



PLANTING IN THE FOREST OF DEAN

Viv Prescott is an officer in the Salvation Army. This is the story of her church plant at her home in the Forest of Dean.

The Forest of Dean is an unusual place in many ways. It is located on the borders of England and Wales and has its own strong sense of identity. Those who live there call themselves 'foresters' and tend to see themselves as 'insiders' to an extent that those who come to live in the Forest of Dean from elsewhere feel a corresponding sense of being forever 'outsider'.

The Forest is a place of outstanding beauty and yet strangely has a history of coal mining which somehow has not destroyed the natural life of the area. As with many places that are associated with mining, the very local life of communities are important, so much so that the various small towns and villages see themselves as distinct from other areas with their own particular characteristic stories and

heritage. Some would say that “foresters” feel isolated, forgotten and exploited by outsiders.

For all these reasons, and possibly for other reasons too, the life of the church has not thrived. Church planting in particular has often been attempted and has failed. The story of this one attempt by the Salvation Army, to do something different, is therefore all the more remarkable.

It has been attempted by someone who is an insider, someone who knows the importance of narratives, and of respect for the very local. One of the remarkable instances of hearing God, engaged by this particular church planter, has been the encouragement to ‘work in the opposite spirit’. Those who know the Forest of Dean, with its often negative stories, can appreciate the importance of creating a new spirit of welcome, of openness, of forgiveness and of acceptance.