

A WORD AND SPIRIT  
MAINSTREAM  
NETWORK

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*Issue Theme*  
TOWARDS THE 21st CENTURY CHURCH

## Introduction:



# Welcome to the 21st Century.

At a time when, we hear, most of the big halls and arenas are already booked for New Year's Eve 1999 - I know the century actually begins in 2001 but who cares! - it is good to know that at least some parts of Christ's Church are there in vision and planning already. David and Keith and the team they are building at Didcot are keeping 'Towards 2000' firmly on the Council agenda with regular updates on progress to date. Part of their vision of course has been one for re-vitalised Assemblies. This May '95 issue is timed to coincide with an imaginative and welcome new approach to the annual Baptist Assembly. A Spring weekend programme for all the family. How good to see a Plymouth Assembly programme that is integrated with ABY's own and that incorporates children and teenagers as well. I just hope it all is as good as it sounds - we have two young and streetwise Baptist consumers coming from our family so I write with some feeling.

What kind of Church will emerge into the 21st? And what kind of Baptist Union? Rob Warner has put fingers into the word processor to present us with one, or is it several, visions? In the Editorial this issue I interview Rob about his stimulating new book. Iain Hoskins writes to our churches raising searching questions about meaningful youth work as the new millennium dawns. His article is matched by a provocative one from Anne Dunkley whose concern for bored 'Baptist' children speaks volumes. Ralph Davies shares something of a global vision as we practice the Great Commission through the rest of this

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century. We also glimpse in this article something of a European dimension for the C21st as we publicise here the so called Berlin Statement with its plea to the European Baptist Federation to do all it can to protect Charismatic Baptist Churches, not least in the new Eastern Europe. One of our Probationer Ministers, Jeremy Brown, dwells on the inter-relationship between faith and finances in an economical article! Who was it that said that when it comes to money we are all of the same religion?

Finally, in addition to the above there are updates and reports on the January Conference, Regional Developments and the Spring Executive Meeting. I think it is accurate to say that Mainstream is flowing freely once again after a logjam or two. Readers will, of course, judge this for themselves. I do know this...it is good to be part of it all again.

Michael Bochenski, St. Albans, May 1995

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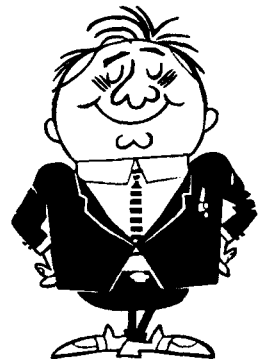
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# A LETTER TO THE CHURCHES

## Imitation or Mimic?

### Conversation and Listening

Conversation is my business, I talk to people. The emphasis over the last few years in all strata of society has been to get things organised and structured. To just talk to people is often seen as not being real work. There is also the notion that con-versation is something that can be done by anybody, well we do it every day. The work I do is aimed at stimulating thinking, not giving the answers. This in itself is dangerous because it makes people feel uncomfortable, restless to the point they think that I am not doing my job. The purpose of my job is not to satisfy people's curiosity about what I do but to stimulate the way they think about the work they do with young people.



The work involves helping people to draw out the options and possibilities that exist and to see what opportunities and choices are available to them. To do this we have to be continually thinking about what we have heard and what we are doing. You cannot follow a preset plan of action as laid down in 'procedure paper 43'. Rather the informal educator will be asking questions, making suggestions and giving encouragement or the value of many conversations will be lost. Informal education means 'reaching out to people on their own patch, territory, call it what you want and initiating projects where they are at'. Don Townsend found himself engaged with young people in the school cafeteria over issues of life and death. Young people found someone who was willing to discuss their issues and help them to find ways of understanding their world. The time spent in research was invaluable to Don. Donald Schon suggests that if a worker ever stops being a researcher into their own practice they will 'die'. The fear by some in the church who knew of Don's work was that he was not being directive enough - he was not telling young people what to think! However, if we are to be true to the Jesus model then we can only help young people to make decisions if first they have the knowledge and understanding upon which to base their decisions.

### **Imitators or Mimics?**

The use of conversation and listening are not new features of this present age but two senses/skills given by God as a means of communication. Jesus demonstrated the way these two gifts can be used with devastating effect. We are being called to imitate Jesus. What will this mean for the way we work? Michael Griffiths says it does not mean *'pretending to be what we are not, or putting on a pious Christian mask...only God has the capacity to reproduce Himself in you'*. We are more likely to mimic Jesus than to imitate Him because this means we can be different things to different people, one characteristic this of the post-modern person. But Jesus calls us to be imitators, transformed by the Holy Spirit. His sitting by the well of Samaria, for example, has similarities to one of the stories Tony Campolo tells about the party he arranged at 4 am in the morning for a prostitute. The conversations and questions asked by Jesus had a profound effect upon the lives of many. The rich young ruler is led to ask, 'What must I do to inherit eternal life?' To the blind man Jesus said 'What do you want me to do?'

It can be argued that the majority of Jesus' ministry was in conversation, helping people as Donald Schon puts it *'to reflect in and on action'*. *It is all too easy to mimic the latest customs and conventions of one group in order to look fashionable. Those who work with young people more than others often feel 'out of date' with their language and the material they use. The way Jesus worked was to address the whole person, holistic ministry. Michael Griffiths says 'The whole point of Christian imitation of the example of Jesus is that there is a transformation of the inward character brought about by the Holy Spirit in actually*

*making us like Christ*'. The pluralistic world in which we live is not witnessing such 'transformation of the inward character'. We are seeing people who are adopting cultures and patterns of behaviour and very often mimicking Jesus, reflecting a world view that says 'anything goes'. The attitudes and values of the young are not those of their parents but the media invasion that controls them and teaches them the norms for society. They are not imitators of Christ but of 'Power Rangers', 'Pulp Fiction' or 'Natural Born Killers'. This is how mimicry works out in human experience.

### **Front or Back Regions?**

Erving Goffman suggests that much of our life can be divided up into two regions, *front regions and back regions*. *Front regions are social occasions or encounters in which individuals act out formal or stylized roles - they are on stage performances*. 'Back regions resemble the back stage of a theatre, or the off camera activities of filming. The young person in the pew may be the soul of politeness when speaking to you but once outside the church doors become loud and aggressive. Back regions permit profanity, open sexual remarks, elaborate rough and informal dress, sloppy sitting and standing posture, use of dialect and substandard speech, mumbling and shouting, playful aggressive behaviour and kidding, inconsiderateness for the other in minor but potential symbolic acts, minor self-involvements such as humming, whistling, chewing, nibbling, belching and flatulence' (Goffman, 1969).

Teamwork is often involved in preserving front region performances. Thus two church leaders may put on an elaborate show of unity and friendship in public, even though they do not like each other. A wife and husband may take care to conceal their quarrels from their children, only to fight bitterly once the children are in bed. Young people are not as skilled in the teamwork required to display positive front regions and often openly display their true feelings. The disciples worked well at giving a good front region appearance until the time when the mother of James and John asked if they could have a special place alongside Jesus, and harmony broke down. The difficulty with this whole notion when it comes to leadership in our churches is that young people can often see through the masks. True imitation means that the heart of the individual is changed and we have to recognise that if we are '*the midwives to the emerging generation*' (Mead 1991) then we need to be ready and willing to offer the best possible service to the new infant. The church has often NOT given the best and most qualified people to the work with young people, rather they have given the job to the willing, who are not always the gifted, and the work has suffered. Willingness is not enough.

### **Generation X'ers or Baby Boomers?**

This generation of young people is the most highly educated ever. Fuzz

Kitto from the United Church of Australia says of young people 'they are mature intellectually, but not socially. They work hard for independence, security, and yearn to be understood and respected. Feelings are everything with a strong sense of urgency to have fun and to have it now. They find it difficult to establish an ethical framework which has any application beyond the boundaries of their own immediate circle of friends'. (Kitto 1994). This is the scenario in which we are living. Paradigms are changing, the old world order is no more. We need a new breed of change agents if the church is to succeed in taking young people into the 21st Century. Mead suggests that *'in a time of change we badly need innovators - people who will take a stab at a new way of working with the freedom to fail ... the church must learn to encourage innovation and even fund it, rather than handicap and punish it'*. Andy Rance, Youth Pastor at Saltash Baptist Church, says 'Jesus met people where they were at. He didn't sit in an ivory tower and wait for people to come to Him, He went out to them, He mixed and socialised with them and became a friend. He didn't just tell them. He was real'. Andy meets young people on the streets. *'When I first became a Christian, a lot of young people saw me as a traitor, they saw me as anti everything, because I came from the same drug culture they did. Now I'm trying to show them that I care about them. I do not have to keep asking them if they know Jesus Christ personally because we are showing them Jesus just by caring for them'*. (Rance 1994).

The Canadian Generation X'ers spokesperson, Doug Coupland, concludes 'My secret is that I need God - that I am sick and can no longer make it alone; I need God to help me give, because I am no longer capable of giving; to help me be kind, as I no longer seem capable of kindness; to help me love, as I seem beyond being able to love'. (Tapia 1994) Generation X'ers are unlike the post-war Boomers generation who value individualism, are upwardly mobile and an individualistic generation. The X'ers value community and are not as transient as the Boomer. The X'er longs for relationships that are meaningful, spontaneously generated and life long. They have known little of this, often coming from dysfunctional families and having become 'disposable' kids. Their measure of success lies in the quality of relationships they can forge. They don't want groups that split and make more groups, they want relationships that take time. They don't value being a part of the big church with a cause, they desire care and to be cared for. They look to older people for examples of what a good marriage looks like.

### **Co-operation or Isolation?**

We are to be imitators of Christ. Jesus had conversations, listened and gave time to people. He built relationships, spent time in their homes. Mary and Martha knew him as a family guest. Peter knew him in his home for a meal and rest. He was known to spend time with the people who needed him, the outcasts, sinners. Jesus made the unwanted feel appreciated and gave meaning to their life. The 21st Century needs a caring church that builds relationships

with and between individuals. We need to recognise that we are seeing the birth of a new generation where the old values no longer hold true. Young people are expressing themselves but are we listening? Over the last twenty years we have seen for example Three Mile Island, The Gulf War, Vietnam, The Collapse of Communism, Famines in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa. I don't know if we have dealt with the outcomes of these very well because we do not expect the future to be different from the past. Tom Sine at Greenbelt in 1993 said 'the world is changing before our eyes - but are our eyes open?' We must be prepared to retrain and re-orientate our skills for a generation whose teacher has been the TV. Co-operation, not isolation, is the key for the future.

And Youth Workers and Leaders? We must become informal educators who need to give their imagination a chance to find ways to put first things first, using the positive aspect of today to build for tomorrow. Informal educators will increasingly become less centre based and become more 'informal', being found where the action is - pubs, car parks and schools. The postmodern informal educator needs to be a thinking person, radical and capable of the unexpected. The 'postmodern' I have come to understand as a state of mind: restless, questioning, moving forward, challenging boundaries, working in new ways.

The world needs imitators of Christ who have been transformed by the Holy Spirit, willing to take risks in Jesus' name with the freedom to fail.

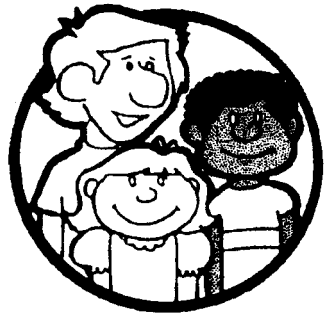
Iain Hoskins, Baptist Union Youth Officer, Didcot. March 1995

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# 'Let the children come'



## Attitudes

As you begin reading this article, take a few minutes to reflect with total honesty on your feelings about children. For unless we all admit our ambivalence towards them, and expose the prejudices we are reluctant to admit (as with any other group which suffers discrimination) we will never make progress in the way we treat children in our churches. Having children around, whether in our own families or in the church, is uncomfortable; they won't let us ignore them. They demand attention and special consideration - usually at the least convenient time. 'Go away' or 'Don't bother me now' are our common reactions to children's persistence. Even the most devoted parent or children's worker looks forward to having a break from them.

Yet we live in the tension of the gospel, which is revolutionary. A contextualised reading of Jesus' actions towards, and words about, children in Mark's Gospel suggests that they form the framework for his teaching on the reversal of worldly values which is true gospel living (9:2 - 10:32). We often detach Jesus' words that the kingdom belongs to 'such as these' (10:14) from children themselves. If we take His teaching seriously, then children will not only be examples of what the kingdom is all about, but will have priority in the kingdom. If we do not value children in the way that God does, then we cannot understand or live the life of the kingdom, for ourselves or in our church communities.

## All-Age Worship

In recent centuries, the generations have been separated in our churches by age; adults have worshipped while children have learnt about faith. Consequently worship is perceived as for the mature, learning for the young. This is damaging to both. And frequently, those to whom we entrust our work with children do neither. Today, the failure of this model is thankfully exposed. If you are in any doubt, ask yourself where now are all those children who flocked to Sunday School 50 years ago? Few are living and worshipping as committed disciples of Jesus within the church (1). Count, too, the number



of adults in your congregation who are learning in Bible study or housegroups. Today, we are regaining what for Christians in earlier centuries was the norm, when authentic worship was offered as the whole family of God's people celebrated together. To make the Gospel relevant to all ages in an act of worship is not to diminish it. There is only one Gospel, for old and young alike.

Sunday worship is the most important activity of the week, for adults and children. Churches often have one of two attitudes to children. Either they are allowed to roam noisily around (an open baptistry makes a fascinating play area) or they are expected to behave as mini-adults. Both result in frustrated parents, unruly or bored children, and other adults who stay away. Worship cannot happen in this alienating environment. There is a middle way: to welcome and accept children as fellow members of the Christian community, enabling them to worship in their own way and as older people do, taking part as appropriate, while encouraging self-discipline and restraint (something which adults who, for example, take silence as an invitation to chatter, could also adopt). But why is this necessary? Isn't it better for children to 'do their own thing' in their own space? This is true for some activities, but as our understanding of childhood has increased and as we consider the insights of those who have studied how faith grows, we are driven to question long-held assumptions, however uncomfortable that may be. So as we look to the future with children in the church, we discover the rich possibilities that God is opening up for us together.

### **A Dream**

I dream of the church (and in a few places it is becoming real) where children and families are considered in every aspect of the community's life. As you enter for worship on a Sunday morning, there is something to say that children are welcome: posters, books, tables and chairs are at children's level. Adults talk without patronage with the children. Every precious minute of the brief time spent together is used to build quality relationships.

Babies and young children are made to feel welcome for the whole of the worship time. Mothers feel relaxed about feeding their babies if they need to (instead of staying at home because the baby's timetable doesn't fit in with service times). If there is space without presenting a hazard, prams and pushchairs can be accommodated and there will be a room for parents to use if the child is fractious. Some parents prefer to keep their young children with them, others long for a break; both are an option. All who look after children have accepted and signed the church's undertaking under 'Safe to Grow' to protect children. There is somebody designated not only to welcome the family but to be on hand to help if there is a problem, instead of frowning and tut-tutting. There is a quiet play area in the sanctuary for parents and children

to use if they wish. Here, there are games and toys, and parents and children can listen and be involved in worship while doing something active. It's surprising how many things children can do at once; they can absorb quite a lot of the service and join in the singing while drawing a picture for example! Or every young child is invited as they come in to take a bag made of bright material, which is stocked with pens, paper, pictures, puzzles, story books and perhaps a small bag of raisins. Each week, these are checked over, and the consumables and any deteriorating books replaced.

Children are invited to contribute to the preparation of worship, along with people of all ages. Children can share in worship in a variety of ways. There are many excellent books available to help in the planning. It need not be daunting. All-Age Worship takes place meaningfully week by week in many churches. There, children both receive and give, in prayer, in music, drama, art ... as they respond in awe and wonder to God's love alongside adults who themselves are changed by the children's presence. Children grow in the church family knowing that they are accepted. Worshipping God is real for them. They feel at home. Whatever happens to them in later years as they search for a faith they can call their own, these good memories will remain with them, a foundation on which they can build for the rest of their lives.

### **The Charter for Children**

All-Age Worship, then, is the norm, with learning and other activities for different groups built into the Church's programme preferably at other times eg. weekdays, before or after Sunday worship. These groups may or may not be determined by age. It is becoming accepted that the link once considered fundamental between chronology and Christian maturity has been broken. It is the experience in many churches that while some quite young children are striding out confidently in faith, there are increasing numbers of adults who are taking their first tentative steps. 'And a little child shall lead them'. In the 'Charter for Children' the place of the child at the centre of the Christian scheme of things is recognised. I hope every Mainstream reader has a copy, has discussed it in Deacons' and Church Meetings, has it pinned prominently on the noticeboard, and regularly reviews their church's progress towards its implementation.

As a parent, I grieve over the unnecessary divisiveness of church life; the years of doing things together as a family are short and precious, and to be united in the celebration of faith creates special bonds. As a Minister, I grieve that children, to whom worship comes easily and naturally, find what is so often served up to them boring, or merely entertaining. I am concerned too when new or visiting families are immediately invited to split up: baby to the creche, children to established groups in which they are outsiders. We expect of children what we would find unacceptable as adults. Increasingly, families

wish to remain together. If the act of worship or the atmosphere among the people does not address their needs, they will not give it another try.

### **Faith-Development**

This approach to life and worship as a Christian community is not for expediency or to try to arrest the decline in children and families who are coming to church. Numbers don't interest me; authenticity does. Much work has been done in recent years on the way that faith develops, for adults as well as for children. The principal exponents of this work who are known in this country are James Fowler and John Westerhoff (2). While there is much in their writings we would want to debate, the insights they have given us are increasingly recognised as having relevance and value. Although Westerhoff's thinking has now gone beyond his earlier 'tree-rings' concept, I still find it a useful model in understanding faith development, and in determining a church's programme for and expectations of children (3). He describes the faith of a child in the early years as 'experienced'; it is formed as the child finds trust, love and acceptance in the people around. What you are as a Christian is important to them, not what you say. (4).

At about seven, coinciding with the extension of intellectual and social skills, a child will move to a different style of faith, while still embracing earlier experiences. Here, the sense of belonging is important. Shared stories and experiences help them to identify with the community. Significant adults become role models. Children need to know that they are valued by participating, by having their opinions heard, and by being given space to be themselves within an accepting community. It may be that around this time, a child makes a profession of faith, which is real and appropriate to her/his age and stage of development. How the community handles this is crucial for the future spiritual life of the child; little work has yet been done on appropriate ways of discipling these children, who are generally considered too young for baptism, but whose faith and sense of belonging need to be affirmed.

In adolescence the searching stage will begin, when doubt, experimentation with new ideas and lifestyles may take them away from the community. The approach of these years should be anticipated, not feared or resented by the church. Children who move into this stage still belong. Here we can make sense of Westerhoff's view that the styles of faith form concentric circles, each one a part of our experience which remains with us as we move on. Kirsty left the church at 11. Now a pregnant teenager, she met up with her Minister again recently. She talked very openly about her life, and the Minister was able to meet her where she was and support her in her difficulties, because of the relationship of trust and the awareness of belonging that Kirsty had known as a child. We cannot determine where children's lives will take them, and where God will meet them. Ours is to own the responsibility we have to be true to

them now, without setting conditions for the future. Whether they go or stay, if they feel good about themselves, about God and about His people, we have given them the richest foundations upon which to build their life of faith.

### **Towards the C21st Church**

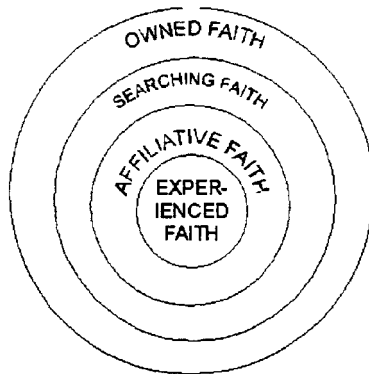
There are other issues affecting children with which people in many churches are concerned. Do we admit children to communion? How do we protect them from harm within the church? How do we make sure their voice is heard at all levels of church life? Indeed these are all on the agenda of the Baptist Union's Children's Working Group, because they are also issues being raised by children themselves, and by society. We pray that both the debate and the action for and with children will continue and that it will be lively. Also that it will be central to church life and true to the gospel.

#### **Notes:**

- (1) The Rise and Development of the Sunday School Movement in England 1780-1980 by Philip Cliff. NCEC 1986.
- (2) James Fowler: Stages of Faith, Harper & Row, San Francisco, 1981. John Westerhoff: Will our children have faith? Seabury Press, NY, 1976.

Both are summarised in 'How Faith Grows', National Society, 1991.

(3)



- (4) As with new Christian adults for whom relationships and not theories and doctrines are of initial significance. See John Finney's research in 'Finding Faith Today', Bible Society, 1992.

ALSO well worth reading is Gretchen Wolff Pritchard's, 'Offering the Gospel to Children', Cowley Publications, 1992. It is available in this country through SPCK.

**STOP PRESS:** In May 1995, an important new book from the Consultative Group on Ministry among Children (CGMC) (which published 'The Child in the Church' and 'Kaleidoscope') will be released. 'Unfinished Business' - Children and the Church' will be essential reading for all concerned about these issues. It will be available from the Baptist Union, priced around £2.00 excl. p & p.

Anne Dunkley, Chairperson of the BU Children's Working Group, March 1995

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# AD 2,000 and beyond

The 'Toronto blessing' is proving to be an ongoing source of debate amongst British Churches today. Many individuals witness to the new refreshing or blessing, that this work of the Holy Spirit has brought into their lives and so into the fellowship life of the Church. In recent months, as I have travelled quite widely in the U.K, I have observed many other Churches not associated with the Toronto blessing, experiencing a resurgence in Church life, particularly in worship and prayer. An important question that needs to be addressed is 'Why is God blessing the Church at this present time?' Surely one reason is that God has heard the cries of His people, that He will revive His Church in our day in order to bring our nation back to Himself? There has been a coming together of God's people in repentance and intercessory prayer for our nation. God is answering. Perhaps, though, there is another reason which is indelibly linked to the first and which is based on the word 'blessing'?

Dr. Ralph Winter, in particular, has pointed out that the word 'blessing' as it occurs in the Genesis version of the Great Commission (Gen.12:1-3, 18:18, 22:18, 26:4, 28:14) implies a relationship - a bringing into one family, people from every tribe and tongue and people. The purpose of God blessing Abraham was that 'all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you' (Gen.12:3) - that is brought into the same family of God. God's original blessing on all humankind (Gen.1:28) would be restored and fulfilled through Abraham and his offspring of faith (Gal.3:6-8). This is the great unifying theme of the Bible - 'may God be gracious to us and bless us and make His face shine upon us'. Why? 'That Your ways may be known on earth, Your salvation among all nations' (Ps.67:1-2). God's covenant of blessing is conditional in that it must be shared with all nations. 'The Bible is a missionary book

throughout... the main line of argument that binds all of it together is the unfolding and gradual execution of a missionary purpose'. (Bruce Ker). It is not surprising that Israel was at its strongest when it sought to 'bless' other nations and was at its weakest when it no longer saw its purpose to be 'a light to lighten the Gentiles'.

The Bible is quite clear. God blesses His people in order for them to bless others. The covenant of faith obligates the Church to 'Go' and bless all the people groups of the world so that they also will be blessed as they join the family of faith. Could this be the reason that God is abundantly blessing the Church in such countries as South Korea and Brazil? Both these countries are 'blessing' many nations with their commitment to world evangelism. For example, South Korea has set a faith target of blessing the nations with 100,000 missionaries by the year 2,000 and Brazil has set a target of adopting around 2,000 unreached people groups. It should not surprise us to see the phenomenal growth of the Church in such countries as they obey the Bible injunction 'to be a blessing to the nations of the earth'.

Today, we are witnessing an amazing growth in the Christian Church worldwide. Some of the facts are breathtaking!

- \* 70,000 new believers per day in the world.
- \* 3,500 churches per week are established worldwide.
- \* 28,000 new believers per day in China.
- \* 20,000 new believers per day in Africa.
- \* By the year 2,000 there will be 100 million evangelical Christians in Latin America compared to 20 million in 1980.
- \* Today Korea is 30% Christian.
- \* Albania now has 300 active Churches.
- \* Churches in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, have grown from 10 to 40 in the last 5 years.
- \* A network of 12 Eastern European countries plans to train and send out 500 cross-cultural missionaries, supported by their own national churches.
- \* 19 denominations in Ghana are working together towards a local church for every 360 people by the year 2,000.
- \* Despite persecution, the Church in Indonesia has grown 300% in 25 years.
- \* In Iraq, the Kurds now have a public worshipping fellowship for the first time in history.
- \* 20 local fellowships now meet regularly in Mongolia and 4 fellowships in the capital city have a regular attendance of 4-6,000 and operate under national leadership.
- \* Christian leaders in the Hindu kingdom of Nepal are planning a Congress for 2-3,000 Christian leaders to develop a national evangelisation strategy.
- \* Nigeria plans to send 1,000 missionaries by the year 2,000 particularly amongst unreached people groups.

- \* In 1792 only 1% of all evangelicals were in the two-thirds world. 200 years of Mission has increased this to 58% and by the year 2,000 about 60% of all evangelical missionaries will come from the two-thirds world.

The examples above are just a few of the indications of a world-wide working of the Holy Spirit in our day. They should not only cause us great rejoicing, but also result in a renewed commitment to prayer and resourcing world missions by giving and going. Out of the world's 24,000 people groups it is estimated that 11,000 are still unreached - the vast majority of these are within the 10/40 window. Can they be reached? Our answer should be in the words of D.L.Moody - 'It can be done - it ought to be done - it must be done'. The 'A.D. 2000 and Beyond' Movement has united world Church leaders with the vision of 'A Church for every people and the Gospel for every person by the year A.D. 2,000!' In May 1995 the Global Consultation on World Evangelism by the year 2,000 and Beyond (G.C.O.W.E. '95) will be held in Seoul, Korea. Christian leaders from over 200 countries will unite together and seek to fulfill the Great Commission in our generation.

'Go and make disciples of every people group' (*Matt.28:19*). It can be done. In 1950 there were 33 congregations of Bible-believing Christians for every unreached people group. By 1980 this had grown to 162 congregations. By 1993 the number had risen to 600 Christian congregations to every unreached people group. In recent years Church leaders of Latin American countries have met and covenanted together to reach 3,000 unreached people groups. Asian Christians have met and adopted a similar number. Will the British churches, the birthplace of modern missions, continue to play their part in completing the Great Commission?

Back then to my original question. Is this the reason that God is blessing His Church today throughout the world including us here in Britain? Is it to prepare the Church to complete the Great Commission? Those who are blessed by God are obligated to be a blessing to all the peoples of the world. No individual or Church can keep 'blessing' to themselves, for like the manna in the wilderness, we will find it will only become stale. Surely God is refreshing His Church in order for the Church to rediscover its main purpose - the blessing of all the nations of the earth. This task is within our grasp. It can be done - it ought to be done - it must be done.

Ralph Davies, formerly Minister of Maghull Baptist Church Liverpool. Now Church Relations Manager with Operation Mobilisation. March 1995.

# 1994 BERLIN STATEMENT -



## Baptists in the Power of the Spirit

At a European Charismatic Baptist Consultation on church renewal in Berlin on November 21-23 1994, in the light of the current debate about Baptist identity, the following statement was agreed.

### 1) CONVICTIONS

We affirm the following as characteristic Baptist convictions.

#### a) *The supreme authority of the Bible for both doctrine and life.*

As a result of this conviction that we hold in common with many other believers, these fundamental beliefs follow:

- \* Our faith is Christocentric
- \* Our soteriology is crucicentric
- \* We embrace the priority of mission - both evangelism and social action
- \* We recognise the need to be Spirit empowered for effective service
- \* We pray for God to work in revival power in Europe in these days, even as He has in previous generations, supremely in the early church as recorded in the book of Acts.

#### b) *Believers' Baptism.* We derive our practice of baptism from our interpretation of the New Testament. While this is not our sole distinctive conviction, water baptism for all believers in the Triune Name is fundamental to our doctrine and identity.

#### c) *The autonomy of the local church.* Our national bodies are Unions or Federations of local churches. While other historic denominations are centralised in their government, with hierarchical structures, our local churches retain independent responsibility and decision making processes. This local autonomy should not be confused with total independency. We also emphasise the importance of fellowship beyond the local church, both through denominational structures and through personal and inter-denominational networks.

#### d) *Freedom of conscience.* Baptists have always stood for freedom of conscience, in terms of both religious and civil liberties, in the church and nation. This principle is applied not least within our own denomination. Within the broad framework of classical Baptist convictions detailed above, we believe that the local church has liberty to determine its own pattern of life. Thus,



our distinctively Baptist framework promotes a rich variety of expressions of worship and witness.

## **2) CHARISMATIC RENEWAL**

In some countries in Europe, the relationship between non-charismatic and charismatic believers has had time to stabilise, develop and mature over the last quarter century. Sustained dialogue has continued to improve mutual understanding and trust. Such dialogue, partnership and co-operation, is now well established in eg. France, Germany and Great Britain. As charismatic Baptist leaders, we regret the pride, judgementalism and immaturity that have sometimes characterised the attitudes of charismatics towards their denomination. We also appreciate and commend, however, the policy of accepting charismatic Baptist churches as full and authentic expressions of Baptist convictions and life, witness and worship. We therefore affirm the following:

- 1) The value of diversity among Baptist churches.
- 2) The enriching contribution of charismatic renewal to the life and mission of Baptist churches.
- 3) The fact that many of the fastest growing Baptist churches in Europe are charismatic churches.

## **3) EVANGELISING EUROPE TODAY**

There is an immense evangelistic task in Europe today, the only continent where the church of Jesus Christ is not growing significantly. We therefore affirm the following:

- 1) The Great Commission calls us to an evangelistic responsibility not only for the rest of the unreached world, but also for our own continent.
- 2) In many parts of Europe, one invaluable expression of our evangelistic task will be church planting.
- 3) The task is immense, and so we urge our churches to pray not only for effective evangelistic initiatives, but also that the Lord would send revival power to Europe in these days.
- 4) In order to fulfil this great evangelistic task it is essential that we co-operate with others wherever possible, including the historic denominations, the Pentecostals, the New Churches and the Independents.

## **4) CONCLUDING PROPOSITIONS**

In the light of this analysis, we therefore request that the European Baptist Federation Council and the national Unions consider the following propositions:

- 1) We believe that the classical Baptist convictions outlined above remain central to our identity and express concern that they are not always being adhered to adequately and consistently.

- 2) We need to express our common faith in mutual respect and recognition, working together to avoid conflicts and needless division.
- 3) We need to resist the exclusion of charismatic Baptist churches from any European Baptist Union.
- 4) We need to work together for effective mission in Europe today.

We would be most grateful for a response from the European Baptist Federation in time for our next meeting, 27-29 November 1995.

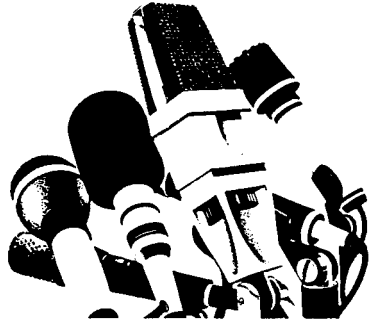
This Statement was first compiled by several European Baptist representatives including the British Representative Rob Warner in November 1994. The Mainstream Executive meeting at High Leigh, Hoddesdon in January 1995 gave it full and warm support.

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# *Editorial*

## *Interview:*

### **Towards the C21st Church**



**Michael:** Congratulations on the two recent books Rob. So many people have said to me that '21st Century Church'\* is the book they wish they had written. How guilty do you feel driving so many of us into the sin of envy?! When and how do you make the time to write - in study weeks, or lovers of English literature as we both are, like Anthony Trollope, at special times of the day?

**Rob:** Writing has so far been squeezed in around everything else. '21st Century Church' was written during a sabbatical. 'Prepare for Revival' during the quiet weeks of Summer. My first book 'Rediscovering the Spirit' was written at a Summer vacation while I was at College. As requests to speak and write continue to increase, I am now looking at the possibility of reserving some writing weeks in my annual schedule. I also plan to buy a laptop, so that I can write on the move.

**Michael:** You write convincingly in the book of 'continuous change' all around us as the new millennium beckons and of the need for Jurassic Churches to adapt or die. It's the old question really: who is actually setting the agenda, the world or the church in this relentless process? Is all change necessarily Spirit-driven and therefore to be blessed? What about continuity as well as discontinuity?

**Rob:** The world is setting an agenda of continuous change whether we like it or not. Some business consultants speak of the intrinsic value of change, giving room for creativity to flourish. If we simply follow in the wake of the world, abandoning our own convictions, we will end up with no gospel to share. The failed experiment of liberal theology surely demonstrates that each compromise is self-defeating, unable to preserve the gospel and incapable of leading others to living faith. However without compromising our biblical convictions we need to become again a missionary people, changing and adapting to create indigenous churches in the modern world.

**Michael:** I found the book somewhat triumphalist in places Rob. No problem with that in some ways. It's sure better than the gloom and doom approach. However, we have both read enough Church History to know that these waves of Renewal come in phases and that the Body of Christ is bigger than charismatic-evangelicalism. In your view is this a 'last times' wave or might there be other swings of the theological pendulum still to come as we enter the C21st?

**Rob:** When I consider the unmistakable signs of weakness, whether in my own life or in the Western church I could never be triumphalist. And yet I do affirm unreservedly the triumph of the cross. In our day there is a mighty resurgence of evangelicals, particularly charismatic evangelicals, and that is a matter of objective fact.

However, while I rejoice in this growth I also draw attention to the dangers of theological drift: we must not lose sight of the centrality of the cross, the authority of the Word and the power of the Spirit. As to whether these are the last days, we will only know that for sure from the other side of the second coming! However, the example of the first Christians encourages us to live in hope that we are indeed the last generation, seeking to complete the task of the Great Commission in our lifetime.

**Michael:** I'm not sure you've tackled the underlying question about whether charismatic-evangelicalism is all there really is of value in the Body of Christ. At the risk otherwise of John Humphrysism - and I'm on his side! - let's move on. You write perceptively of Team Leadership in the book and state that 'a creative leadership team supports and strengthens the authority of the team leader'. For many of us wrestling with these issues each month in Baptist Church life locally, regionally and nationally, it would be helpful to know if you think that we need to discover new models of Baptist Church government for the C21st or continue to use and reform the present ones? Please don't just quote Nigel Wright in your answer!

**Rob:** When the church in England has been losing 1,000 people per week in recent years, none of us can afford to be complacent about our inherited traditions. Loyalty to the gospel demands that we question every human tradition and institution. We need to ask two questions of church practice, at

local, regional and national levels. First, is it biblical? Second, does it really work? A ferment of creative experiment is breaking out in many local churches today and this is both necessary and welcome. Increasing numbers of Baptists in Britain are experimenting with new patterns of associating; it is too early to assess the lasting results. We also need to be more open to the fact that there are many different patterns of church government among the Baptists around the world. In the global context, evangelical convictions, evangelistic endeavour and the baptism of believers are the indelible essentials of Baptist church life.

**Michael:** I felt as you wrote of the 'tall poppy' syndrome that you were speaking from strong personal experience Rob. Have you come under attack as you 'stand out' and how can we help to support you and younger leaders like you?

**Rob:** I have been very grateful for the personal support I have received from senior leaders. Whether I can still be classified as a younger leader at the age of 39 is vigorously disputed by those in their twenties, let alone my own children! I chair the Evangelical Alliance younger leaders group which seeks to provide sustained opportunities for leadership development for those in their twenties and thirties. In the Baptist setting, I would like on behalf of Mainstream to propose three major initiatives: 30% of BU Council and Assembly delegates under the age of 40 by the year 2000; a new initiative to encourage young men and women to train for Ministry in their early twenties; and a 'fast track' programme of leadership development for those identified as having national leadership potential.

**Michael:** I believe there are some signs of more younger candidates emerging through Ministerial Recognition procedures once again Rob and with you I welcome that. The 'fast track' idea is interesting. How we can get such people onto the BU Council when recognition there often comes only by playing Association power games well is a very pertinent question. Finally, Rob, I know you cannot cram everything into a single book though goodness knows you nearly succeeded! I missed a European dimension to more of the book. I know from Steve Gaukroger, for example, that ideas for a European Spring Harvest have also been mooted. I wonder, then, if you would like to share at least a glimpse of your European vision with us all?

**Rob:** As you know I was one of the convenors in Autumn 1994 of a gathering of European charismatic Baptist Leaders in Berlin. The vision there concerns both renewal and evangelism. We want to assist one another in the advance of renewal across the continent. We will seek to rally support for charismatic Baptists in some Eastern European countries who face exclusion from their national Unions. We also want to exchange ideas and methods for evangelism and church planting, and I am exploring the possibility of a 'Church to Church, City to City' evangelistic programme, in which teams from several nations will convene on a major tourist city to do multi-lingual evangelism together.

However weak the Christian church may sometimes feel in Britain, many Europeans look upon us as spiritually strong. At a time when British politicians are encouraging isolation from Europe, we are inviting British Christians to discover a European dimension to our evangelistic responsibilities. My own prayer is not only for evangelism and church planting but for a mighty wave of revival fire to sweep through Britain, Europe and the world. I believe the stage is set for what could be the greatest revival the world has ever seen.....

Michael Bochenski & Rob Warner, April 1995

\* '21st Century Church - why radical change cannot wait' by Rob Warner is published by Hodder & Stoughton price £6.99p.

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## **Towards the 21st Century Church: Faith or Finance?**

Christian accountants are a strange breed! I feel well able to make such a sweeping generalisation having trained and qualified in the profession back in the 80's. O.K., I admit it - I'm strange! Perhaps a contributory factor to my strangeness, though, is that I left the profession in 1989 to train for the Ministry and am now an ordained probationary Minister.

Let me outline the symptoms of my problem. It's a Church Meeting. The main agenda item of the evening is speeding towards me with gathering momentum. It's arrived. Well, what is it to be? Faith or Finance? Does the building project go ahead this year, or next, or never? Is it to be a step of faith or a review of the financial position? The leaders are outlining the plans. The members are starting to drool. The Treasurer is twitching and urging caution. I reach for my parachute. I want to bail out. I jump...out of my bed and land on the cat. My wife reaches out a reassuring hand and murmurs, 'Get some sleep'. She is so understanding the week before a Church Meeting!

As we begin to ponder launching ourselves into the 21st Century I am convinced that, as Christian Leaders, the way in which we deal with the scenario I have just outlined, and others like it, is going to be very significant in determining whether or not we witness the expansion of the Christian Gospel in these islands. Unambiguous leadership is going to prove vital. I suspect that as Leaders (accounting trained or otherwise!) we have all attempted at one time or another to play either or both of our trump cards and left our people bemused and uncertain. You know the cards that I am referring to - the king of Victorious Faith and the ace of Perilous Finances. But the question I want to address is this: what leads us to decide which card to play on each occasion that presents itself to us? Do we base it on a letter from the

bank manager about the perilous state of our own personal finances at the moment? Or a 'phone call from a Korean missionary informing us of the incredible numbers of people responding to the Good News? Or perhaps even the desire to deflect criticism of our ministry in a particular area by the declaration of an exciting new initiative for growth!

In the search for some pointers as to how as Christian Leaders we ought to respond, I turned to my good friend Nehemiah. In the first few chapters of his writings, I suggest that Nehemiah works to a model that we will do well to learn from:

- (i) **Receive news and understand the times.** It all begins with Nehemiah receiving news: '...those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire'. (Neh. 1:3). In our Ministries we are constantly sifting through news and interpreting situations within our churches and communities, often subconsciously. This particular piece of information that Nehemiah picked up touched him personally. These were his people and somebody needed to respond to the situation outlined to him. If as Leaders we are not prepared to allow our own emotions and feelings to be touched, we are not going to be in a position to motivate others should the need arise. We cannot always stand aloof!
- (ii) **Commit to prayer.** Immediately, Nehemiah prays... and prays... and prays again. No sign here of seeking rubber stamped approval from the Lord for a plan already formulating in his mind. Rather, a picture of a man opening himself up before the Lord - weeping, mourning and confessing past failings of the people. Nehemiah is, as it were, making himself available to the Lord. He sees the need for himself to be in right relationship before the Lord in order that his prayer might be heard.
- (iii) **Seek the Lord.** As he prays, clearly a growing burden is laid upon Nehemiah to respond to the original message. By the end of this extended period of prayer, a plan has been outlined to him which he later declares: '...my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem'. (2:12). He is then in a position to start to involve others. For Nehemiah it begins with speaking to the boss for time off! He also realises that there are contacts that he has who can be brought in at an early stage - bodyguards and a timber merchant! As a cupbearer he had the King's ear. We are Leaders - and have our people's ears.
- (iv) **Work at the Vision.** Clearly, this is make or break time. If the Lord has provided a vision we are charged to bring it to the people of God. Nehemiah did just that but not before fully understanding the extent of the project before him. We read in 2:11-16 of how he went to check out the ruined wall on horseback. To be credible he had to know what he was talking about. Should it be any different for us?

- (v) **Outline the plan.** In chapter 2 and verse 17 Nehemiah reports: 'You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace. I also told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me and what the king had said to me'. Our people need to be informed and kept fully up to date at this planning stage. Lack of information, I suggest, has too often been the cause of rejected plans by a Church Meeting when the Lord actually wanted the project to go ahead! We need to remember that whilst the Deacons might have discussed the project at length - the Members probably have not! They will have questions and seek clarification.
- (vi) **Rebuild the walls.** Convinced in their hearts that the Lord was behind all that Nehemiah had outlined to them, we read in 2:18 that the people declared: 'Let us start rebuilding'. So they began this good work.

### Conclusion

I offer this interpretation of 'Nehemiah's model' because I believe that it tackles head-on the question I set out with, namely 'Faith or Finance?' Did you notice that in the sixfold points of the model above no mention is made of money at all! Now clearly there would have been financial implications arising out of the work that Nehemiah engaged the people in. He wasn't blind to these. For a start, he had personally had to seek time off from his rather risky job of tasting the king's drinks! Quite clearly, too, in chapter 5 Nehemiah displays a real concern for, and champions the plight of, the poor when they cry out: 'We and our sons and daughters are numerous; in order for us to eat and stay alive we must get grain'. Others were saying 'We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards and our homes to get grain during the famine'. Still others were saying 'We have had to borrow money to pay the king's tax on our fields and vineyards...' (5:2-4). Nehemiah takes on the nobles and officials, calls a large meeting and demands action. And he gets it! Establishing the fact that Nehemiah was a 'financially aware' man of God is important.

It's important for us too - for Christian Leaders today are often accused of failing in this regard and refusing to take seriously good financial control and practise. My point however is this - I do not believe that we should see our church's current financial position as being the acid test for determining whether or not to embark on a new project. If we sense a God-given vision has been set before us then a response of complete faith must always be the way forward. No compromise, no fudging the matter, no blurring round the edges. Faith first! So why do we opt for the 'state of our finances' as the acid test for determining the Lord's will? Well clearly money is tangible. Even an overdraft produces a piece of paper. And as Christian Leaders we like facts. We are by and large conservative in our nature - certainly when we are together in Deacons' and Elders' Meetings! We are aware of the responsibility laid upon us to be 'Guardians of the Faith' We are also people who like to be able to

measure things : growth, faith, conversions, the temperature of the baptistery and so on. So if we can manage to convince ourselves that the Lord is going to speak to us predominantly via the offerings we will do all in our power to listen to the flutter of notes and clatter of coins. We can chart the results. We can draw pie diagrams and graphs and even burn out the bulb during extended overhead projector presentations!

The Lord clearly touched Nehemiah in a way that sparked him into action. A clear vision was placed before him so that he had no option but to see it through. He had to leave the cosy surrounds of the king's palace and bring to fruition that which had been laid upon his heart to do out on the fringes of Jerusalem. I'm sure that looking back over his life Nehemiah would not have had it any other way. At the end of the day Faith can produce Finances, but Finances cannot produce Faith.

Jeremy Brown, Minister Hadleigh Baptist Church, Essex.

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# CONFERENCE REPORT '95

## Well, how did it go?

The 16th/18th January Mainstream Conference proved a stimulating and helpful time for many of us. True, some people wondered why we had opted for High Leigh rather than Swanwick but once we were there the conference gelled amazingly well. In fact the presence of the Holy Spirit unifying us, creating a continuum and manifesting His attendance was very apparent.

The Mainstream Executive's desire to be open to God in structuring the conference the way we did, was in some ways attributable to recent moves of God's Spirit and our desire not to box God in. A daily time for anyone to request prayer and to give time for God to refresh and envision was, as far as I could see and sense, welcomed. No doubt for some, the manifestations of shaking gently or violently, or swooning, when overcome by God's Spirit were strange, as no doubt were the events of the first Pentecost to onlookers. Some wept quietly as God touched areas of inner pain but were later smiling with joy and release. For some there were obviously stories of new visions and revelations from God to tell when they went home. God's Spirit at work in human lives works Christ-like changes in character and new compelling love for mission and evangelism, so let's pray fruit will come from this Conference.

Word and Spirit is to be the identifying hallmark of the newly honed



Mainstream and this thread strung the sessions together. A whole variety of Christian leaders took part on the platform. The inimitable Glen Marshall and music group led us in worship that was full-bodied, and also, in the times of prayer, sensitive to the Spirit and frail humanity. He and Rob Warner should prove a productive team as new co-chairs of Mainstream. Rob's historical vignettes of outpourings of the Spirit and his exhortations to be open to the God of Scripture Who comes in mighty ways, was persuasive to many. Quoting from both Isaiah 64 and Acts 22 he challenged us that 'events and encounters with the Spirit need explanations from Scripture and history'.

Faith Forster of Ichthus spoke on Word and Spirit in the Inner Being. Focussing on the person of Jesus she named some of the pressures of public ministry that threaten to crush us; criticisms, internal personal conflicts, the innumerable needs of people, pressure from evil spirits and even pressure from our deepest friends and family relationships. She called us to believe again that prayer is the 'antidote' to pressure and 'the only way to spiritual breakthrough'.

Derek Tidball (of the BU Mission department and soon to be Principal of London Bible College) spoke with conviction of the need for authentic Evangelicalism that can communicate in a post-modernist world. As always, he got me raking through my mental dictionary of sociological terms but I was amused to hear him define the phenomena of 'karaoke Evangelicalism' as 'indulging ourselves to bits at everyone else's expense'. His challenge was that as evangelical Christian activists we must not fail to use our minds because truth matters. The God of truth has revealed himself in Jesus. This truth has been revealed in Scripture: how we interpret Scripture and how we communicate truth are just two of the issues of the day. He also illustrated that the Spirit and the Word go hand in hand (Acts 1:16). This partnership enables us to interpret the current move of the Spirit for in the words of the old saint J.C.Ryle, 'Scripture is the only judge of controversy'.

The tempo of the platform speakers switched again when Rob White, Minister at Poynton, played us a cassette of Rolf Harris singing 'Two little boys' to illustrate his talk on Relationships. (Did he know it was one of Margaret Thatcher's favourite songs?) Several people commented to me how helpful they found this talk. His humour, honesty, but also clear use of key biblical principles and texts, was refreshingly simple. For me, he highlighted the explanation of why so many Christians complain about, and feel let down in, Christian relationships. Often it is because there is a false expectation and consequent lack of fulfilment on someone's part. Many relationships are only for a time - a task in the kingdom is completed and we move on. Not all relationships are long-term ones where deeper mutual sharing of self is involved.

The variety of personalities and approach of the four key-note speakers was enriching and it was encouraging to see the different giftedness of Baptist

Ministers. The variety was also seen in conference participants with pastors, evangelists, elders, deacons and other leaders of all shapes and sizes being present. It was particularly heartening to have Steven Adams from Northern Ireland back with us, sharing a little about the situation, and asking for prayer for ECONI: the Evangelical Contribution on Northern Ireland.

There is a good precedent for leaving the best wine until last and, for me, I must admit the highlights of the conference were Michael Quicke's two Bible Readings on the theme of Word and Spirit. It is well worth sending for the cassettes (\*). The first was a trip to the 'Valley of Death' recorded in Ezekiel 37 via a Pulitzer Prize photograph taken by Kevin Carter. The picture shows an infant girl squatting close to a food camp in the Sudan, but too tired to advance. A fat vulture sits and waits for her to die. The photo made the horror and miracle of Ezekiel 37 live again for me. The spiritual challenge of this contemporary world's wastelands is as real as the dry bones that faced Ezekiel. The need for the breath of God is as desperate, the faith required to 'preach to the ruach and trust in what we cannot see' as daunting.

The second Bible reading entitled 'In a Locked Room' and based on John 20:19-23 was no less challenging, even though the introductory humour of the transport cafe frequented by lorry drivers and bikers was an easier introduction to cope with. In this biblical account in John 20 we are brought face to face with frightened leaders, fearful of confrontation. Michael, with the help of the Spirit, caused us to see seven steps in the disciples' encounter with Jesus. Jesus spoke to the disciples of shalom-peace and He took time to reveal His wounds. The disciples experienced joy and the peace of Jesus. As Jesus told them to go into the world He also breathed deeply the Holy Spirit on them and spoke of the power of forgiving others. At the end of this encounter the disciples were better equipped to go into the world as instructed by Jesus.

Hopefully, this was also true of participants at High Leigh. The time given at the Conference to try to discover and foster ongoing networks of supportive relationships will, we hope, spawn more regional events which are a real encouragement to leaders. Geographical spread does not always make this easy but there seemed to be a genuine desire on the part of many to meet more regularly to share in Word and Spirit.

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Jane Thorington-Hassell, Minister Victoria Park Baptist Church, Bow, London.

(\*) Editor's Note. Available from : Sherbourne Sounds, 48 Gordon Road, West Bridgford, Nottingham NG2 5LS See order form ON NEXT PAGE

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# *A Conference Testimony.*

I didn't stand up to bear witness to God's blessing at this year's conference but I am writing to share my experience.

The last time I went to High Leigh was ten years ago with another group of Christian Leaders. I enjoyed the sense of God's presence then as I did this year and the rich ministry of God's Word. The first time I couldn't help but observe the open faced enthusiasm with which they greeted one another and I found my heart and spirit stirred by their praying and sense of vision. I envied the encouragement and challenge that these regular days of prayer and fasting gave to those involved in the pressures of local leadership.

Stirred deeply by what I was seeing I walked up to the bridge over the by-pass that night a decade or so ago. I longed for such vibrant fellowship with other Leaders in Word and Spirit, yet from the vantage of my own autonomous local church could see none. What was God saying? What should I do?

As I pondered and prayed I looked up and saw a wire crossing overhead. It came from the house next to the bridge. I traced the wire to a post marked with a warning sign. From that post I could see the power supply striding post by post across the field into the distance and out of sight, but not before its path was intersected by a line of massive pylons. The picture was clear, a mighty source of distant power had its network of distribution across the land reaching to every dwelling. I returned home and made two choices. First, I would not pursue links with the group whose fellowship I had so enjoyed and secondly, I would use what opportunities came my way to work for more real and purposeful fellowship amongst Baptist Ministers and churches in my area.

Thus I came to High Leigh this year to find out what was happening to the vision of a Word and Spirit network and to revisit the spot up the road which had so impressed my mind. The opportunity came during the free time on Tuesday afternoon. I walked alone to the place where the single wire from the house crossed the lane and joined the line of electric posts. It was all the same, although this time not in the silhouette of night. There, too, was the distant line of pylons, but there was something else there, something I hadn't experienced before - something Michael Quicke's Bible study on Ezekiel 37 had fixed in my mind - the wind - the wind! I love windy days and I delighted in the tug of the gale at my coat, 'Prophecy to the breath', Ezekiel had been told and say 'Come from the four winds O breath and breathe...'. I prayed 'Lord, send your wind'. Next I turned and crossed the bridge over the dual carriageway. Uninterrupted, the wind swept over the parapet, whistling past

my ears - 'Come from the four winds O breath and breathe'. Exhilarated by the wind I paused to reflect in the shelter of the trees on the far side. On the way back the wind blew again - 'More, Lord, more' I chuckled - and to my surprise the wind strengthened until the drops of light rain came with such force they stung my face!

So, I've returned home, still convinced in the value of networks to share God's supply with individuals, but free to realise that our man-made systems are but a part of God's mighty power supply for this world. I'm still going to encourage real fellowship and purpose between Leaders and churches but I'm more at ease with other manifestations of God's power flowing. Above all, I pray 'Come O breath and breathe'... So I was, along with many others, one who didn't stand but sure was encouraged!

Bill McIlroy, Minister Trafalgar Road Baptist Church, Horsham, West Sussex.

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# *Snapshot of a Leaders' Group*



## 1. Origins

Ours is a cord of three strands: During the 1980's each District of the Lancashire and Cheshire Association was divided into Mission Units, clusters of approximately ten churches who were encouraged to do mission together. At the heart of each Mission Unit was a Ministers' Fraternal. Each member of the Stockport Fraternal at that time identified themselves with a 'Mainstream' stance, somewhat at variance to the more 'Liberal' stance common to much of the remainder of the Manchester District. This Fraternal, meeting every couple of months for coffee and discussion, is the first strand. Ten miles to the West, at Lymm, Altrincham and Warrington three young leaders, all new to Baptist ministry, were encouraged by their Senior Friend to meet together for mutual support and encouragement. This formed the second strand. Finally, there was myself who, while giving token support to the Stockport Mission Unit Fraternal, was primarily involved with what was known as the Covenant Group.

The Covenant Group came to life during the late 1970's by the bonding together of four Baptist Ministers in churches North of Manchester. The catalyst for their commitment was the death of the wife of one of them, an experience which highlighted their personal need for a deeper, more sustained level of mutual support than was available through the traditional structures. They would spend a whole day together each month, travelling up to a hundred miles to meet. The supportive relationship grew to encompass much

honest speaking into one another's ministries. All four were also involved with the Dales Bible Weeks and saw the need to encourage Charismatic Renewal in the Baptist Churches of the North West. Monthly Celebration Services took place in Sale and Heywood; there was a Conference for Probationary Ministers and a week long Heywood Bible School. Following the pattern seen in the Harvestime House Churches 'apostolic' oversight was explored for a while with a more experienced BU leader. Over a period of five to ten years the Group grew to include some dozen ministers spread from South Cheshire to Cumbria, from Lytham, St. Annes to Skipton.

In early 1987 the Covenant Group had begun to dissipate as the founder members were led elsewhere. I felt the time was right to co-ordinate a group based on the South side of Manchester using the Covenant Group model. Personally, I needed more than the minimal contact provided by the Mission Unit Fraternal. A series of invitations went out and the South Manchester Group came into being with a mailing list of about ten names. The Mission Unit Fraternal disbanded.

It would be fair to say the first five years of the group's life were mixed. Some members shared the principle of spending a substantial amount of good quality time together, others could only give an hour or two. Some felt more able than others to cope, as deeply felt hurts were revealed. When it really came down to it some were prepared to give only token assent to the principles of Renewal. Finally, it was clear that the Leaders of the larger churches in the area had very full internal agendas and were therefore unable to regularly attend. The result was a steady growth in relationships amongst the Leaders of the smaller churches but a lack of dynamic intent within the Group. Attendances varied from three to a dozen.

The past three years have seen a change, more evolutionary than revolutionary. A key factor has been the increase in involvement from the leadership teams at Poynton, Altrincham, Hazel Grove and Sale. The District Secretary also attends, as do members of the Old Baptist Association. Our mailing list is now more than twenty, with attendances averaging ten to twelve.

## **2. Shape**

We meet every six weeks, from 10.30am to 2pm, moving around the area for venues. Our agreed first priority is to give time for anyone to offload personal, family and church pressures. We listen, advise if invited to, and pray into the situation. Rarely do we go round the group for general news; we deal with fewer situations in greater depth. Our second focus is on a specific topic with one of us detailed to launch the discussion. Occasionally, the topic is overtaken by some item of current interest. The intention is to blend structure with flexibility.

## **3. Relationships with official BU structures**

With its origins in personal invitations to like-minded ministers, the group has necessarily been an alternative to other geographically based Fraternals.

Within South Manchester there are, therefore, two groups, whose members choose themselves on theological lines. There is no evidence of tension between them, more a case of parallel development, with both being numerically viable. Tension does, however, exist within attitudes to District and Association committees and working groups. Much frustration has built up over the years, particularly around understandings of mission and charismatic renewal. Some of us feel we have tried to work within the system and become bogged down, others have deliberately stayed outside. At our worst we can become a moan shop, massaging one another's frustrations.

#### **4. Developments**

Having created social relationships of growing depth, we are beginning to respond to Rob White's call to instrumental relationship which moves us on to a chosen goal. With the Northern College and the Association we are exploring a church planting project. In terms of the 'Word and Spirit' Network some of us now see that our group should link in to the larger unit based on Skipton. We note that there are part-time Ministers and Students in the area who would value becoming part of our life.....and some of us note that we are already at the optimum size for an efficient cell group!

Brian Radcliffe, Minister St. George's Road Baptist Church, Macclesfield.

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## **Regional Round-Up**

**AIM:** To develop a Celebration - Congregation - Cell model across Mainstream with a national Conference, Regional Gatherings and a network of appropriate cluster groups which may or may not be directly affiliated to Mainstream but which share similar 'Word and Spirit' concerns and vision.

### **North Region:**

The Northern Leaders' Meeting has another attractive programme for 1995. It meets every two months or so at Skipton Baptist Church between 10am and 3pm. 1995 Speakers include Alan Kreider (9/3), Rob Warner (27/4 evening), David Coffey (15/6), Elaine Storkey (21/9) and Rob White (16/11).  
Contact: Phillip Igo 01924 - 280776.

South Manchester/North Cheshire : For details see the article elsewhere in this magazine. Contact : Brian Radcliffe 01626 - 618034.

### **Midlands Region:**

A Regional Leaders' Gathering is being planned for July, perhaps with Steve Gaukroger (to be confirmed - the date that is not Steve. After Nick Mercer's announcement I thought it as well to make this clear! Ed). Venue : Sutton Coldfield Baptist Church: Contact: Derek Wick 01121 -378 -3020. **STOP PRESS:** Now confirmed for Friday 7th July, 11.00am - 3.30pm.

East Midlands: 'Heart to Heart' meets every six weeks or so from 10am - 3pm. A time of ministering, worship and sharing. Quarterly evening meetings for elders and others are also held. Venue Daybrook Baptist Church, Nottingham. Includes 'new church' leaders. Contact: John Brewster 01777 - 705690.

### **London and South East Region:**

No Regional Meeting planned as yet. However, The 'Times of Refreshing' days at Queens Road, Wimbledon Baptist Church guided by Norman Moss and Rob Warner have been well attended by Christian Leaders. There is also a weekly Leaders' Prayer Meeting held there on a Tuesday morning, 9.30am - mid-day, attended by some 60-70 leaders. Contact: Norman Moss 081 946 2634.

Guildford: Peter Nodding and Peter Jackson are drawing together a number of Baptist and 'new church' leaders for sharing and prayer and ministry. Contact: Peter Nodding 01483 - 575008.

Sussex: Leaders' Together is the name given to a meeting for those in church leadership held regularly at Ashburnham Place, Sussex from 10am - 2pm on the first Thursday of every month. Further details from Mark Burlinson 01424 - 892244.

### **South West Region:**

No Regional Gathering planned as yet but Ian Coffey and David Slater and Nigel Coles are hoping to develop something.

Bristol : Nigel Coles 0117 - 989 2308 draws together a group of 15 or so Leaders monthly for prayer, worship, sharing and ministry. 12.30 - 3.30pm.

### **Central Region:**

Lynn Green is drawing together a group of Leaders for a Regional events. Contact : 01734 - 786912. Andy Baker (01725 - 510215) writes of a recent Event: 'Over 30 people were present from a large area for a day of lively worship, inspired teaching and creative ministry. Andrew Kane led the morning session on the theme 'Taking your shoes off' Frank Cooke led an afternoon session based on Ezekiel. Worship was led by Ian McFarlane and the music group of Bookham Baptist Church. We picnicked in the Spring sunshine and enjoyed countless jam-filled doughnuts. We are repeating the event, with different speakers, on October 19th. Venue Basingstoke Baptist Church 10.30- 4pm.'

The Executive would be pleased to hear from other cluster groups who would like details of their grouping publicised in future issues of the Magazine. Please contact the Editor directly with details and copy if so.



## News from the Executive.

The Executive met recently - as is traditional - at Gorsley in Herefordshire. Here is a Church Community, gifted in hospitality, that remains a living tribute to the ministry of an earlier Mainstream pioneer, Pat Goodland. Among the decisions we reached were:

- \* To appoint two co-chairs: Glen Marshall for the North and Rob Warner for the South, thus modelling, we hope, a new leadership framework for the future.
- \* To appoint Lynn Green as our new Secretary in succession to David Slater, whose long service to us all was warmly appreciated. Also to try and increase the number of women serving in leadership among us.
- \* To return to Swanwick for the 1996 and future Conferences. See the flier included with this magazine for details. Nicky Gumbel is among our 1996 speakers with Su Rinald: leading worship. Book now and don't renege!
- \* To continue to develop the emerging 'Word and Spirit Network' by incorporating this into a new logo; by publicising Regional gatherings and groupings wherever appropriate; by modelling some new patterns of Baptist associating, alongside the traditional ones; and by inclusively building bridges where possible in our Union and with 'newer' churches as well as with historic ones through eg. GEAR (URC) and HEADWAY (Methodist).
- \* To restructure the Executive with a dozen or so of us meeting at least quarterly for prayer, sharing and strategy planning and by building once again a Council of Reference, as from January 1996, to meet twice a year, one of which would be at the Annual Conference meeting.
- \* To develop a Celebration - Congregation - Cell model across Mainstream with a national Conference, Regional Gatherings and a network of word and spirit cluster groups which may or may not be directly affiliated to Mainstream itself.
- \* To accept an invitation to speak on Mainstream at the South Wales Baptist College this Autumn. Yes, that is a hint to the others! We were encouraged as an Executive to hear that the distinguished historian, David Bebbington, judges Mainstream to be an example of an organisation that has had significant impact historically on contemporary Evangelicalism. We knew that already, but did you?
- \* To convene a 24 hour Consultation on Human Sexuality at Gorsley in the Autumn of 1995.

Not bad for 24 hours eh?! Prayers and practical support for implementing these decisions are, as always, greatly valued.

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Michael Bochenski, April 1995

The **Mainstream** Executive are:

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