethren ministering in song.

As I looked around the Hall that day I listened to my pastor Dr James McConnell read from Luke 14: 12-14 & 23

"When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy Brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours, lest they also bid thee again, and in recompense be made thee, but when thou makest a feast call the poor, the maimed the lame and the blind and thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just."

Verse 23

“And He said unto the servant ‘Go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in, that my house may be full,’

My heart cried out again to the Lord that day to ask him how to fulfil the need of my heart to love these people. I reminded him of how stupid I was and how useless, but surely as Christians we could do more for these people? But how?

The following morning whilst sitting in the choir I heard my pastor tell of Joni’s visit to Whitewell the day before. He said he felt he had neglected the disabled and he announced he wanted to start a ministry to people with a disability – and he wanted a woman to lead it!

BEFRIENDERS

A caring ministry for people with a disability

Allow me to introduce you to the Befrienders Ministry. We are a body of Christians who have a desire to enable people who have a disability to enjoy fellowship within our church.

If you have a need or disability please get in touch with us.

"But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just." Luke 14:13-14

During our church services we provide the following care:

- **WHEELCHAIR USERS:** We provide 'one-to-one' care and assistance for all wheelchair users at all church services. Our carers are trained in lifting and toileting techniques.
- **VISUAL IMPAIRMENT** As with wheelchair users, all those who are visually impaired are given individual attention.
- **HEARING IMPAIRMENT** For those with hearing difficulties, the area below the balcony in our main sanctuary is fitted with a loop

system. Additionally, we have two ladies, Dorothy and Maisie who sign for the deaf throughout all services in the main sanctuary.

- **LEARNING DIFFICULTIES** The term "learning difficulty" encompasses a multiplicity of problems. Each person with a learning disability is uniquely different from another and it is on this basis that we intensify our one to one care.
- **VISITATION** We visit members in hospital or at home who are unable to attend our church meetings. If you require a home visit please contact us.
- **THE BEFRIENDERS BIBLE CLASS** The Befrienders Bible Class is for wheelchair users and takes place on the third Saturday of every month in the Metropolitan Tabernacle Youth Centre from 11.00am to 1.00pm.
- **THE BEFRIENDERS CLUB** The Befrienders Club is to meet the needs of people with learning difficulties. We meet in the Metropolitan Tabernacle Youth Centre on the first Saturday of every month from 11.00am until 1.00pm. (Activities include Arts & Crafts, Table Games, Sports, Outside Activities such as Shopping, Bowling Etc.)
- **THE WELL** Once a month we take young people with disabilities to the Saturday night youth fellowship known as the Well.
- **TRANSPORT** All of our drivers undergo training to drive buses for the disabled and are familiar with wheelchair clamps, straps and relevant legislation. Each driver is confident and competent with all aspects of driving these special buses.

WE PROVIDE FREE TRANSPORT IN THESE AREAS

- East Belfast
- West Belfast
- Newtownabbey
- Newtownards
- Bangor
- Lisburn
- Carrickfergus
- Ballymena

Times and Locations

The befrienders meet at all the church services.

Link to the website for more...[click here](#)