

Message from Bishop Robert

1 October 2024



Flip flops, lollipops and LIFE Together

You may have read elsewhere of my recent ‘Night on the Town’ with the Cheltenham Street Pastors. To be honest I was a little apprehensive. I am not known for my ability to manage late nights or, for that matter, for my love of clubbing – I have been, but it was a long time ago! But... I had the most wonderful time and saw Cheltenham in a very different light.

Come 11 pm on a Saturday, Cheltenham is simply full of young people, all dressed in their best party clothes, spending time with friends and embracing life. With them were the Street Pastors who were my hosts for the evening. We had a few years on those going into the clubs, most of us in our 60’s and 70’s and here too was life.

The Street Pastors are Christians, members of a number of different churches across the town and beyond, committed to living out their faith in living service by giving one night a month to be on the streets between 10pm and 4am, offering loving, practical service with the aid of a dustpan and brush to sweep up broken glass that might otherwise cut young feet, bottles of water for when a little hydration might help, flip flops for when high heels are hard to walk in, and lollipops for a bit of sugar. They also run a safe space, a haven in the middle of the town with a place to sit and the promise of a hot drink. Thiers is a practical and loving service born out of relationship, with Jesus Christ and with the young people who were, when I was present, universally friendly and pleased to see us. As one young woman in her 20’s said, having commented that we were a little like her grandparents, ‘I am just so happy you are here, and you care’. We were sharing in life!

That matters. That matters a lot. It matters because life as we all know has indeed great joy and some sadness and both were in evidence. A little later we came across another young woman and her friend. Through tears she shared her sadness with one of the team, and they cared for her with the water and flip flops, and they stayed with her, and then walked with her, as she found her lift home. They stayed and walked with her as Jesus stays and walk with us. This too was indeed life.

My evening was truly inspiring, life affirming and humbling, and I am delighted that the Cheltenham Street Pastors are running their ‘Come and See’ campaign. It is not by accident that these are words from John 1, the invitation of Philip to Nathaniel to come and see Jesus, and in John 2 to join in a very splendid wedding party, an invitation to find and enjoy life in abundance. ‘Come and See’ is an invitation for you to share in my experience and explore if this might be part of the way you live out your faith and enjoy the life that God has given us to share with all.

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