



# Foreword

**By Archbishop John Sentamu  
Bishop for Birmingham 2002 - 2005  
Now Archbishop of York**

In 2003 the community cried together enough is enough as they joined together at the Aston Villa football stadium following the New Year shootings in Birchfield where two very precious lives were lost. Since this time, more of our neighbours, friends and families in this city have been affected by the evils of guns, drugs, knives and gangs resulting in the loss of more precious lives - our shared pain and fear continue, unabated

In the last three years Bringing Hope has been set up to bring together churches in Birmingham to respond practically to the issues of guns, drugs, knives and gangs - remembering always that a gang is made up of people, a weapon is not dangerous unless it is being held by a human being and drugs are sold and abused by people in need of God's transforming love.

So for me, at the heart of the calling to deal with guns, drugs, knives and gangs is a calling to engage with vulnerable people, to offer opportunities and support - in short to Bring Hope to those in need, to bind up the broken-hearted and to set the oppressed free.

It is not an easy task but it is the task Jesus called us to through his words and his example. When he called us to make disciples of all people he did not just mean those people who make us feel safe and comfortable.

The task we face in rebuilding our city and our communities reminds me of the Old Testament story of Nehemiah who was a great visionary and had passion to rebuild the broken walls of Jerusalem. He was a persistent man undaunted by rumours and discouragement from his colleagues. At one point he and his fellow builders were building the wall with their sword in one hand and their tools in the other.

My hope is that the Church in Birmingham will become like Nehemiah. And when I say the Church in Birmingham I mean the whole Church - Catholic, Protestant, Black-led and Free Church - and the whole city - the suburbs, the outer-estates, the inner-city and the neighbouring towns of Solihull and Sutton Coldfield. With the toolkit I pray that you will work to restore the broken walls of the community and the broken lives of those caught up in guns, drugs, knives and gangs. I hope you will hold on to your sword - your values, your faith and your compassion that comes from knowing we are all known and loved by God.

*Yours sincerely in Christ*  
*John*



# BRINGING HOPE

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## Introduction

Ten years ago, the concept of Bringing Hope was planted into the heart of Robin Thompson, a Bringing Hope Consortium member. Following a meeting with Rev Carver Anderson, formerly of New Testament Church of God, a steering group was formed and an event, designed to gauge how the church could respond to guns, drugs, knives and gangs, took place on 26th May 2004.

The Bringing Hope launch was not a 'talk shop' and shortly after this event the Bringing Hope Consortium was formed with representation from Birmingham Churches Together, Council of Black-Led Churches, Diocese of Birmingham and Birmingham City Council's Community Safety Partnership. Nicola Linton was appointed as the Project Coordinator in February of the following year, and based on the suggestions from the event the Bringing Hope strategy was devised. One of the recommendations included the need for a toolkit to prepare and inform those in the church that have a desire to respond to the issues of socially excluded individuals who are affected by guns, drugs, knives and gangs.

Two of our key partners Birmingham Churches Together and the Council of Black-Led Churches fully support the idea of churches taking ownership of these challenges which affect every ward in Birmingham. The following pages include a few words from their representatives and from Carver Anderson, Chair of the Bringing Hope Consortium, unpacking the unique qualities of the Church, and why it is best placed to respond to guns, drugs, knives and gangs.



## Revd Carver L Anderson

### Chair of the Bringing Hope Consortium

At Bringing Hope we ask ourselves some key questions. Questions that I hope you in your churches might ask as you consider the challenge posed by the problems on our streets and Jesus' call to us to be Good News to the poor, and salt and light in our communities.

The questions we ask ourselves include:

- Are our churches relevant to the communities we are in?
- How can churches work together regarding issues of concern?
- How can we represent the Kingdom of God in the activities and programmes we present?
- How can we effectively work with the community, state and the church to maximise our joint impact in diverting young people from their involvement in guns, drugs, knives and gangs?
- Along with prayer, what actions are required to deal with the causes and impact of gun crime, gangs, knives and drug use?
- What resources do churches need to begin to tackle the problems of violence and disaffection that blight the lives of so many people in our city?

We hope this Toolkit will be a starting point for action, prayer, co-operation and change among leaders and congregations in all kinds of churches in this city. We hope you will join the Bringing Hope vision of 'Christ Action' and 'Social Action' that brings holistic, redemptive and transformative love from the heart of God out on to the streets and into the lives of people crying out in need of salvation.

Our vision is based and rooted in a scripture that has become the anchor for our work: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." Luke 4:18.

This verse highlights the importance of both making sure that we remain filled with the Spirit of God – enjoying times of refreshment, worship, prayer and teaching and not stopping there but becoming active and operational among the poor, prisoners, the disadvantaged, disaffected and oppressed.

The Rev. Eugene Rivers, a community activist working in Boston, USA, challenges ministers by stating that 'too many preachers want to preach elegant sermons from their podiums, but not reach out to where the action is'. If the church refuses to engage with authority, wisdom and compassion with the evils of gang war, drug dealing, gun crime and other issues of disaffection we will see minimum changes in these areas.

The churches' involvement is vital as an agent for change towards better communities. There is a clear need for church leaders to begin to work together in response to the crisis on our streets.

# Bishop Dr Joe Aldred

## Chair of the Council of Black-Led Churches

In 1992 the community in Boston had a wake-up call during a funeral for a young murder victim. During the service gang members chased a rival gang member into the church where he was beaten and stabbed. People were stunned. It became imperative at that stage for the police and the church to work together. Consequently, a group of churches took to the streets, chatting to youngsters and those involved in drug deals. They also had tents for children and young people in which worship services were held. The church, along with the police and parole officers visited homes of troubled youths.

The result of this intervention was stunning. There was a reduction in the youth murder rate and it was described as the "Boston Miracle". Between 1995-1998, no one under 17 was killed. The overall murder rate for the city dropped from 157 in 1995 to 37 in 1998.

What Rivers felt to be a great accomplishment is the fact that a mostly white city Criminal Justice system which was distrustful of black residents and the church found some very constructive ways to work together.

The Boston example gives us some insight into how church involvement and action can impact community life. In fact there are other examples of church participation in Jamaica, Hong Kong, Ireland and Colombia. In these areas, we hear of radical changes as a result of prayer, discussion, developing street activities, face to face contacts between church and community individuals, and outreach. There is also evidence of the church working with other groups to bring about change.

Let us forge new partnerships – across the boundaries of generations, geography, denomination, ethnicity, gender and class. Bringing Hope's vision is to bring together and develop effective partnerships with all who wish to engage whole-heartedly with the problems on our streets and help build God's Kingdom of Love, Peace and Justice here in the city of Birmingham. We know this is a huge task and we call on all our Brothers and Sisters in Christ to get involved in whichever ways they can for this vital initiative.

We'll keep in touch with you as we bring out more information, updates and additional resources that can become part of the Bringing Hope toolkit. We are planning a DVD and a resource for Lent 2007. Please let us know if further support is required as you use this toolkit. Finally I want to thank all those who have contributed in various ways to this toolkit.

**Revd Carver L Anderson**

The church as an institution does not exist for itself. It exists for the glory of God and to bring salvation, good news, to the world in which Christ left it. Jesus made clear this *raison d'être* of the church by saying to his disciples, 'You are the salt of the earth, you are the light of the world' (Matt 5.13,14). More than ever before, the church in its various guises seeks to take seriously its calling to minister and bring salvation to our world.

For those of us who live in Birmingham, we are well aware of the many pressing issues with which people grapple. They are economic, environmental political and social issues. None of the challenges we face is greater than those for which we set up Bringing Hope as a purpose made initiative representing the churches response to guns, drugs, knives and gangs.

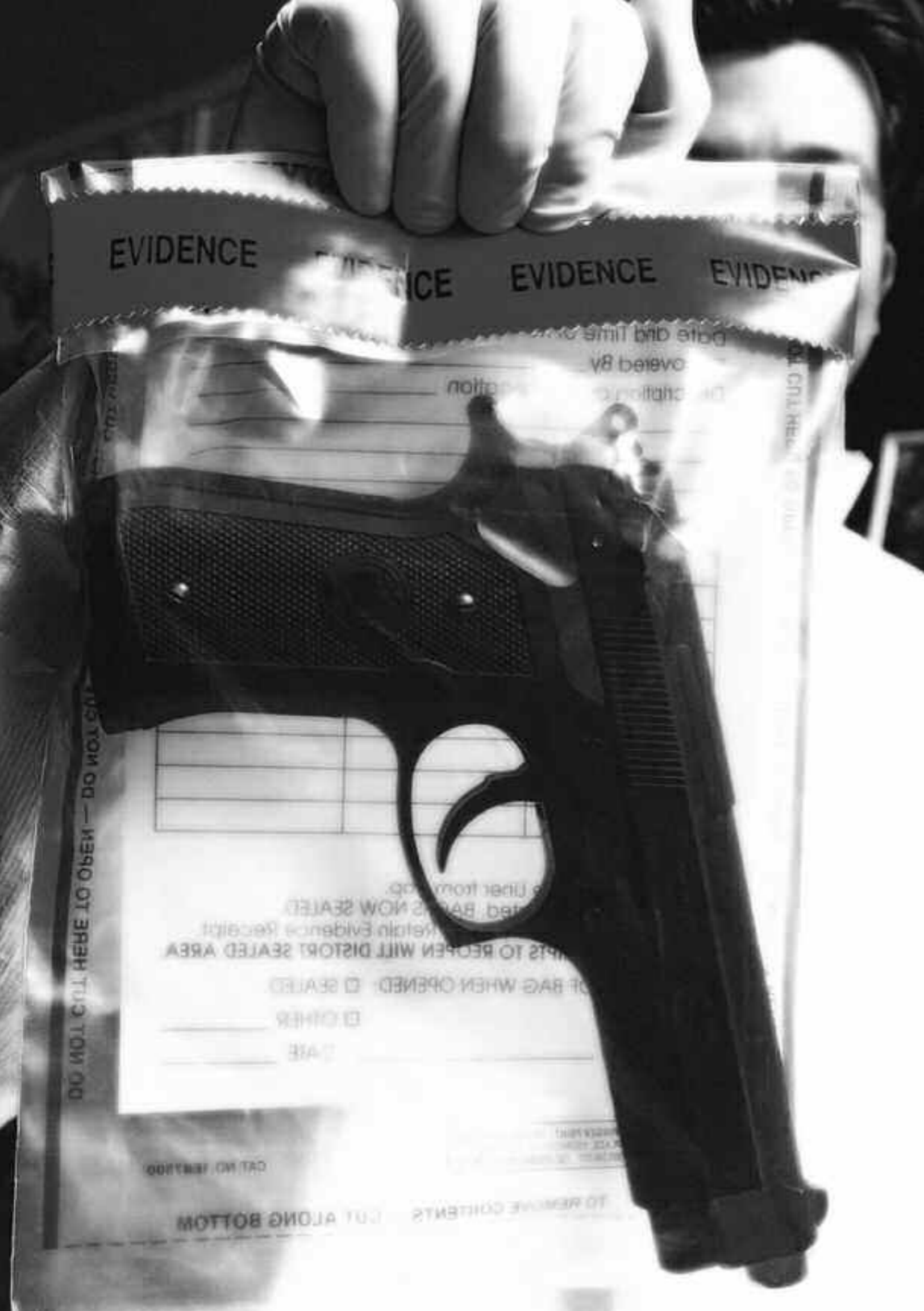
The church has shown a willingness to engage deeply with these matters. This is not surprising since the victims of guns, drugs, knives and gangs often are members of our congregations, or soon beat a track to our doors for prayer, comfort and guidance. Often though, some of us who are willing to help simply do not have the necessary skills and resources to do so. Hence this toolkit.

It is designed for those who want to engage and to encourage those who may feel that this is not for them to become engaged. Truth is, none of us can afford to exempt our self, because as the lottery ad. says, 'It could be you' next, or someone you know. We should never be tempted to say 'peace and safety'; since the bible teaches that usually that acclamation is followed by sudden destruction. Our community has lost so many of our young people that guns, drugs, knives and gangs are all of our business.

This toolkit is designed therefore to equip you as leader as well as various other people and departments in your church, such as young people, many of whom have spoken loudly, 'enough is enough'. Enough of wastage of young lives. Enough of blighted society. Enough of under-resourcing. Enough of disengagement. Its time to equip ourselves with knowledge and resources to contribute to bringing an end to the perverse use of guns, drugs, knives and gang life in our city and our country.

May I encourage you to study it and use this toolkit. I believe that as the churches utilise this new and exciting resource we will see further decrease in the use of guns and drugs and less inclination to join gangs. Let us rise to our God-given challenge to be salt and light to a community and a world that lacks the virtues of both. Jesus says to us, 'A city set on a hill cannot be hid' (Matt 5.14)

**Bishop Dr Joe Aldred**



## Revd Neil W Johnson Chair of Birmingham Churches Together Council

The issues of guns, drugs, knives and gangs must be of deep concern to all Birmingham Christians. To ignore the problems, believing that they are contained in certain pockets of our city, is to fool ourselves and fall short of our calling as the Church. Drug issues and gun crime impact all of our neighbourhoods, either directly or indirectly. As citizens of such a major metropolis, we are interdependent neighbours who should view the whole city as 'home'. The Christian community in Birmingham is in a crucial position to face this city-wide concern. Our churches are rooted in local communities, and our people can be found in every realm of city life. In partnership with other agencies, we can make a real difference for the good of Birmingham.

What is regarded by wider society as a dangerous sub-culture is to those people involved in it a whole way of life. Gangs offer to their members a sense of comradeship, belonging and purpose, which is attractive to those young people who have not found meaning in other aspects of life. Along with personal peer pressure, there is the whole question of social marginalisation, which means that gang culture can be irresistible or unavoidable to many of our sons and daughters. The Christian Church must offer a true alternative to the 'meaning' of the gang. This is not simply uttering pious words or sharing wondrous dreams, but practical support, realistic goals and firm faith. ."

The 'gang' Jesus gathered around him was offered a vision of God's Kingdom on earth, that is, the world living under the will of God. This vision was not given as an opiate to numb the senses and create a false view of reality, but was found in Jesus, himself. In him they found the comradeship, belonging and purpose they were looking for. And when they and the whole world seemed to be questioning his authority, Jesus gave himself up to death for the sake of love so that all can have new life. The Crucified Christ, our Risen Lord, calls us today to bring the hope of his love to our city.

'Birmingham Churches Together' is proud to be a partner in the 'Bringing Hope' consortium. We are committed to supporting its work and development, and strive to promote its services to our member churches throughout the boroughs of Birmingham and Solihull. We encourage all people in a leadership role of our congregations and fellowships to use this 'toolkit'. It will enable you to engage the Christians of Birmingham with the issues of guns, drugs, knives and gangs as they affect our lives. Together, let us be in the business of bringing hope.

Peace be with you.

**Revd Neil W Johnson**