

‘As one’ proposal (for possible local church network backing)

Based on a highly successful Christian initiative in Birmingham, networks of churches at the city- or county-wide level could be invited to approach their local authority with a partnership proposal. Drawing in dozens of other partners including businesses, schools, community centres, GP surgeries and others, hundreds of two-metre vinyl road-side banners would go up, bearing an attractive message that reflects and reaffirms the most positive aspects of the shared Lockdown experience. They could go up soon.



When gatherings are safe and welcome, perhaps 30 churches per area stand ready to put on simultaneous outdoor Memorial Services for their local community, using the high-profile *as one* brand, coming alongside those who mourn and helping bring peace to the shared experiences of grief, anxiety, trauma and loss. Subsequently, and probably next year, the same churches put on a Back Together Celebration in the form of a tea party, as pictured, again using the *as one* partnership brand as a draw. Each church invites about 10 nearby streets. On arrival, residents are asked which street they live on and are guided to the table reserved for their own street, meeting near-neighbours, often for the first time. They then hear how they could, together, start a Street Association for their road, with the strap-line ‘friendship, fun, belonging, a helping hand’, led by residents and able to put on a few events per annum such as a barbecue, picnic, quiz night or children’s party, just for their street. Relationships grow, belonging blossoms and isolation recedes. Meanwhile, church members living on those streets help build positive community, pray for their street, engage with many, bringing something of the love of God and finding a new fruitfulness.

We provide a comprehensive service to take the burden off church leaders, including suggestions for the Memorial Service, providing banners, branded letterhead for invitations, table signs, window stickers and much more, with clear guidance and mentoring support. Part of the budget is also to support a paid Local Coordinator to handle the nuts & bolts. Most importantly, because the Lockdown inspired a wave of community spirit, there is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to harness and shape something that already exists. This gift from the church to their city or county will ignite new partnerships; help reaffirm locally and nationally a spirit of friendliness, service and love; mobilize ordinary church members to pray for and engage with their community; and give a massive boost to supportive neighbourliness.

As one is led by Martin and Gina Graham, who previously led *On the Move*, the free barbecue ministry which engaged groups of churches around the UK and abroad from 1998 to 2008. Since 2009, they have worked to rebuild community street-by-street through developing *Street Associations*, often commissioned by local authorities to work on troubled streets in deprived areas. In 2018, they led Birmingham’s high profile *Permission to Smile* campaign, which brought 159 organisations together to reignite community connections, road-testing all elements of what is now proposed.

2-min. video from Churches Together in England president Hugh Osgood: <http://bitly.ws/8Wwi>
Contact: Martin, office@as-one.uk ; 07931 282716 ; links: www.permissiontosmile.org ;
www.as-one.uk; <https://www.local.gov.uk/permission-smile-campaign-boost-friendliness>.