



## Barnabas Children's Ministry Christmas Appeal

I am writing, at what is a very challenging time, to ask for your financial support and your prayers for BRF's *Barnabas* children's ministry. Each year I write to all our subscribers and supporters to share with you something of the past twelve months and the needs as we go forward. We continue to be deeply grateful for your generous response to this. This year I am also enclosing information about our [A Gift of Life legacy appeal](#) which I hope will be of interest, as it sets out the overall vision for our *Barnabas* children's ministry in both schools and churches and how a legacy gift could make a significant and lasting difference.

Next year we will celebrate a decade of working face-to-face with primary schools and churches. It all started with a two-week pilot with some schools in Sussex, with a freelance storyteller offering creative workshops based on Bible stories. We now work with schools and churches throughout the country, helping children and the adults that work with them explore Christianity creatively and bring the Bible alive. Today our *Barnabas* team comprises four staff and nine freelance members and we have seen our children's ministry become established and widely respected for the contribution it makes in both school and church contexts.

The past year has seen a number of significant developments. We started the year with a major review of our work in churches and identified four specific areas in which we have something distinctive to offer and can therefore add real value: supporting children's leaders, helping churches to engage with their wider community, helping churches and schools to build strong mutually beneficial relationships, and equipping churches as a whole to nurture children in the Christian faith. This has enabled us to define more precisely what **Barnabas in churches** is about and we are developing specific initiatives within each of the four areas.

**Messy Church** is one such initiative. We were delighted in September, thanks to the generosity of a trust and a private donor, to be able to set Lucy apart to work full-time for the next three years developing Messy Church. So much has happened with Messy

Church during 2008, including the launch of a dedicated Messy Church website <http://www.messychurch.org.uk/>, publication of *Messy Church 2* written by Lucy, 26 Messy Fiesta training events, and a host of other invitations to write and speak about Messy Church. Lucy can't do everything herself and so we have now recruited a team of nine regional coordinators to support and resource Messy Church interest in their own area. Messy Church really is making an impact as a way of engaging with families beyond the fringes of the church. As someone wrote recently in an email to Lucy:

*'I praise God for giving you such a vision of how Church can be so much fun, while at the same time building community and relationships.'*

**Barnabas in schools** continues to be greatly appreciated. During the year the team has worked in 120 different schools from Barnstaple to Inverness, delivering 110 *Barnabas RE*



creative arts days and 11 days of In-Service Training (INSET), plus a number of other one-off events. This was a reduction on the previous year but is accounted for by the fact that since September Lucy Moore has not been involved with *Barnabas* in schools, and we have not yet been able to recruit a freelance team member based in the south of England to cover that region. **Barnabas RE Days** have become established as a core aspect of our work – one school has booked Chris Hudson to lead a day twice a term throughout this academic year! A teacher wrote recently to Martyn:

*'Thank you very much for all your hard work and inspiration in bringing the stories of Jesus to life with our children on Wednesday. Talking to some of the children since, they remembered the sessions as fun, they recalled the stories in detail, and they could also talk about a meaning for them. That sounds like success! Class teachers also enjoyed your active approach to the storytelling, and will be helping the children to recall and apply the stories to their own lives.'*

We have just begun to pilot a new approach to **INSET**. Teachers have told us that they are very interested in our specialist RE-related INSET but all too often their school doesn't have the budget (in terms of time or money) to book us to come to them. We want to make our INSET as accessible as possible and so we are now running a pilot by which we offer INSET days to schools in an area in collaboration with the local authority or diocesan education department. These days are free to the teachers that attend them and should enable many more teachers to benefit. It costs £500 to provide one of these full days of INSET and we have secured funding to pilot 20 such days in the current academic year in different regions of the country. All but one of these 20 days are planned and allocated already and we hope, funding permitting, to be able to expand this approach significantly during 2009.

Having taken some eighteen months to establish the foundations, our work in the **North East** has really taken off in the past six months. Esther Chilvers decided not to return to the team in the summer after maternity leave, but Chris Hudson had already joined us last November (three days a week) and he has therefore been able to continue to build on what Esther had started in the region. This term alone he has worked in 14 different schools and led one of the first of our pilot INSET days in collaboration with Durham diocese; Chris has introduced two new *Barnabas RE Day* themes – on 'Northern Saints' and on 'Changes/Moving On' (especially relevant for children changing class or school), and he has been piloting a scheme whereby a school can have a free one-hour taster session to experience what happens on a *Barnabas RE Day* before booking one for themselves. Chris is also currently writing a book for us on creating strong relationships between churches and their local schools.

Following the success of what we have developed in the North East we had hoped to do the same elsewhere, with *Barnabas* team members based in particular regions, working more locally and building ongoing relationships with schools and churches. During the past year we have worked hard towards establishing *Barnabas* in Kent, the North West and Scotland. This included the team all being involved in a 10 day visit to Scotland in April – a visit that received a very positive response from schools and churches alike.



However, the current financial climate has caused us to rethink our plans to expand the team and we have put all of this on hold. Our priority must be to secure and consolidate what we are already committed to and ensure that we can continue to resource this effectively. Some considerable challenges lie ahead: there is no reduction in the level of interest and demand in what we have to offer through our *Barnabas* ministry, but funding this is a big concern. We have always tried to cover a proportion of the costs through charging modest fees for the *Barnabas RE Days*, INSET and other training that we offer. However school budgets for RE are constantly being reduced and churches often don't have the funds to provide training for their children's leaders either.

Our aim is to make what we have to offer as accessible as possible. To this end we are reducing the cost of a *Barnabas RE Day* for the whole of next year; we are hoping to expand the provision of INSET days that are free to teachers; and more often than not we are providing training for church-based children's leaders at little or no cost to them.

As we approach the end of this year and in 2009 reach the milestone of ten years of *Barnabas* children's ministry, we need your help more than ever to ensure that we can continue to provide this valuable resource to primary schools and churches. We are so fortunate to have such a talented staff team – Jane Butcher and Martyn Payne working across the whole country, Chris Hudson in the North East, and Lucy Moore developing Messy Church – plus our freelance team working in schools. In an increasingly secularized society, in which more and more people are growing up with little or no knowledge of the Bible, the ministry of our *Barnabas* team is so vital in helping children and adults alike to encounter the Bible and its stories, themes and people, and to explore Christianity creatively.

Lucy and Chris are funded independently at present and their costs are secured for the next year. However we still need to secure the £150,000 needed for Martyn, Jane and the rest of our *Barnabas* ministry as a whole. BRF is not an endowed charity, nor do we have large financial reserves and every year we have to raise through grants and donations the full amount to fund our children's work. We are therefore highly dependent on the support of individuals, trusts and churches that share our vision for this ministry. The following provides an illustration of how we could reach our funding target:

2 gifts of £10,000	=	£20,000
4 gifts of £5,000	=	£20,000
10 gifts of £2,500	=	£25,000
26 gifts of £1,000	=	£26,000
30 gifts of £500	=	£15,000
56 gifts of £250	=	£14,000
100 gifts of £100	=	£10,000
200 gifts of £50	=	£10,000
400 gifts of £25	=	<u>£10,000</u>
		£150,000



As I mentioned at the beginning of this letter, these are very challenging times. At the end of another year of *Barnabas* children's ministry will you please consider making a special gift to help us secure the funding that we need to continue this work? Whatever you can give, whether it is through a regular standing order, an occasional donation, or a gift in your will, we are extremely grateful to you. And most of all, thank you for your prayers.

With every good wish for Christmas and the New Year

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads '+ Colin Fletcher'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Rt Revd Colin Fletcher OBE  
Bishop of Dorchester, Chairman of the BRF Trustees

PS If you would like to discuss how a specific gift or bequest could be used in the development of our ministry Richard Fisher, BRF's chief executive, would be delighted talk further with you, either on the telephone or in person. Please let us know if you would like him to contact you.