

Lois Fergusson and Catherine Butcher reflect on the Olympic opening ceremony

SET APART TO SERVE

In those days when the number of disciples was increasing... the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, 'It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.' (Acts 6:1-4)

The opening ceremony of the Olympics celebrated the NHS and children's literature in a sequence featuring staff and patients from Great Ormond Street Hospital. GP in training, Lois Fergusson was among the 7,500 volunteers who spent on average 150 hours practising during the build-up to the three-and-a-half-hour show under the direction of artistic director Danny Boyle. There were 800 health professionals in the NHS sequence: nurses, physiotherapists, speech therapists, public health workers and doctors.

Reflecting on the event Lois said: 'I learnt so much from my experience. I saw a leader in action, who envisioned his followers, was present for all the hard work and who was trusted to stand up for us to those in power.' (There had been calls to axe one of the volunteer performer sequences to shorten the ceremony.)

Lois added: 'I was part of a team so huge that you were individually anonymous but together produced something unique and unforgettable. The show is now over, the hospital beds have gone on to have real patients in them in Tunisian hospitals and my nurse's costume is hanging in my wardrobe. But the lessons and experience will be with me forever.'

The Olympic focus on the NHS was a reminder that it is a service of which we can be proud. For the many Christians employed by the NHS, it is a service which reflects the servant heart of Christ. As Christians we are not only envisioned by a great leader, we are also empowered by his Spirit.

When the early church was growing, the first disciples recognised the need to care for widows. Acts 6 describes how seven men were chosen for this practical service. Their qualification? They were 'known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom'. Stephen, who became the first martyr, was one of those chosen. He is described as 'a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit'... 'a man full of God's grace and power, [who] performed great wonders and signs among the people'.

These godly, practical servants were presented to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. The result: 'The word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.'

Working as one of 1,186,790 NHS staff¹ it might be easy to say 'What difference can I make?' Instead, let's be envisioned by our servant king,² following his example in service and empowered by his Holy Spirit to play our part in seeing the word of God spread and Christ's kingdom established.

Lois Fergusson is finishing GP training in east London. Catherine Butcher is CMF Head of Communications.

references

1. <http://bit.ly/TNAmrq>
2. Philippians 2:7