



Planting a Baptist church in the West Midlands

How a consistent, pastoral presence has led to the gospel taking root. Interview with Mark Francis-Green

“It takes years of trust and hard work,” says Mark Francis-Green, the minister of Castle Vale Baptist Church. “Church planting is not an easy thing. It needs consistency.”

“But so much has happened. People are getting to know the church is there, and who we are. The gospel is being shared, and some are wanting to be baptised.”

Mark is the pastor of Castle Vale Baptist Church, which he has led since it was planted in 2015.

There was scepticism when he first arrived.

“The first question the community asked of me when I started was “How long am I here for?” And I said 10 to 15 years and beyond. It’s up to the Lord how long. A few people laughed. But I’m now at the 10-year mark. “That’s what’s needed to win their trust, to understand we are not here short term.”

EARNING TRUST - MINISTERING AS SCHOOL CHAPLAIN

Castle Vale is a large housing estate in east Birmingham. It was significantly regenerated in the 1990s having been one of the city’s most deprived neighbourhoods.

The regeneration is now widely seen as one of the UK’s most successful housing projects (BBC, December 2025). With modern, energy-efficient homes, a rebuilt school, new sports facilities and a revitalised shopping centre. Nevertheless Castle Vale is not immune to wider social pressures – it has a higher-than-average rate of working-age residents with no qualifications and below-average employment rates.

Mark has ministered to many at times of acute tragedy through his role as school chaplain.

Being new to the area and thereby not knowing anyone, and with a background in youth work, Mark offered his services free of charge to Greenwood Academy, the local secondary school. Within four months the school officially employed him as a chaplain two days a week, recognising the need for a pastoral presence at a time of increasing mental health issues. Ten years on, Mark remains employed by the school. In that period the school community has been rocked by several deaths, including suicide and a murder of a parent. “We’ve faced some terrible issues,” says Mark. “There has been a lot to do.”

The role has enabled him to build relationships with teachers, parents and pupils, generally serve the community in whatever

way is appropriate. This has seen him invited to lead funerals, and helping reluctant pupils attend lessons.

LAUNCHING A COFFEE MORNING

The church meets at the school, meaning there is a helpful synergy between this and Mark’s chaplaincy role. The church has undertaken many activities to best serve its community.

One example includes launching a coffee morning post-Covid, to help combat isolation.

“In Castle Vale people don’t speak to you, they close the doors,” Mark explains. “But people wanted somewhere to go, and this is what we gave them. The opportunity to come out of their home, go to a warm space, drink coffee, craft, talk to people. It addresses issues like loneliness, allows them to meet other people.”

Through talking and listening they began to hear and better understand issues some were facing. Around 14 began to attend regularly.

Mark explains the coffee morning was birthed out of Matthew 28 and its command to go out and make disciples. After three years he subsequently sensed the café needed to be a space where the gospel was intentionally shared.

“We would always pray at the end and share a nugget of a scripture. We did that from day one. After about three years we insisted it’s time we started sharing the gospel and introduced Christianity Explored. But we lost a number of people, because they weren’t interested.”

Mark discovered people have a difficult background with church, often feeling they were forced to go as children, and keen to break away as adults. But there is a latent interest among some – a small core of locals continued to come, and numbers are once again beginning to grow.

“Some people embrace it (the Christian faith). Some people resist it. It’s not easy, but the people there now have come to a place of acceptance and want to know more about Jesus. “So we are going through Christianity Explored and it’s covering the life of Jesus. Sometimes they ask us why we’re doing it, and we show them Matthew 28. This shows them it’s not just me, but all of us, are called to go out and make disciples.”

“We have people who are uncertain about faith, but we also now have others making

inquiries about baptism.”

SHARING THE GOSPEL

Sharing the gospel is a key aspect of life at Castle Vale. A section of the church’s website is devoted to evangelism and the church’s commitment to “making the gospel known in word and deed.”

Around four years ago, Mark discovered the church had access to money in trust from another Christian charity. He used the grant by partnering with Birmingham City Mission to employ a missionary one day a week. The missionary knocks on doors to let people know about the church and its activities, and shares the gospel in the Castle Vale shopping centre.

“We know we need to keep reaching out to the people,” Mark says. “We know they need to see us more than once, twice, and continue those conversations. Hopefully through those conversations, trust and relationship can grow and they can come to a place of faith.”

The funding for this is due to run out, so that’s another challenge Mark faces.

“We don’t know what will happen in the next six to eight months because we have no funding left. But we know we need to continue the work.”

“IT’S NOT A FORCING PROCESS”

The church has launched a Boys’ Brigade, runs a holiday club every summer, and serves a popular Christmas Day lunch. It is also exploring launching summer community event.

“We have all these different activities, engaging people, sharing the gospel and listening to them, trying to respond to their needs where we can,” Mark says. “They’re coming back slowly. We have to look at how we help them to read and understand the scriptures, to understand it’s not a forcing process. They need a personal relationship with the Lord, accept Him as their Lord and Saviour, and need to come to a place of repentance.”

He’s now at the stage of looking to local people to form a leadership body.

Mark adds: “Making disciples is not easy. There will be challenges, including rejection.”

“We continue and ask the Lord to give us strength, faith, courage and wisdom.”



The Heart of England Baptist Association supported Castle Vale Baptist Church with Home Mission funding for the first six years of its existence.

See this video for more:
bit.ly/castlevalle