

National Express Bus Chaplaincy

A Report on the Work of the Chaplains

October 2015

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Workplace Chaplaincy in National Express Buses is supported by a number of churches in the English West Midlands and Scotland. Our four chaplaincy groups are:

- Black Country Urban and Industrial Mission (BCUIM)
- Churches and Industry Group Birmingham and Solihull (CIGB)
- Workcare (Coventry and Warwickshire)
- Workplace Chaplaincy Scotland (WPCS)

Our chaplaincy in National Express Buses has been active in the West Midlands since 2012; and our Dundee chaplaincy much longer. Within our organisations we have all received training and ongoing supervision and support. In addition to our own meetings as Bus Chaplains, we also meet periodically with other Workplace Chaplains and the leadership of our various groups.

2.0 Who are we?

2.1 We have two Chaplains in **BCUIM**:



John Welsby has been Chaplain for Wolverhampton Garage and Station since January 2015. In 2014 he took early retirement from Wolverhampton City Council where he served as Assistant Director for Children, Young People and Families. He is a Reader in the Church of England and on the Ministry Team of St Jude's Church Wolverhampton. John usually spends Thursdays on his Chaplaincy Work.

Shaun Kelly has been Chaplain for West Bromwich Bus Garage and Station since May 2015. More recently he has also covered Dudley Bus Station. He is an Agency Contract Driver during the week but, depending on workload, this allows him to spend Saturdays and occasional weekdays as Chaplain. He is a member of Warley Baptist Church and a Lay Preacher.



2.2 We have three Chaplains in **CIGB**:



Chrissy McAteer has been Chaplain at Acocks Green Garage since August 2013 and at Yardley Wood since April 2014. She is the Older People's Development Worker at St Gabriel's Weoley Castle and occasionally works on bus replacement services. She is a member of Moseley Benefice (St Mary's and St Annes) and often organises spiritual retreats. Her normal Chaplaincy day is Friday.

Ebenezer Asaju has been Chaplain at Perry Barr since July 2014 and also visits Miller Street, including the fabric workshop. He is Pastor of the Christ Apostolic Church (Solace Centre) in West Hockley. His normal Chaplaincy day is Thursday



John Bradley has been Chaplain for Birmingham Central Garage and Bordesley Green Offices and Garage since September 2013. He took early retirement following a career in the Gas Industry; most recently as a Commercial Manager. He is a member of Olton Baptist Church, a part-time theological student and a lay preacher. His normal Chaplaincy Day is Tuesday.

2.3 We have one Chaplain in **Workcare**

Clive Fowle is a retired Methodist Minister. He began his Chaplaincy in Coventry in September 2015, but is not new to buses - over the years of his training and ministry, he has been Chaplain at Cotteridge, Harborne, Selly Oak and Acocks Green Garages. He is also involved in peace-building work in Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia; and in Warwickshire in a mediation service for neighbour and workplace disputes.



2.4 We have one Chaplain in **WPCS**



Geoff Findlay has been Chaplain in Dundee since 2010, where he visits both garage and bus station. He is also Team Leader for Chaplains in other workplaces in Dundee. He is pastor of Lifegate Church Dundee. His normal Chaplaincy Day is Thursday.

3.0 How do we go about our work?

- 3.1 This varies from location to location but all of us spend time in garages meeting drivers, engineers, cleaners, office staff and management. Where there is a bus station, we also meet drivers there; and also spend time at bus shelters where drivers wait for their buses to arrive. Most of us accompany drivers on their routes so we can experience at first hand some of the issues that occur when driving buses. As we visit bus stops and stations, we meet inspectors, customer service managers, revenue enforcement teams; and occasionally engineers called out when a bus has a mechanical problem.
- 3.2 We only speak to employees where it will not cause a distraction to work; or endanger health and safety, particularly when we are travelling on a bus. However, we find that there are a large number of occasions where employees are both able and willing to talk with us; and we have established friendships in many cases.
- 3.3 Most of us encountered some initial uncertainty about our role. We have been quick to emphasise that we do not see Chaplaincy as an evangelistic ministry; and many of our conversations are secular in nature. Equally, we find many employees want to discuss their faith with us; and to ask questions about ours - which we are, of course, willing to do. Whilst all our Chaplains are Christians, we have found that such conversations have aided mutual understanding and respect among the various faith groups represented within National Express Buses.

- 3.4 We have a policy that respects confidentiality, but in general terms, topics such as ill health and bereavement often occur in our conversations. Sometimes the situations discussed are critical; and people appreciate our approach in offering a "listening ear". Where prayer is requested, we are more than happy to respond; but always seek to respect the faith position, or even lack of faith position, of the person concerned. We have been pleased to receive positive feedback – sometimes from the person him/herself and other times from his/her colleagues.
- 3.5 Many employees have spoken to us about pressures that occur in their jobs such as long shifts, accidents, assaults; and company rules We recognise and support the role that the Trade Unions play in representing their members; but recognise that sometimes people like to have a chat with us as well, if they are facing difficulties, if only to help them think straight.
- 3.6 We are grateful to managers for the discussions we have with them when we discuss, in general terms, issues that are being discussed by employees. We trust that these discussions have helped, in a small way, to improve relationships between managers and their staff.
- 3.7 Whilst we see our job as supporting National Express employees we inevitably meet customers, some of whom are pleasantly surprised to see us on the bus or at stops and bus stations. It is one of the hazards of the job that people think we know the nearest stop on the route they wish to take; but fortunately there is nearly always a driver or inspector nearby who can help. We are impressed with the attention shown by National Express employees in helping such people and also the care drivers shown to elderly and disabled passengers.

4.0 Individual Reports

4.1 Acocks Green and Yardley Wood

Each Friday Chrissy McAteer visits these depots. She began to visit Acocks Green in August 2013 and Yardley Wood following the sudden death of Peter Seeney in April 2014. She pops into the offices, canteens and booking-on rooms and listens to a variety of staff. Chrissy also visits Solihull Train Station, when she can, where a number of change-overs still take place. Because of the changes to the bus routes in Solihull the train station has been less busy; but drivers and the cleaner still appreciate Chrissy's presence. She also visits the proprietor of the station kiosk and listens to the Diamond bus drivers.

In May 2015 Chrissy and Peter Sellick of CIGB spent an evening at Acocks Green with the cleaners and engineers, experiencing first hand routine maintenance and cleaning of the bus fleet.

4.2 Birmingham Central

Three Tuesdays each month, John Bradley went into the garage for an hour or more, usually beginning at the downstairs rest room talking mainly with drivers. He also used the opportunity to speak with Training Officers, Union Reps and Traffic Office people. Upstairs, he chatted with the Management Team and the support staff, canteen and social club personnel. As much as H&SE restrictions allowed, he spoke to the engineering and cleaning staff in the garage. Following this, he usually sampled one of the Birmingham Central or Bordesley routes, speaking with the driver as much as safety allows. He also tried to pop-in to all the main change-over points in the City Centre where drivers discussed various issues with him. Due to other commitments he has recently changed his day to Thursday but intends to follow the same schedule of visits. In addition, he continues to spend one Sunday a month, focussed mainly on the bus routes and the Birmingham City Centre change-over points.

4.3 Bordesley

One Tuesday each month, John Bradley did a morning tour of the Bordesley offices meeting staff and managers located there. He appreciated the welcome he received on these occasions. Most conversations were brief but courteous; but occasionally employees wanted to speak with him at length; and sometimes asked for his prayers. He also visited the garage speaking to drivers, cleaners, operational managers and support staff. Due to other commitments he has recently changed his day to Thursday.

4.4 Coventry

In his first month as Chaplain, Clive Fowle had been made very welcome by the staff he has met and looks forward to visiting the garage, station, change over points, Travel Office and also working his way round Coventry by bus to find out what it is like running a bus service in the City,

4.5 Dundee

On Thursdays, Geoff Findlay goes into the Dundee bus garage whilst many drivers are beginning their shifts. Later in the morning he visits the staff and managers and the bus station in Dundee. He has a good rapport with Dundee people – some of them he went to school with. He has also arranged pleasant surprises, including a visit of a Gospel Choir, which was featured in “about you”.

4.6 West Bromwich

On Saturdays, Shaun Kelly begins his morning at West Bromwich garage where he meets people from the Traffic Office and in the canteen (mostly engineers). After this, he meets Travel Centre staff, drivers and inspectors at Dudley Bus Station, following which, he chats with drivers at the change-over stops in Oldbury. He normally ends his day at West Bromwich Bus Station, where he meets with Travel Centre staff, drivers and inspectors. Occasionally, he takes opportunities during the week of doing a similar tour of visits.

4.7 Wolverhampton

John Welsby generally visits Wolverhampton Bus Station and garage weekly spending typically around 1 to 2 hours in the Bus Station, mostly in the National Express canteen on each occasion. He also tries to visit the canteen at different times of day and on different days including week ends/Bank Holidays on occasions. On top of this, he undertakes bus journeys as another way of getting known by the drivers, and, where a journey involves a break, this gives further opportunity for private discussion with drivers even if this might only be sat on an empty bus parked up in a bus station! In addition to drivers, John meets Travel Centre staff, administrative and engineering staff at the garage, inspectors and revenue teams.

5.0 The Way Forward

In general, we are not thinking of radically changing the way in which we provide chaplaincy in National Express Buses, but a few things come to mind, which we discussed with Marc Stone and Angela Russell when we met them last month:

5.1 Plugging the Gaps

BCUIM is reviewing the situation in respect of Pensnett and Walsall. One thing we all want to ensure is that any person we appoint is well trained and has a good prospect of remaining in the role for over a year.

5.2 Wider Roles

We believe most managers appreciate that we can make ourselves available outside our normal Chaplaincy Days if a critical situation occurs with an employee; or their close family. However, we feel it is worth considering together how this can be better drawn to the attention of managers.

One of us enjoyed attending the Remembrance Day commemoration in November 2014 and will do so again this year, if invited. Whilst we respect the intention of the organisers to keep this as a secular event, we would respond positively and sensitively if they felt that prayers should be included at future events.

We would also be happy to take part in any events such as Christmas Carol Services if any were arranged.

If any individual garages hold open days we would appreciate an invitation to have a stall which lets people know who we are and what we do.

5.3 Other National Express Businesses

We understand that the Train and Metro businesses already receive chaplaincy support so do not see our roles expanding into those areas. We do meet some group staff located at Bordesley; and are happy to support them in the same way as we support bus staff. If other group functions located in the West Midlands asked for support we would do our best to deliver it, although we don't currently have the personnel to do this. The same applies to the part of the coach business based at Digbeth.

5.4 Feedback

We receive a lot of positive feedback from those we meet at every level. However, we have recently set-up an internet based survey "<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/DC698M8>" for more objective feedback. To publicise this, and our work generally, we are submitting a draft article for "about you".

5.5 Business Information

We appreciate receiving copies of "about you" and "Connect" which HR at Bordesley send us routinely. Many garage-based managers also circulate us with newsletters produced more locally. We like to read Employee Survey responses, which generally reflect the conversations we hold at the various locations.

Additionally, we would like to discuss, how we can keep abreast of management changes, such as emailed copies of announcements placed on company notice boards. Some of us read the general sections of National Express Annual Report, but would also like to receive anything sent out generally to employees in the bus business when the results are published. We are grateful to Marc and Angela for identifying a means by which we can be circulated with this type of information.