

Garry Ion

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The call in action

Dear Friends,

With pandemic restrictions hopefully behind us, it's been good to start visiting link churches in person, something I have been waiting to do since returning from Uganda two years ago. I have especially missed worshipping together, the very purpose for which we were created! I remain very thankful and encouraged by the support I receive despite my change in focus and location. If a visit hasn't yet been arranged, and you would like one, please do be in touch. I'm trying to organise visits around my work in Carlisle and caring for my parents in Penrith, my mum is currently having radiotherapy.

At the Community Shed, formerly Men's Shed, in Carlisle, the ministry continues to grow and develop. Despite the name change, we remain focussed primarily on supporting men. With restricted space and a number of men wanting to join, we have split daily meetings into two, so we can offer separate morning and afternoon sessions, tailoring activities according to the needs and ability of the participants. We find productivity varies according to whether the men feel up to doing some practical work or just need a chat, cuppa and a prayer. We now also offer lunchtime fellowship between sessions which includes a bite to eat. So we take it in turns to down tools in the workshop and pick up kitchen utensils and a tea towel!

Most of our new members are being referred by social and mental health services in Carlisle. We have members from all walks of life and a wide age range. What members have in common is the feeling of isolation and disillusionment and struggling with anxiety and depression. Younger members, especially, often lack self-confidence due to unemployment. Members describe a feeling of being caught in a black hole or vicious circle, which has led to addiction and crime. Which in turn of course makes it even harder to obtain a job. In the extreme, we have men who find themselves on the streets, homeless. And some who have contemplated or attempted suicide.

Because of vulnerability and the complexity of support needed, we would like to partner with other Christian organisations who have specialist experience, as we share a sense of believing and belonging. One charity, based in northeast England, is involved in providing supported housing alongside their daily shed activities. I hope to share more about this possible partnership in future letters.



Name: Garry Ion

Location: Britain

My call: Holistic mission using practical skills to come alongside people and share the gospel.

My role: I am seconded to Restore Cumbria, a pioneering, church-founded community project seeking to support those on the margins struggling with life.



Selfie at Penrith railway station platform on the way to visit a link church, with a fitting poster in the background

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Writing to the Philippians, Paul says in chapter four to put aside anxiety and struggles, to lay them before God in prayer with thanksgiving. Peace will come when hearts and minds are focussed on what is good, the knowledge of God's presence in this troubled world. My hope and prayer is that members of the shed will come to know this peace which passes all understanding.

Appreciating confidentiality, as we focus on what is good and positive, it is nice to share some encouraging testimonies. In one case, a young man who has been with us from the start of the shed, last year, has now found a full-time job which he seems to enjoy. To see his self-confidence grow in the time we have known him is a great inspiration to the whole shed, though we do now miss him. Another young member, who, despite struggling with much I have spoken of before, had begun to enthusiastically attend shed activities. Sadly, he suddenly died at his home before Christmas. His passing has left a big hole in the groups he attended. In the last few weeks his family, who had lived apart from him since before the pandemic, discovered he had been attending the shed. Wanting to learn of his time with us before he died, yesterday they visited. Although a sad and emotional meeting for us all, we were able to share stories and pictures. I also presented his family with two bird boxes he had made during his time with us. One box to be given to his parents and another for his children. A very sad ending, but we give thanks for the time we knew him and positive conversations we had both with him and now his family.

We rightly focus on and pray for world peace in these uncertain times, for the many thousands of people being made homeless across the world, with refugees and migrants finding safe haven in our communities. Please remember all the vulnerable people in our own communities who fail to make ends meet, who feel alone, at risk or have found themselves homeless. As the cost of living spikes, its impact is being felt most by those already struggling on the poverty line. Please pray for these increased needs – for physical and mental support. At the shed we are very aware we do not have the space or capacity to help everyone who enquires about joining. Please pray for sensitivity and wisdom as we network with likeminded organisations and as we form groups who can support each other. Pray for conversations as we sensitively share the gospel message through actions and words. May God's love be at the centre of all we do and say so that the vicious circles and black holes referred to above can be permanently broken and left behind.

Thank you, again, for journeying with me,
God bless,
Garry



Photos from top to bottom: A laugh, chat and cuppa at the shed; members make a cross for the grave of a friend; bird boxes made by a late member presented to his family

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You can give to Garry at:
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If you would like to discuss your mailings with us or to receive this link letter on a regular basis, please email supporter.care@churchmissionsociety.org or call 01865 787400

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