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Growing Churches: What are the options?

Growing Churches: What are the options?

Contents:

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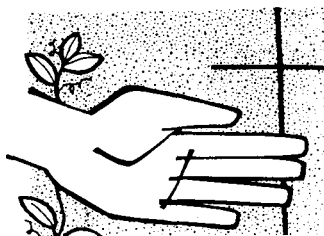
November 1999

Introduction	Chris Scupham	3
Threshold of the Future – Book Review	Ian Nicholson	4
How to Evangelise a Happy Moral Pagan?	Clive Sims	6
God Loves the Poor – Church Loves the Poor?	Christine Leonard	11
Church Planting as an Option for Growth	John Bridger	16
So, What in Heaven's Name is Christertainment?	Roger Standing	23
Revival: a Possibility?	Ian McFarlane	27

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Peace
be with
you.

Introduction

Welcome to the latest publication of the Mainstream magazine. I have been asked to be the guest editor for this particular issue focusing on *Growing Churches: What are the options?*



We live in a climate of indifference to the gospel where the population in the UK perceives the Church as largely irrelevant. Mike Riddell states that 55,000 people a week are leaving the church across Europe and the USA. A common theme in recent Mainstream magazines has been that there is much “hard ground” and the seed of the gospel does not easily take root. However, I am thrilled to see and hear of signs of life and growth and I am grateful to each of the contributors who have submitted their vision so that we might benefit from their experience.

The Contributors

Book reviews are normally kept to the end of magazines but I have deliberately placed Ian Nicholson’s review of Mike Riddell’s challenging book at the beginning for he sets the scene that unless the Church encounters a paradigm shift in communicating and demonstrating the gospel we will be ineffective.

Ian Nicholson is part of the leadership team at Guildford Community Church affiliated to Pioneer People. He oversees “Network” which draws together some 25 youth-workers from various churches across the town.

*Clive Sims is not a Christian. He is a partner in his own Market Research Company. Whilst the gospel is not a product to sell I am delighted he has contributed to this magazine because he highlights from a non-christian perspective how *the happy moral pagan* may begin to listen to what we have to say. I commend this thought-provoking article to you.*

*The Gospel is good news for the poor – but how many churches have really imbibed the truth of this statement? A New Frontiers’ Church in Bedford birthed a church committed to the homeless. I recently attended an open-day at the church known as the *King’s Arms* which truly is an amazing demonstration of love and compassion to some of the most difficult people to reach with the gospel. As someone once said “*We need to walk the talk*” – this church is clearly doing it. *Philippa Stroud and Christine Leonard published their work entitled “God’s Heart for the Poor”.**

During the late 1980s and the *Dawn 2000* movement Church planting became a possible option for growth. *John Bridger* began as an Associate minister at Redhill Baptist Church and then under his leadership planted a church into an area of Reigate. He has been at the heart of this new church and experienced significant growth.

Roger Standing has seen his church begin to embrace the *seeker-sensitive* approach. Roger writes humorously but there is a wealth of wisdom and honesty here. I would like to hear from Roger again in 12 months time as to how this approach is progressing.

Finally, *Ian McFarlane* has a tremendous heart to see revival come to our nation. His vision has led him to implement a prayer movement called *Mustard Seed* which has seen a number of other church leaders from a variety of streams joining in heartfelt unity interceding for the power of God to be in our midst.

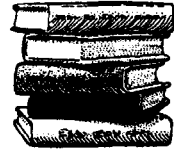
A clear challenge and warning is that **employing strategies alone will not produce the desired harvest but only vision birthed and bathed in prayer.** This a common principle running through these articles.

Chris Scupham – Guest Editor

Book Review:

Threshold Of The Future

By Michael Riddell (SPCK1998) £12.99



Mike Riddell, a New Zealander, is well known in the UK for his regular writings in *Third Way* magazine, conference speaking and writing a number of popular books during the nineties. For those who carry a burden for mission and yet are painfully aware how wide the gap between the church and those beyond its walls has become ‘Threshold For The Future’ is a must. It focuses thinking and stimulates creativity – giving permission to think in fresh ways as we approach the new millennium.

Riddell’s foundational thesis is that the church in the West in its current form is a terminally sick patient and yet largely in denial fighting to repress the signs of its own demise. While the reshuffling of allegiances among Christians helps to promote the illusion that at least some sections of the church are growing the statistical reality shouts otherwise. Far from wanting to plunge us into despair however Riddell is calling the community of Christ back to its radical roots and essential character as a missionary body.

A key issue, Riddell argues, is that we are now living in the first post Christian culture, which has known Christianity and largely rejected it as an option – to most people there is now a sense that Christianity lies in the cultural past, facing not opposition or incomprehension, but massive indifference. While the church stands in need of comprehensive reformation there is the danger that, like any threatened community, it will look to withdraw and regrow focusing on preservation and mission.

The foundational biblical motif that Riddell draws on to help us face the future is Acts 10 where the Spirit is poured out on the Gentiles. He shows how Peter’s understanding of what mission to those beyond the church might mean needed to be dramatically and radically reshaped to move forward. Similarly it is possible that our current situation is a God given *kairos* moment.

Like Peter we will need to think outside of our theological and ecclesiological boxes, which in turn will call for a radical dependence on God.

The first six chapters look in detail at some of the issues that we will have to consider. The church is seen by many to be tired and reactionary and has largely assimilated

western middle class values of consumerism, individualism, careerism and security. When the church becomes another leisure time pursuit for the comfortable it does not do well in the face of opposition. We need to rediscover passion but passionate people are often considered dangerous in a setting where moderation and preservation are key values. A passion transplant brings a cost with it and we must courageously make room to critique and create.

Riddell is particularly challenging in his chapter on the practical way the Bible is appropriated by many Christians. Our fear of God and the demands involvement with Him might make mean that there is commonly a search for a more comfortable intermediary. Scripture is foundational but can also become a means of objectifying God and distancing ourselves from the threat of divine intimacy; once scripture ceases to point beyond itself it has become an object of idolatry. For the church to face the future with hope we must abandon ourselves wholeheartedly to the passionate love affair between God and humanity which Scripture bears witness to.

The third key challenge is to an incarnational approach to holiness rather than a separatist one where the world is a constant threat. When the world is regarded as an enemy it is then not surprising that mission falters. In contrast Jesus was friends with the ritually unclean and his own reputation suffered. He modelled holiness as a separation to rather than a separation from – a holiness expressed with passion for God and the world; a holiness which is portable, accessible and inviolable. The church needs to rediscover in our time what it means to be friends with tax gatherers and sinners; however a change in orientation will not happen without the same type of psychological and theological tension, which anguished Peter; the only alternative to painful change though may be a comfortable death.

The second half of the book looks more specifically at the changes that post modernity is ushering in and what this might mean for the church and mission. Urbanization is increasing mobility and many distinct subcultures are emerging which in turn leads to pluralism where differing beliefs, cultures and lifestyles exist in close proximity, and relativism where each set of beliefs is considered equally valid. Amongst younger people there is a despair with little hope that things will get better. This in turn can lead to a hunger for immediacy and authenticity and a search for experience and community. Part of this search is certainly expressed in a desire for spirituality. The challenge as Christians is to be part of the new land and learn to tell the Jesus story to its inhabitants.

There will be changes to face in the way we view the world, crossing boundaries to engage with those who are different and, perhaps, threatening. We will need to reassess spirituality and community and look to give the church a human face to which the hurting and damaged can relate.

The final chapter, Models to hope on, was the most disappointing of the book. This may be unfair but the overall impression was of a network of initiatives which seem to be defined negatively by what they are not. Whilst these alternative experiments are each laudable and valid, and may well be necessary to help us through, the future surely belongs to those who know who they are and what they are called to rather than

what they don't want to be! To be fair though, Riddell is well aware of the danger of cynical withdrawal and is searching for a positive response.

That small criticism apart, this book is powerful, pertinent, quotable and a rewarding read; its message needs to be heard, grappled with, prayed through and acted upon if we are to be positioned to carry the torch of the gospel forward. To close with Riddell himself

'We are not speaking of some esoteric, epistemological debate which is awaiting Christian approval to proceed, but the shape of the emerging context in which Christian mission must take place. We can neither ignore nor dismiss this context ... its is rapidly becoming the locus of our faith.'

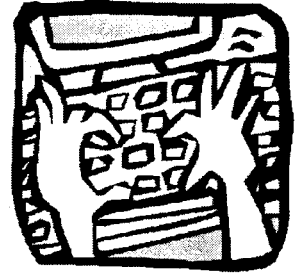
'We stand on the threshold of the future, looking across the border. Spies have been sent out ... perhaps this is a territory of danger and tyranny; perhaps it is the promised land. Only those with the courage to enter it will know.'

Ian Nicholson

14th October 1999

How to Evangelise a Happy Moral Pagan?

**(Some thoughts from an
unchurched, number crunching,
marketer)**



My wife is a committed, active Christian. She looks after administrative matters, and much else besides it seems to me, for her congregation. This means that I see, in all its busy, demanding, and sometimes frustrating detail, what goes on in making a Christian congregation function. It seems to me that the operational problems in running a Christian congregation, and some of those encountered in a large commercial environment, are very similar. It is hardly surprising since both are involved in trying to organise the efforts of many people to achieve agreed objectives, at least in the best of both of them. Given this situation, it is perhaps not surprising that when we talk about congregational matters, I address the questions or problems as if they were in a commercial context - we are all prisoners of our experiential mind-sets.

The title of this article, how to evangelise a happy moral pagan, illustrates a particular example of this 'cross cultural' process. My reaction on hearing the question was that it is similar to many commercial marketing strategies. Firstly it is a short, catchy description of an objective. Secondly, without more detailed examination of the implications, it would lead to a lot of discussion and little action. The question as stated is too vague and the characteristics of the target group too general, to lead to any clear conclusions. As might be expected, my observations were greeted with "well what would you do then?" Hence this article.

I have approached the problem as if I was devising a marketing campaign. This leads me to use words like ‘product’, ‘service’ ‘users’, ‘advertising’ etc. I would suggest that, whilst these terms are not usually associated with Christianity, they are not inappropriate. It is not my intention to shock or offend, but to approach the question in a way that is not biased by preconceptions of the subject and the language habitually used.

The Objective - To Evangelise

I appreciate that evangelism is a complex, multifaceted, process embracing information, persuasion, and eventually conversion. For the purposes of this article I will define it as being similar to advertising. Its purpose is therefore to bring to the attention of the target group persuasive aspects of Christianity that will lead to conversion i.e. ‘non-users’ will become ‘users’.

What to do?

This is *the* important question. What should be done, what actions should be taken, in order to achieve the objective? Given my assertion that the process of evangelism is akin to advertising, there are three basic questions:-

- What to advertise? (What are the persuasive elements for this group?)
- How to advertise? (Articles, posters, conversation, the internet, etc.)
- How should content and tactics be fine-tuned for the target group in question?

The Target Group

I begin by considering the last question, what characteristics of Happy Moral Pagans are important when deciding what action to take. The only reason to define a target group is that there is some element common to members of that group. This will help determine what is said to them and how it is said. A well-specified target group means that the same message, delivered in the same way, will be effective amongst that entire group. The first issue therefore is to consider the actionable characteristics of ‘Happy Moral Pagans’.

Pagan

Pagan would seem to embrace all those that are not Christian, i.e. ‘non-users’. Describing the universal target for evangelism is not much help in refining thoughts on message or method unless you conclude that the same message given in the same way will be equally effective amongst all pagans. I would suggest that there are at least two major sub-groups that have very different implications for method and content: -

- Those with a different religious belief
- Those with no particular religious belief

Each of these groups could contain ‘lapsed users’, those who were once, or at least brought up to be, Christians. There are undoubtedly other important sub-divisions depending on the nature of alternate beliefs. The communication issues involved in talking to a Muslim are probably very different to those encountered with a committed ‘New Ager’. The first refinement of any action plan would be to consider what sub-group of happy moral pagans you wish to address. Within the context of the question, pagan is too general an adjective.

Moral

This is a difficult characteristic of the target group to use when considering the main question of how to. Firstly an agreement on what moral means has eluded philosophers over the ages, so how to distinguish between a moral and an amoral person? One can assume a working definition of morality, for example it might be someone who obeys the laws of the land through a sense of rightness rather than fear of punishment, 'does good', is decent, fair, and honest. I do not think that this characteristic helps to answer the basic question of how to evangelise.

Whilst not being of immediate help in deciding how to evangelise, this characteristic might be of importance when considering what message to use, the persuasive factors. For example, if moral and amoral described a division between those whose value system is firmly rooted in the material world and those who are interested in 'non-worldly' questions, it could indicate a style of approach. Similarly, if being moral indicated a degree of concern for others they might be interested in something they perceived as benefiting others.

Happy

The nub of the problem, this is the important element of the target group definition, although it can stand some exploration. The word is often used to describe of a seemingly discreet state, happy or not happy. This is unhelpful. It must be considered as a continuum ranging somewhere between the suicidal and the euphoric. Without resorting to extremes we have to find a practical definition of happy in order to address the question of how to evangelise to them.

If most people, even 'happy' ones, were asked if there were some things in their lives could be changed for the better the answer would be yes, everybody would change or add something. In order to address the question, a more useable definition of those who are happy might be that they do not devote much time or energy thinking about, or trying to achieve, changes to their current lives. In contrast, matters of food and money are very important to the hungry and the poor and occupy much of their consciousness. Those who are well fed and have enough of most things might like more, but it is not the dominant, or even important, factor in their lives.

Target group implications

There are obviously different sub-groups within the target market. This will have a significant impact on the style and detail of the message conveyed, not only what kind of pagan they are, but also factors like education, occupation, family circumstances, etc. These differences should affect the order and style in which arguments are presented. Consideration of these differences should also help prepare for questions that will be asked and problems that will be encountered. The most important operational common denominator however is that they are all happy.

What does being happy imply in terms of action. The target group consists of people who, in their own perception, have no wants or needs that are important enough to warrant much of their time or energy. The problem posed by the question is how to arouse the interest of happy people in something different.

This problem could be addressed in a number of ways:-

- Convince them that they are not really happy. (Conversion)
- Make them aware of something that they did not know existed. (New product)
- Frighten them, make them unhappy. (The stick)
- Offer a reward, they could be even happier. (The carrot)

If something in any of these general areas could be communicated effectively the objective would be met. However, it seems to me that to convey the necessary information would take a considerable time. The initial hurdle is to convince these people, who by definition are happy and therefore do not currently devote much time or energy to changing their lives, to devote sufficient time and energy to be convinced. I would suggest that this could only be a process of progressive, non-contentious, involvement. A 'road to Damascus' experience is comparatively rare and possibly difficult to organise. This means we have to break the 'how to' question into two parts:-

- How to hook them (Interest/trial)
- How to reel them in (Repeat usage)

How to achieve the second of these cannot be generalised within the terms of the question. It will vary depending on the characteristics of the sub-groups and the way the initial 'hook' was set. Similarly it is difficult to generalise the detail of the first objective but I would suggest that, given these are all 'happy' people, there are a number of necessary elements that would be common across all sub-groups in order to achieve the objective:-

- Pique the curiosity
- Low personal cost /effort
- Low personal risk

The first two of these refer to internal, personal values. I suggest that it would be difficult, given a very limited communication facility in this first stage, to do more than get across the message that this might be interesting. The low cost/effort is necessary because the target group, by definition, is not interested in spending much time or effort in changing what they currently do. It is not necessarily a question of 'don't agree' it is more a question of 'why should I be bothered'.

The low risk element involves both internal and external value systems and addresses the main area of possible, active resistance. These people, by definition, like things as they are. This new thing might make things worse either socially or personally. Whatever is offered should be non-threatening.

Wants and Needs

The preliminary examination of target group characteristics has provided important guides to the initial style of communication. It should be interesting but not costly or threatening. We can use the same process to consider the question of what to communicate.

Key Assumption

It is my contention that a 'non-user' only becomes a 'user' if they have a personal reason to do so. This reason requires the perception of a potential, personal, benefit.

Selecting a benefit

Most products or services actually provide many benefits, both functional and emotional. Cars, for example, cater for needs of comfort, security, and status as well as more practical considerations of transport. Different groups of people have different priorities, economy versus performance, price versus image, style versus practicality. It is also common that the reasons for continued 'use' are different from, or at least more varied than, the reason for initial interest and trial. A car might have been bought because of perceptions of style and performance but continued use might elevate values concerning practicality and safety.

The experience of use alters the value system of an individual with respect to a product or service. The reasons for product choice given by the experienced are always different to those of the novice. The first question then is what would engage the interest of the 'happy' novice. I would expect the benefits of Christianity described by 'mature' Christians to be different from the prospects that interested them in the first place.

Concentrating on the first step inherent in the question, achieving initial interest, and recognising that need for low energy/low risk inherent in this target group, I would suggest that success would most likely be achieved by promoting something perceived as interesting rather than potentially momentous. By definition, happy people will have little initial interest in something described as personally life changing.

To summarise, the word 'moral' seems to have little impact on possible courses of action unless the amoral can be convinced that they are unhappy because of their amorality. In this case they have been removed from the target group, they are no longer happy. Pagan is redundant because it is too general, all targets of evangelism could be described as pagan. 'Happy' is the important adjective because it conditions both what is said and how it is said, certainly in the critical first stages of generating interest.

Taking the characteristics of happy people and rules of communication in general, certain criteria are suggested for an effective initial contact. It should be brief enough to serve as an initial hook, impactful enough to gain attention and interest, and low key enough not to threaten. This seems to me to be difficult to construct as a straight 'advertising' message. The alternative might be to take an even softer approach and offer involvement in something that the happy and moral would consider worthwhile. Hopefully this would provide the opportunity for more extensive communication, the hook should be potential interest. It might be intellectual, a discussion on Third World debt, a presentation on the work of Tear Fund, direct trade organisations, or some kind of local community action group. My conclusion would be that, initially at least, be known and recruit by your works.

Clive Sims

Status	50 something, married, 3 sons.
Education	normal + degree in maths.
Work	Marketing, market research, market analysis for a number of big, consumer goods companies. Currently, consultant market analyst.
Other	I play the 5-string banjo left-handed

God loves the poor – church loves the poor?

They were a newly-married couple, aged just twenty-four and back in England after working with Jackie Pullinger in Hong Kong. David Stroud wanted to plant churches where the poor were welcome and his wife Philippa wanted to work with the poor. After some roller-coaster years of triumphs and near disasters, finally Philippa's four levels of hostel for homeless people started working in a stable fashion alongside David's thriving 'King's Arms' church plant in central Bedford. Ten years later 3,000 residents have passed through the hostels and some who came off the streets are now church or worship leaders. Leaving both church and project running well, the Strouds have recently moved to the Midlands where David is involved with a large church-planting initiative for New Frontiers International, while Philippa cares for their three young children and advises one of her former staff members from the Bedford project as she starts a new residential work with the poor in Birmingham.

This article has been adapted mainly from one chapter of 'God's Heart for the Poor' by Philippa Stroud with Christine Leonard, published by Kingsway in August 1999 and used with permission. Bible quotations are from the NRSV.

Who are the poor and why care for them?

Caring for the poor is not optional, according to scripture. Jesus commanded in Luke 14:13, 'When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind!' In his story of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31-46) only those who feed the hungry, clothe the naked, care for the sick, welcome strangers and visit prisoners inherit the kingdom. Yet, look at most churches in Britain today. They're not overflowing with marginalised individuals. In fact, imagine what would happen if a homeless person turned up at a church you know. Would that person feel comfortable?

So who are the poor? In Hong Kong it was obvious, but Bedford's not especially renowned for its unemployment or homelessness. We didn't have to look very hard though, before finding disadvantaged people hanging around in its centre. Our street wasn't run-down, yet in the block of four houses which included ours, two widows lived alone. Single mothers, the elderly, the disabled and those with mental problems exist in every community, yet many of us fail to notice them. We know many whose poverty of spirit far exceeds their material poverty. Sexual abuse victims and people with eating disorders live in their own dark prisons. Addictions, rejection and sin keep men and women captive. May we see all of these with God's compassion!

Christians sometimes tell me they aren't in touch with the poor and I'll reply, 'Think of those who haunt the fringes of our churches – the lonely, the sick, the disabled, those with hidden eating disorders, those who don't feel loved, those who are going nowhere!' We didn't need a Waterloo Bridge but started with six contacts we made on one of the estates. Once your eyes are opened it's not difficult to find damaged and hurting people.

Who cares?

I wouldn't like to tell you how many times I've heard stories of Christians with compassionate hearts who try to take on needy people by themselves – and most often it ends in tears! I know from personal experience how tough it can be to take a seriously needy person into your home, where you are responsible twenty-four hours a day, for however long it takes. You invest so much that it's hard remain objective and to let go when the person abuses you – and him- (or her) self. Being able to let go is so important. Later the person may well return, more open to receive help.

Other Christians care for disadvantaged people through para-church organisations. Sometimes these develop highly specialist care, e.g. people working with spina-bifida. But though these organisations do an amazing job, even those with a Christian base are not normally linked with local churches. Para-church organisations may be able to offer effective physical care. But they may struggle when it comes to discipleship and to bringing the promises of Isaiah 61 into people's lives.

Working with the local church gives a project accountability and, with the right pastoral oversight, should ensure that project workers don't push themselves too hard – a problem which beset us in the early days when we tried to meet huge need with scarce resources.

David and I believe very strongly that caring for the poor has to be the responsibility of the local expression of the body of Christ. A strong dynamic comes into play when a local church works with the poor, because God longs for the disadvantaged to become radical disciples of Jesus. That involves being built into his body – being knitted together with those who love him. He longs for churches full of once-broken people, whom he has redeemed and restored and who go on to bring his restoration to others.

Ministry with the poor is only one part of church life, but we believe it is a non-negotiable part. When planting a church we asked ourselves, 'If Jesus were to start one here in the centre of Bedford, what would it look like?' We asked our house-group as well. It wasn't long before someone said, 'It would reach out to include people standing on the street corners – the ones who have no-where to sleep at night, the addicts, the "unemployable", the rejected.'

Who owns the vision - and what, exactly, is it?

Our church didn't start because a bunch of keen youngsters felt called to work with disadvantaged people – we can think of only three from the early days who joined us for that reason. No, David planted a church and taught us what the Bible said about the poor and marginalised. Neither he nor I tried to convince people that they should work with the poor but we did look for people with a pioneering spirit and a willingness to come out of their comfort zones in order to embrace the life-changing works of Jesus. Of course we all need a time of adjustment and counting the cost – a time to develop a deeper intimacy with Jesus. It's vital that all we do flows from his love.

If working with disadvantaged people seems glamorous at first, the illusion won't last long! If local church leaders don't share the long-term vision any project will either become detached or fade like last year's flavour of the month. Conversely, if church leaders become bogged down with the problems of broken people they won't be free to take the church forward. A local church would be unwise to start a ministry (to the poor or any other) unless a gifted leader, with a vision, comes forward to run it. The project leader has to remain accountable to the church leaders yet be mature enough not to go running to them every time a small problem occurs. Unless a project has several leaders of exceptional quality, we reckon that a church needs at least a hundred members to be able to sustain residential work with the poor. It will also need to be strong to withstand some of the problems which broken people will inevitably bring to light.

Before starting, church and project leaders need to think through many questions together, such as what is our philosophy of ministry? What is the thinking that undergirds and directs our practice? What are we seeking to achieve? Is it physical care, evangelism, or both – or maybe it's more educational? Do project and church leadership mean the same things by our stated aims? For example, if we open a soup kitchen, are we expressing the Gospel simply by giving food, or are we using food as an excuse to 'evangelise'? What counselling models will we use? Given that most people who volunteer for this kind of work will be female, what is our understanding of women in leadership? Who is responsible for appointing staff, bringing in the finances etc? Project leaders will have the detailed vision, but the church leaders need to be in agreement with their overall aim and the two groups to be in constant dialogue about how this is being implemented and communicated. Once they have set a framework and a project is up and running, church leaders' on-going role is to affirm the project's workers and leaders and to keep the church's vision for it alive.

I don't want to give the impression that the King's Arms is all about work with the poor. Three priorities which David built into it were worshipping God (both in meetings and in life), building community and reaching the lost. We describe the church as a house, with a huge front door welcoming everyone inside and a big back door through which, having been trained and disciplined, people can go out again to start other churches and ministries. And our favourite room in the house is the lounge, where people can relate together informally, like family.

Our house groups are central to church life, because we believe discipleship, pastoral care and friendship are so important. Our outreach includes Alpha-like groups and work into Bedford's colleges. We're also a sending church - we send out teams and individuals to support, train, teach, preach, prophesy or in different ways to resource other churches, both in this country and overseas. In fact the King's Arms emphasises ministry with the poor far less than training people to church plant – and has already sent people, including its leaders, to do this in a number of places.

Consequences to the church of ministry with the poor.

Ministering to the poor causes violent repercussions in any church, involving both amazing blessing and extreme cost – so a wise church will think through all the

questions beforehand. People off the streets may meet God and become Christians, but their lives won't necessarily become ordered overnight. After doing well for a while they may go on a binge of drinking, gambling or whatever. Later, they'll be back, then stray again, perhaps do time in prison, repent and return to the church and so on, sometimes for years.

Having thought the issues through, church leaders will be able to prepare and train the church – for things will have to change. Sermons may have to be kept shorter and more rooted in real life. People living on the street have limited concentration spans, and won't sit for long in one place, so David programmed a break for coffee and doughnuts into the middle of our services. Prayer and welcome teams, stewards, children's workers will all need training to deal with new situations. Security issues will have to be addressed.

To be practical – suppose someone you met on the soup run decides he wants to come to church, then urinates in the middle of the service. As the dampness and smell spread, do the stewards know what to do? Or if someone who can't control his anger snatches the kettle used to make everyone a friendly cup of tea and starts chucking boiling water over the congregation – who will deal with that? If an ex-prisoner runs off with the collection, how will your treasurer react? If someone is known to smell, be drunk, to have fleas, or AIDS, will anyone sit within a ten-metre radius? Are you prepared for members' cars or the building where your church meets to be vandalised? All of these things have happened in our church – and more. As leader of the project I didn't attempt to deal with them in the church setting. David, as leader of the church, would say, 'What happened last week we welcome. We want it in our church, because the blessings here are the result of our love for the poor.'

It's one thing welcoming damaged people, but if incidents run out of control the church and, more importantly, the Gospel, lose credibility. When assorted unsaved members of David's and my families came to church to see our three children being dedicated they weren't too impressed when a guy from the project threatened to throw paint all over the building. Although we're called to welcome everyone, violence, intimidation and law-breaking are not acceptable because the church needs to be a safe place for children, for mature, respectable Christians *and* for Night Shelter residents who turn up for the central heating and the coffee and doughnuts. We learnt that if the church leadership sets clear guidelines and boundaries, if they teach and train and put certain things in place, then the church will become safe and welcoming for all.

When David asked the most senior people in the church to form a security team he explained that he felt they had the necessary clout to deal with situations and to call the police if necessary – and they do, without hesitation. Also, just as we bar people from the Night Shelter for behaviour which repeatedly threatens the safety of others, we bar people from church for the same reasons. That sounds harsh, but if the leadership of the church is not prepared to take decisive action then everyone will get nervous about attending – especially if they feel their children are in danger. Given strong leadership, the church will grow: if leaders evade issues or put their heads in the sand, either the project will become detached or the church will suffer.

How the local church gains from its ministry to the poor

I've written about the problems thrown up by welcoming disadvantaged people into a local church, and I don't want to minimise these – but we've found that the church gains tremendously from the project and vice versa. A large proportion of our church members have, at one time or another, been involved in the project – as staff, as volunteers or as residents. Their faith has grown as they've prayed in the money needed for specific things – and seen God provide in miraculous ways at the very last minute. Showing God's love for individuals, they've seen them change, against all the odds. They've been stretched and challenged in ways few people of their age have been... and, with support, have come through much stronger than before. Many of them now would be able to tackle most things, lead most things even. As leaders move on to plant new churches elsewhere, it's not been hard to find new leaders for the church. They have already been tested in their lives as well as in their ministry. The project grows competent leaders and church planters, fast!

Working on the project, people receive an intense period of practical, theoretical and biblical training. They have regular Pastoral Interviews and experience discipleship over all kinds of issues in their own lives. Living in community and/or working on the project throws up all kinds of attitudes, good and bad, which might otherwise have remained hidden. Both staff and residents receive support as they work these through – getting rid of the bad and developing the good.

It's tough, being on the project, but everyone is in it together. Teams are created and deep friendships made. This spills over into the church, where the norm for relationships goes deeper than that which might come from meeting only on Sundays and in mid-week house-groups.

On the other hand Sundays and house-groups provide spiritual input and further opportunities to grow in worship, in discipleship and in understanding. When a resident prays for or encourages a staff member in the house-group context, suddenly all the battles seem worthwhile. Residents from the project are included in a normal church life. They see families which work well and single people living pure yet fulfilled lives, free from addictions. Through the dynamic of shared worship they open up to joy and to pain – and the manifest presence of the Holy Spirit softens their hearts.

The church grows as those not involved 'hands on' with the project pray and intercede and hear God on our behalf. The church provides a reservoir from which the project draws. A number of church couples will take in a homeless person on nights when the Shelter has insufficient beds. Some people give practical help – making curtains, doing maintenance. Mature Christians from the church help with the Pastoral Interviews. Usually these are former staff or residents who understand all the tricks! Residents particularly appreciate people from outside the project investing time in their lives.

As people reached by the project become Christians, the messy but exciting growth keeps us on our toes as a church. It keeps us dealing with real issues and ensures we stay utterly dependent on God, because often only he has the answers to the appalling

problems in people's lives. Isaiah 58 promises, 'If you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places... your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations.'

God loves the poor? Without a doubt! Church loves the poor? Oh yes – it can, it must!

Christine Leonard, October 1999

'God's Heart for the Poor' is Christine Leonard's ninth book. She's Vice President of the 1000-strong Association of Christian Writers and a member of Bookham Baptist Church

Church Planting as an Option for Growth

In his book 'Church Planting for a Greater Harvest', Peter Wagner declares, "The single most effective evangelistic methodology under heaven is planting new churches". I have become convinced of the truth of this statement in the four years that have elapsed since Reigate Baptist Church was planted.

In March 1995 I visited Burundi at the invitation of David Ndarahatse, the leader of African Revival Ministries. I had met David some years previously at college and I knew him to be a godly man with a proven prophetic ministry. On our last afternoon in Burundi David prayed with me, or to be more precise prophesied over me. The word he shared was simply that it was time for me to step out in faith and move on. At that time I was the Associate Pastor of Redhill Baptist Church, a church of about 200 people. When he had finished praying, David asked me if his word meant anything to me. I told him that it didn't but that while he was praying, I had a very strong sensation. I felt as if I was pregnant and about to give birth, although I had no idea what this meant.

On my return from England it quickly became clear. In a variety of ways, through Scripture, circumstances and several individuals, I realised that I was being called to plant a church in Reigate about two miles from the main church. I shared my vision with the pastor and elders at Redhill Baptist and although initially they were very surprised, they agreed to pray about it.

The next time we met all four of us agreed that we should go ahead and plant a church in Reigate. We shared our vision with the church and miraculously, with only one exception everyone agreed with our proposal. Church planting is biblical and whilst old wineskins do need to be patched up, new wineskins are even more desperately needed. The truth is that many of the new generation will not be saved in their parents' church and the majority of the unchurched are unlikely to be attracted by traditional churches. The decade of evangelism has not arrested the decline in church attendance.

Having said all this, the principle I would underline is that a clear word from the Lord is essential before a new church is planted. A word confirmed by Scripture, godly leaders and by circumstances. Then, and only then, should a church plant take place. Church planting is no easy option and when the going gets tough, it is essential to know that God Himself has spoken.

How did we go about planting a church? I like to think the answer was prayerfully. When Moses was making the Tabernacle, he received exact instructions from the Lord. We asked the Lord to give us exact instructions as we set out to plant a church. Looking back, I believe He did speak to us although we didn't always recognise His voice as clearly as we should have done. I read several books about church planting but there was one book (which I have already mentioned) I found particularly helpful. This was Peter Wagner's book entitled 'Church Planting for a Greater Harvest'. So much of what was contained in this book was directly relevant to our position including a profile of prominent churches which were planted in the 80's and had grown significantly. The characteristics identified were as follows:

1. **Conservative Theology**

These are mostly evangelical churches with a high view of scripture and a belief that unbelievers need to be born again.

Conservative theology was and is an essential part of our church tradition.

We are a Baptist church in that we believe in the priesthood of all believers and believers baptism by immersion.

We are a charismatic church in that we believe in Spirit inspired worship with the exercise of spiritual gifts.

We are an evangelical church in that we believe in conversion and in the authority of Scripture.

We are a pentecostal church in that we believe in the baptism with the Holy Spirit.

2. **Strong Pastoral Leadership**

A rule of thumb is that the larger the church the more crucial is the role of the senior pastor. If a smaller church wants to grow larger it must be prepared to accept the leadership of the senior pastor.

It is true to say that many of our founding members had become increasingly frustrated by religious democracy. As Bill Hybels once said 90% of people in church want to be led. Either the appointed leaders will lead or other unappointed teachers will emerge.

Peter Wagner says, "Those churches who interpret the Bible as centralising leadership authority in the pastor enjoy a superior growth dynamic. There must of course be a balance of authority and

accountability. The general tendency is that the older a church gets the more the authority tends to be shifted from the pastor to the people.”

We decided to move away from the traditional Baptist structure with authority invested in the church meeting, often at the expense of effective leadership. Authority was invested in the leadership team in general and in myself as pastor in particular. We normally only vote on three things which are:

- *The appointment of Pastors and Elders*
- *Changes in the Basis of Faith and Rules*
- *Purchase of land or buildings*

Our church meetings are devoted to worship, fellowship, faithbuilding and vision and as such they are times when the church come together gladly and enthusiastically.

3. Participatory Worship

Worship is long (30-45 min); it features modern songs; there is a freedom for body language through raised hands and other actions. Contemporary musical instruments are used.

Our worship has been contemporary from the word go and most, if not all of the unchurched people who have joined us have mentioned that worship was one of the main reasons they decided to join us.

We endeavour to have the best of the old together with the best of the new. A selection of inspired hymns and inspired songs and choruses all enabling us to worship the Lord.

4. Powerful Prayer

Not only does prayer permeate all aspects of life in these churches, but some have even employed full time prayer leaders.

Before we planted the church we held regular prayer meetings. Since the church began we have endeavoured to keep prayer at the centre of the life of the church. From time to time we have turned our Sunday evening services over to prayer and these meetings have been very well supported.

We still have a long way to go however and we realise that prayer must be a first resort, not a last resort when all else fails.

5. Centrality of the Holy Spirit

The person and work of the Holy Spirit are stressed. He once again becomes a prominent member of the Trinity and the works of the Holy Spirit including supernatural signs and wonders are welcome.

For want of a better description, we are a charismatic church in that we encourage the use of spiritual gifts and in a limited way we have

experienced the power of God. However, we long for the day when the power of God will be released in a much greater measure.

6. Abundant Finances

Through giving and giving generously the members of these churches have discovered that God loves a cheerful giver and they cannot outgive God.

Redhill Baptist Church funded us for the first fifteen months and then generously gave us a substantial gift when we became independent. Since then our members have given sacrificially and the Lord has provided for us in a miraculous way.

7. Lay Ministry

Each church member is expected to be using his or her spiritual gift. Many of these churches have developed high quality lay training programmes.

We not only believe in the priesthood of all believers. We also believe in the ministry of all believers.

We do our best to avoid the clergy/laity divide and our aim is to encourage every church member to minister according to their gifting.

8. Life Centred Bible Teaching

Rather than teaching Biblical content, the preachers apply biblical teaching to the everyday lives of the church members.

We have endeavoured to make our teaching relevant and the mid week cell groups concentrate on the application of Sunday's message.

I am convinced that the more we hold to the characteristics outlined above, the quicker our church will grow.

It is now four years since Reigate Baptist Church was planted. What has happened during this time?

Firstly we have grown. We started with nearly fifty adults and about twenty-five children. Research by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board has shown that Southern Baptist churches starting with less than fifty have three times the rate of failure as those with over fifty. We also worked out that with fifty adults we would be able to provide a full children's programme alongside our main service which would help attract new families.

We now have more than one hundred adults and about sixty children. More than half the new people come from a completely unchurched background which is very reassuring, as we believe we were called to be a church for the unchurched.

Our growth has come about through two main ways. Through relational evangelism whereby friends, relatives and colleagues have been drawn in. Also through the Jesus Video Project which has resulted in several conversions and many contacts. Peter Wagner said, "There is little question in my mind that world-wide the 'Jesus' film is the most powerful evangelistic tool currently in use". The 'Jesus' video which is an edited version of the film has proved to be very effective making an impact across a very wide age range.

Secondly, our paid staff has increased. To begin with I, as the pastor, was the only paid employee. We now also have a second full-time pastor, a part time children's coordinator and a part time administrator. We also have an unpaid worship director and our staff team works exceptionally well. We were fortunate to start with one full-time member of staff and we have fixed our staff ratio for growth, not for maintenance.

Thirdly, we have had a very interesting time as far as premises are concerned. We began meeting in a local community centre. A superb facility, completely unchurched in the middle of a large housing estate. The only problem was that the building quickly became too small.

On Sunday mornings we now meet in a local school which, whilst providing more spacious accommodation, is in every other way inferior to our original meeting place.

We have also purchased a small redundant chapel with a capacity of about 80. Apart from Sunday mornings this is our main base so we now have a church office and other facilities which will enable us to run Alpha courses, a parent and toddlers group and various other activities in the local community.

Right at the very beginning however, I felt that the Lord gave me the following word concerning premises:

"And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed".

2 Samuel 7:10

As result of this word, we have been searching for our own premises for the past four years. Bearing in mind that in Reigate there seems to be no suitable existing buildings, building land costs upward of £1million an acre and planning permission is nearly impossible to obtain. It has become very clear that we need a miracle.

Perhaps a miracle is underway! We have reached agreement with a local school to buy nearly an acre of land in return for the provision of a 'all weather pitch' costing £250,000. If we pay cash apparently the school would obtain no benefit whereas they will directly benefit from the provision of an 'all weather pitch'. We have employed an Architect who has come up with a very exciting scheme in the form of a multi-purpose community centre which will cost about £1.5 million to build.

After protracted negotiations with the local council our planning application has now been submitted and is due to be considered on 10 November. Approval is by no means a formality particularly as we have strong objections from a handful of local residents but our confidence is in the Lord.

Why do we want our own premises? I believe that many church plants eventually fail because they don't acquire their own premises. They don't therefore have a secure

base or a tangible presence within the community. We have had to work much harder to attract people to Reigate Baptist Church than we ever did in the main church, which had its own building in a prominent position. We have also found it very hard to rent premises. There is often a reluctance by schools to ask their caretaker to work on Sundays. Insurance requirements and complex alarm systems also make schools more and more reluctant to give out keys. We have also encountered anti-Christian attitudes which may well become more prevalent in the days to come. All in all I believe that it is vital that we obtain our own premises notwithstanding the vast cost.

The question is where will we get £1.75 million from? In 1998 when this scheme was first agreed, I asked the Lord for a tangible sign that we should proceed. Within a few weeks, without making any appeals whatsoever, we received two anonymous gifts totalling more than £41,000.

In July of this year we decided to begin fund raising with a gift day, our initial target being to raise £250,000 to pay for the land. Remember we are a church of about one hundred people, many of whom are working class and several of our new members have financial problems. On the very first day we received £165,000 and by the end of the week total giving together with an interest free loan amounted to £250,000. All this from a small church with very few wealthy people. I don't know where the money has come from but I do know that if our building project is of God, He will provide the next £1.5 million just as He has already provided £0.25 million.

We will pray persistently, we will give sacrificially, we will search diligently and we will trust in the Lord. One idea that has been suggested is that we contact other churches to see if they would be prepared to 'help a church plant take root'. The idea is that we would ask established churches to grant us an interest free loan of say £10,000 for a period of ten years. If fifty churches were prepared to each lend us £10,000, we would have £500,000 which would be a tremendous boost to our fund raising. In reality I hope that we would be able to repay any loans well before the ten-year term expired and that would certainly be our intention.

What advice would I give to anyone thinking of planting a church?

- 1) Be certain God has initiated the new church. Church planting is not an easy option, neither is it a way for frustrated leaders to fulfil their personal ambition.*
- 2) Be clear what God has initiated. We felt from the outset that we should plant a church, not just a congregation.*
- 3) Remember, that unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labour in vain. Psalm 127:1.*

Peter Wagner says, "The more deeply I dig beneath the surface of church growth principles, the more thoroughly convinced I become that the real battle is a spiritual battle and that our principal weapon is prayer".

Persistent and consistent prayer is essential.

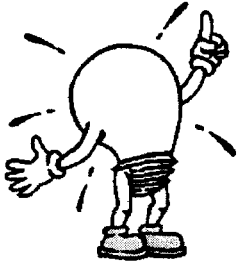
- 4) *If possible start with a full-time leader and at least fifty people who are prepared to step out in faith.*
- 5) *Choose your premises carefully. The more suitable the premises the more likely the church plant is to succeed.*
- 6) *Introduce small groups at the very beginning. We are now embracing cell church principles which should help us to become a large church, at the same time enabling people to feel that they belong. Ideally we should have started with cell groups in place.*
- 7) *Don't forget evangelism. Our mission statement is 'In Christ to win for Christ'. There is a constant temptation to be drawn from mission to maintenance and this must be resisted at all costs.*
- 8) *Work at worship. Our contemporary worship has been a real attraction to newcomers and it is quite clear that contemporary worship is evangelistic.*
- 9) *Introduce a Membership Class as soon as possible. After reading "The Purpose Driven Church" by Rick Warren, we introduced our own Membership Class. This is an introduction to the church and sets out the commitment expected from our members.*
- 10) *Read 'Church Planting for a Greater Harvest' by Peter Wagner. This surely is an outstanding book, much of which is very relevant to the situation in this country.*

I finish where I began. Peter Wagner declares, "The single most effective evangelistic methodology under heaven is planting new churches". I wholeheartedly agree. The past four years have been an adventure I wouldn't have missed for anything and the adventure continues into the new millennium.

*John Bridger
October 1999*

So, what in heaven's name is Christertainment?

I was left staring like a rabbit caught in the headlights of an on-coming car! There was an impending sense of doom alongside a mild sense of euphoria. It had all seemed pretty good in the planning stage, but was it about to go horribly wrong? On one hand, we had a TV crew at church who, having interviewed three or four people, were now setting up to record the whole of our monthly, midweek alternative service, *First Tuesday*. But on the other, the local press had caught on and run a, “*Church recruits sexy babes to attract the faithful!*” feature that hadn’t cast us in a good light. The advertising hoarding outside the church on our busy junction had been proclaiming, “Great SEXpectations” for the previous two weeks, and, by the look of the assembled audience, it had done its work (we’d planned to pick up sexuality having looked at money, health and friendship in previous months). Now, as I walked back into the church I contemplated how London Today would report the event the following day, would it be acclaim or ridicule?



Our *First Tuesday* project had begun as the vision of my co-worker, Joe Davis. Having responsibility for our outreach ministry and a passion for the seeker sensitive approach, Joe had wanted to put together an entertaining, high-quality, cringe free event that would be attractive to the unchurched. We were already committed to an evangelism strategy based on Laurence Singlehurst’s, *Sowing, Reaping, Keeping*, and this initiative fitted the “Sowing 2” category. We wanted it to be the means of communicating the insight and wisdom of God’s heart for His world. As such it would easily dovetail into the church’s overall vision of where the Lord was leading us.

Our planning had given shape to the vision. Running the programme midweek would minimise the “church service” perceptions in the minds of potential attenders, and running it in our blacked out sanctuary, under spotlights would help foster an environment of theatre-cum-cinema which was the model we were working with. Our target audience was 20-30 somethings, so we planned an 8pm start for a 60-75 minute show. And show is the right word. There were to be no worship songs, no organ, no pulpit, no offering, none of the normal components of a Christian service. Rather, the programme centred on wholesome entertainment, sometimes with an implicitly Christian flavour, most often not. The varied diet of live music, poetry, dance routines, escapology, stage magic and drama all went to set up the talk presentation, which was my responsibility. Thus the concept of “Christertainment” was born. Don’t bother looking it up in a dictionary or seeker sensitive service manual, Joe Davis made it up!

We booked crossover Christian band “Last Exit” because of their ability to perform appropriate secular music on our chosen themes, and so we planned the launch. There was no doubt that it was an ambitious undertaking, and we are not a mega-church with

abundant resources to hand. West Croydon is a multi-cultural congregation of around 200 members, with a Victorian, $\frac{3}{4}$ gallery preaching house located in the middle of a road traffic island towards the centre of the London Borough of Croydon. We have little in the way of financial reserves and, each year, just seem to cover our budget and expenses. Most of the congregation are not professional people, though just over half are under 45. Yet, as corny as it seems, we learnt afresh that where *“God guides, he provides”*.

Central to the whole concept was the use of a video projector, but that is an expensive piece of kit. Yet, one afternoon in the run up to the commencement of our initial run, one of our most enthusiastic supporters of evangelism asked what would be a significant thing to purchase to empower our outreach as she lay dying of cancer. She wanted to make it happen before she died. Bless you Rona! Now an 8’x10’ screen sits in the upper pulpit area where the rail has been removed, and we back project from above organist’s seat.

Then, some bright spark had the idea of advertising in the local Warner Village Multiplex. Well, Valley Park had just opened and they were short of advertising. They offered us a still slide for 8 seconds, 8 times before every movie on all 8 screens for 6 months at a discounted cost of £2000. Our budget wouldn’t stand it, but a one-off appeal raised the money, to the pound, on one Sunday morning three weeks before Christmas 1997.

Part of our overall goal, alongside the use of video clips, was to include computer graphics and audio files during both the programme and the talk. We wanted to grab people’s eyes and ears and fully engage them. To do that you need someone who knows what they’re doing. The Lord sent us a computer expert, who was both theologically trained and had some experience in exactly what were hoping to begin to explore. Microsoft Powerpoint is wonderful!

So it began, and I have to say that it is singly the most exciting, energising and fulfilling thing that I have done in the last decade. It has meant developing a whole new range of skills in “preaching”. Not the least of these is group-based preparation. Not that the planning group wrote the talks, but they did decide on the themes, brainstorm the resources, determine the titles, and debrief me each month as to what had worked and what hadn’t in the previous presentation. A salutary experience indeed. So when we determined that the first two talks had been overly masculine – “What would Jesus say to James Bond/Bill Clinton?” they came up with the third title “What would Jesus say to Barbie?” And as much as I tried to protest...!!!

The preaching was different too because I did it sitting on a barstool, under spotlights. It is amazing how sitting on the stool made the whole talk more conversational. I just can’t “preach” preach sitting down like that! Then the spotlights rob you of eye contact, that’s really spooky especially as I found I needed to still appear to look to where people were sitting to establish intimacy with the audience. Added to this I recognised that I was increasingly dependent on narrative in my delivery, either in the structure of the talk itself or in the illustrative material.

Being tied to a script has been particularly hard for me too. Yet to keep with computer graphics with me and to allow the videos to be cued in at the right moment has meant I have had to be far more disciplined in this context. Preparation has called for discipline too, as each talk can take 25-30 hours to put together. Because the subjects are topically based the process begins with researching a whole new area so that you know what you're talking about. Wesley Owen don't stock too many theological commentaries on Barbie and the Spice Girls! Then comes the biblical work of determining which passages relate and what exactly they say into the chosen subject. There are no shortcuts. Then there is the work with the video clips! This is one of the upsides, watching 3-4 movies becomes legitimate sermon preparation! Potential clips that illustrate the themes to be addressed then have to be identified and logged.

The \$64,000 question is, "*Did it work?*" Well ... if I'm really honest ... it did ... kind of!! We did eleven presentations over a period of thirteen months to March '99, and our attendances ranged from 80-150. We couldn't identify quite a large number of those who came because we just didn't know who they were. A few have started attending on a Sunday, and a smaller number have since been baptised and would say that *First Tuesday* was one of the influences the Lord used on their spiritual journey to faith. But then we were seeing it as a Sowing 2 event and did not make explicit calls for commitment with accompanying invitations to come to the front for prayer.

Our intention was always to run an appraisal of where we had got to at the end of the series of eleven, and we learned a lot of lessons. Here are some of them:

- the unchurched don't necessarily think the way we do! We wanted a "strap line" to go with the title *First Tuesday* for the Cinema campaign and our advertising hoarding. We came up with what we thought were some brilliant ideas like "... *spiritual reality for now*" and "*help on your faith journey*". We sent our Oasis Frontline Team into the centre of Croydon to test them out on the general public. Invariably the unchurched chose the line we thought was the weakest and had just included to make up the number, "*Christianity without being religious!*"
- these events are people, time and resources hungry. Months come round very quickly and the creative energy needed to stay fresh in presentation, ideas, video clips is very demanding. Channel 4's *Friends* series may be a good source of relevant material, but you can only use it so much!
- team work is essential. From front of house to the people who serve refreshments we had between 20-30 involved.
- the clips say something about us as they reflect our choice. For example, there is a difference between what we called by shorthand, "laddish" and "girlie" clips. All action movies might look good if you're hooked on Bond & co, but what about romance, costume dramas and more inter-relational material. Also, because we are a multi-cultural church we quickly became aware of how "white" much of our material was. Without that insight we would have been ignorant of our lack of cultural balance and inappropriately exclusive in our approach.
- quality does not determine how many people come. After the first few expectations of an attendance explosion were high because of how well both members and visitors had received the events. Even one of the TV crew commended us in glowing terms. Yet, at times the numbers attending were

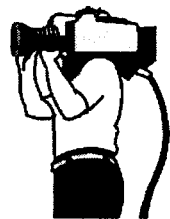
disappointing. Only members of the congregation being committed to bringing their friends, family and colleagues will actually bring people in to an event. While some did, most didn't. We are still working on teaching and mentoring relational evangelism.

- be careful with momentum. Our initial run of six took us from February to July '98. Momentum had built well and the last event of our first series was the best attended. We thought that August would be a dead month and September was a planning nightmare so we held off the restart until October. We lost momentum big-time! Attendance almost halved and took three months to begin to recover and never did exceed where we had left it the previous July.

So, where do we go from here? Well, our series came to a conclusion in March '99 and then we entered the period of appraisal. We got lots of affirmation from people, and it seems as though the wider church loved the fact that we were doing it, even if they weren't coming themselves because they recognised that it was just not their thing. However, we discovered that we had misjudged our target audience very badly indeed. Tuesday nights were not a good time at all. For a start, for those in work 8.00pm midweek was a turn off. By the time they had got home and eaten it was not so easy to get out. Plus, if they'd had a bad day the temptation to stay home was overwhelming. Also our wider network of contacts in the target group has a large number of single parent families. While some did make it, the need to organise baby-sitting was a major issue and a significant disincentive to coming.

So we began to talk and reflect on what we had discovered on timing and ultimately came up with the ideal alternative – Sunday morning! To cut a long story short, we were amazed and thrilled when the Church Meeting unanimously agreed in July to trial *First Sunday* for a year from January 2nd 2000. By Singlehurst's definitions it will be a little different to what has gone before as we shall transition it from a "Sowing 2" event to a "Reaping" event. Also we will include a modest amount of worship. Initially we had thought about moving to two services on these Sunday mornings, but the deacons were adamant that this was an initiative for the whole church to participate in and own, and for it to be otherwise would be to needlessly allow a potential for divisiveness. Our big millennium initiative is therefore the launch of *First Sunday*. On Boxing Day the new hoarding will be erected, advertising the event, "*Tomorrow began yesterday*".

Just in case you were wondering what happened with the TV crew on our "Great SEXpectations" presentations. Well, our PA sound went down at the beginning of the talk, the computer froze out an audio file at an embarrassingly inappropriate point and one of the clips was really badly miscued. I wondered why this night of all nights? We all waited with baited breath the following lunchtime to see what London Today had made of the event, would it be acclaim or ridicule? We weren't on! Thinking that we had been bumped for a major news item we rang in to touch base with them. Their explanation was reassuring, they got their lighting levels all wrong and none of their material was usable! Perhaps it was just as well.



Revival: A Possibility?

The simple answer is 'Yes!' Before outlining some of my reasons in the light of contemporary experience and historical reflection, please allow me to sketch in some of my personal journey which has led me to have a passion for the harvest and to see the lost discover their eternal destiny in Christ.



A Personal Journey of Faith

I suppose I have always known that there was going to be a revival dynamic to ministry, but it has been a long time coming. Back in the mists of antiquity – well, January 1967 actually – I had what can only be called a 'power encounter' with God. I had only been a Christian for about six months when I was called to be a 'minister of the Gospel'. That is exactly what the voice said and it was confirmed with pictures, and writing and lots of weighty glory around the place. I spent the next half-hour or so flat on my back shaking from head to foot. I confess I did not know what was going on, other than nothing like that had ever happened to me before! Nor would it again for many years.

As I tried to reorganise life in the light of this strong call, I began to seek confirmation in the word of God. I was led to Ezekiel 18:31.

Rid yourselves of all the offences you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live! (NIV)

The inner witness in my spirit echoed the heart of the Father that he took no pleasure in anyone's death, but realising that that would be the inevitable corollary if people did not meet Jesus. I became overwhelmed then with the sense of the lost and the heart of God in compassion for his creation.

During my time at college I realise I lost a lot of that original zeal and began to get into the structures of training to 'do' church. One significant thing did happen, however, and that was receiving the release of the Holy Spirit. I soon learned that admitting to this was not designed to lift one high in the popularity stakes. Indeed it caused a degree of marginalisation. Nevertheless, I still believed that there had to be more to ministry than maintaining structures and organisations.

Renewal and Relationships

In 1974 I was blessed by going to Edmonton in North London for seven years. During that time some of fruit of what God had planted in me began to grow. There was a real move of the Holy Spirit helped by 'Life in the Spirit' seminars. Those who have been brought up on the current Alpha diet probably never knew that there was life before Alpha! There was one other important key in all that went on in the heady days of Renewal, in the mid 70s, and that was the growth of unity within the body of Christ and across the denominational boundaries. It was through meeting with some dear

brothers and sisters from The Church of Christ the King in Cockfosters that my eyes were opened to the tremendous power within the whole body working together. Dom Benedict Heron, a Roman Catholic Benedictine monk became a great encourager to move ahead in the things of the Spirit. So at the same time that renewal led some into withdrawal and isolationism and authoritarian church government, others of us were finding release in being able to work in evangelism, prayer, healing and deliverance ministries using the resources God had placed within the whole church.

I began to catch a whiff of the fires of revival when people were being drawn to the church who had no previous Christian background to speak of and often whose lifestyle would cause a frown on the brows of the more inward looking church members. In other words, I began to see the possibilities in the gospel for the radical transformation of lives and in time whole communities.

The time in Edmonton with its growth and spiritual vitality as well as the growing relationships between Christians of all shades and traditions provided a good foundation for life in the RAF as a Chaplain. There is no place to be ashamed of the gospel in the Forces, because there is an expectation that you will represent the Christian dimension to life. The additional opportunity for a Chaplain is that of representing the Church in a non-denominational way and working closely with Anglican and Roman Catholic colleagues. Once again the unity dimension had a significant part to play.

Prophecy and Empowering

I arrived at Bookham in 1991 knowing the clear leading of the Spirit to the church and having a strong sense that God had exciting things ahead. During the month between moving into the Manse and starting ministry. I had the opportunity to visit a number of local churches. Martin Scott of Pioneer People who had never met us before spoke a lengthy prophecy over Ros, my wife, and me. He was so specific about things that had happened in our past that we had to pay attention to what he was saying about the present and future ministry. Much of what was said had to do with extending ministry to other leaders and having a widespread opportunity for serving God alongside other denominations. It also spoke of realignment of relationships, which would be surprising. I weighed these words carefully and sought the wisdom of others. In recent months many of the things that were spoken at that time have begun to be realised.

In 1994 the refreshing and renewing outpouring of the Holy Spirit impacted many churches. Bookham was no exception. We were blessed with the characteristic expressions of the Spirit that many shared, but in a gentle 'Surrey' way! There was nothing particularly wild about our meetings, but there was a deep and life-changing encounter with God that touched many. We took the opportunity of holding regular celebrations and inviting people from other churches. Being a semi-rural area, some of those who came travelled quite a distance. We soon found we were meeting with people from over twenty different churches. These celebrations continued to meet a need, particularly for those who found their own churches had not moved into a renewal experience. In time this opportunity to serve other churches has grown into network, based on relationships, that now touches over fifty churches and covers all

the major denominations and streams. I will return to the significance of this group – called ‘Mustard Seed’

Touching Revival

It would be fair to say, in common with many churches, we found the refreshing from 1994 left us seeking more of God, not simply to ‘bless the saints’, but to motivate and mobilise us for mission. I attended Stonleigh Bible Week in 1966 and saw a video of a testimony of a young woman from Brownsville Assembly of God Church, Pensacola, Florida. She, under the profound influence of the Holy Spirit, cried out that ‘There is not much more time, He grieves for your spirit’. Just as in the Brownsville congregation, a shock wave went through the assembly of leaders at Stonleigh. Many of us were on our knees before the Lord weeping for the lost and the poverty of our ministry.

The outcome for me was to seek more information about Brownsville. I discovered that there had been a mighty move of God going on there since June 1995. Hundreds were coming to faith weekly. Could this be the flame of revival that I had been sensing for so long? To cut a long and miraculous story short, two colleagues, Graham Holliday and Bryan Pickard, and I, went to the Pastors’ Conference in November 1996. We were totally changed by the overwhelming sense of the pure, holy and awesome presence of God. A deep hunger and thirst was put in my soul. All that I had known from those first moments of calling in 1967 was being affirmed. God did not want any that He had created to die in ignorance of His love. Now, here was visible evidence of the sovereign move of the Almighty to enable unprecedented numbers to come to faith in Jesus. But, was this revival?

Duncan Campbell in reflecting on the Hebridean Revival said

Let me tell you what I mean by revival. An evangelistic campaign or special meeting is not revival. ...there will be hundreds or even thousands of people making decisions for Jesus Christ, but the community remains untouched....In revival, God moves in the district. Suddenly the community becomes God conscious.

If having a prayer time with staff in a Levi shop in a busy Mall, or deep spiritual discussion with waitresses at a Wendy’s diner or even being let off a driving infringement by a policeman who knew we ‘must be here for the revival’ is any measure, then this community was surely God conscious. There is evidence too that there was an effect in the schools as many young people began early morning prayer meetings and classes had to be stopped because pupils were being overwhelmed by the power of the Spirit. It has also been reported that crime statistics in the area round Brownsville had fallen. The global aspect of this work of God is to be seen in the thousands like myself who had something imparted to us and brought it home. (The image of the widow and the oil in 2 Kings 4 comes to mind.) Time will tell how this particular work will be judged, but from my perspective, the fact that there are still queues of people hungry for God lining up in the heat and humidity from six in the morning for a seven in the evening meeting suggests something pretty remarkable is going on. I do believe it to be revival.

What Now?

The inevitable question arose for me; How can such revival happen in Britain? There are two schools of thought about the way revivals begin. Jonathan Edwards described them as 'surprising works'. As an 18th century Calvinist preacher he saw the entire move of God as a work of sovereign grace. Charles Finney, on the other hand, saw the possibility of 'putting on' a revival provided 'special means' were employed.

A revival of religion is not a miracle; it is a purely philosophical result of the right use of the constituted means. (Lectures on Revival of Religion 1835)

I warm to Mark Stibbe's definition of revival

A revival is a season ordained by God in which the Holy Spirit awakens the church to evangelise the lost, and the lost to their desperate need of Jesus Christ. ('Revival'. Monarch 1998)

I believe that there are a number of preparatory things that can be done both by churches and individuals to make preparation for God to move. Brian Edwards in his excellent book 'Revival! A people Saturated with God' (Evangelical Press) headlines a number of features that history shows are present before revival. He includes urgent prayer, godly example, and obedience to the word of God and holiness of life.

Prayer

The most obvious and consistent feature is prayer. Hezekiah began his reforms by opening the doors of the Temple (2 Chronicles 29:3) realising that the nations dilemma was spiritual in origin, and prayer needed to be offered. Joel speaks of an urgency in prayer that calls people even from the bridal chamber to intercede before the Lord. (Joel 2:15-17) Jesus reminded the assembled religious leaders of the nation in the Temple when he came to cleanse it, that his house was a house of prayer. (Matthew 21:13) Spurgeon records evenings of earnest prayer at the New Park Street Chapel. *'Sometimes they seemed to plead as though they could really see the Angel of the Covenant present with them' ('Spurgeon on Revival' Hayden)*

What impressed me at Brownsville was the fact that their experience of revival with all its cultural baggage, was born on a solid foundation of prayer. John Kilpatrick, the pastor, had called the church to prayer around a number of broad issues of social and spiritual significance. These themes were represented by prayer banners which acted as focal points for people. What is as significant is the fact that even though revival has come, prayer continues unabated, in fact it is seen as even more important. This kind of prayer is not 'polite prayer' necessarily, but sometimes it is the kind that storms the very gates of heaven, whilst at other times it can be deep heart rending intercession.

Purity

A second significant strand that precedes revival is a call to holiness and purity. This starts in the church and when revival comes seems then to spill over into the streets and stops people in their tracks. My own experience of being at Brownsville was profoundly challenging.

I have to say that the greatest impact on me was the call to examine my own life before the Lord and recognise just how much dross and rubbish had accumulated that needed repentance and forgiveness. We were called to step into the deep waters of the river of God's love and power. That called for a degree of personal commitment that had been lacking. Things are different now. It is both moving and humbling to be kneeling at the altar alongside those who have been struggling with lives bound up with drink, drugs, violence and prostitution and recognise that we are all the same at the foot of the cross - sinners needing the grace and love of Jesus to set us free. (Renewal Magazine Feb 1997)

From what has already been written the reader will gather that unity within the body of Christ has to figure somewhere in the revival dynamic. When I came across the scripture in Ezekiel 18 back in 1967 I did not know then that there was a similar word in 2 Peter 3:9

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

This scripture inspired the title of Ed Silvoso's book 'That None Should Perish' (Regal Books). Silvoso's thesis focuses on taking cities for God. The key strategy is prayer evangelism, based on the commissioning and sending out of the disciples by Jesus. However, because Silvoso sees the issue as being territorial too, relationships of unity for the sake of territory become significant.

An Emerging Pattern

This is where all the strands start coming together for me so that I am able to say that I believe revival is a reality. At the Mainstream Conference in 1996 God began to show me an area of Southern England that he said was 'there for the taking'. I was quite stunned at the enormity of what I saw. When I later went to Pensacola, I had the same picture. I asked the Lord what He meant and I believe I was encouraged to see the possibilities of a vast tract of Southern Britain caught up in revival. I began to pray for connections with people with a like vision and very soon discovered two others, Peter Brayne from Guildford Community Church and Stuart Lindsell from Pioneer People. We wanted to open up the vision and invited the church leaders that had been coming to the Bookham celebration plus a number of other contacts that these two brought. Very soon we have found ourselves in a vibrant network with some forty plus churches representing at least ten denominations and new church streams. Alongside these leaders we have invited key intercessors to meet and seek God for his vision. This relationship based group we call 'Mustard Seed – sowing seeds for revival'. We share a passion for the lost and a desire for the harvest, together with bible based and prayer led activities. This does not take anything away from the requirements of the local churches to be moving ahead in prayer and evangelism, but it does express unity and sets a wider context for our churches.

The Emerging Picture

I find that there is a quickening of the tempo of spiritual activity. Those of us in the counties around the M25 have a call to mobilise prayer for the capital. Mustard Seed is encouraging that prayer focus at collective events and in our individual churches

within the North Surrey area. We also link into national networks that are seeking to work in cities, towns and villages for the sake of the harvest.

Personally I am excited and also daunted by what seems to be unfolding. I am pleased to be involved in a church that is prepared to support me in seeing the outworking of this vision for revival. God is bringing together strategic relationships at such a pace at the moment. Martin Scott's words are beginning to be born out as new networking opportunities emerge. It is like watching a jigsaw puzzle being put together by an unseen hand. The local congregation is key to the whole process of revival as it is prepared. The context goes beyond, however, to include opportunities for specific activities to go on in unity that will begin to change the spiritual climate in an area. This then fits into a bigger and bigger spiritual map. I believe I have been privileged to be given an eagle's eye view of what is happening and to begin to play a small part in what I see is the preparation of the church for the revival God has promised. I would exhort those who read this not to dismiss what is happening, but to climb the walls and start to look out and begin to see for yourself.

© Ian M McFarlane October 1999

Ian McFarlane is currently Senior Minister at Bookham Baptist Church in Surrey. He relates to the Word & Spirit (South) network as well as being part of the core team for Mustard Seed. Other connections link him with the M25 Prayer Net, Passion for the Harvest and Building Together across the South.



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The Executive are always happy to include new names and groupings here. Please let the Editor know of these ...preferably in writing.

(*) Please note that not all these groups describe themselves as Word and Spirit Networks but *all* share similar aims.

The Mainstream Council of Reference appointed 1998 are:

John Brewster - Retford	Dave Cave - Wales
Ian Coffey - Plymouth	Andy Cowley - Bushey
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The Council meets next at Swanwick at the Conference

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