

## 'I WAS LOST BUT NOW AM FOUND'

London cabbie in need of direction, Ken Ashton, left behind 'The Knowledge' and the streets of London to tend to a new flock when he was ordained this summer in Chelmsford Cathedral. Now the Reverend Ken Ashton, he has started ministry as a curate at St Mary's, Walthamstow. "Most of all I miss the ease of parking in central London!" says Ken. "I did have some great conversations about God with fares but these were few and far between, and of course there were lots of lessons about persevering in situations we don't like."

As a born-and-bred Londoner, Ken has had a varied career. Beginning his working life as an apprentice engineer, he moved into the print industry, working as a lithographic planner for many years before doing 'The Knowledge' and becoming a fully-fledged cab driver in 1994. Brought up in Dagenham, Ken moved on at 21, pestering friends around the East End for accommodation and, eventually finding a "hard-to-let" council flat in Poplar. As a newly-wed, he moved on to the Romford area - first to Chadwell Heath, and then to Collier Row.

Ken's route to ordination has been equally roundabout, and it was as he started driving that he felt God leaning heavily on him - beginning with a comment in an 'Agnostics Anonymous' group on a Christian holiday, where someone told him that "God had a plan for his life..." When his wife, Eve, committed her life to Jesus in 1993, Ken thought this was great: she could do churchy things on a Sunday and he - a keen cyclist - could be out on his bike. "Everyone's a winner!" thought Ken. "This continued for about three years, before God decided that everyone is a winner, but not the way I had



seen it." Over the next couple of years Ken wrestled with the question of who God was and how relevant Jesus was to his life - through conversations, Eve's Christian faith and various Church-run courses such as Alpha. Ken says: "In common with many others I didn't always love my job but was happy to do it as a means to an end, a way to earn a living . . . but I stayed with it because I never felt that God was calling me out of it."

For the next 10 years, Ken continued to work as a cab driver whilst getting increasingly involved in the life of his church, with a particular commitment to the Alpha courses. "Eventually I began to feel a pull to full-time ministry - that God was calling me into something that required my energy full-time. I resisted that call, but remained restless, and began exploring how this could take place in my life."

The Bishop of Barking, the Rt Revd David Hawkins, was instrumental in encouraging Ken to explore the possibility of ordained ministry. He said: "I am convinced that Ken's in the right place for the next stage of his journey with Jesus. I look forward to watching him develop and grow further in his Christian life as he starts work in Walthamstow."

Ken and Eve have two teenage daughters. Eve trained as a textile designer, but since having children herself has been actively involved in working with children and young people. And, as well as enjoying being a mum, she thoroughly enjoys her rescue greyhound, Harvey. Ken adds: "They closed Walthamstow Stadium just after we got here, so old friends can't even accuse me of going to the dogs!"

## UPTOWN OIL

In South London, business pioneers are recycling of vegetable oil and at the same time providing London with a sustainable, local solution to climate change and pollution. Uptown Biodiesel is made from waste vegetable oil (WVO) onsite in Southwark. Run by Jason and Nigel, WVO is collected from London's catering establishments, then filtered, processed and turned into high quality, 100% recycled biofuel which is then ready for use by diesel vehicles. This is currently the only licensed biodiesel manufacturer in London.

Ciaran Baynes, a taxi driver from Clacton, has been filling up with Uptown Oil since the summer and is a true believer in the benefits of recycled biodiesel.

Ciaran said: "I've done 8000 miles with this Uptown Oil. I was interested in running the cab on biodiesel just to see...I wanted to do it myself you know, but when I found out what was involved I realised it was a bit too much, so I found Uptown Oil who do it all for you, it's a brilliant idea - what they are doing is cheaper and better for the environment. It runs just fine and is quieter."

"It runs with DERV too - so if I get stuck with an empty tank I can just fill up on DERV - mixing it is no problem. Drivers might be worried that biodiesel will damage their engine, they worry that it might not run, whether it's tested or not - you don't want to be putting dirty stuff in your cab. I know that Nigel tests each batch here, so it's clean biodiesel. The way they

process it makes it just like running the cab on normal diesel - there are no worries with it," says Ciaran.

Life cycle analysis shows that Uptown Biodiesel saves at least 80% CO2 compared to mineral diesel. 100% recycled biodiesel removes the complex argument of biofuel crops: food vs fuel - Uptown Oil reverses this and makes the most of the catering industry's by product. The exhaust emissions of carbon monoxide and particulate matter from biodiesel are 45% lower when compared to that of DERV. Sulphur emissions, a cause of air quality concern, are also eliminated. Uptown Oil approached London breweries offering to collect the WVO from their pubs and close the loop by providing 100% recycled biodiesel for their delivery vans. Wandsworth based Young's brewery has picked up the environmental baton and are supporting the work of Uptown Oil.

100% recycled biodiesel can be used in diesel vehicles with no conversion needed. Uptown Oil vans have run on 100% biodiesel for over a year with no detrimental effects. The facility in Southwark is licensed to process 1.5million litres of biodiesel per year, which saves an incredible 1,500 tonnes of CO2. By using recycled biofuel, drivers can reduce their carbon emissions AND save approximately 15pence per litre of fuel! The facility is available to all diesel users at Uptown Oil Limited Unit 2 King James Court King James Street Southwark SE1 0DH. For more details you can telephone 020 7928 6300.

