

BRISTOL'S UNSUNG HEROES - CHRISTMAS MARKETS

Bristol has always been a one-stop-shop for an array of amazing Christmas markets. There is always a huge selection of food and produce available alongside arts and crafts, handmade by people both from the west country and from all over the world. Located in the very heart of Bristol City Centre, the Christmas market is home to over 50 unique stalls. 2019 sees the return of the Christmas Market in Broadmead, Bristol. Open 10am-8pm every day from the beginning of November until 24th December.

For the ninth year running traders on the stalls at Bristol's Broadmead Christmas market are receiving support from a team of 'unsung heroes' – market chaplains, including volunteers drawn from the Bristol & South Gloucestershire Circuit, who circulate throughout the day to give stall-holders the chance to take a quick break.

The scheme is being co-ordinated by Matt Albury, full-time work place chaplain for the Bristol and South Gloucestershire Methodist Circuit, with a team of eight – all wearing easily identifiable blue jackets and red woolly hats.

Team member Adam Biddlestone who in 2017 was nominated by BBC Radio Bristol as one of Bristol "unsung heroes" for the time he spent as a chaplain at the Christmas Market said: *"We identified a real need and have responded in a practical way", "When the scheme began the support provided was informal, but it was so appreciated that it is now run on a more structured basis."*

Irene Maguregui Martin, who is running a stall on the market for the fifth consecutive year, said: *"It's lovely to have the chaplains around every year. They help us so much either by just chatting to us, warming our spirits on a cold morning or by keeping an eye on our stalls if we need a quick break."*

When the Christmas markets arrive each year, the team circulates to introduce stall-holders to the scheme and build relationships with them. For the first time this year the Chaplains have translated a useful information sheet describing what support is available into six different languages. Rev David Alderman Superintendent Minister said, *"Whilst most of the stall holders speak some English, last year we felt should up our game and produce our information sheets in several different languages, it was interesting and a talking point to discover how good our translation skills are with the stall holders! This year we have had cards professional printed to hand out"* Once the market is up and running chaplains go round daily in pairs and are identifiable by their blue outfits.

Matt, whose post is partly funded by the Methodist Mission in Britain fund said: "There are many repeat stall-holders, some of whom operate all on their own. We chat to them if they're having

a quiet moment or can stand in if they need a coffee or loo break. Most of them are not local to Bristol, so quite often they need practical help, such as where to find a laundry, where to park vehicles or where to get medical help. “

“We’re not pushing faith, just being there to lend practical support when needed, very much in the genuine spirit of Christmas.”

The New Room, where the chaplaincy team meets up at the beginning of each day, is also open to traders and shoppers, who are welcome to use the chapel as a quiet space to unwind. Both the chapel and the artisan café at the New Room will be open as usual throughout the festive season. Members of the Bristol & South Gloucestershire Circuit will mark the closing of the market with an all-age “pop up Christmas nativity” at 2pm on 23rd December in the New Room Courtyard.



Members of the 2019 Chaplaincy team outside the New Room, Bristol

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