



StoryHouse in Crosby, Liverpool, is a café church set up by husband and wife team Lizzie and Dave Lowrie. Dave is self-supporting pioneer minister in the Liverpool Diocese and Lizzie works part-time supporting the Fresh Expressions charity in a communications role, as well as pioneering in her own time.

As a married couple, they've always had each other to start, grow and maintain fresh expressions of church, but Lizzie says they've had many different 'seasons' when they were joined by others in these ventures, and times when they carried all the responsibility.

The seasons of working closely with others made all the difference to the success of StoryHouse, which began as a house group of a few young adults.

Lizzie explained: "We were aware of some young people who wanted a local church but didn't connect with the existing church, so we thought, 'what if we started a congregation in a café?' We felt God's hand in it and we got started on setting it all up.

"The young people helped to shape it, they had involvement, responsibilities, a bit of ownership, and they even invited some of their friends to it. Things started to slowly grow - we had baptisms happening there, and everything seemed great."

But sadly, just one year in to the café opening, it all disappeared.

"Over just a few months, there was a marriage break up in the group, several of them moved away or just drifted away, and after having ten plus people, we were left with just us and one girl. It felt like it had come under some kind of spiritual attack," said Lizzie.

"It was such a tough time," she admitted, "it made us realise why pioneers might step away from it all. It can be very costly and exhausting ministry. You need a core team who can endure it with you and who are deeply rooted in Jesus. They need to be people who can draw close to each other prayerfully, to share personal burdens and encourage one another in the tough times.

"What we learned from all this was that we needed to get better at strengthening discipleship, and not just keep bringing in yet more new people. We realised we hadn't equipped that original group to build up their faith and lead with us."

Lizzie remembers the financial struggles too, which left the couple with the dilemma of whether to sell up and leave.

She said, "We didn't feel called on to anywhere else, so we decided to stay and emailed everyone we knew to help us with the finances so we could get back on our feet and kickstart the church again."

This was to be the turning point for StoryHouse. Through the café, they'd met families who were part of the New Frontiers church. Lizzie said God seem to be consistently drawing these families together with her and Dave and they eventually teamed up to run an Alpha course.

“This bigger team turned out to be an amazing gift,” Lizzie said, “they were totally reliable, embedded in their faith for the long haul, they were embedded into the community too and were part of a body of evangelists.

“The established New Frontiers church they were part of really blessed us – they gave us money to get going again and they released these families to us. They were so generous – it was better than anything we could ever have imagined,” she said.

As the Alpha course ran and they continued to meet, the church that was forming had people showing up every week. Six months in, the congregation had started growing too and six years from their lowest point, StoryHouse is now thriving well.

Throughout 2020 and 2021, pandemic lockdowns have presented fresh challenges, but the church has grown even stronger online.

Lizzie said, “We now have 80-100 people engaging with our online weekly service and between 20-30 adults engaging in weekly midweek sessions. Around 15 of these new committed members have joined during lockdown and come to faith or returned to faith in the past six months. We keep in touch through FaceBook, Zoom chat and outdoor walks with each other one at a time, and we’re now equipping families on discipling children.”

All this has been made possible by the resilience of the core team, and now there are signs of new leaders emerging from the congregation with one young adult stepping forward to get more involved.

Lizzie said, “What we’ve learned is that you need to stay in a project for a minimum of five years because people are starting from a point of absolutely no knowledge of God, the Bible and church. We haven’t put a time limit on how long we’ll stay, but when we leave, we want all this to still be going, and we’re really hopeful that will be the case.”

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