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**Steven Croft**

Hello everyone. I'm Bishop Steven Croft Bishop of Oxford and welcome to this edition of "My (extraordinary) family." I'm here in St. Nicholas Church in Earley and I've just bumped into Julia Jones who I first met a couple of years ago... and Julia is project director for a most wonderful project called REInspired and she's kindly agreed to take some time to tell me a bit about her life and story and about the project. So Julia. Lovely to be here. Thank you so much for agreeing to this conversation.

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**Julia Jones**

You're very welcome.

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**Steven Croft**

Tell me a bit first about yourself and about your Christian faith and how you come to be part of the church.

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**Julia Jones**

Well, I came to faith when I was probably about 12 13... so joined secondary school and I had lots of questions. My faith, when I arrived in secondary school, was really Jesus wants me to be a sunbeam. And those were songs that we sang, we prayed in primary school and they became very meaningful to me. And then I had lots of questions when I was in secondary school. We started doing science and all those sorts of things and had lots of questions. So I felt the only place I was going to get the questions I wanted answers to was to go to church and the only church. I could see that had any resemblance to something on a Christmas card was St. Peter's. So that's why I ended up...

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**Steven Croft**

This church we're in now?

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**Julia Jones**

No St. Peter's just up the road our sister church. I was confirmed, went through all my classes, confirmed... felt surrounded by a

## Julia Jones (continued)

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traditional church and surrounded by story in the windows and in the Psalms and in the songs and in the liturgy. So for a newbie on the pew just what was surrounding you and what you were reading was very informative and that really helped me because my family weren't churchgoers at that point in time. So I was confirmed and everything started from there really... I raised my family and this is within walking distance from home, this particular church, which is why I ended up here when we moved back into the area after college. So I've always been involved with the youngsters and Sunday school and youth work when I was a young leader before I had family and then subsequently when I had my own.

## Steven Croft

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And how long have you been involved in REInspired. 00:02:07

## Julia Jones

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Reinspired. I probably join them now about 16 years ago I joined as a volunteer because my own children were in primary school. My youngest had gone into year three which meant he got to do RE and was very excited about doing RE because he felt you had something to contribute, but all they were getting really was worksheets and he was hugely disappointed and lamented to me "Well why can't it be fun like Sunday school?" Which landed with me I thought well why can't it be multisensory and interesting and lots of questions and fun? And then I learned that the church that I was had started to do RE inspired so just ticked all the boxes for me it was creative it was conversational it was coming alongside children answering questions and taking it off the page and bringing it to life. And that really appealed to me so I started because my own children were doing it and then did more and more more and then a vacancy came up because the project had legs and they were able to recruit part time team leaders to organise that for

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**Julia Jones (continued)**

the school because everything is geared towards school. The choir on that RE syllabus so that's what I did. 00:03:13

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**Steven Croft**

The project has grown and grown hasn't it? And you were just telling me earlier, before we started recording, how many children you were in contact with last year and the size of the whole thing now just tell me.... 00:03:16

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**Julia Jones**

The slither of the project that I'm involved with is the home hub if you like and that's Earley in East Reading and within that geographical 00:03:28

area. We have 11 primary schools and two secondary schools. So we're 00:03:36

in all of those situations and contexts now. So, if you were to add up 00:03:45

the footfall for all of those sessions or assemblies in primary and secondary that is about just over 14000 encounters that we have per 00:03:59

year. So for me I think that's really significant and life changing, and 00:03:59

we have such a diverse community within that geographical area from New Town spreading right out into the suburbs of Earley and towards the South of Reading as well. So that's just our hub but we have other 00:04:16

hubs elsewhere where people clergy have moved and they want to 00:04:26

take it and offer it to their new schools. So we have a hub in Woodley 00:04:26

and Caversham, we've got one in Chinnor and Headington on 00:04:37

Guernsey and our resources also used in places like Bristol. So.... 00:04:37

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**Steven Croft**

It's beginning to travel quite a long way from from the base? 00:04:38

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**Julia Jones**

It's really exciting when we first started out it was RE Inspired people 00:04:41

that were moving or clergy that were moving and it was in their toolkit 00:04:51

if you like. So in different situations this is what I could offer you 00:04:51

because everything we do fits the needs of the Christian RE syllabus.

## Julia Jones (continued)

Now we're finding that actually it's the staff and the teachers that are coming to us saying "my friend's working in this school as she has this and I really want it for my school" or "I've moved jobs and I'm now in this school. You did it for my old school. Please will you come and visit us now in the context I'm in now".

## Steven Croft

I saw and indeed took part in one of these events. I think it was in Any Questions. When I was on my deanery tour a couple of years ago and it was genuinely really inspiring. But just describe for somebody who's never seen it what a typical engagement with a school will look like.

## Julia Jones

Well we start with the syllabus question and we plan an hour, an hour and a half, around that and typically will take a year group at a time. So for some schools that could mean 30 children for a year group for some schools it could be 90. So we have a raft of volunteers that come and help us and we break those down into groups of 10. So we do little workshops if you like. So we'll start with a syllabus question and we introduce the session. And we always start with "we're not here to change what you believe, but to share what Christians believe." So we will be very open up front about that. And we're an ecumenical team. So the experience that we bring is very rich and it's very diverse and sometimes a difference of opinion and that's a really good thing. So we'll start with the introduction. We'll hook into their experience. We introduce the syllabus question and then we break it down into workshops from thereafter where we might be telling story we might be showing a video clip we might be doing an exercise using drama using art and craft to explore all the elements around that particular story. What does the Bible say. What does it mean to us as a Christian? How will that change our behaviour. How does it impact us and what

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**Julia Jones (continued)**

can they take away from it? So it's not just learning about faith it's 00:06:50  
learning from faith which is really what the syllabus is about, it is really  
bringing everything alive in as creative way as we can. So the kids 00:07:02  
really look forward to class coming. It's seen as a bit of a treat actually 00:07:05  
because they know they're going to have a good time. They know 00:07:09  
they're going to be in a small group where actually they're going to be  
heard. They know they're going to be heard and listened to and have 00:07:14  
an opportunity to contribute as well which is a wonderful thing isn't it  
these days when school and classrooms are really stretched so a child  
to go for quite some time without actually having a one to one  
conversation with an adult. So if we can offer that that's amazing. 00:07:30

**Steven Croft**

And so you see a real impact on the children when you're working with 00:07:33  
them and who are the team that you work with are they paid staff or  
volunteers. Well we have a small hub of part time paid volunteers and 00:07:42  
they're paid for a certain amount of hours depending on how many  
schools they have.

**Julia Jones**

So I've got six members of staff and we have... I'm full time in the 00:07:49  
office and I have a part timer that helps with our marketing and  
whatnot. So they'll liaise with the staff and will work with our churches 00:07:57  
who support us wonderfully with volunteers and with financial  
donations as well. So we're really blessed to be brought into the family 00:08:05  
of each congregation regardless of which denomination they are. They 00:08:13  
all will value as being important actually in Earley in East Reading and  
they took it on board and we rolled it out across our particular area  
which is why it's been as successfull as it has.

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**Steven Croft**

That's fantastic. And you were saying earlier that you are just poised on thinking how to expand and make the learning that you've gleaned over many years accessible to to more people. 00:08:24

**Julia Jones**

So we've been kind of home orientated you're looking after our area but we've freely shared our model and offer training, we do a lot of 00:08:37

training actually. I've been in post I've done 15 it's lovely us getting all together but sharing that is a really good idea to see it in action and 00:08:49

share it could you really get a understanding of how it works what it looks like what it feels like. Yeah we're at a crossroads really. So we 00:09:00

have other hubs up and down the country that have taken on our model. I've trained them I've supported them I've given them 00:09:06

everything they need. So they're up and running doing their own thing. 00:09:09

So but there's a limit I think to how many we can do because there's only a few of us really. And so partly it's down to funding and partly it's 00:09:11

down to raising the right team that catch the vision and because we're all busy people. And I understand that now a school might come to me 00:09:16

and say I'm over here and I really want this from my school. So you've got all those hundreds of children and you've had the doors of being 00:09:24

flung open. So the challenge then is to get the church community to work together to find the time to come together for the benefit of this 00:09:30

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**Julia Jones (continued)**

things I like everything to be buttoned down and all organized. But if 00:10:10  
you're dealing with people as much as we are you can't always  
guarantee everything. I can't always guarantee that I'm going to have 00:10:14  
exactly the right number of people. You know what. It always works out 00:10:18  
is a lot of prayer and a lot of trust and stepping forward and  
networking with people is important as well. But I do believe God goes 00:10:25  
wherever he wants something to happen. He goes ahead of you 00:10:29  
whether you're ready for that or not. I have to say he does go ahead 00:10:32  
with you and he puts things in place to enable stuff to happen.

**Steven Croft**

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So we have this vision as a diocese of becoming a more Christlike 00:10:38  
church for the sake of God's world contemplative compassionate  
courageous. What are the lessons you've learned about being 00:10:47  
courageous?

**Julia Jones**

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To step out in faith and to trust God no matter what and it will come to 00:10:50  
pass if he wants you there it will come to pass and to be brave to  
accept sometimes if a door is closed don't lament over that and worry  
about and beat yourself up too much. Actually it's because he has 00:11:06  
another plan. Or he might be just redirecting you somewhere else for a 00:11:08  
moment but he may well come back to that later. He provides what you 00:11:13  
need and you have to be brave with that and you have to be brave  
when you're working with people that might have a different opinion to  
you that requires you to be brave and to be generous. When 00:11:26  
sometimes it might be something that actually rocks your foundations.  
You have to trust that actually it's still a good thing and children can 00:11:30  
learn from that because as Christians if we can't show that we're one  
family and there are things that are important to us join us together  
actually rather than focusing on the stuff that could pull things apart

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**Julia Jones (continued)**

then that's not good modeling for children is it. So we have a responsibility to model that good relationship and that can be challenging and you have to be brave for that.

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**Steven Croft**

Yeah. That's tremendous Julia. Thank you. And one of the lessons that comes across to me. Hearing this story again and and knowing something about it from my previous visit is the fruitfulness that has come through persevering in the same thing over and over again with each generation of children over many years and the expertise that you gather and the relationships with the skills that must develop from year to year as well just keeping going. Yes. And you don't know what the fruit is to you because as you said right at the beginning in your own story you were a pupil at secondary school. You went with lots of questions you had lots of encounters and conversations you just don't know what's going to come from the sowing of the good seed of the gospel. It's really tremendous to hear the story. Would you pray for the diocese. I'm asking all of my guests as part of this to pray for this wonderful community of people seeking in our own ways to do what God is calling us today. Let's pray.

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**Julia Jones**

Heavenly Father. I thank you so much for all of your blessings and for going ahead of us. Opening doors and preparing the way. Heavenly Father I pray for our diocese for all of your people in this area that we're aware of when doors are being opened for us and then we have confidence enough to go through. I pray that we work in a more joined up way that we love one another and trust one another to make the journey together. That we put our money where our mouth is and our skills and our talents to make your plans a reality on this world and in our area. We can't do it without you Father. You've given us what we



**Julia Jones (continued)**

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need, help us to make it happen. Amen.

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**Steven Croft**

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Amen. Julia thank you so much for taking part in this podcast with "My (extraordinary) family."

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**Julia Jones**

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You're very welcome.

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