

Introducing



Every street should have a ‘Street Association’. Run by a small group of residents, streets that are ‘as one’ in this way have become friendly, supportive and even loving communities. Hasn’t the pandemic taught us how necessary that can be – and, actually, how positive and delightful it is, even when it’s not strictly necessary? Street Associations (SAs) typically put on things like a Christmas party for the kids on the street, a quiz night for the adults, or a picnic, curry evening, trip, BBQ etc. The result? Isolation is truly addressed. Fun is had, new friendships flourish, people smile, stop for a chat, help one another and feel they really belong. For Christians, it’s a wonderful opportunity to engage with, and be ‘salt and light’ amongst, those who live on the street. ‘Love thy neighbour’ becomes much more of an active experience for all!

How does an SA get started? Following the experience of the ‘Lock-down spirit’ all over the nation, we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity, as so many people will remember that burst of community spirit and want to see it re-kindled. What is needed is a catalyst to help local streets to come together *as one*. Uniquely, the local church is positioned to take the lead.

This is how it works. A group of churches in the town, city or county, excited by the *As One* vision, takes the idea to their local authority, suggesting a partnership. So far, town, city and county LAs approached have said a resounding ‘yes please’. They recognise in particular that a network of churches, with a presence in each neighbourhood, can give a campaign local ‘legs’. In the borough of Dudley, where *As One* was recently launched, 50 churches of all denominations are taking part.

Next, banners go up. In the case of Dudley, 400 large banners have gone up across the borough, displaying the *As One* logo and the message, ‘Fill your street with friendliness’, as pictured below. Over 50 schools there already have the banner, plus businesses, other faiths, council sites, GP surgeries and others. ‘You can’t miss it’. The local web address ([www.as-one.uk/dudley](http://www.as-one.uk/dudley)) takes you to a video introducing Street Associations, inviting ‘champions like you’ to help their own street enjoy community spirit long-term.



One of 400 banners in Dudley



A church-based tea party in Birmingham

Next (when the pandemic allows), churches deliver an invitation letter to local streets using the well-known *As One* brand as a letterhead, saying ‘you’ve seen the banners; we thought we’d see what we can do to boost friendliness right here. Come to a tea party’. They *will come*, including many who wouldn’t normally respond to the church. We know that because we tried it out six times in the context of a 2018 Birmingham-wide campaign (called *Permission to Smile*, with 900 banners!) and it really worked!

On arrival, there is a specific table reserved for each street invited, so that near-neighbours sit together, get to know each other and then hear how they could start a Street Association. Discussed at the tables, groups of neighbours plan to invite the rest of their street to another gathering (in someone’s home, or under a gazebo, etc), to which many more come, together starting their own SA.

When the pandemic first hit and we saw the clapping of the NHS, the WhatsApp groups and volunteering, it became clear that Birmingham’s high profile campaign could provide a template – a tried-and-tested ‘methodology’ – for churches everywhere to bring neighbours together to establish something permanent on nearby streets. We chose ‘As One’ as a name that expresses the heart of the vision – and the heart of something that God (we believe) dearly wants to establish through His people.

As One – Fill your street with friendliness. A tea party put on by each church, as part of a broad and united partnership. With the virus still a threat, the tea party (or ‘back together celebration’) could probably happen next spring. We now need to get the partnership in place, to be ready. It takes a bit of boldness on behalf of the church (but when did anything great happen without a bit of that?) and a bit of organization, too. We also suggest that, when the time comes, churches first put on a community memorial service, probably outdoors and focusing on everything that so many have been through, including bereavement, isolation, anxiety, loss of income, home-schooling – and helping local people find a measure of peace and ‘closure’ from all sorts of traumas. Then, a week or so later, the tea party. And tea parties and memorial services are what churches do!

*As One UK* also stands ready to provide all the materials, mentoring, clear ‘how to’ guides (based on our Birmingham experience), suggested talks for key events, all designs, help in presenting the vision to other church leaders and in explaining it to council leaders as well as managing social networking and more. The budget presented to the LA also includes funding to pay a church-based local coordinator to drive things forward and handle the distribution of materials. Many local, bottom-up, campaigns, could also begin to come to something at the national level, with the church in the vanguard!

Why not consider joining in with what we believe God is doing here – and helping to fan the flames of real community, triggering real leadership and community engagement from the church, at a time when it is most needed – and will be most enthusiastically received?

*To find out more, please contact Martin Graham, at [office@as-one.uk](mailto:office@as-one.uk), 0121 459 8400; 07931 282716. We will be delighted to set up a Zoom with local church leaders to further explain the vision and the story behind it. The website [www.as-one.uk](http://www.as-one.uk), aimed at a ‘secular’ audience, also gives much more detail. Links: 2-min. video from Churches Together in England co-president Hugh Osgood: <https://bit.ly/3e9thE2>; also Local Government Association case study: <https://www.local.gov.uk/permission-smile-campaign-boost-friendliness>.*