

A Passion for Life, the UK-wide mission which culminated at Easter, has been hailed a resounding success with another possible mission planned for 2014.

Hundreds of events saw unchurched people hearing the gospel for the first time, with many churches reporting professions of faiths. Churches of differing denominations came together and, working in groups, helped reach their local communities with the message of Easter.

Hundreds and thousands

The large-scale city-based events saw hundreds, and in some cases thousands, coming to hear well-known international speakers Tim Keller, Bishop Frank Retief and Al Stewart. The largest event at London's ExCel centre drew 2,500 people alone. Also, 'home-grown' evangelists such as Rico Tice, Roger Carswell, Vaughan Roberts and Pete Woodcock were used all over the country and, again, reported positive results. Richard Coekin, one of the organisers of the mission and minister of Dundonald Church in Wimbledon, South West London, said: 'Generally, people are thrilled and praising God for what has happened. New partnerships have been established between people from different denominations, churches of different flavours and cultures have come together and new patterns of outreach have been discovered'. Coekin was overjoyed at how churches had risen to the challenge. 'The great thing is that congregations have broken out of their church culture and made contact with unbelieving people off site. It's now time to make those follow-up conversations, and invite people to church courses. People are asking us about when we plan to do it again! We currently think that 2014 would be a sensible time, but watch this space! John Stevens and I are preparing a report for the Gospel Partnerships, who organised it, and together we will formulate a plan for the future.'

Many professions of faith

Meanwhile, Roger Carswell, who spoke to hundreds in Cheshire, Blackburn, Manchester, Liverpool and Sussex, said he had seen many people make professions of faith and others taking their first steps toward finding God. 'I was working in five areas over the four weeks and I think that every single meeting went well. At every meeting I was able to speak to unchurched people. I saw people counselled and seeking the Lord, there were some real breakthroughs and many people came to faith.' He added: 'The mission has given us confidence in the proclamation of the gospel and I really just thank the Lord for the churches leading it'.

In Birmingham, where ten events took place over three days, A Passion for Life was kicked off by a city breakfast attended by about 100 people listening to Rico Tice. Over the month they had an event for children, a performance from Phatfish and music from former Zimbabwean cricketer Henry Olonga, who gave his testimony. There was also a jazz event and apologetic sessions. The Birmingham mission culminated with Easter Praise, which was attended by 850 people who heard Rico speak about the parable of the lost son.

John Stevens, pastor of City Church, said: 'We were tremendously excited by what God has done in Birmingham, where nothing like this has happened for many years. It was wonderful to see people from churches all over the city attending and supporting

the events, and we are very conscious of how God has met all our needs. We have learnt a great deal from the mission. There is a new desire for gospel churches in the city to work together, and a new confidence that we can put on attractive events at a city-wide level’.

In Liverpool, Steve Palframan, said the events bore fruit despite a difficult mission field. Carswell spoke at three events in central Liverpool, with supporting interviews from Olonga, former loyalist terrorist turned Christian minister, Billy McCurrie and writer Keren Baker. A successful youth programme also ran and Olonga helped teach cricket to boys at St. Margaret’s Secondary School in Aigburth. Palframan said one story, over the weeks, particularly stood out. ‘A young lad heard Henry speaking in school in the afternoon and was so struck by what he was saying that he came along in the evening to the main event and brought his mum, who had no idea what she was coming along to. That evening he committed his life to Christ as he listened again to the gospel being explained in the youth event.’

Much work still to do

The Sheffield event with Bishop Retief at the Octagon was well attended, and events in Blackburn, Cheshire, Norfolk and other parts of the country were worthwhile. In western Cornwall there was a real sense of unity among the churches. Jon Marlow, Peninsula Gospel Partnership Coordinator for A Passion for Life, said: ‘The mission showed a level of partnership within the region which has not been seen before’.

A Passion for Life has shown what churches can do when combining resources. However, the mission also revealed how much work still needs to be done, both outside the church and within. Steve Palframan was saddened at how ‘hard and cold most people are to the message of Jesus’ and alarmed by a report of an atheist who had never heard the gospel from his Christian friends — reflecting the apathy shown by many in the church towards evangelism. Meanwhile, down south, Coekin admitted that they had expected more people to come to the ExCel event, but were still pleased to attract 2,500.

However, overall, A Passion for Life, outperformed its expectations. Sum-ming up, evangelist Rico Tice said: ‘I think in years to come we will look back and think what on earth did we do before A Passion for Life? I’m convinced from the perspective of the many churches I visited across the country that the pooling of resources and effort in evangelism was a tremendous encouragement’.

Matt Cresswell