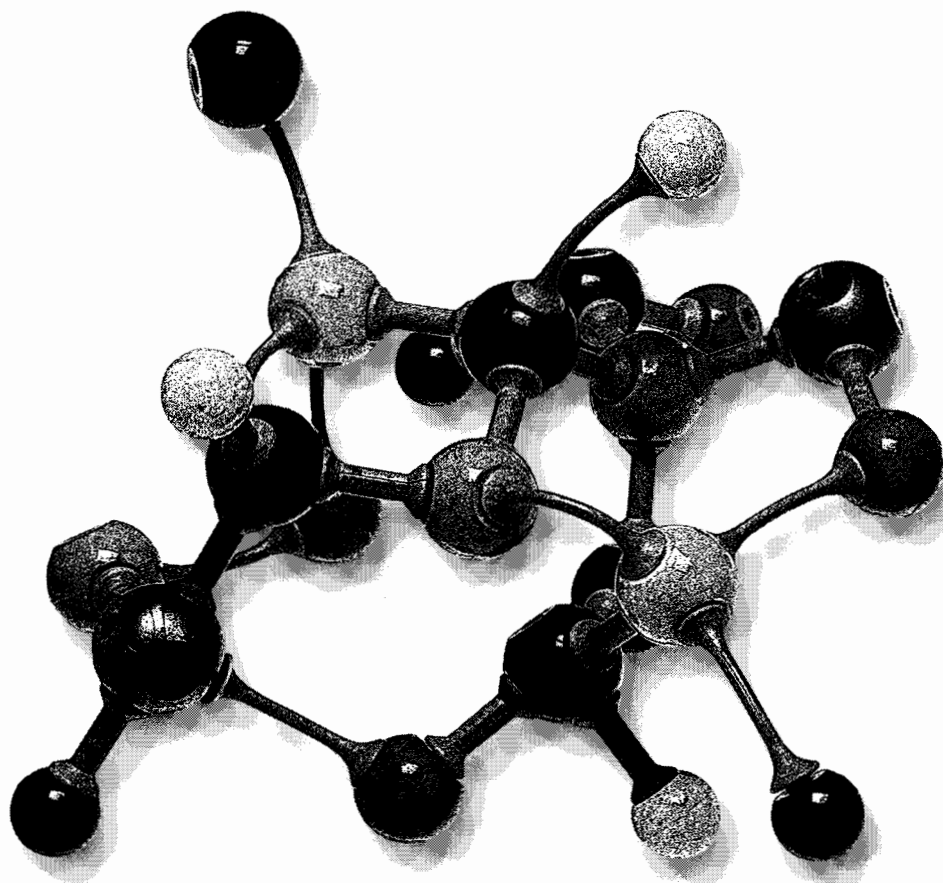


TALK

The Mainstream Magazine

Spring 2006



Seeking the welfare of the city

Glen Marshall
Mike Pears
Marion White
Juliet Kilpin
Rob White
and more....

Connecting leaders

Mainstream is committed to:

Get passionate about knowing God.

Get real in relationships.

Get stuck into God's mission.

Whose city? Whose welfare?

I remember sitting in a sweaty lecture hall listening to Clifford Hill. It was the summer of 1977 and God called me into ministry. The text Clifford was using was Jeremiah 29:7 'Also, see the shalom of the city to which I have carried you into exile...'



Years later as I pondered a call from a church in Peckham, these words came thundering back into my ears '...Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.'

At this year's Mainstream conference, sitting comfortably in the lovely new hall at Swanwick, looking around checking everyone was paying attention and would be blessed, God hit me between the eyes with this text yet again. My treasurer witnessed it - I think he might have felt it too!

God's word was simple: was I going to do this in the suburb he'd exiled me to?

When I got home, having said 'yes' to God, I found doors opening all over the borough, people wanting to have conversations about how the church might be involved in seeking the welfare of the town where I live. It's been a roller coaster ride but at least one initiative should be off the ground by the early summer.

When we awake to the fact that as a Christian community we are in exile and that it's God who's put us there - it frees us to ask 'so what shall we do about it?'

Some Christians sit and mope, long for revival so the 1950s return and the church returns to its rightful place at the heart of things - did this world ever really exist and would its arrival really constitute revival?

As this issue of Talk suggests, however, some Christians are looking exile in the face and asking how can we be seeking the shalom of the places where God has sent us. And thank God for it. So read, be inspired and add to their number.

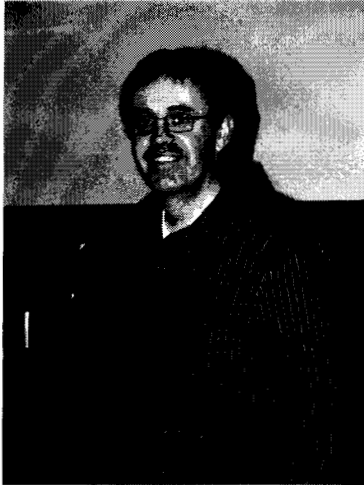
Simon Jones is the editor of Talk. He is also team leader at Bromley Baptist Church and author of *Why Bother with Church?* (IVP 2001)

<h2>Contents</h2>	
main features	
the God of the unexpected is at it again - are we paying attention? <i>Glen Marshall</i>	4
re-sourcing Luke 4-shaped mission in bristol <i>Mike Pears</i>	6
a familiar exile <i>Juliet Kilpin</i>	14
features	
the god of small things <i>Adam Eakins</i>	8
stop the traffik <i>Marion White</i>	10
seeking the welfare of cities near and far <i>Stephen Ibbotson</i>	11
what can you do about this? <i>David Skinner</i>	12
exile on main street <i>Stephen Rand</i>	16
regular columns	
whitewash <i>Rob White</i>	13
network news <i>Peter Nodding</i>	18
newsdesk <i>Craig Millward</i>	22
off the shelf <i>Danny Pritchard</i>	24
surfers' guide <i>Simon Jones</i>	26
the wright stuff <i>Nigel Wright</i>	27

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The God of the unexpected is at it again - are we paying attention

by Glen Marshall



Jerusalem when you should be praying for Babylon. Any hope you may have for the future lies here on alien soil.

The church in this country faces its own exile. Our society continues to journey ever further from many of its once (more or less) Christian values. Christian marriage is receding so far into the sepia tinted distance that, according to the Office of National Statistics, nearly half of all children are now born out of wedlock. Religious pluralism is so well established that we talk less and less of churches and more and more of faith communities. And if the flight from the churches continues many of you will live to see the death of at least half a dozen major British denominations.

Like Jeremiah I would suggest it is time for us too to embrace exile.

Hopefully we will soon tire of the tedious succession of false prophecies that have been telling us for at least thirty years that revival is just around the corner. We must forswear our fond hankering after days when, "the balcony used to be full you know" and, "we didn't have RE, we had scripture lessons."

It is time to seek the welfare of the real world. Where Christianity in general and the church in particular is an increasingly marginal phenomenon. Where Islam and Sikhism, Buddhism and Hinduism have a place in our land and a part to play in shaping British identity. Where the farce of legally required, so called, Christian worship in state schools has clearly passed its sell-buy-date.

I realise that to speak in this way is to cut across much evangelical / charismatic orthodoxy which tells us that all we need is stronger faith, longer prayer and the latest method from this year's American success story and all will be well. But isn't it often the way that prophetic words are resisted by received orthodoxy?

Had there been a Jerusalem branch of Mainstream we would more likely than

not have been on the side of Hananiah. He sounds so faith-full, whereas Jeremiah, as usual, comes across as the life and soul of the funeral. Just listen to him a couple of chapters earlier,

27:12 ... Bring your necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him and his people, and live. 13 Why should you and your people die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence, as the LORD has spoken concerning any nation that will not serve the king of Babylon?

Not only were Hananiah and the rest more positive, they seemed to have Scripture on their side as well. Hadn't God promised to protect and prosper the city and line of David at all costs? The sure and certain orthodoxy of the people of Jerusalem shut their ears to God's word. They were safe and sound. Indeed they were safe because they were sound.

So please don't be too quick to distance yourself from these people and automatically put yourself on the side of Jeremiah just because he turned out to be right and, of course, we belong to that part of the church that is right. What Jeremiah was proposing was, to the theological conservatives of his day, truly inconceivable. What makes us think we are any less prone to theological myopia?

Conservative orthodoxy can be the enemy of the prophetic because, in its commitment to defend forms of faith inherited from the past, it easily ends up locked in the past, deaf to the new thing God is seeking to do.

Please don't get me wrong I too long for revival, as indeed did Jeremiah (28:5-6) but I suspect that God is calling us to forget the way things used to be, or how we wish they were, because there are things we need to unlearn, new insights we can only see in exile. Jeremiah's call to embrace exile is the very opposite of a counsel of despair. It is the path to hope and God's gift of radical newness.

"Seek the welfare of the city." These words of Jeremiah have become common currency in our bit of the church since evangelicals began to recover their social conscience, so sadly misplaced during the early days of the last century. Granted, it would be stretching it to say this text now ranks alongside "For God so loved the world..." as our favourite scripture, but it has become a familiar slogan.

Trouble is there is always a danger when verses become slogans. They lose their mooring in the text, get stripped of meaning, or worse still, become freighted with alien meaning. So if we truly cherish these words it might be a healthy exercise to reflect on them in their scriptural context.

They come, of course, from Jeremiah's letter to the Jewish community in exile following the first Babylonian defeat of Judah and sacking of Jerusalem. The letter as a whole seeks to convey a twofold message.

Forget the Fantasy

The exiles are urged to turn a deaf ear to the message of Hananiah and the rest of the prophets. God wants them to abandon all hope of an early return to Jerusalem.

It won't be over by Christmas. Forget returning home for the next seventy years. Exile is a life sentence, so act accordingly. You are praying for

Hold on to Hope

If the first half of Jeremiah's letter is addressed to those tempted to escape into religious fantasy, the second is a word to any likely to respond with faithless despair. One threat to genuinely prophetic seeing and speaking and living is defensive orthodoxy, another is fatalistic liberalism.

This is a form of the faith that has no room for the decisive intervention of God, which cannot cope with miraculous, divine initiatives. It can only offer humanism with a religious veneer, where faith is constrained by the horizons of history. When such a vision holds sway, exile becomes our eternal home.

(Incidentally I am keeping this half of my exposition shorter than the first as I suspect that those of a fatalistic, liberal bent are not a major part of the Mainstream demographic.)

If God is anything at all he is the God of the gobsmackingly new. His catch phrase in the gameshow of life could

well be, "Bet you didn't see that coming!" This is the God who delights in the journey through barrenness to life, from the old to the new, through the grave to life transformed. It would be entirely in keeping for him to lead us out of exile into an undreamed of future. We just have to be careful not to try to force our way there ahead of him.

What is needed is both an embrace of exile *and* a vigorous hope of exodus. God is indeed tearing down and plucking up (chapter 1) and this must not be minimised. But God's ultimate intention is to plant and build up (chapter 1 again). God's chastening judgement is deep but his powerful purpose is ultimately indomitable.

So as we engage and wait, work and pray let's remember that the reason why exile must be embraced is that it is there that God has made himself available. It is not a matter of getting out of the mess in order to get back to God, but of finding God in the mess: in weakness, in grief, in the wilderness, in our own land become alien, on the

cross, in the grave.

Conclusion: Our Task God's Gift

Having told them in verse 7 to *seek* shalom for the city, in verse 11 God promises to *bestow* shalom upon his people. The letter envisages shalom as a task of the people and a gift of the Almighty. As we seek shalom for others - the city, the empire and all its inhabitants - then we will find God giving shalom to us.

Or as Jesus put it:

Mark 8:35 ... those who want to save their life will **lose it**, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.

(Bibliographical note: many of the ideas, and not a few of the words in this article can be found in Walter Brueggemann's *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming* and Ronald Clements' *Interpretation Bible Commentary: Jeremiah*)



Glen teaches at Northern Baptist College, having held pastorates in Altrincham, Barnsley and Wakefield.

Re:sourcing Luke 4-shaped mission in Bristol

by Mike Pears



Baptists are noted, perhaps more than others, for doing theology on the job. There is a lot to be said for this approach. For example, it keeps our theology earthed in the daily reality of the world around us, it encourages the whole church community to get involved in exploration of the Bible and it keeps us on our theological toes as we regularly face new challenges.

re:SOURCE BRISTOL

So, I want to do a little theology 'on the job' by offering some reflections on an urban mission project we are developing in Bristol in the light of the fourth chapter of Luke's gospel. The project is called re:Source Bristol which is introduced on our website as "an exciting new urban ministry project developed by a group of Baptist Churches in Bristol".

It has three main components:

- * building the capacity of urban churches in Bristol to carry out creative ministry in their own communities
- * providing ministry experience and training in diverse inner-city areas and large urban estates
- * promoting partnerships between resource-poor churches in urban areas and resource rich[liz1]-churches

Luke chapter four lays out some foundational understanding for the mission of Jesus which I find deeply challenging for our own mission and the development of re:Source. I will comment briefly on three points.

Firstly, Jesus' public ministry is preceded and characterised by a profound inner experience. Jesus, like Israel, is declared God's son (Exodus 4, Luke 4) the question posed by the wilderness experience is "Will you look like a son when under pressure?" In other words, "Is this Sonship the genuine article or is the image only skin deep?"

These wilderness challenges are centred around the temptation of self service; will I let ministry, vocation or profession define me? Will I let it become the source of my security and identity? As a congregation, will we allow ourselves to gain an influential name or reputation which will attract others to us?

These are extremely difficult questions to answer. However, I do believe that engaging in certain kinds of mission and ministry will bring us face to face with exactly these questions in our personal and congregational lives. re:Source Bristol is about engaging in partnership with other churches. In doing so we lay down the right to control what goes on we will not get things all our own way; we are challenged to put the welfare and mission of another congregation before our own we will have to take risks and pay for that which will have no visible benefit to our own congregation. I am sure that partnership will contain elements of wilderness where we will face some difficult and testing questions. However, my belief is that the Holy Spirit has led us this way and that the very act of entering into partnership with other congregations could be profoundly good for us if we have the courage to be honest with ourselves and God.



Secondly, I understand Jesus' mission mandate to be as much social and political as it is spiritual and personal (Luke 4:17-19). Good news to the poor and the declaration of a new Jubilee is as much about societal

transformation as personal transformation; and as much about life now as eternal life in the kingdom to come. Therefore as a Baptist community in Bristol, the call on our lives is to embrace the full scope of this mandate.

re:Source is a positive step to engage more fully in this kind of mission; let me illustrate with one example. Like many cities, Bristol is a divided community. On the one hand it enjoys the highest personal average income in the UK outside of London; on the other it has large areas of entrenched urban poverty which have remained stubbornly unchanged since WWII. Successive councils have been unable or unwilling to deal with the problems and as a result Bristol's education and health facilities are amongst the poorest in Britain. Perhaps from our perspective, the most troubling thing is that this divide is actually embodied within our Baptist churches; to all intents and purposes we are not so different from the world. In communities and congregations there is an economic, social and geographical divide which is entirely contrary to 'Good News to the poor' and any declaration of Jubilee.

re:Source is a very deliberate step to live out the gospel mandate in broader terms it will have direct economic, social and geographical impact for individual Christians and congregations; finances will be given, people will get practically involved in social issues and they will visit, pray for and possibly move to areas of the city that are only names on a map at the moment. Compared to the size of the overall problem, we are taking small steps; our prayer however is that, as we take small (and 'prophetic?') steps, God himself will act.

Thirdly, Jesus' announcement of the extent of his mission led to an attempt on his life even before his ministry had started (Luke 4:23-30). In retelling the stories of Elijah and Elisha, Jesus was declaring again the very reason for



relationship with 'the other', to cross boundaries which are ethnic, religious, economic, and class orientated. re:Source is a practical attempt to engage the church more effectively in this kind of mission. It seeks to open up creative opportunities for local congregations to bring the 'blessing' of God to people and groups in our city that we have no natural contact with - especially those who find themselves most marginalised in society.

We are on a steep learning curve; we feel in a rather vulnerable position; we are far from certain about outcomes. But we do sense that God has led us in this direction and appreciate your

prayers and fellowship as we move forward. For practical details about re:Source Bristol, including the year's course in urban mission, please do look at the website: www.resourcebristol.org .

Mike Pears is minister of Cairns Road Baptist in Bristol



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The God of Small Things

by Adam Eakins

Everybody knows what's going wrong with the world, but I don't even know what's going on in myself.

Slow Emotional Replay from the album Dusk by The The.

And what am I to do, just tell me what am I supposed to say, I can't change the world, but I can change the world in me.



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I know that I am quite a driven person! With so many things to juggle I know that often my mind is on the next thing that I need to do. Maybe you are the same. The trouble with this is that we often miss the small things in life. On one occasion recently, my wife and I were leaving a supermarket after another wasted hour doing the food shopping (I like to eat it but not to buy it). As we left Karen said to me, "Did you realise that the person who served you said good morning to you and you totally ignored her." "No she didn't", I replied quickly but as I thought about it a bit more I realised that I had no idea whether she had said 'goodbye, thank you or do you think you should be buying all that beer!' Have I become so caught up in what I do that a simple response back to someone, who probably is not having the best of days, is beyond me?

I wonder if I am alone on this one. I think as leaders we are so often caught up in the big picture stuff. If you have used any material from the States over the last 10 years you will know you need to be a passionate, purpose-driven and seeker-friendly church. This is all big picture stuff and don't get me wrong, very important. We need to be inspiring our churches to be thinking about engaging with the whole of society and be confident that we have something to say to the community that we are part of. However, as leaders, one of the key aspects is how we lead ourselves and in respect to this, it is the small things that matter as much as anything else. How we respond in the little things day to day are often of more value for the Kingdom than maybe having our vision strategy in place for the next five years. How many things happened to Jesus when he was on his way to somewhere? Thankfully, he knew the importance of what we might see as small and insignificant.

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Rejoice from the album October by U2

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In the brilliant film from last year *Crash*, there is a monologue at the beginning of the film spoken by one of the key characters expressing his theory about why people crash their cars in LA.

It's the sense of touch In any real city, you walk, you brush past people, people bump into you. In LA nobody touches you. We are always behind this metal and glass. I think we miss that touch so much that we crash into each other just so that we can feel something.

Maybe we don't have to go to the lengths of crashing into each other to get human contact but research shows that we need contact with each other to develop emotionally. However, increasingly loneliness is something that many in society feel. As Mother Teresa said, "The most terrible poverty is loneliness and the feeling of being unloved." Just giving someone the time of day can have a huge impact on that person's day and wellbeing.

However, that is not the only way to make a difference in our communities. In Danny Wallace's funny book 'Join Me' we see him creating the Karma Army whose aim is to do 'Random Acts of Kindness' on Friday to strangers to make them smile. The book is well worth reading for clues into how to grow a movement but also to see the

impact that doing nice things to others has on people.

<http://www.join-me.co.uk/army.html>

There are many other examples.

Mark Greene has suggested that we each adopt a phone box and keep it clean of those cards offering certain services. There is also the guerrilla gardening group who in the dead of night are planting flowers and shrubs in urban areas to make a difference. www.guerrillagardening.org. These are all examples of people seeking to make a transforming difference in a small way which can make a big difference.

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'Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can.'

John Wesley



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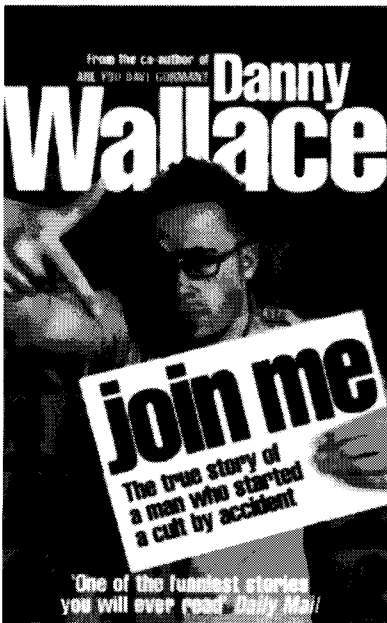


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STOP THE TRAFFIK

by Marion White

On March 25 1807 the bill, introduced by William Wilberforce, to end the Slave Trade in the British Empire became law. Nearly 200 years later, even though the sale of people is illegal, it is estimated that around twelve million people are caught in the trap of slavery, particularly sex slavery, and at least half of them are children or young people. Human trafficking is the third largest source of illegal income, exceeded only by arms and drugs trafficking.

Why do I know these facts? On December 1 2005, I was sitting in the board room of the Spring Harvest offices in Uckfield for a Council of Management meeting with the Leadership of Spring Harvest. I have often heard Steve Chalke campaigning but this time it was different. It was one of those 'God' moments when I knew that God was trying to get my attention!

I had just returned from speaking at a women's weekend and had spoken on Esther. My final words to the women were something like "and who knows when your 'for such a time as this might be'?"

I had also been reading a book by Michelle Guinness about women, Biblical and historical, who had made a difference, so I suppose I had set myself up for what was to happen next!

Steve was asked to speak to an extra agenda item. He said something like "in the 18th and 19th centuries Christians were prepared to lay down their lives for issues of justice and righteousness. In the 20th century we have done very little, despite the charismatic renewal, so what are we going to do in the 21st century?"

He then asked us to watch a short video clip. It was Robbie Williams speaking on behalf of Unicef on the issue of human trafficking. Robbie is not my favourite artist but I was grabbed instantly by the thought that God was trying to get my attention and I knew that somehow I was to get involved in this particular campaign.

I sat through the rest of the meeting trying to think what I might do and how I could help - an ordinary nearly sixty year old granny. I initially wondered if God wanted me to rally all the grannies in Britain. I had this picture of us waving our Sloggi knickers as flags and marching on Downing Street. I realised that I had many contacts with women of all ages and that I could possibly draw them together. Maybe I could do a short tour of the UK (emphasis on short) and perhaps go to ten cities to help raise the profile of those working with women and children who are being trafficked and maybe we could give to some particular projects and offer practical support.

I decided to speak to Steve Chalke afterwards and tell him what I felt God was saying to me. He reckoned that if I was going to tour the UK that I should go to India, where trafficking is rife, and see for myself. I pointed out to him that India was the last place I had ever wanted to go as you always got diarrhoea when you went there! He was rather unimpressed with my argument. I also mentioned that my brother, Paul Field, who is a singer/songwriter, may well be interested, and also that all the women in my immediate family were Christians and may want to be involved.

When I met Rob at Manchester

Airport that evening I immediately began telling him everything that had happened. He was certain that many Mainstream linked churches would be interested, in fact he was himself very supportive, although he mentioned again how much he hates curry and how he is certain God will never ask him to go to India!

I phoned my brother the next morning. He was quite amazed that I was telling him all this because he had been reading about Wilberforce and all the current issues of slavery and was already thinking of writing a musical around that subject. He told me that since the summer he had found himself writing songs about justice and righteousness. Knowing that Christian music companies generally prefer worship songs he had put them on a CD and had, the day before, driven round to Steve Chalke's house and posted it through his letterbox! At least six of my immediate family want to go to India.

Stop the Traffik is a growing coalition of organisations that will use the 200th Anniversary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade as a catalyst for a campaign against human trafficking, particularly within the sex trade, and particularly among children and young people.

Marion is Spring harvest leader and married to Rob. She'll be reporting on Stop the Traffik over the next year or so in forthcoming issues of Talk.

Seeking the welfare of cities near and far

by Stephen Ibbotson



'Stephen Ibbotson is on the pastoral staff at Altrincham Baptist Church and is a former editor of *Talk*

What do an English borough mayor, an induction of a minister, the second city of Uganda and the national curriculum of Trafford schools have in common? If you as a church leader sat down to work out a strategy of engagement to seek the welfare of the city in which you found yourself placed, what would you come up with?

The oblique answer to the two questions is that God's opportunities are far more fruitful than any strategy devised by humans.

My colleague, Roger Sutton, got into conversation with the mayor of Trafford at his induction as Senior Pastor a while back. During the course of this he passed on greetings from the Mayor of Jinja, Uganda, and mentioned he was about to go on a trip because we had a link with a church there. Mayor Harry said that he'd like to go with us on any future trip. Months later Mayor Harry told the Council he was going on this trip personally. Both the ruling party and the opposition agree this should be funded by the Council and be an official trip. So off he goes with our



next trip which I was also on.

Trafford and Jinja formed an official friendship link as a result of this. That link has grown so there are now at least twelve different bodies linking. We're taking out a second delegation of teachers from Trafford schools in a few weeks. Teachers have also come from Jinja schools. Manchester

United have sent old kit to the football bodies of Jinja. Hospitals are linked. A redundant refuse collection cart has been shipped... And Trafford Borough Council has become an open organisation to us. Jinja is now part of the national curriculum of Trafford schools.

If you had devised an imaginative strategy of engagement to seek the welfare of the city you'd never have thought of this. Now Roger's is a voice that's listened to on Council strategic planning and co-ordinating groups. Our railway ministry is infamous locally see *Talk* Autumn 2004 and Roger still sports his train spotter's anorak. The opportunities for developing partnership and projects stretch out before us.



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What can you do about this?

By David Skinner

It is four years since our church became involved in asylum issues. A church member joined the chaplaincy team in the local FE College and found a role supporting young unaccompanied asylum seekers who were learning English. Aged 13-17 years of age they originated from Kosovo and Albania. They had harrowing tales to tell of what they had fled, suffered from post-traumatic stress and were often living with the minimum of support from statutory agencies in bed-sits. One described how he was so afraid of his psychological symptoms that he hid away in his room for 3 months without help seeking him out.

As if this wasn't enough, something was going wrong with their legal representation. They used the same solicitor and not only did cases fail to progress but due to the inadequate legal representation young people were losing their rights to work or receive benefits at 18 years, resulting in severe hardship. Furthermore there were worrying signs of unprofessional legal practice. Clients were seen informally on a Saturday and refused proper appointments.

It seemed to be something that needed sorting out. Three years down the line I have grown cynical about the asylum system, its politicisation and the simplistic portrayal of the issues in the national media. Having previously been accustomed to seeking and usually finding justice for clients in courts, it is hard for me to think of a case amongst the 30 or so we have worked on where justice has been consistently put at the heart of the matter.

- We are familiar with the despair of leading barristers with the asylum system and often appalling standards of adjudication. One advised 'in any other legal jurisdiction these cases would be thrown out'.
- We have continuously seen the young people's complaints about their previous legal representative disbelieved in asylum hearings even where they have formally been upheld by the Law Society.
- In the course of our campaign we



have listened to Des Browne as Immigration Minister defend the indefensible in outlining the Home Office's official position in two aspects of this matter. Firstly that an unaccompanied child, without a full command of English, should remain responsible for the failings of his legal representative. Secondly, that the UK Government has a right to return disturbed young people to Kosovo without any recourse to psychiatric treatment there, in direct contravention of the requests and procedures of the United Nations Mission in Kosovo.

I could continue to list such glaring failures for some time. I find little in the Home Office's procedures or the quality of practice in the Immigration Appellant Authority that can be commended. Rather in the Home Office's determination to rapidly reduce asylum numbers they fail to focus on effective initial assessment and decision making, ignore the pursuit of natural justice, and are grossly inefficient and exceedingly wasteful.

Among the headlines of 'scroungers' there is rarely a mention of the industry of asylum which grows fat by exploiting these vulnerable people's misfortune. Despite the manifest exploitation of public funds in Reading, a succession of Home Office ministers did not act to stop this abuse even though the solicitor concerned has been named in the House of

Commons.

I would not suggest that the search for truth in these cases is easy. We are aware that people who seek asylum in the UK have often put themselves in the hands of others to find safety. These people may also threaten and exploit them when they are here. What is the truth is often a complex question to answer. The pursuit of justice for asylum seekers is a hard and most important issue which demands the attention of our prayers and our determination in fighting for the vulnerable. Would you and your church be willing to help?

We have often sought the formal support of our denomination in respect of individuals fighting deportation and are indebted to the staff at Baptist House for this being forthcoming. We are also grateful for help from other Christians engaged in this field. However, there are moments when what is needed in certain cases is a massive groundswell of protest from individuals. This is hard to organise from cold but if there was an informed and interested network of churches and Christians this could be quickly organised. If you would be interested in being part of such a network across the Baptist family or have other suggestions to make about the potential value of one then please contact me at david.skinner4@ntlworld.com

Exiled in Manchester, but united!



Rob is our Mainstream apostle, encouraging churches and leadership teams in the work of mission.

Marion works closely with him. We are grateful to them both. Please pray for them.

You can contact him on rob.marion@ntlworld.com

Embrace exile! It sounds quirky, doesn't it? It seems to go along with things like welcoming suffering and appreciating the wilderness. And often these things are self-imposed, as surely is the case with the twenty-first century church paying the price for decades of slumber when she should have been watching and navel-gazing when she should have been looking outward.

But this exile looks quite different to that endured by ancient Israel. It seems to me that, in this exile, the church is learning quickly and beginning to bear fruit. Surely we now find ourselves, in this marginalised situation, able to speak with that subversive voice rather than be tempted to toe the expected ecclesiastical line. So, embrace exile? Perhaps it's not so quirky after all.

What does exile look like in Manchester, the UK's second city? For Southerners, of course, Manchester itself, and anything north of Watford, looks like exile! Except for a couple of football teams, which might make life seem a little more normal for Londoners and natives of the Home Counties! Well, I suppose it looks much like it does anywhere else the church's voice given little room in the media and scant regard paid publicly to what the church might think on any issue of social or political importance. And, of course, one of the results of a church which has been on an extended journey towards exile, viz. the lack of influence of salt and light, seen in a lot of homelessness and major

amounts of drug-related gun crime. Problem families and individuals abound and, of course, Manchester is one of the largest centres of homosexual activity.

However, by contrast, the church's learning capacity and consequent fruit-bearing is very evident. Manchester, in terms of the Kingdom, is an exciting place to be. I have no doubt that this was born, and is sustained, through **prayer**. In the passage in Jeremiah, ch.29 v.7, the Lord instructs the exiled to "pray to the Lord" for "the peace and prosperity of the city". That has been happening on a regular basis for many years, often with hundreds gathering to pray for local government, police, businesspeople and those in education, healthcare, arts & media. And what happens? God answers prayer! The police, politicians, educationalists and others are contacting Christians and asking them to pray for specific needs. The innermost Council chambers in Town Halls & Council offices have been given - free of charge - for prayer gatherings, often attended by the Mayor or Council officials.

One of the results of prayer is **involvement**. Space does not permit me to enumerate the many ways in which the church, local and para-local, is involved in the city and its boroughs. Let me just give a few examples: > there are regular prayer breakfasts in at least four of the Manchester boroughs attended by their MPs. Two of them joined recently for Peace Week for discussion and prayer about peace,

hope and security. > BBC GMR is the exception to the dumbed down media 'rule'; it broadcasts a weekly radio show of music, news and Christian comment. > The Message Trust has Eden teams in nine of the most difficult areas of Greater Manchester, with the result that the crime rate has fallen in each of those areas. Many young people, and their families, have become Christians and are growing in their faith. > Barnabus works right in the middle of the red-light district, with a drop-in Centre in the homosexual village, amongst the prostitutes and giving food, clothing, medical and dental care to the homeless. > Asylum-seekers are finding help with housing and court appearances and, in a large number of instances, finding the Lord.

Through all this 'Manchester United' has taken on a new meaning for me, a rugby aficionado, anyway! One of the things that I've been commissioned to do, alongside others, is to build on the growing co-operation and trust between churches and organisations across Greater Manchester by drawing together a group of leaders (from church, business, healthcare etc.) who will seek to be a prayerful body, perhaps with the title 'Mission Support Team', drawing together all that's happening across the city, with the aim of influencing its key mind-shapers.

Embrace exile? Yes, perhaps so. Perhaps, with prayer and involvement, it's a significant place to be.



Juliet Kilpin is one of the ministers of Cable Street Community Church in East London. The church developed out of the work of Urban Expression, a mission agency which recruits, equips, deploys and networks self-financing teams to pioneer creative and relevant expressions of church for under-churched areas of Britain's inner-cities. For more information visit www.urbanexpression.org.uk. She is also a half-time Mission Advisor for church planting and evangelism.

A Familiar Exile

By Juliet Kilpin

Exile is becoming a popular word used by many recently to describe the paradigm many Christians in Britain feel we are in. But for many of us it is not a new expression at all. For those of us in the inner-cities this has been a fact of life for many years.

All around us we see exiles from other lands who have come to seek refuge here and have achieved it with differing levels of success. While some of these exiles bring faith and spiritualities with which we can connect, we also observe a society which is becoming increasingly alien to us—the material hunger and the absence of a God-language that we recognise makes us feel disconnected and uncomfortable.

We have no natural platform from which to speak any more and instead have to earn the right to be heard. We ponder the future of the church in such an environment and question methods which we had taken for granted. We ponder the future of our children's faith in such an environment, and are tempted to remove them from it to find sanctuary in suburbia where there are at least a few more people who think like/look like/behave like us. We no longer feel in control like we used to. It all feels a bit strange. We wish we could change it back...but we can't. We wish we knew the answers...but we don't.

Sound familiar? I often say to people when I am talking about urban mission that I wish people would take more time to look at our cities, for they tend to experience national trends far sooner than elsewhere. If only we looked seriously and carefully at our cities we might feel a little more prepared. But, as far as I can tell, urban ministry and

mission is still a subject which attracts little interest. Books

these millions of people who abide within the city, venture on



don't sell, seminars are not attended... except by those already immersed in that context. We are trying to help our brothers and sisters to learn from our urban contexts, but we are often left feeling that those who don't live here consider our reflections unconnected and unworthwhile.

The United Nations inform us that over the next twenty years the pendulum will swing and the majority of the world's

a steep learning curve, and minister to the masses? Or will the Bride of Christ retreat to her quarters where everything is at least a little familiar, a little more recognisable, and hang on to models of church and mission which work brilliantly for the few, but which fail to engage those whose lives look very different to ours, or those from a non-book culture, the working class, the seriously 'never been to church unchurched' and the spiritualities which were born far

will the Bride of Christ retreat and hang on to models of church and mission which work brilliantly for the few

population will then live in cities. Not only will we be living alongside more and more exiles from elsewhere, but we ourselves will be exiles in our own land which no longer looks the same as it did. And what will we do then? Will the Body of Christ suddenly have a change of heart and focus its energies on

away, but which now reside next door?

Jeremiah, as I am sure has been unpacked elsewhere in this magazine, brings a message of gloom to the Israelites in his 29th chapter. He does not say what they want to hear when he dashes their hopes and

encourages them to dig in, settle down, be faithful and seek the welfare of the city.

Everyday those of us in Urban Expression and other urban ministries consider our options we breathe the pollution, we sweep away another needle, we sleep with police sirens in our ears, we battle with pest control, we hide our mobile phones while walking for fear of mugging, we might supplement our kids education and discipleship, we book the soonest emergency doctors appointments in 2 weeks time, when we will no doubt be better - and we ask ourselves if we want to stay here in such a context.

Some days I don't want to stay here in East London. Some days I crave the normality of suburbia, (now I know that many of you will now be jumping up and down and shouting at me that there is nothing normal in suburbia, and of course suburbia reflects all the problems of the inner city in one form or another, but, whatever you say, I would argue that it

simply does not have the same characteristics as the inner city caused by the density of issues compounded in a relatively small area). But then I read these words and ask what God means by them. Will I take seriously the call to settle down - to not move house; to take wives for your sons to let my children grow up here and for this to be their home town; to seek the shalom of the city to proactively seek the best for the community I am in and use my energies for such ends?

For those trying to create relevant forms of church in our inner cities the theme of exile is often too close to home. At the risk of sounding like a grumpy old woman, it often feels like few people understand us: Christian families ask us when we are going to move somewhere more sensible to raise our children; books tell us that we should be implementing models that just don't seem to work here; peers tell wonderful stories of their developing churches and we reflect on how little we feel we are achieving. We often

feel excluded from the predominant church culture of our own nation.

And yet in many ways those in urban situations are at the forefront of the developing culture and are learning lessons that can be passed on. Five lessons in particular that we seem to learn frequently, and which mainline denominations are increasingly beginning to reflect on themselves, are:

1. How to listen to our changing communities;
2. How to be inclusive of those who are not like us;
3. How to work from a position of powerlessness rather than status;
4. How to be creative in our ways of being church and doing mission;
5. How to be Kingdom-minded as a starting point rather than concerned primarily with church development.

I am sure that you have experiences of learning these lessons in your own context too. These are lessons we need to boldly share more frequently, and draw to the front of our discussions about how we effectively communicate the Gospel and live Kingdom lives. Those who are urban missionaries need to have the courage to speak more loudly as part of our responsibility to aid our brothers and sisters. Those who are suburban or rural missionaries need to look to the culture which is changing and developing ahead of them to prepare themselves for what is to come and to encourage those for whom exile is no new word.

May God give us all strength of faith and character to live in changing times.



Exile on Main Street?

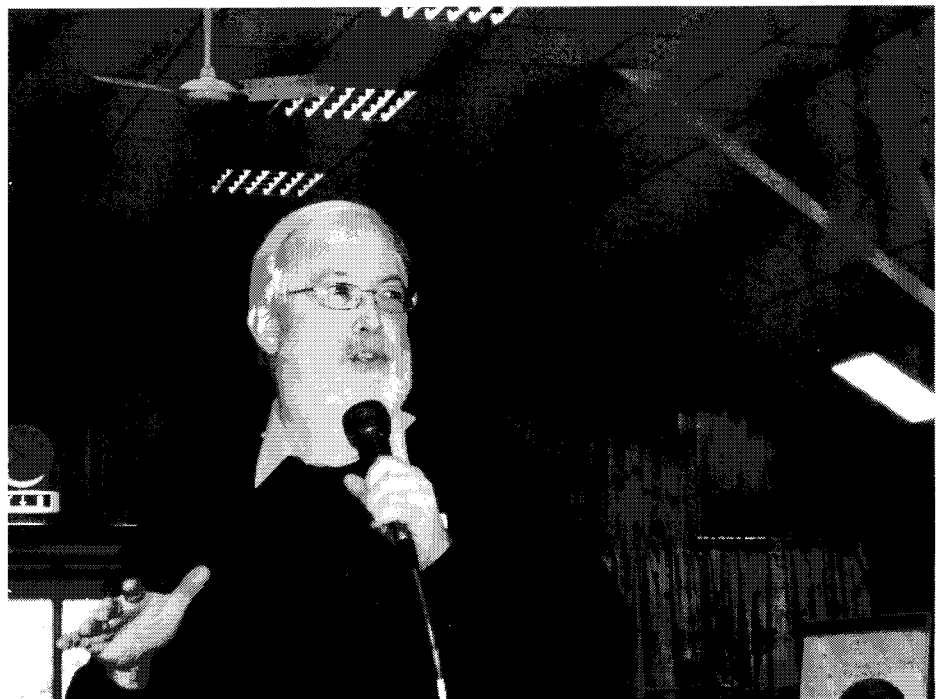
Stephen Rand

Embracing action for community development and social justice ('seeking the welfare of the city') as a core component of the mission of the church is a foundation for effective local church life but one that evangelicalism has seriously undermined for nearly one hundred years. The results are all too clear: largely ineffective evangelism and growing marginalisation within society. But the tide has turned in both theology and practice.

We've seen it in our experience of Soul in the City in Wimbledon. Those in the church who got involved for one week in August 2004 simply couldn't leave the young people on the local estate without any contact for another year. So they went down on a Thursday evening and played football with them. A year later they did another week of concentrated activity on the estate and at the end of it some of the young people indicated they wanted to become Christians.

When you get involved with people and build real relationships you can't just drop them they have become real people, not just potential converts. And when you treat people with that kind of genuineness, they respond. If we insist on identifying two activities called evangelism and social action, then evangelism without social action is inadequate and less effective, because it doesn't represent the reality of God and encourage people to want to know God. When people see that we care, they can see that God cares; when they know that the church really loves people, they are more willing to believe that God might love them.

But then good social action must always have an evangelistic edge. People need the power of God in their lives; communities need the power of God in people if



circumstances are to change. Money, projects, investment of time and resources all matter; there is also a spiritual dimension in which the resources of the Spirit of God are vital. The welfare of the city is a holistic concept - it incorporates physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual well-being: the *shalom* of God's Kingdom.

If we have made this breakthrough in our understanding of the integral and integrated mission of the church, if we are determined to maintain the evangelistic cutting edge in our church and community projects, we still need to explore further how we can be prophetic in our action. If we need the gift of prophecy in our worship services, how much more do we need it when we engage with marginalised individuals and communities, when we engage with local and national power structures?

I came away from the Mainstream conference determined to be more

open to using the gift of prophecy in the church and we have seen the gift released much more among us directly as a result of the message of the conference being communicated to the congregation. It's been great. I am also still determined to try and maintain that same openness and discernment in weekday meetings with government ministers, with colleagues because God's authoritative word needs to be heard as much and more in those situations.

This raises significant questions about the role of the prophetic in community and society, not least in the context of exile. Nonconformity often responds to the doctrine of the 'gathered church' by viewing the external community as a place of hostility, so that evangelism is a matter of raiding parties sent out hoping to drag some people in. (As opposed to Anglicanism, where the parish tradition encourages a sense of identity with the local community.) Part of the significance,



therefore, of the instruction to 'seek the welfare of the city' from a position of exile is to remind us that isolationism in our communities is not the biblical option; rather, the challenge of church in community is to be 'in the world, but not of it.'

This raises genuine complexities when the church engages with community, and therefore with local and national power structures. The churches that have engaged with the realities of asylum seekers have had to face the realities of abuse of power and injustice, and therefore work through what it means to be prophetic in those circumstances. Just how awkward do you get? How much do you risk compromise of the project funding by speaking out or compromise of the gospel by keeping quiet? Not an easy question. Sometimes our longing for acceptance and significance makes us

happier being cosy with the powerful rather than challenging them.

All through Make Poverty History in 2005 there were accusations that the campaign was too close to the Government, that it was being used by the Government. In one sense it was used by the Government the very existence of Make Poverty History was a negotiating ploy used by the UK in hosting the G8: we must together do something about Africa because the British public are demanding it. The irony is that the Government feels Make Poverty History did not give it enough credit for what had been achieved. I think the principle is simple credit should be given where credit is due; but this does not mean shelving the obligation to point out where further action is needed.

One last thought. Most of our

congregations are representing God in their community and in their workplace on a daily basis. How does church resource, support and equip them, as citizens of God's Kingdom in exile, to seek the welfare of the city as part of the mission of the church?

This article draws on input and discussion at the Mainstream Conference seminar Prophetic Voice, Prophetic Lifestyle. There was an indication of a desire to develop some kind of Mainstream forum for exchanging ideas, support and information among those involved in social justice and community development activity as part of the mission of the church. If you would like to know more, please email stephen@jubileedebtcampaign.org.uk and also let the editor of Talk know of experiences and case studies in mission and community involvement that could be published here.



Stephen Rand is co-chair of Jubilee Debt Campaign and part of the leadership at Kairos Baptist Church in Wimbledon.

network news

The day that changed my life

Chris Duffett writes...

I'm often asked why I do what I do. Let me tell you a story...



They were sitting by the canal path gathered around a fire, a group of about 12 men who were homeless. I joined the circle, squeezed in-between two of the lads and took my place to appreciate the warmth of the fire on a cold winter's day. We shared the latest gossip on the streets, who was new in town, who needed a blanket, what had happened the previous day. This unusual group of men had become my friends over the past few months. I arranged to meet up later with one of the men with a change of clothes from a small store I had in a local church. After sharing some stories I looked up and saw Simon perched on a bench, he sat away from the group, hunched over. I asked what the matter was with Simon. One of my older street friends, who we all called Granddad informed me that he had just taken something that he shouldn't have. I knew Simon was a heroin addict and thought he must have just had a hit and was

'gouching out' a term used to describe the sleep-like state that many addicts enter at a place of euphoria. I got up and went to check on Simon. He was crying and looked in a mess, pale face and shaking hands. I managed to glean some information from him, in-between him groaning he told me that he had taken a bad hit of heroin and he couldn't move. I started to worry, I had heard too many stories of people dying after taking some bad drugs, only the previous week I had attended the funeral of a man from the streets, and he had overdosed on drugs. My concern turned into panic when the group gathered around the fire decided to walk into town. "But what about Simon?" I pleaded. Nothing would convince them to stay as the seemingly urgent business of 'ham and egging' (begging) was much more important than "baby sitting a smack head." In any case, they informed me that he would be alright. But I wasn't certain if he would. I didn't know what to do. I had only been a 'full time' Christian worker for a few months. Then I knew that I should pray for Simon. I didn't tell him or any one else for that matter, I simply prayed quietly and laid my hand upon his shoulder. After a few seconds Simon turned to me and said, "That's it Chris, the hand of God!" He stood up, called to his mates to wait for him and ran after them in the direction of the town centre. He then turned and shouted, "Thanks!" and continued into town. I remained standing by the bench with my mouth wide open, wondering what had just happened.

The next day I went to find Simon determined to find out what had occurred. I found him in the musty old soup kitchen. We sat down together with a cup of tea and he said, "All I know is that you were praying for me and a wave of love engulfed me and then I felt better. How did you do that?" All I could simply say was "Simon, God loves you."

That day changed my life. It also changed Simon's who, as well as being made better on that day, was healed of his heroin addiction. I learnt something new on the day that has laid a foundation for what I do and how I seek to follow Jesus. Firstly I learnt that God is 'out there' searching for His lost children even amongst the heroin addicts and beggars on the streets. Secondly, I saw that evangelism isn't all about me and what I do and say. It is more to do with God working through me and touching people's lives in ways that are much cleverer and effective than my ways.

That is why I am a Baptist Minister accredited as an evangelist! I believe in God's heart for the lost so much that I devote my time running The Light Project, a Chester based charity, committed to actively demonstrating the Christian message in a relevant way, and equipping others to do the same. We offer a unique 'Community Evangelism' Foundation Degree working in over 30 youth and community projects including youth cafés and Kidz Clubs as well as engaging in street evangelism and festivals! For more information please contact me via our website, www.lightproject.org.uk



Peter Nodding brings us news of the Mainstream network and other connections. Peter chairs the Mainstream Leadership team and is the Senior Pastor at Purley Baptist Church, Surrey. Peter.nodding@purleybaptist.org

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Impressions of Imprint

In October 2005, Mainstream put on the Imprint conference for younger leaders. Here three of them tell us what it was like

I was one of the group leaders at the Imprint conference in October 2005. Whenever you're leading something it's always good when those attending really begin to fly, needing only direction rather than the usual pull by the lighthouse. Imprint felt great from the start; the minute the 18-29 year olds arrived (albeit fashionably late for many) they brought with them a genuine desire to meet with God, and to ask difficult questions about the call on their lives.

Thankfully this desire did not dry up as the conference continued. The seminars and small groups seemed to meet a need for honest and frank fellowship; the main sessions with Paul Maconachie, provoked mind, heart and spirit and led to conversations about vital matters of church leadership and discipleship.

Both delegates and leaders left the conference with fresh visions of their own calling and new challenges for their ministry. With the rise and rise of the age of ministers in training, let us hope that these called individuals will find a Union willing to effectively train and release them in the service of the Kingdom before too many grey hairs have started to sprout.

Graeme Fancourt.
Crook, County Durham.

Our Pastor suggested this weekend conference to us, but we arrived on the Friday night of a hectic week unsure of what we were coming to, or even exactly why we were there. However, the teaching we received was both intense and exciting; making

You could really feel the Holy Spirit in the room with us

us think about other people's walk with Jesus and how we can learn from that. We met many new friends, from all over the country, and spent time with them in small groups. On the Saturday evening we were challenged to speak God's words into the lives of those in our groups, this was quite scary when people you don't know start saying things that make a lot of sense to you! God said some things to us all that require a response and, while we are still working on what that response should be, what was said is still fresh in our minds. We arrived feeling tired and, despite a full and varied weekend, left refreshed and excited about what God can do in our lives.

Michael and Jenny Wilding.
Rawtenstall

Before attending the conference I had never heard of Mainstream. It was my pastor who showed me the leaflet and I'm glad he did. I've been a Christian since 2001 and have recently been chosen to lead a cell group along with my wife. It felt quite daunting, but I wanted to be open to what the Lord had in store for me.

This conference is just what I needed to grow in the Lord and in leadership.

I felt the small groups were an excellent idea and were extremely well run. It was a great blessing to me, as you could go to a deep spiritual level with each other, knowing other people had similar ideas and could understand any problems you may have had and any fears you may have felt.

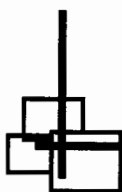
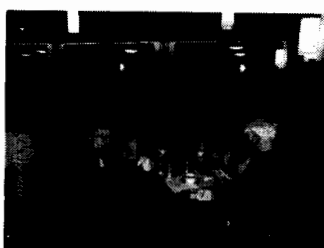
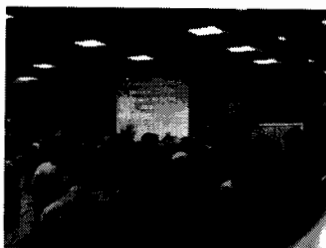
The seminars were very informative and fun to be in. The topics were well chosen to fit into today's church and society. The speakers were fantastic, easily approachable and excellent to chat with.

The worship time was brilliant; the band did a great job. You could really feel the Holy Spirit in the room with us.

I was encouraged all weekend by what people said and did and was very sad to leave. It was great to see young Christians following God's guidance into becoming young leaders.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to attend the weekend it was superb. I now have more of an idea on where the Lord is guiding me."

Paul Holmes
Wheatley Park Baptist Church,
Doncaster



network news

Two participants reflect on their experience at this year's mainstream conference

Taking an elder's advice...

by Geoff Andrews

'Tell him to come to the Mainstream Conference,' one of the Elders of the church said having returned from France where a Spring Harvest event had taken place with a message from Rob White.

Well, I had been thinking of doing that very thing because I knew I needed some teaching and spiritual refreshment. I was not disappointed.

Myself, my wife and a couple of Elders from the church arrived late on the Monday afternoon and found ourselves seated directly in front of the band. An interesting experience, but one we sought to avoid for the rest of the week, sitting further back regulates the volume. Having said this, I really appreciated the opportunity to be led in worship.



Glen Marshall's teaching from Jeremiah was inspirational.

For me it was prophetic in itself and drew me to hear God again in the Old Testament. Barry Kissell complemented the Bible teaching by bringing teaching which drew from his experience placed alongside the biblical narrative.

Being part of the ministry at the end of each session was particularly helpful. Whilst I didn't feel the need to go forward for ministry and did not have any word directed towards me, to be in the place where God could touch me and be ready to be touched was important. These were the highlights.

To be in Derbyshire, close to the Peaks, was a joy and although the weather was pretty bad on the free afternoon, I really enjoyed a walk to blow the cobwebs away. I came to the end of the conference knowing how important it is for me, and dare I say all in leadership, to come to places of feeding and refreshment, in body, mind and spirit. I went away happy, but with the nagging feeling that perhaps we had only touched the surface of our needs.

Geoff Andrews, Minister,
Perry Rise Baptist Church, London, SE23

Great refreshment for me and my team

by Gavin Murray

It was my first visit to the Mainstream conference, having been to only one other Mainstream regional event. I am extremely glad I went.

Having just come through the autumn term and Christmas which for a pastor, in terms of ministry and spirituality is rather like being dragged through a hedge backwards, repeatedly, followed by the London marathon, I arrived at Swanwick, tired and hungry for feeding, refreshment, and intimate encounters with God. My hunger was satisfied thankfully, and a lot more too.

Simply being able to worship free from the constraints of a leadership position was refreshing and inspiring in itself, but to have the input of great men of God like Glen Marshall and Barry Kissell was great. Glen's words were deeply challenging to me and helped put our own vision for church growth in the context of massive national challenge - it increased in me even more the need for churches in Britain to be totally mission-minded. It was a delight to receive from Barry something more than words can describe: dare I say an anointing or a spiritual authority? His humorous delivery of no-nonsense and highly practical teaching on ministering in the prophetic was not only excellent but empowering.

Having our church staff team and a few other leaders with us was great as we were all challenged and inspired to engage in the prophetic more. We are using what we learned already and have planned an evening of training for our prayer ministry team on healing; as he said, "It's really very simple". We've seen greater fruit in this area already in our fellowship as prayer ministry is going deeper and more specific as the prophetic is increasing.

When we're giving out so much through the year it's so important to have times when we can receive from God, through the prayers, prophecy and encouragement of others, and I returned home built up and with much to chew on. The simple dynamic of having a gang of leaders from your church there together is priceless, and I'd recommend others doing this if they haven't already. On top of all this we had great laughs, further bonding and sparked ideas and vision off each other from breakfast till bedtime. Three days together as a team was tremendously effective and helpful.

There was one downer though: a moment of humility for me as the team leader. After another late night of 'changing-the-world' discussions in the bar, I returned to my room, and struggled to get my key in the door of my room. It was so difficult I had to kneel down, and began to think that anyone passing by, at midnight as it was, seeing me on my knees with my key, would think, 'Oh no a minister whose had too much to drink!' Suddenly I was aware of giggling, and at the end of the corridor were my 'team' killing themselves with laughter, having switched my keys for somebody else's. As I say, an uplifting time! Revenge will be mine in 2007!



Personal Profile: Lisa Holmes

Born in the year that England won the Football World Cup - this year promises to be an exciting one for me!! I spent the first part of my life in the South of England but nearly 12 years ago managed to emigrate to the North which I love. Who could not enjoy living in Skipton, the beautiful gateway to the Yorkshire Dales? I am married to Mike who was brought up in Skipton and is currently a computer programmer but doing a distance learning MSc in Building Surveying. We have two children: Caitlin who is 4½ years old and settling into her first year of school. She has a passion for all things artistic and loves reading and writing. Joel is 2½ years old and loves tractors and trains and has a fantastic sense of rhythm! When I'm not juggling the requirements of home and children, I work as part of the Team Leadership at Skipton Baptist Church. I have been here as Associate Minister since 1994. I started with one colleague who moved on after 2 years since then 3 more have joined!!

I studied at London Bible College (now London School of Theology) and then worked for the Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship in the South East for 4 years as a staff worker. It was during this time that I more clearly sensed God's call to local church ministry. I wrestled through some of the theological issues and also struggled somewhat with lack of exposure to female leadership due to the scarcity of female role models but through all this my church was very supportive and confirmed that they also believed this was what the Lord was saying to me. I then served that church part time whilst completing the church based pastoral course at Spurgeon's and an MTh at London University. It was after this that I was called to Skipton.

My passion is for teaching for bringing enlightenment to people about God's word and from God's word into their lives. I love doing it in a small group context or the whole congregation. In the last couple of years I have really sensed God adding a prophetic dimension to my teaching which has been very exciting and a real privilege. My other passion is worship I love leading but also playing flute, keyboard or guitar with our band. In church one of my greatest joys has been co-leading our monthly creative prayer event. It has been so fantastic to grow in prayer together; to experiment and learn and see God at work in and through our lives.

I have been on the leadership team and both national and northern Mainstream for some years now and really appreciated both the opportunity to be involved in what God is doing and to benefit from the relationships that we have established. I am also involved in the Leadership of Northern Light a summer conference held in the North. Life is very busy and my regular prayer is that God would help me know his priorities and have the confidence to say "no" to the things he's not asking me to do!

Out of the pressure cooker - but not into the fire!

By Richard Starling

Take one portion of rocky coastline, add woodland and meadow to taste, stir in a select collection of Mainstream-minded people, and simmer for a few days in the delightful setting of Lee Abbey in North Devon. Season gently with love, honesty, and openness; spice with a dash of Rob and Marion White! Invite God to come and meet us...

This was the recipe for a great week of encouragement and ministry. Thanks to the wonderful support offered by the Lee Abbey Community, and the practical financial assistance of the Baptist Union Study Week bursary scheme, we were able to gather together a group who wanted to put themselves in a place where God could bless and equip them. From the opening session - where participants were willing and able to open their hearts - right up to the end of the week, we were able to pray for each other, offer prophetic insights and seek God's guidance to help us face the opportunities and challenges of ongoing ministry.

Rob and Marion gave very helpful input, speaking from the Scriptures and from their own wide experience. And it was amazing to see how much fun a collection of grown adults could have with a couple of AirFix kits and some obscure clues... to co-operate or to compete, that is the question!

Our original inspiration for the week came from borrowing somebody else's good idea. The New Wine network run leadership retreat weeks, and Juliet & myself were able to attend one a few years ago. It proved to be a very significant time for us personally, and important prophetic words were shared with us. Why keep such a good idea to ourselves? *Surely within Mainstream we have resources to offer that would encourage good networking and increase the effectiveness of local leaders...* With the release of Rob and Marion into wider ministry, we were able to invite them to be a part of this first Lee Abbey Mainstream week.

Having experienced the goodness of God in this kind of safe setting, amongst a community of people where Jesus is kept at the centre, my appetite has been whetted to come back for more. So we will be holding another "Mainstream at Lee Abbey" retreat in October 2006. Contact me for details- we will be limiting places to allow for in-depth fellowship. Book early - or be disappointed!

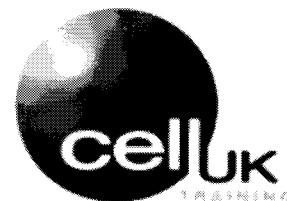
baptiser@btinternet.com 01626 834755



Craig Millward brings us information from the Christian world. Pastor at Ormsby in Norfolk, Craig is a member of the Mainstream leadership team.

February 2006

European Cell Conference



If your church has been impacted by the Cell Church movement you might be interested in the UK and European Cell Church Leaders Symposium to be held from 22-25 May 2006 at Highfield Oval, Harpenden.

The Symposium is aimed at those who are current practitioners and will look at:

Equipping and Discipling
Every Member Ministry
Effective Evangelism

The Friendship Factor



Friendships matter - yet so often we forget how important they are in our lives. Our friends can positively affect our health, success at work, stability of relationships, and capacity to reach our potential.

Join Rob Parsons for The Friendship Factor - a series of evening presentations in which he explores the characteristics of a true friend, why one good friend just isn't enough, and how to take existing friendships to the next level. During the evening, you'll discover:

The golden key to making friends
Why so many men find it hard to make close friends
How shy people can make friendships that last
How to overcome the hurt friends can sometimes cause
How friendship can revolutionise your marriage
How to become friends with your children

The tour takes in venues all over the country from March 14th June 8th.

For more details go to www.careforthefamily.org.uk/events or call (029) 2081 0800

National Parent and Toddler Conference

Parent and toddler group leaders from all over the country are invited to the national Get Activated! Supporting Families conference in Derby.

The conference will help you discover ways to make every child and adult who attends your group feel cared for, valued and understood.

With special sessions covering:

Listening skills
Building strong relationships through music and play
How to organise events for dads
Coping with stress

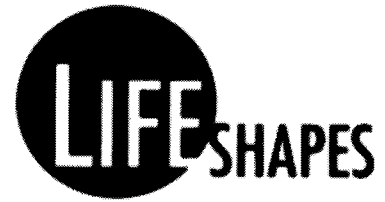
The conference will also bring you networking opportunities with leaders of other groups in your area and you will also be provided with a set of conference notes to take home and share.

For more details go to www.careforthefamily.org.uk/events or call (029) 2081 0800



St Tom's Visitors' Week 2006

St Thomas's Church in Sheffield is hosting a visitors' week from 12th- 16th June. The week will incorporate a LifeShapes Conference (14-15) and Cluster / Huddle Conference (16) along with an opportunity for church and lay leaders to take advantage of in-depth consultations with experienced church leaders and learn about the vision and values of both St Thomas' Church, Philadelphia and St Thomas' Church, Crookes.



Several of the Mainstream Leadership Team met up at a Lifeshapes conference last year and found it a highly stimulating event.

For more details go to: <http://www.stream247.com/>

The Making of Movements

This EuroChurch.Net conference is being held at the IBTS in Prague from 26-28 April 2006 to ask:

What is the future shape of the church in Europe?
Can the Church become a movement?
Can missional thinkers join with practitioners to ease the transition from one paradigm to the next?



eurochurch.net is seeking to build upon the work of the last decade and change our focus in the light of new trends in mission in Europe by:

seeking to network European leaders
creating a forum for mission practitioners and thinkers
wrestling to understand and work with new forms of church

eurochurch.net is an emerging network for key Christian leaders and missional thinkers across Europe in the conviction that thinkers and activists need to debate the future together so that we might see more clearly the emerging needs, shapes and priorities for the church as Europe is re-awakened to embrace the Christian faith.

The Making of Movements conference includes contributions from Martin Robinson and Roy Searle and there will also be time:

to listen to God
for reflection and imaginative worship
to build relationships and new conversations
for relaxation amidst an historic and beautiful Eastern European city

off the shelf

Clear thinking for a church in exile

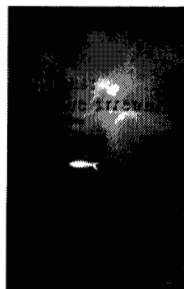
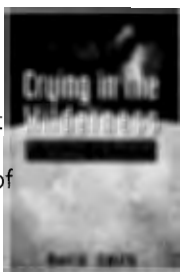
Simon Jones recommends church leadership teams immerse themselves in the wisdom of David Smith

When we find ourselves in a strange place - a European city or English suburb, for example - we have a choice: do we wander aimlessly around hoping that we'll pick up clues to what's important just by looking or do we get ourselves a guide book? The answer's pretty obvious.

It's a pity we don't apply the same common sense to the situation we find ourselves in as believers and churches. It's manifestly obvious that the church in the UK is in decline and has lost its position at the centre of cultural and moral life. But still so many of us carry on in the hope that with just one more push, revival will come and our churches will refill - as if our problem were akin to a blocked hosepipe.

Over the past few years, David Smith has been quietly publishing slender books full of calm analysis and spiritual insight that might just prove to be the guide books we need. A former principal of the Northumbria Bible College, co-director of the Whitfield Institute, he is now lecturer in urban mission and world Christianity at the International Christian College in Glasgow.

Starting with *Crying in the Wilderness: Evangelism and Mission in Today's Culture* (Paternoster 2000; £7.99), Smith has turned out a trilogy of books tackling the issue of how we engage with culture and do mission in a world of religiously motivated terrorism and economic globalisation, a nation of religious decline and growing pluralism.

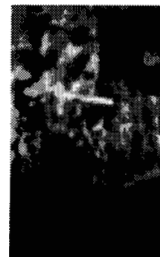


In 2003 he followed up his first book with *Mission After Christendom* (Darton Longman Todd; £12.99) and *Against the Stream: Christianity and Mission in an age of Globalisation* (IVP £9.99). The latter is a collection of lectures in which Smith wrestles with the mission implications of 9/11. The former, an extended meditation on art, culture, the Bible and mission.

All are quite brilliant. In measured tones, he delivers devastating critiques of our complacency and sloppy thinking in the face of the tsunami of change that has swept across the western church in the past generation.

In *Mission After Christendom* marginally the most complete of the three books he offers a model of what it means to

live in exile suggesting 'while in the long term secularisation may be recognised as a providential opportunity for the recovery of the gospel and the renewal of the church, at the present time it is more likely to be viewed as an almost unmitigated catastrophe.' It certainly is where I live.



But proceeding to engage with Victor Turner's model of liminality (also used to good effect by Alan Roxburgh in *The Missionary Congregation, Leadership and Liminality Continuum* 1997, £8.99), he notes that 'the mindset of most western Christians has been formed by centuries of tradition which has conditioned them to expect the surrounding world to constitute a friendly and hospitable environment for their beliefs and values.' Then he uses the model of Israel between exile and return to suggest how we might think about and engage with the situation we find ourselves in.

All through his work, Smith raises the uncomfortable thought that maybe our present condition has to do with God's judgement on a complacent and compromised church. Certainly he argues that we need to relearn the Gospel and the shape of the holiness that the Gospel produces in the lives of God's people.

In *Mission After Christendom* he powerfully applies lessons from the Book of Revelation to the church in the West. Like the seven churches, we are weak, self-centred, hopelessly in thrall to a godless empire and seemingly powerless to do anything about it. Can we hear Jesus knocking?

Smith is not a gloomy read, however. He writes beautifully for one thing, and beneath the careful analysis and unflinching holding of the spotlight to our condition, he affirms God's unending love for his people and desire to see us restored. He holds out a vision for a Christian faith that unites people across clashing cultures, brings peace and justice and points to a God who passionately loves the world he made and is looking for partners in his project of recreation.

Copies of all titles mentioned on these pages are available post-free from Wesley Owen, Bromley (8a The Mall, Bromley BR1 1TR; 020-8464 1191 bromley@wesleyowen.com)

BUGB and Mainstream invite you to the Baptist Youth and Children's Specialists Conference
28-30th June 2006
High Leigh, Hoddesdon

Time to meet with God and be spiritually refreshed
Inspirational main sessions and a variety of seminars and workshops relevant to your ministry
Time for relaxation and recreation
Andy Flanagan will be leading us in worship, Andy Hawthorne and others will lead main sessions, seminars and workshops.

For more information please contact:
Nick Lear - nlear@baptist.org.uk Sandra Crawford - the_crawfords@blueyonder.co.uk



Finding the Plot: Preaching in a Narrative Style Roger Standing
Paternoster Press (2004) ISBN: 1842272667
List Price - £9.99



A colleague of my wife's was telling the story of the three pigs to her nursery class. She just got to the part where the wolf was about to do his thing and blow the house down when a boy on the front row, clearly so engrossed that he had forgotten where he was let alone what he was saying, blurted out, "The b**t**d!" There's no doubting the power of stories. Equally there's no doubting that Roger's book is very good indeed. Is he now destined to be known as the Max Bygraves of regional ministers? I do hope so.

This is a well researched, ably written, highly informative and immensely practical introduction to narrative preaching. What's more it's not American! No small advantage this. Our cousins beyond the big blue sea seem to value preaching much more highly than we do. They certainly devote much more time and effort to seeking to do it well. That's why there's already a significant body of literature on narrative preaching in the States. It's about time we had something decent in proper English.

One of the great strengths of *Finding the Plot* is that it approaches its subject from a number of angles.

There's a section on more theoretical issues - how the ancient power of narrative has seen a renaissance in recent years; the narrative shape of our narrative-rich scriptures and how they intersect with our storied lives; some technical stuff on narrative theory (perhaps a bit more technical than we really needed).

Part two deals with narrative preaching itself - including what for me was the central chapter of the whole book, looking in particular at the power of narrative tension; some good stuff on how to set about producing and delivering narrative sermons with loads of practical worked examples; a defense against critics of narrative-style preaching (a shame this didn't interact with objections raised by post-liberal homileticians such as Campbell, and Brueggemann).

Next we get three chapters worth of sermon transcripts so we can see what it actually looks like. Might have been better to have fewer examples here but with a bit of commentary.

Finally there's the equivalent of the extra features you get on a DVD: a transcript of interviews with practitioners of the art, some personal reflections from Roger and an annotated bibliography. All very useful.

One or two minor quibbles: at times the early part of the book had a few too many references to other authors, not strictly necessary in a non-academic work and it would have been good to have had something on how narrative theory can help even non-narrative sermons. But that's about it.

So my advice would be buy it, read it and have a go. Your congregation will be glad you did.

Glen Marshall - Northern Baptist College

Editors note: The price will depend on where you order from, but expect to pay less than the list price!

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Places limited to first 25

Energize is a part of the Mainstream
Network, specifically seeking to engage
with young leaders, both in age and
service



Simon Jones is team leader at Bromley Baptist Church and author of *Why Bother with Church?* (IVP, 2001). Previously he was BMS World Mission Co-ordinator for London and the South-East.

Click on to a wealth of world-changing information

Simon Jones

More and more churches want to get involved in community-changing social action. Praise God. But faced with a barrel-load of need and meagre resources, where do you start? Surprisingly, the web has quite a lot to offer.

There are a lot of people already gaining great experience in the dos and don'ts, whys and wherefores of setting up and managing social ministries. So let's not re-invent the wheel - something Christians seem prone to do.

Greg Smith's extensive site of social and missional research can be found at <http://mysite.wanadoo-members.co.uk/credoconsultancy/urbmiss.htm>. It's quite brilliant. Originally based in the East End, Greg is now in Preston. He is a true pioneer, an original thinker and tireless worker for the Kingdom of God.

The site contains seminal works such as *In the inner city, how can we tell if God is at work*. I wish he had turned many of these papers into pdfs which would make downloading and reading them easier. But you cannot seriously engage in this kind of work without having Greg's wisdom at your fingertips. He'll save you from some pretty basic errors as well as inspire you with what can be achieved with a bit of persistence and bucket-loads of energy!

<http://www.jesus4preston.co.uk/pcan/> is devoted to linking churches in Preston engaging in and exploring social action. There's lots of good stuff on this site and it could serve as a model for groups of churches in other places to copy.

Lots of news and information about Pecan, the ground-breaking social action project based in Peckham can be found at <http://www.pecan.org.uk/>. I declare a vested interest here. I was once chair of the trustees and my wife is human resources manager - but the organisation is a great lesson in how faith and a truckload of hard work can grow a Christian project that impacts the lives of everyone in its community. Pecan now turns over £3.5m and delivers high quality training and assistance to a large number of people across South London.

Bethany Christian Trust is another project worth checking out. It's at <http://www.bethanychristiantrust.com/>. Led by the wonderfully energetic and inspiring former BMS World Mission worker in Nepal, Iain Gordon, Bethany provides care for the homeless and support for those at risk of being homeless in Edinburgh.

As well as checking out the re:source website (see

Mike Pear's article on p6), information on what's happening in Bristol can be found at <http://www.bcan.org.uk/>. I found their document on a homelessness forum very interesting - as we're about to be involved in one in Bromley. This kind of information sharing I like!

Reading up on projects like these can inspire and inform - they'd also love you to get in touch, visit and pick their brains.

Sojourners magazine has a very good website at <http://www.sojo.net/> - it's the ministry that launched Jim Wallis and contains inspiring stories of Christians making a difference in tough places. You can read about Wallis' ministry as well as check out a whole load of his articles at http://www.sojo.net/index.cfm?action=about_us.display_staff&staff=wallis

Check a UK-based news service at <http://www.christiantoday.com/>. It's a clear and easily navigated website covering a whole of Christian news from the UK and around the world. Worth keeping an eye on to see how good it is over the long haul.

There are lots of good articles on-line these days. These two in particular caught my eye. <http://theologytoday.ptsem.edu/jul1961/v18-2-article3.htm> is a link to an article on forms of Christian social action in the journal *Theology Today* by James Gustafson. It offers a good overview of recent theological thinking in the area.

<http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=142> A Christian Century piece exploring the theme of exile from a biblical perspective. Author Ephraim Radner notes how exile has replaced liberation as the dominant motif in current missiological thinking. Overstated but interesting.

<http://12.106.150.196/justice/index.asp?WhatWeOfferMenu> is the website of the Office for Social Justice and Hunger Action of the Christian Reformed Church of North America and it's full of good stuff - theology liturgy and links. And Prism is an American evangelical organisation with a distinct Ronald Sider bent. Check out their extensive website at <http://esa-online.org/prism/>.



Photo: Jackie Sheppard

Is the ministry in exile?

By Nigel G Wright

Dr Nigel G. Wright.

is Principal, Spurgeon's College, London. A former president of the Baptist Union, his latest book *Free Church, Free State: the Positive Baptist Vision* (Paternoster) came out in May 2005.

I'm making a special effort this time to link in my column with the general theme of the publication. I'll let you judge whether or not I succeed.

It's of interest how the different themes of the Old Testament get replayed in different contexts. In the early 1980s it was the theme of restoration, return, conquest, victory and triumph. We sang songs about taking the land with two-edged swords in our hands and executing judgment on somebody or other. We were moving forward step by step, planting churches here and casting out powers and principalities there. They were heady days and the themes were not altogether unjustified. Even though we did not know it at the time, in retrospect the eighties were filled with a special kind of Christian energy and did show definite signs of growth and progress. But now from restoration and return we have returned to themes of exile and displacement. I'll leave you to ponder how we have gotten from one to the other.

My particular 'thing' in this column is about the ministry. Not the ministry of all to which we are whole-heartedly committed (at least in theory), but the ministry in the sense of those who are 'set apart' (yes, it is in the Bible: Acts 13:2) to minister to the whole in order that the whole might minister. People like me, and some of you. Is the *ministry* in exile? In other words, is it no longer sexy/fashionable/heroic/desirable/praiseworthy to offer your life for a life-time as a minister of Christ, his gospel and his church?

One might be forgiven for thinking so. For instance where have all the young ones gone? Actually, it is an exaggeration to say that there are no young people coming forward for ministry, there certainly are. And there also are a good number of youth specialists preparing to apply for the innumerable youth ministry posts advertised in the press (or is that just an illusion?). But at the next Baptist Assembly at that happy moment when hoards come forward to be fully accredited in their ministries, notice how much grey hair, or just no hair, there is on the platform (but don't let them notice that you are noticing). Could it just be that the churches of our British nations are failing to inspire too few young people with the vision of what an exciting and worthwhile thing it is to be able, attractive and evangelical ministers of Christ? Could it be that too many churches, by their attachment to the past rather than the future, are cutting their own throats by failing to generate and excite the very people they will need to ensure their continued existence?

With all that the gifted and intelligent young people in our churches are undoubtedly capable of, what might it take to attract sufficient numbers of them to serve the church in the ministry of Christ? The most important thing must surely be that this is seen and known to be a worthwhile way to spend a life, despite the fact that it will likely not bring great wealth, great fame or even (in the present climate) great success. And since in the world's eyes becoming a minister is at best incomprehensible and at worst totally dotty, how will such worthwhileness be communicated unless we, the church, value, admire, encourage, support and excite our young people in offering themselves for this task?

In Martin Luther's day the only vocations which were spiritually valued were the specifically religious ones, monks, nuns and priests. Luther did a great job in convincing people that the 'secular' vocations of farmer, blacksmith, mother and magistrate were just as important. Some would say we need more Luthers to say the same things again. But perhaps we also need voices like mine in this column which remind us that we cannot take the ministry for granted. There is no eternal law of supply which says that high-calibre and well-trained people will come up with the rations and be there just when we need them. The Catholics, the Methodists and the United Reformed Church are all experiencing major recruitment problems in the ministry. We don't want to be part of this trend. The office of 'bishop' or pastor, is a noble one and it is good to aspire to it (1 Timothy 3:1). We need to lay this down as part of our culture and instead of sending the ministry off into exile, complacently imagining that we can do without it, give it both our best attention and some of our best people.

What's Mainstream all about?

Mainstream is an informal network, mainly comprising Baptist leaders and churches. We are absolutely convinced that the authority of God's Word and the power of the Holy Spirit must always be brought together. It's only then that we can be fully under the Lord's control, direction and empowering and have any hope of doing properly the things he wants us to do.

- Local groups where leaders get together to talk, pray and encourage each other.
- Regional meetings where we encounter God and receive significant input to resource our ministries.
- A national leadership team drawn from those leading the local groups.
- A quality magazine that addresses the issues and concerns that matter to us.
- An annual conference for teaching, ministry, building relationships, and releasing gifts and ministries.

What do we hope to achieve?

- A network of leaders and churches with authentic relationships, sharing their experience and resources and committed to working together for the advance of God's Kingdom.
- A visible difference in leader's spiritual lives and in God's work through the things we do together.
- Our churches throbbing with spiritual life in their worship, outreach and ministry to the poor in Jesus' name.
- The recognition, mentoring and release of emerging ministries.
- A prophetic voice within the Baptist community.

