

National Media Features Prayer and Crime Rates February 2010

Recently there has been significant press coverage concerning a member of the CPA leadership team within Devon and Cornwall – Inspector Roger Bartlett and his involvement with Christians in Barnstaple. The coverage is edited and has not always accurately reflected the content and context of what Roger has said, so to clarify matters we have produced this document which outlines the circumstances leading up to the coverage.

The Home Office has recently provided £10,000 to the Christian Police Association to fund a CPA project called CoAct (www.coact.org.uk) aimed at increasing involvement of the Christian Community in supporting local policing – both practically and prayerfully.

On 29th January 2010, the Police Review contained a feature about this project, which Inspector Bartlett felt was unfair and dismissive of the project and indeed the Christian faith. He therefore submitted the below email. A letter published in the Police Review on 19 February was an edited version of Roger's email.

Following this, the Western Morning News approached Roger expressing an interest in the article which they then featured on their front page on Saturday 20th February. Subsequently many of the national daily papers have produced their own features.

As the CPA leadership team in Devon and Cornwall, we stand with Roger Bartlett in our absolute belief that prayer changes people and situations and we would encourage Christians to join with us to pray for their communities and support policing locally as laid out on the CoAct website.

From: Roger.BARTLETT@devonandcornwall.pnn.police.uk
Sent: 16 February 2010 10:01
Subject: Response to feature NOT PROTECTIVELY MARKED

Dear Editor

I read with interest, and some disappointment, the recent article (29 Jan) headed 'Pray to solve crimes, Christian cops urge' about the Christian Police project called CoAct and funding from the Home Office. Whilst the editorial addressed in part my concerns, I have to say that I felt the article was unbalanced for two reasons:

Firstly it 'conveniently' failed to mention that CoAct is predominantly about encouraging Christians to practically engage with, and not just prayerfully support, the police, as we have seen to great effect in the last few years with the Street Pastor initiative as one example.

Secondly, and more notably, I felt the article was written in a cynical and dismissive tone that seemed to discredit the Executive Director of CPA and the whole idea that praying for the police was outdated, irrelevant and should not be supported by the Home Office.

I am an Inspector myself with about 24 years of experience and would like to redress the balance with some evidence from my policing experience. I am also a Christian and am absolutely convinced of my faith based on compelling evidence - not just from my own personal experience, but tangible historical evidence of the life, death and unique resurrection of Jesus Christ.

I have seen many direct answers to prayer in the work place - far too many to mention here. Indeed, only two days after reading your article a lady stood up in our church and shared her life story about how she had suffered from suicidal depression but how she was now, not only free from that, but how, every weekend as Street Pastor in North Devon, she 'sees answers to prayer every time she steps out onto the street' including many volatile and violent incidents that dissipate into nothing in front of her eyes as she prays.

For the last 6 years or so, I have reported to quarterly meetings of Christians from different churches in Barnstaple who want to pray for local policing issues. I have seen a number of specific answers to their prayers - like the unprecedented 'Halloween' night in the town when the police did not have to attend a single incident of disorder or the prolific serial dwelling burglar who, after a significant series of offences, was apprehended in very unusual circumstances within 3 days of that group praying that he would trip up and be caught.

In 2007, I asked the group to pray for the local detection rate particularly in the Barnstaple sector which was at about 26% of total crime and one of the poorest in the force area and meant that justice, in too many cases, was not being done.

Every quarter since that time, there has been an increase in that figure, despite reductions in the overall crime rate to the point that Barnstaple currently has a detection rate of just over 40% of total crime which is one of the highest in the country.

Of course that is down to some fantastic local policing, but the prayers I hear from Christians are for officers to be good at their job and implement practices that will lead to offenders being brought to account and victims seeing justice done. Clearly many who do not have the faith I have would say that this is just coincidence, but the increase in that figure is so marked that it is indeed 'some coincidence'. From my experience, the more I pray, the more 'coincidences' I seem to see.

Probably the most significant answer to prayer came following a request I made for prayer in April 2008. I presented to the group about a significant rise in Northern Devon of the number of casualties killed or seriously injured (KSI) on the roads and asked them to pray for this number to come down. The figures available for the previous years were:

91 - 85 - 66 - 71 and then in 2007/08 - 97.

At the end of 08/09 the KSI figure for the same area was **32**. Not only was this a 67% reduction on the previous year and a far greater fall than any other area of the force, it was also more than 50% lower than the next lowest annual figure locally (66). On this occasion, I am not sure we can make the same link between this reduction and just 'good police work' as the figure is well beyond the control of even the best traffic officers that I know! Is this another coincidence?

In any event, as the last BCU Commander for Plymouth (and a non-Christian) shared with all of his staff after visiting such a prayer event locally, *'Whether or not one believes in such things, this was a most impressive gathering of some 45 people, very intensively and intentionally directing goodwill towards us. I thought you would like to know that whilst there are many thousands of people out there wishing us well, yesterday morning at 7am you were in the minds of a very focused group of people specifically wishing you well and taking action they felt would make a difference to all of us'*.

However, one final example I would give, I believe proves beyond any doubt that the Christian faith and prayer does have a direct impact on policing in 2010. It concerns a local pastor and friend of mine in Barnstaple who helps to run a well respected 'drop in' centre for those with chaotic lives. Some time back, that pastor committed himself to pray for the three most problematic visitors to the centre. All were heroin addicts and dealers and two of the highest harm causers in the area. Two of them had more than 130 convictions each for theft, burglary and other offences including firearms.

Now, the lives of those two have changed beyond recognition. One is employed by the local statutory drug support agency (EDP) as a harm reduction officer having been interviewed for the job by police officers. He has since married, has two young children and has become a trusted friend of mine. The other last year appeared on the ITV's 'Pride of Britain awards' where he was presented with the Prince's Trust young achiever award. This man now runs a local drug rehabilitation centre which has a very high long term success rate where dozens of men have seen their lives transformed and an end to their offending. He too is now married with children and is also a trusted friend of mine. He and his wife are volunteer presenters of a course aimed at equipping parents to steer their kids away from the harmful use of drugs and I have presented with him to 300 school children about the dangers of drug use and consequences of a criminal lifestyle.

This has all happened in the last 5 years and the common factor in the story of both men is that **THEY SAY** their lives changed following a personal encounter with the living Jesus. Whether you believe their story or not, the simple fact is since that time, their offending has ceased. They are no longer creating more victims of crime, but making a positive contribution to life in Barnstaple.

Christianity was never forced on them. One tells how he sank to his knees in prison after hearing of the death of his best friend. The other prayed 'God, I don't even know if you are there, but if you are, you have to take this addiction away from me' and when he stood up and says he knew his addiction had gone. Both, I know would be glad to share their story with you.

Whether you believe Christianity or not, the simple fact is that our communities would be SO much safer if the story of these two individuals was repeated. So please do not be dismissive of the practical impact of prayer or Christianity without at least examining the evidence a little more. £10,000 for the CoAct initiative I believe will be money very well spent if it does encourage more Christians to engage with their local policing teams, and dare I say even if it only means they pray more!!

Inspector Roger Bartlett