

# WITH MUCH MORE THAN GOLD IN MIND



**Amazing plans are afoot as churches get ready for the 2012 Games,** writes Alice Hayward

Open a newspaper and you're likely to find a story about the Olympics staring you in the face. Whether it be about London's transport systems, ticket disappointments, or the regeneration of the Olympic area, it will be there.

However, the biggest story of all is missing – the Good News story. But churches in the UK want this to change.

Churches are being encouraged to see this as a once in a lifetime opportunity to engage with their communities and thousands of overseas visitors. This is not just true for churches close to the Games venue.

That's because, wherever churches are, their communities will experience 'Olympic fever' as a result of the media, schools, advertising and the live screen events taking place in over twenty centres.

To give churches the support they need, the main denominations established More Than Gold, a temporary agency to help them make the most of the Games.

The Torch Relay will also pass within ten miles of most of the UK's churches – bringing the hour long cavalcade through over a thousand communities.

David Willson, CEO of More Than Gold explained: 'The route of the Torch Relay will come in easy reach of almost the whole of the UK during the seventy days leading up to the opening of the Games. Churches do not want to miss out'.

That's why churches have the opportunity to use the Games to get closer to their community. This

includes running large screen events showing the opening ceremony, opening homes to overseas visitors and welcoming the Torch Relay with prayer.

David adds, 'There is something appropriate every church can do in the context of the Games to engage with their communities. And we are coordinating the skills and experience of over sixty Christian agencies to provide the resources and training that will help them.

The inspiration to set up More Than Gold for the London 2012 Games has come from the success and experience which has taken place at past Olympics.

During the Sydney Olympics, churches organised over 100 sports clinics for disadvantaged young people. In Atlanta, churches gave out over three million cups of cold water to visitors. During the Winter Games in Salt Lake, the churches provided the largest number of homes to host athletes' families.

Churches can use material provided to offer outreach, hospitality and service to their local community before, during and after the Games. In this way they can use this opportunity to build lasting relationships with their community

## Outreach – reaching beyond the walls of the church

One of the outreach tools is the 'Holiday at Home' guide. This is available as a step by step guide to help churches run a successful holiday club for the over 65's, drawing on the theme of the coming Games.

One church which has the Holiday

at Home event before is St Peter's Church, Farnborough.

Alison and Tony Milway head up this yearly event saying, 'Holiday at Home is a very successful event for the retired, offering talks, lunch, tea and an opportunity to chat in a welcoming environment. Above all, we try to offer God's love to the lonely and isolated.

'This year, it seemed appropriate to keep the Games in mind. Amongst other things planned, we are using the Olympic values to form the theme for our Thought for the Day item.'

## Hospitality – a welcome in Jesus' name

There is also the opportunity for hosting family members of athletes. With the cost of accommodation skyrocketing during the Games, this meets the needs of those who would not otherwise be able to afford to see their loved ones take part. Rather than make a profit by renting their homes, Christians are offering hospitality as a gift through More Than Gold's Athlete Family Homestay Programme.

## Service – putting Christ's love into action

There are significant ways for individuals to serve those visiting the Games. For example, More Than Gold is appealing for 800 volunteers to serve as Games Pastors – much like Street Pastors - to respond to the practical and spiritual needs of the thousands of extra visitors.

David Willson points out, 'There will be many lost, confused and lonely people coming through London during the Games. These



Steph Cook MBE (*left*) launches More Than Gold's Athlete Family Homestay Programme with the first volunteer hosts. The programme will provide free accommodation for family members of athletes taking part in the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games who would otherwise not be able to afford to attend. Behind them is the Olympic countdown clock. Stephanie Cook took up modern pentathlon at Oxford University and four years later won a gold

medal at the Sydney Olympics. She went on to win the World Championship in 2001 before retiring from athletics to resume her medical career as a doctor. Brought up in a Christian family, her faith has become increasingly important to her, 'When I took up modern pentathlon, it was obvious that God had given me gifts for the sport. I just tried to use the ability God had given me to the full and hopefully bring some glory to his name in the process,' she told Stuart Weir.

Games Pastors are going to be a lifeline for them, making this a great opportunity for Christian service'.

### Prayer at the centre of it all

Undergirding the whole thing is prayer. Jane Holloway of the World Prayer Centre is leading the team helping churches pray before, during and after the Games. This is through an initiative called 'A Time to Shine' which draws on the words from Isaiah 60:1-5, which tells of God's light shining through us for the good of others.


During the Olympic Torch Relay, when the torch travels around the UK for the seventy days leading up to the opening of the Games, churches on the route are invited to take part in a prayer relay alongside it.

### What else can churches do?

Whatever churches may have in mind, More Than Gold is helping them to keep the issues of social

justice firmly in mind. This includes taking responsibility for their environment including using Fairtrade resources in all they do for the Games and being aware of the likely increase in homelessness and human trafficking as thousands descend on London.

You'll find a 48-page event pack is available offering ideas to help churches engage with their community during the Games themselves and the Torch Relay plus ways to inspire your church including an all-age sermon, sketches, prayers and outlines for small groups. Created by Traidcraft, there is an emphasis on acting justly.

Churches are now getting ready to seize the many opportunities the Games offer to engage with their community and touch the lives of thousands of visitors. Are you ready? 

*Churches can find all the information they need to get ready for the Games on the More Than Gold website at [morethangold.org.uk](http://morethangold.org.uk)*

### A prayer in preparation for the Olympic Games

Eternal God Giver of joy and source of all strength, we pray for those who prepare for the London Olympic and Paralympic Games. For the competitors training for the Games and their loved ones, For the many thousands who will support them, and for the churches and others who are organising special events and who will welcome many people from many nations. In a world where many are rejected and abused, we pray for a spirit of tolerance and acceptance, of humility and respect and for the health and safety of all. May we at the last be led towards the love of Christ who is more than gold, today and forever. Amen

*The Olympics Prayer has been composed by the Revd Christopher Woods, the Church of England's National Worship Development Officer.*