

Press release: Traffic officer and lay reader Chris serves a wide congregation on South West travels

But it was a Road to Damascus moment some 37 years ago which changed the life of the then 26-year-old.

Chris found himself unemployed and desperately searching for work in late 1979. Not long after becoming aware of a welcome sign outside St Peter's Church in Tiverton, he found work, both as a petrol attendant and as a retained fireman in Cullompton.

Moving into a new home near St Andrew's Church in the town, he said:

I felt drawn again to the church and within me a desire to speak to the minister. I did that, and he spoke with me about committing myself to Jesus.

Once I had prayed a prayer of commitment I felt a very real peace and since becoming a Christian, I have experienced the Lord working in amazing ways in my personal life, in my work and with the fire service. That moment led to him becoming a committed Christian, in 1994 he was licensed with the Church by the Bishop of Exeter and he now combines the role of a lay reader with the uniformed duties of a traffic officer with Highways England.

So much so that he can often be heard discussing traffic-related issues around his regular Pause for Thought broadcast to BBC Radio Devon listeners.

He said:

In 1980 I had what for me was a powerful conversion...and having gone through this time I became passionate about helping people to understand the Bible so that it can be seen to be relevant to everyone. "The Bible has become central to what I believe and becoming licensed involved three years of training and a five-week placement in a church.

As a lay reader, Chris leads services, preaches and presides over funerals primarily at St Mary's Church in Willand and St Andrew's Church and also takes services at small chapels in Somerset and Devon.

As a traffic officer based at Highways England's Chelston outstation in Somerset, the 64-year-old patrols the strategic road network between Exeter and Clevedon, as well as the Pridamsleigh beat as far as the Tamar Bridge on

the A38 and as far north as Gloucester when covering patrols from the Almondsbury outstation. Married to Josie for 42 years, with three grown-up sons, the former school caretaker served as a retained firefighter at Cullompton for 34 years, but he now revels in both of his current roles.

Highways England traffic officer Chris Russell on duty at the Chelston outstation in Somerset

He said:

The two roles are similar in that I am serving others. It is about having compassion, helping people through sometimes very difficult times and communicating with others through one-to-one conversations.

I have managed to balance my faith with my friendships at work, I've never had any problems with being a Christian at work.

As a traffic officer, you need to enjoy working with people and be that reassuring person in uniform to the many people who break down or those involved in incidents. Some can find themselves in very worrying or frightening positions and in that respect I enjoy helping people to find the best possible outcome.

Our priority is to keep the general public and stakeholders safe on our network, and good communication is vital as we sometimes have to deal with challenging situations.

Chris will again feature on BBC Radio Devon's daily Pause for Thought broadcast during the Early Show with Laura James next week.

The broadcasts, which start on Monday, will air at 6.20am each day on 103.4FM and DAB, and are also [available online](#).

And he added:

Through my passion to speak about the Bible I have been given a great opportunity through BBC Radio Devon's Pause for Thought. I've done 21 of these broadcasts to date and I'm looking forward to being in the studio next week.

As part of Highways England's Traffic Officer service, Chris and colleagues patrol England's motorways and major A roads, helping to keep traffic flowing smoothly.

Chris Russell pictured in the BBC Devon studio

Traffic Officers have the power to stop and direct traffic, close lanes and carriageways and manage traffic. Traffic Officers help to keep roads running smoothly by attending incidents, ensuring the scene is safe, clearing the

carriageway of debris, managing debris and supporting the emergency services.

They also deal with broken down and abandoned vehicles on the strategic road network, removing vehicles that are causing a blockage or hazard, and assist and support road users in times of difficulty.

For more information on the roles and responsibilities of a traffic officer go to Highways England's traffic officer service.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

[Press release: Fake remembrance merchandise seized by Border Force](#)

The goods, some of which were also branded with the words 'Lest we Forget', were later confirmed to have infringed the Royal British Legion's 'two-petal poppy' copyright.

The items were seized on 8 November when Border Force officers from the mobile International Trade Team based at Tilbury Docks attended a freight depot to examine an air freight consignment from China. Inspecting the shipment, which was destined for an address in the Manchester area, officers discovered packages containing poppy branded goods including 1,212 scarves, 5,400 badges and 1,200 key rings. Suspecting the copyright infringement, officers seized the goods and contacted the rights holder.

Amongst the consignment, officers also discovered 600 four petal brooches which were later confirmed to infringe the 'four-petal' copyright held by the Earl Haig Fund Scotland (Poppyscotland).

Mark Kennedy, Border Force Acting Deputy Director, said:

Had these fake goods entered the market, they could have cheated thousands of pounds from unsuspecting members of the public and diverted vital funds away from the Royal British Legion.

My officers work around the clock at ports, airports and mail

sorting centres identifying and seizing counterfeit goods and their diligence has proved vital here.

All counterfeits cheat honest traders and we are determined to crack down on this type of criminality. Border Force works closely with partner law enforcement agencies to ensure co-ordinated action against those who attempt to import fake goods.

Once items are seized, Border Force's specialist international trade teams work with the owners of big brands to establish whether or not goods are genuine. If they are confirmed as fake, the goods are destroyed and the rights holders can then decide whether to privately prosecute the importers.

A spokesperson for The Royal British Legion and Poppyscotland said:

The two-petal poppy is a registered trademark owned by The Royal British Legion and the four-petal poppy is a registered trademark owned by Poppyscotland. We have a responsibility to make sure that these trademarks are protected so that the public can be sure that their donations are going directly to a registered charity.

The Royal British Legion and Poppyscotland offer a number of poppy accessories which raise much-needed funds for our charitable work. By donating for a poppy through our official channels, or corporate partners, the public can rest assured that their money will go towards supporting our Armed Forces community.

As well as working with rights holders when counterfeit goods are seized, Border Force also links with a variety of partners, including Trading Standards and the Intellectual Property Office.

Anyone who has been sold counterfeit goods or knows someone who is selling them should contact Action Fraud on 0300 123 2040.

[News story: The AAIB is sending a team to Belfast](#)

[unable to retrieve full-text content]The AAIB is sending a team to Belfast International Airport to investigate an aircraft incident.

Speech: Minister Smith NICCY speech

Thank you very much for inviting me to attend this excellent event today.

You've made it clear to me that there are worries about Brexit, about what it will mean for your families and for your future, and I want you to just take a moment to hear a different perspective.

I want to tell you about the opportunity of Brexit, about what it can mean for the economy, for jobs, for your university experience and for your future as the next leaders and involved citizens of Northern Ireland.

Before turning to the subject of Brexit I want to provide a short update on the politics because as those attending will be all too aware it is essential that we see the return of an NI Executive as soon as possible to allow Northern Ireland's issues to be fully represented at all levels in the negotiation process.

Despite intensive efforts it has not yet been possible for the parties to reach agreement and as a result the Secretary of State has not been able to bring forward legislation to enable an Executive to form. Crucially, a budget for the current financial year has yet to be set. The consequence of this is that the UK Government and the Northern Ireland Civil Service have assessed that Northern Ireland will begin to run out of resources soon.

The Government therefore intends for a Budget Bill to be introduced into Parliament on Monday in order to protect the delivery of public services in Northern Ireland.

The UK Government's strong preference would be for a restored Executive here in Northern Ireland to take forward its own Budget. So this step is one that the UK Government is taking with the utmost reluctance.

The UK Government's priority will continue to be the restoration of devolved government in Northern Ireland. The Secretary of State will continue to work with political parties to encourage them towards an agreement to form an Executive.

The issue you have spent the day analysing – the decision by the people of the UK to leave the European Union – presents a range of challenges and opportunities.

I want to stress that in discussions about the future of the relationship between Northern Ireland and Ireland, we have agreed that the Belfast Agreement should be protected in full. That means that if the people here want Northern Ireland to remain within the United Kingdom, that will continue to be the case.

The money in your and your family's pocket will be at the heart of our discussions on Brexit. We are leaving the EU but that does not mean we are turning our backs on our friends and partners in Europe.

What is also clear is that we are committed to securing a deal with the EU that works for the whole of the United Kingdom, including Northern Ireland. That was clear from the Prime Minister's speech in Florence recently, and we have made our intentions clear specifically about what we Northern Ireland to the EU in a paper we gave them over the summer.

At the moment, you can travel from the UK to Ireland without a visa and without a passport. For many decades we've had a system called the Common Travel Area. We want this to continue after Brexit, and the EU agrees with us on this.

We want to uphold the Belfast Agreement in all its parts; avoiding what some people call a 'hard border' when goods cross from one country to another. We want to work north-south with Ireland and we want Ireland to work with the UK east-west too. It's a great relationship at the moment and we want that to continue.

We have also made excellent progress discussing the citizenship and identity rights provided for in the Belfast Agreement and scoping the North-South cooperation that currently takes place under the Agreement.

We want there to be free movement of goods, and we want to ensure local businesses that your families may work in here in Newry and across Northern Ireland can continue to trade freely across the border.

The Government also recognises investors, businesses and citizens in the UK, Ireland, the rest of the EU, and beyond, need to be able to plan ahead. What would be most helpful to people and businesses on both sides, is for us to agree detailed arrangements for what's called an implementation period, so that people can get used to the changes and things only change once.

The Prime Minister said in Florence, and again recently in Parliament in Westminster that we want this period of implementation to give businesses and people certainty and time to prepare for the change; and a guarantee that this implementation period will only be for a certain time – two years.

No-one pretends that leaving the EU is easy, it is not. It will require a period of adjustment for both the UK and the EU, for our businesses and our citizens.

But the Government respects what people across the UK told them in the referendum on 23rd June last year. We will leave the political institutions of the European Union on 29 March 2019.

This momentous decision presents challenges, as you will all have seen from the media reports and briefings around issues like citizens' rights, financial obligations and the land border here in Ireland. But it presents the UK, including Northern Ireland, with opportunities too.

We have always been an open trading nation, forging alliances across the globe to trade with other people. Since we joined the then-EEC in 1973, we have been part of the trade agreements negotiated on our behalf by the Commission.

While these have benefited the UK and the EU, they have not always been in the best interests of each and every nation to which they apply. Some will gain more and some will lose more – that is the nature of world trade.

Leaving the EU provides the UK, for the first time in a generation, the freedom to negotiate trade deals across the globe with any nation we wish to do so.

Soon, the UK will decide what it is prepared to do to secure the deals it wants.

There are those who say the UK will lose the benefits it currently has, through the trade deals it is part of now, through the EU. But this overlooks the fact that the UK will have freedom to negotiate new terms with these nations which could be better than the ones we have at the moment within the EU.

Trade and immigration are two issues that are often seen to go hand in hand. The UK has benefited from immigration, bringing new cultures, skills and ideas to the UK economy. You only need to see here in Newry, which has a high level of immigration, the benefits this has brought to this area.

We will continue to welcome people to the UK. We need skilled migrants to work across our industries to ensure we have the right people in the right jobs to provide maximum benefit to our economy.

This is what EU exit allows us to do. To have our own immigration policy. One tailored to the different needs of the economy. One that is flexible and can react when we need more people, and equally when we need fewer.

Our trading relationship with the EU is also of crucial importance. We have said that we want to see an excellent free trade agreement with the EU. We believe the EU wants the same thing.

I'm an MP, and along with 649 others I have a vote on laws, one of which at the moment in front of us is called the EU Withdrawal Bill. When that law goes through it means we will have the same rules and regulations governing all of our trade now. Some EU laws will become UK laws.

This means that both our country and our neighbouring countries will be in the same regulatory position when we leave the EU, providing both the UK and the EU with an excellent opportunity to forge a great trading agreement.

Put simply, we buy more stuff from the EU than they do from us. So it's within the EU's interests to have a great agreement with us that doesn't punish the UK.

Obviously, the border down the road from here in Newry is the only actual land border the UK has with an EU country, in this case Ireland.

This does present some challenges, but there's also an opportunity, in that Northern Ireland can act as a bridge between the UK and the EU.

I was about your age when the Belfast Agreement was signed in Belfast between the UK Government and the Irish Government. So much has been done politically, in the economy and in relationships between people of all ages in the past 20 years. We don't want to lose any of that progress.

Northern Ireland's position will mean a slightly different set of rules will apply, to ensure the open border continues as it does now. Is anyone's dad or mum a farmer? You will know that animal health is really important, and it's important standards are kept right across the UK and Ireland to make sure our food is safe and our farms are safe. We're working to make that happen.

So it's clear we need specific solutions to the unique circumstances of Northern Ireland and Ireland ...and that is what we are working towards every day.

I'm really encouraged by what I've heard today. It's clear everyone here really cares about Northern Ireland, about the EU and about the future. It's clear many of you wouldn't have voted for Brexit, but what I want to assure you is that there are hundreds of people in the UK government working really hard every day to make sure we get the best possible Brexit, so when we leave, when you're a bit older and when you hopefully go to university or into training or a job you will know we have done our very best for you, for your families, and for everyone in this country.

And maybe one day someone in this room will be giving a speech like this. Maybe you'll be reflecting on Brexit and what it has meant for Northern Ireland and Ireland. I want to assure you that you will have positive things to say, that there are opportunities ahead and if we all work together, we will make a success of Brexit.

Press release: Thousands of fish released into rivers

The Environment Agency has released 8,000 young fish to give fish stocks a boost in north east rivers.

The chub and dace were released on Thursday, 9 November into the River Tees at Low Coniscliffe and River Wear at Maiden Castle.

It's part of the Environment Agency's ongoing plan to develop and restore rivers in the region, targeting those which have been affected by pollution or where barriers affect fish passage.

Fisheries experts will release a total of 30,000 fish over the next two weeks in rivers and Stillwater fisheries in the north east. As well as the Tees and Wear, fish will be released into the Skerne near Darlington and the Team at

Gateshead.

The fish – chub, dace, roach, bream, tench, rudd and crucian carp – were all reared at the Environment Agency's fish farm near Calverton, Nottinghamshire, using funding from rod licence sales.

Commitment to anglers

Alice Fitch, Fisheries Team leader for the Environment Agency in the north east, said: "We are pleased that we can provide these fish for stocking as part of our commitment to rod licence paying anglers. Restoration and the creation of new fisheries for all people to enjoy is a very important aspect of our work."

The Environment Agency releases fish into our waterways annually. Fisheries officers target fish stocking activity using data from national fish surveys to identify where there are problems with poor breeding and survival. Releasing fish helps the process of natural recovery in waters which have been impacted by pollution or suffered poor water quality.

Alice added: "Restocking is one of many things we do together with our partners to develop fisheries, including reducing the effects of pollution, improving habitat and removing barriers to fish migration."

Fisheries officer Paul Frear releases dace into the River Wear.

Improved water quality

Many of our industrialised rivers have improved dramatically in water quality in the last 30 years and targeted and appropriate restocking has helped the restoration of natural fish stocks and viable fisheries.

Angling is a great way for everyone to keep healthy and enjoy the natural environment. All rod licence income is used to find work to protect and improve fish stocks and fisheries.

Anyone who wants to go fishing needs to buy a rod licence. A full annual licence costs £30 (short term and some concessionary licences are also available) and are available [online](#)

[Fish stocks boost for north east rivers](#)