

Lighting up Christmas!



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"Trying to be original and make the oh so familiar message of Christmas relevant and fresh to today's *'seen it, know it'* society was the big headache I carried around throughout September as I struggled with planning the Christmas outreach from our church.

God was good – he knew our longing to lift up high his lovely son and communicate just what He came to earth for, to our inner city, tension laden community, and gradually the plan was made clear.

On Halloween night we had a tangle with the 'powers and principalities' that was eye opening. My oldest son was walking home to his wife and two young children after work, talking to me on his mobile.

He was telling me how he felt; he had just been released from hospital after being diagnosed with life threatening Type A diabetes. Suddenly he started calling out, 'Help me dad, help me – I'm being attacked' and then the phone went dead.

My wife and I rushed out to try and find him, and nearly got mown down by three guys sweeping down the road at speed on bikes. We found our son, badly shaken and with bruised ribs and took him in and called the police. When they arrived they told us he was the seventh incident in **half an hour**. The previous incident had been a hold up of a man coming out of a take away pizza; a gun had been held to his head for him to hand over his pizza. The three policemen said, 'it's lawless out there'; even they were frightened.

That was it!

We needed to proclaim the PRINCE of PEACE is here. We needed to minister PEACE to our streets and estates.

So started our CHRISTMAS PEACE project

- We started showing people coming out of Tesco's a lovely post card 'Someone Up there likes you' (from **CPO**) everyone wanted one.
- We started putting up Jesus, Prince of Peace posters and banners (also from **CPO**)
- We bought lots of beautiful Peace Doves, illuminated Christmas lights, from **Silent Lights** and put them in trees, front windows, schools, shops...everywhere. What an alternative to Rudolph! And every night they began to silently speak, and speak, and speak.
- We began 21 Days of Prayer and Fasting to punch some holes in the darkness over Clapham
- We invited the community to nominate local 'good' people to receive a Bringing Back the Love' peace award at a gala Christmas tea, attended by the Mayor of Lambeth.
- We went out with food to the homeless, sung carols to old folks, gave parties and presents for children and young people;
- We flooded the community with the presence of the Prince of Peace, and as the Peace doves shone throughout December, peace returned to our streets again.

It was beautiful. It had cost us almost every penny the church had. But that was what we give for - 'to make a difference'. And we had.

In February, with the Peace lights taken down, sadly the violence returned with a vengeance, as we faced a spate of teenage gun violence culminating in the deaths of 3 young boys, aged 15, 16 and 21. Clapham was on the front pages.

Back to square one? Not quite. Scripture tells us it's an ongoing '**wrestling match**' (Ephesians 6), but we know we can outlast the enemy because he that is in us is greater than he that is in the world.

And so we are seeking God again for a plan to tackle the 'principalities and powers' this year. We won't give up.

We thank God for the brilliant resources **Silent Lights** and **CPO** produce – powerful ammunition for us in the battle!"