

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.