

Ed Preston

Prayer Letter

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Getting Going Again

I last wrote to you when we were on the cusp of the new university year. Much was (and still is) unknown. How would universities deliver their promises of face to face teaching? Would students' unions step up to the challenge and create spaces for students to mix and form new friendships?

Universities around the country are hitting the press, most notably Manchester Met who are presently enforcing 1,700 students to remain in their halls of residence for two weeks. Campuses remain close to empty, and with further local lockdowns and 'circuit breakers' looming the student world is indeed a bleak picture. I personally fear for the huge impact this will have on the mental health on students, especially those who have moved away from home for the first time. I am conscious that while Covid is deadly for the elderly and frail, suicide remains the biggest killer of young me. We must pray for students as they weather these present dark days, and the darker ones still to come.



NE team at our socially distanced team days in early September

Lights in the Darkness

And yet into this darkness the light of the gospel continues to shine. The usual ways CUs operate: large main meetings, public evangelistic events and so on have obviously had to change. To help CUs continue to meet together, encourage one another and reach out with the gospel we have encourage students to form *Impact Groups*: gatherings of 3-8 students from different year groups, gathering together face to face or online. Each of these groups is resourced with pre-prepared studies (Check out the study material here: <https://www.uccf.org.uk/impact/1>). Our tag line for these groups is *'Impacted by the Word, Impacting the University'* and we therefore hope that as these small groups gather, in whatever way they can, they will be encouraged and encourage one another. Our Prayer is that these groups will especially help new students to feel welcomed and at home in their new city, and help them connect with a local church through their connections with retuning students. So far these Impact groups have been taken up by CUs up and down the country (almost every CU in the NE region is running them) and many more students than initially expected have signed up for these groups, which is itself a huge encouragement. Please pray for the student leaders and my team as we work with CUs to gather additional leaders for these groups and for creativity and boldness with the gospel as students reach out to their universities at this unusual time with the comfort and hope the unchanging gospel brings. At the same time CU have been preparing Impact groups that they also been getting ready to welcome students to their campuses for freshers weeks. As expected this is very different to previous years. Some Sus have completely banded any gatherings of societies while others have been less strict. A real outlier in the region so far is the University of York who in the process of erecting 'The Forest' (see photos below) a set of outdoor venues on campus which will host social events for students. We eagerly await to see how this impacts the university this term and pray of for other universities with less ambitious plans for the social lives of students.



Pictures of 'The Forest' At University of York currently being created to host students while they socialise on Campus

**Joey Kirkham: New CU Staff
Worker in York & Hull**



New Staff

Much has changed but there are of course things which have remained the same, one such thing being welcoming new staff to the team. This year we've had two new staff join the NE team in the form of Joey Kirkham (CUSW for York & Hull) and Charlie Coombs (CUSW for Leeds & Bradford). Joey studied her undergraduate degree in Aberystwyth, did a year on relay in Bangor and then spent 5 years teaching Secondary English in Exeter. Joey is already well loved by her students and is a delight to have on the team. We have also been joined by Charlie Coombs in the Leeds patch. Charlie studied his undergraduate degree in Durham, spent a year in Leeds as a Relay Worker on the team after graduating, and then worked for St Philemon's Church in Toxteth. It is wonderful to welcome Charlie back to the city and back to the CUs. Charlie is picking up a patch that has been without a staff worker since Christmas due to the slightly early departure of Lizzie Fry, our former team member, so its great to have the additional team member on the ground in the city again. Charlie is a fantastic lad who has already brought a fresh injection of energy, love and grace to the patch and his CUs. I thank God for both of them.

**Charlie Coombs: New CU Staff
Worker in Leeds & Bradford**



Support Update

Thanks again to all of you who have continued to support me in prayer and with finance through this difficult time for everyone, I am grateful for the Lord's provision through you. I am continuing to work towards raising fund for my post and greatly value your prayers and contributions towards my work. I have always believe in this ministry to students, but right now I feel especially clear and resolute in our calling to disciple students as the hold out the gospel to their campus, as we too proclaim the good new of Jesus alongside them.

If you would like to start giving towards my post you can sign up online through this link: <https://www.uccf.org.uk/our-team/ed-preston> Please do get in touch if you would like to hear more about the work and how you can support me in it.

**Jesse and Micah setting off for
Jesse's first day of School**



Personal Update

Hannah and I remain deeply thankful for our church community through these strange times. We too have found these last 6 months to be difficult but have known the love and support of the Lord through his people. We recognise the many ways the Lord has blessed us and are thinking and praying about how we can use this to bless others, especially students. While none of us would wish for these circumstances we see the Lord's hand in all of it and are grateful for how he has grown us through it all.

Prayer Requests

- Please pray for Joey and Charlie as that settle into their new roles. The first year of any job in a usual time is difficult and covid restrictions have made their starts more even more difficult. Please pray for them as the gt to know students, and settle into their new homes and into a church. Please pray especially for them as they work to maximise their time face to face with stduents while they can.
- Please pray for Hannah, Jesse, Micah and I as we continue to adjust to our new routine of school, work and home. Leeds was recently put into local lockdown which has we're both really disspointed about this. Please pray particularly for Micah as it makes giving him the kind of stimulation he needs to develop very difficult.