

Mainstream

baptists for life and growth



Magazine Issue 51.

Issue Theme : MAINSTREAM and MISSION

Introduction

Our Letter to the Churches is written this time by Anne Wilkinson-Hayes, Executive for Social Action at Baptist House. Many of us are already convinced that Anne is one of the brightest stars in the Didcot firmament - when those chimneys aren't smoking out the sky! Someone, may I say, we need to affirm, use and encourage far more across our Union. Read what she says here to see why. In this issue's Editorial, Mission is considered from a perspective too long neglected by Evangelicals - that of Third World Christianity in general and of Liberation Theology in particular. Two fine articles from two outstanding ministries among us follow. John James writes of the commitment to Mission he has developed during his time at Penarth and Alan Pain writes from nearly a decade's firsthand experience of one local church's partnership with South Africa.

'If you've had problems taking your church through Renewal just wait until you try Seeker Services' Roger Sutton once said to me. He contributes here Part Two of his reflections on two year's of pioneering such Services among us. 'From Probation' (or is it Near Probation?) this edition draws on the ministry of Graham Watts in Sussex and a good write it is too. Then the moment both of you have been waiting for - actually the Mainstream circulation is currently around 2000! - the first of our contributions to the Letters page. We start at the bottom as you will see! As the Autumn Church session begins and as, I trust, we are all planning for 1995 may this issue encourage, inspire and fire us afresh to live out the calls of both Matthew 25 and Matthew 28. Otherwise - for Christ's sake - what are we here for at all?

Michael Bochenski.

NB. The views expressed in this Magazine are the authors' own and are not necessarily those of the Editor or of the Executive.

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A LETTER TO THE CHURCHES



I have noticed a significant shift in Baptist life over the last ten years. Across the theological spectrum there is a prevailing view that part of the church's function and ministry is to serve the neighbourhood in which it is set, and to see salvation in wider terms than the conversion of individual souls. There are some very exciting community projects under way in many churches. The days of Baptists being seen as inward-looking pietists are over....or are they? In my job I swing from a great sense of optimism about our churches and social action, to a pervading pessimism that maybe the changes are not as deep as one would hope. Exciting ecumenical partnerships; projects developed with Spurgeon's Childcare; collaborative ventures with local authorities - that are both making a significant difference in an area and changing the public perception of the role of the church. The wide acceptance and enthusiastic support of the BU's initiative 'Against the Stream', whereby 1% of Home Mission money will be available to smaller churches to enable them to combat poverty locally. All these are encouraging.

However, there are some significant yawning chasms in the landscape. These are often hidden by clever phrases such as 'holistic mission', and 'incarnational theology', which are freely used but can merely serve to disguise the reality beneath. The truth seems to be that our commitment to social justice does not go very deep. I want to briefly outline some examples of this, in the hope that we may continue the debate and reflect more critically on our priorities and practice.

1. Church planting

Church planting has had a high profile in recent years. The key of being a successful church has been determined by the question 'Have you planted a new congregation yet?' Church planting has been the radical cutting edge of the denomination and in many ways perceived as the activity for the 'really spiritual'. I don't want to knock church planting - I believe firmly in finding new and authentic ways to be the church and in encouraging better evangelism and discipleship. However, I found the facts contained in Derek Allan's research into church planting ('Planted to Grow') rather disturbing. Here are some of them.

(i) Commitment to local area? Church planting is often talked about in terms of holistic mission. Sadly the evidence undermines this view. Only 17 out of 55 of the church-plants surveyed by Allan and 3 out of 20 surveyed by Roberts did any community research prior to planting the new congregation. How can we even think about holistic ministry when we don't know the area we are working in? How can we possibly develop a vision and shape for a Kingdom-centred Christian Community when we have no real information about the area, and the needs, concerns and aspirations of the people we are working amongst?

(ii) Success Orientation? Allan's research reveals that, outside of London, there have been no church plants in the inner city or in an urban setting. The vast majority have been in suburban and small town settings. Are we so governed by the desire to create success stories that we shy away from the more difficult areas? Breaking out of our cultural fetters and building bridges with people who we might not immediately relate to takes time, and does not produce instant results, but does that matter?

(iii) Reasons for planting? There are many other questions arising from this research - not least what it reveals about motivation and about whether the new church-plants are any more orientated to mission than their parents? The research in fact reveals little social action taking place in the new congregations. Indeed the impression is that, though many of these new plants are thriving, meeting the need for a local evangelical witness and attracting new people, despite the rhetoric, there appears little evidence that holistic mission is really taking place.

2. Sticking Plaster Ministry?

We are getting good at running projects but how effective are we at tackling the reasons why people are poor, or unemployed, or feeling marginalised? Unless it's an issue like Sunday trading or something to do with sexual morality, such as lowering the age of consent for homosexuals, my post-bag is fairly empty on public issues. Some of the debates on issues at the Assembly are reduced to bland statements that amount to 'Dear Prime Minister, we don't like poverty, unemployment, sin etc.'. Our structures do not allow for more constructive debate, but then, no-one demands it either. There does not seem to be any real heart within our denomination to engage with the powers and principalities and affect the underlying structures that so damage and limit people's lives. Admittedly, it is a demanding and uphill task which can show few short term results. But, as before, are we concerned about 'success' or about committed discipleship? Unless the church maintains the continual and insistent demand for change, our occasional 'squeaks' lack integrity and credibility.

It is not only at the political level that we seem to have a fairly shallow commitment to social justice. In the area of personal lifestyle in our churches there seems little that distinguishes Baptist Christians from our neighbours -

except, perhaps, that we are busier, more harassed, and have less time to enjoy ourselves. Apart from attending church what marks out these radical followers of the Way? What has happened to our dissenting tradition? As I travel around churches I am sad to see so few fairly-traded products being used; so little evidence that Baptists are concerned about the environment and God's earth; so few examples of people living in a way that frees resources for other sections of our society, or that creates a welcome for the marginalised in our homes. It seems as if our commitment to social action goes little deeper than the occasional, albeit generous, donation and the creation of schemes that reflect well on the church. We prefer to set up a soup-run rather than invite people to stay with us. We prefer to run a night shelter rather than campaign tirelessly for better social housing. Yet which of these options are in the best interests of those we purport to serve?

We pay lip service to issues such as racism, poverty and homelessness but all too often our lifestyles as individuals and as churches perpetuate the problem. Our commitment does not carry us far enough to address the root causes either in ourselves or in our Society. Too often we are keen to stick a plaster over a festering sore and naively assume we have improved the situation. Justice will not come until there is change at every level and Baptists need to be actively living out the possibilities for change at the personal, community and political levels. If, of course, our words about the life-transforming power of the Gospel are to have integrity and true impact.

3. Worship

There is not space to do more than raise this issue, but in many churches the worship is the litmus test as to how far the commitment to social action has gone. Unless our prayer life, our songs and our preaching embrace the world, the nation and the local context in which we live and serve, we will perpetuate the distorted vision of Mission held by so many. If we continue to emphasise the ascended and glorified Christ at the expense of the Word made flesh, we will maintain the impression that this earthly life has little significance and that our social responsibilities are therefore an optional extra.

It would be interesting to hear responses to some of these issues and to encourage more discussion within the Mainstream network.

Anne Wilkinson Hayes- BUGB Executive for Social Action, Didcot, Oxfordshire.

Editor's Note. The Letters page is, as always, open. This letter to the churches has drawn on the seminar Anne gave at the 1994 Mainstream Conference.

EDITORIAL -

Liberating Stuff!



For nearly a decade now, I have been finding inspiration for contemporary Mission in the writings of those much maligned Third World Christians we have come to know as the theologians of liberation. Again and again I hear through their writings, sermons and community lifestyles the voice of the Living God, the God of the Bible, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. For me it is like hearing the voices of Amos or Micah or Isaiah or that of Jesus in Matthew 23 and Luke 4 replayed at the close of one millennium and the dawn of another one. As we consider Mission in this issue of the Mainstream Magazine I emphasise here the conviction that we First World Christians must learn to listen to the Gospel afresh from the lips of Third World ones. Among them the theologians of liberation. In my reading of these theologians twelve key themes emerge. They have, I suggest, much to say to us as Baptist Christians as we consider Mission. Those themes are as follows:

- 1) Conscientization. The need to bring home to our community, national and international leaders abuses of power, injustices and the plight of the poor and vulnerable. The need for Christians and local churches to be prayerfully and carefully engaged in consciousness-raising. To intercede, to lobby, to protest and to act to see things change for the better.
- 2) Orthopraxis. Right action is needed as well as right belief (orthodoxy). Praxis means a creative blend of theory and lifestyle, of theology and social action. Too many of our Baptist churches, or so it seems to me, still spend more time exploring one half of James' equation - faith - whilst neglecting the other: good deeds. Where are our local church Social Action programmes so often? Jesus will be asking us the same question of course. See Matthew 25.
- 3) Base communities. Communities rooted in Liturgy and Word but not ending there. Communities committed to community action and to social justice as well as to prayer and personal holiness. Margaret Hebblethwaite's fine book 'Base Communities - an introduction' (Geoffrey Chapman 1993) draws out helpfully and skilfully the importance and challenge of such communities to us all. Derek Tidball, Steve Gaukroger and others are rightly challenging us in the First World to discover new ways of being Church. In the base communities I would suggest we find some of the finest examples of what that might mean in the contemporary World Church.

4) Evangelization. The theologians of liberation I read are holistic in their commitment to evangelization. They are committed both to personal conversion of the individual as well as to the conversion of the Church to Scripture and therefore of the Church to social reform and justice. I seem to remember Colin Marchant's fine Presidential year calling our Union to exactly those three conversions. What happened? Perhaps it is more charitable to say not everyone listened! In his book 'The Holy Spirit and Liberation' (Burns and Oates 1989) Jose Comblin, a Belgian who has devoted much of his life to working alongside the poor of North Eastern Brazil, describes conversions he has seen. Lives transformed; families more united; children more carefully brought up; people more neatly dressed; such money as there is, better spent. Being more, matters more than having more, he goes on to say... long before our own Roy Searle did I suspect! First World affluence he writes '...does not produce life, but just consumption, excitement, the satisfaction of desires and, above all, isolation and individualism'. Visit your local Superstore if you don't believe him.

5) New Humanity. Liberated humanity living life to the full. Jesus shows us not only who God is but how to become a true human being. Christ humanizes human beings. Which leads to the next theme.

6) New Society. A middle way between the Capitalism that has brought with its 'Development' such harm to many of the Third World's peoples AND the Socialism that lies discredited by violence or undermined by the realities of perverse human nature. Such a Christian middle way is the quest of the theologians of liberation: 'The Christian Faith can contribute by marking out new paths to a New Society - an alternative to both Capitalism and Socialism - a fuller and more humane Society, free and liberated'. (Leonardo and Clodovis Boff in 'Introducing Liberation Theology'- Burns and Oates 1987).

7) Violence versus non-Violence. Too many First World Christians have false pictures of the theologians of liberation. A few have turned to violence and, in the process, discredited the whole movement. The C16th Anabaptist disaster at Munster comes readily to mind here. Most of these Christians have rather seen themselves in the tradition of Gandhi and Luther King. Consider these words of that most remarkable Bishop and C21st citizen Dom Helder Camara: "Non-violence has always been my way of interpreting the Gospel - my temperament if you like. But I don't really like the term non- violence. I much prefer a phrase like 'the violence of the pacifists'. How can we expect young people to renounce armed violence unless we offer them something strong and effective in exchange - something that can achieve results".

8) Contradicting Reality. This phrase has its origins in the writings of Jurgen Moltmann: 'Those who hope in Christ can no longer put up with reality as it is but begin to suffer under it, to contradict it'. What a splendid description of the work of Base Communities and what a splendid manifesto for Christians

and local churches committed to Mission. We are called to contradict reality. Jesus did. We call it Easter. These bones can live.

9) Church and Kingdom. Church and Kingdom are not one and the same. It's just that we pretend they are, too often. Intercessions that never get further than little Joey's bruised toe. Worship that begins and ends 'within these hallowed walls'. Preaching so non-political that it is in fact thoroughly political - condoning the status quo without even realising it. 'Church' biblically is one part, one aspect of 'Kingdom'. Under God's guidance and grace she can have great Kingdom-effectiveness and significance. Equally, she can be as irrelevant to the plans and purposes of God as any tiddlywinks competition or meeting of the Humanist Society. Lord deliver our Union from collapsing Kingdom into Church and worse, into our one local church at that!

10) The Suffering God. Paul Fiddes, perhaps best among contemporary Baptists, is raising these issues for us as we consider Mission. Post Auschwitz and Hiroshima what does it mean to speak of God as dynamic and co-suffering; as the human yet incarnate Lord? Pastoral concern for the poor, the disappeared, the abused and the tortured, make such an understanding of God in Christ poignantly alive and real for many Third World Christians. That and hunger, destitution, homelessness and diseases such as Aids.

11) The Faith handed down. I have tried to read widely in the sphere of Liberation Theology for at least a decade now. There I find a contemporary re-application of the Gospel and the faith handed down in words and ways that live and have resonance for our planet and for humankind as a new millennium beckons. From Leonardo Boff reminding us of the social dimensions to the Doctrine of the Trinity through to Jon Sobrino's inspired and inspiring fresh look at Christology. For example.

12) The preferential option for the poor. Perhaps the best known example of the teaching of these Christians this, popularised for us not least by Bishop David Sheppard's writings in the 1980's. I close this Editorial with the words of Clodovis Boff and Jorge Pixley: 'We are now seeing that the very future of humanity depends on achieving conditions that are genuinely those of life for the mass of the world's people. Out of sheer instinct for survival humanity has to make a preferential option for the poor. If it does not succeed in doing so, all the indications are that we shall all perish, rich and poor alike'.

Mainstream and Mission. Perhaps we are not always looking in the right books, or for that matter, countries for our Mission inspiration?

Michael Bochenski.

St. Albans.

Summer 1994

SET FREE FOR MISSION



I am excited by the breadth of our Mission at Tabernacle, Penarth. We haven't arrived, but at least we are on the move.

The Editor has asked me to write about our approach to Mission. We don't have a Diaconate, but in its place we have three leadership teams - Administration, Ministry and Mission, made up of Elders and Deacons. The purpose of the Mission Team is to develop and implement the Church's Mission strategy. It has been truly liberating. "The Lord has been calling us to step out in so many areas and He has accomplished so much in the past year that as I have reviewed the activities, I can only marvel at His goodness and continue to praise Him" - (Dr. Tony Hall, Chairman of Mission).

The Mission Team comprises Elders and Deacons responsible for the following areas of work: evangelism, overseas mission, social action, church planting, our children and young people, publicity and the homeless. Each of these areas have their own working group. The Elder overseeing the work, ensuring that the strategy and the working practices of that group are consistent with the overall direction of the church; whilst the Deacon is responsible for the practical implementation of that policy.

EVANGELISM TASK FORCE

Our Evangelism Task Force has a rolling programme throughout the year. A group of just a dozen who are totally dedicated to making known the Good News. This year for instance we supported the 'J.I.M.' and the 'Minus to Plus' initiatives; we also completed our 'Back to Roots' programme. We are in the middle of our Summer programme with open-air meetings Sunday mornings at a car-boot sale, attracting hundreds of visitors to a nearby village. On Sunday afternoon the Team are to be found on the Esplanade leading another open-air meeting. The very first week of this season saw a man profess faith and he hasn't missed Sunday evening worship since. The town Carnival is in July and we have a float, which has become the base for entertainment and evangelistic outreach as well. Last year two men, one aged 18 and the other 21, professed faith at the Carnival and are going on in the Lord. Come the Autumn we will return to door-to-door visiting and so the cycle of evangelism continues. Our worship services are lively and the teaching is systematic expository preaching, but always with a sharp evangelistic edge. Most of our evangelistic growth has come through the Sunday services.

HOMELESSNESS

'Tabs Cares' is the name for the work headed up by full time Social

Worker, Barry Lakin. It covers the need to care for people both within and outside the fellowship. Barry arranges transport to hospitals, sorts out Social Security Benefits, assisting with practical work such as property problems. In particular, the last two years has seen a huge increase in caring for the homeless in the community. 1993 was the third year in which we as a church have been actively involved in helping homeless people. This past year saw a 166% increase in the case load that we handled. The number of homeless people coming to us for assistance rose from 41 in 1992 to 109 in 1993. Whilst the presenting problem with each of these people is that of having no roof over their head, their problems are always more deep rooted. Perhaps the most important factor of all is that 63% of those who came to us were under the age of 24. Our work amongst homeless people is now well recognised throughout the County of South Glamorgan and we are enjoying very happy relationships with a host of other agencies. A grant of £5,000 has been made this year from the Vale of Glamorgan Borough Council to support the work that we are doing.

BOND BANK

At the end of 1992 we launched our 'Bond Bank' - the first in Wales. This is an incredibly useful service and resolves the problem of the many homeless people who, having acquired accommodation, are unable to take up a tenancy due to being unable to find a Bond which is often 'only' £100. The Tabernacle 'Bond Bank' issues a promissory note to prospective landlords in approved cases and undertakes to underwrite should there be damage or arrears. In 1993 nineteen such Bonds were issued with only six claims being made. Not only have homeless people benefitted initially from this initiative, but both statutory and other organisations have recognised the usefulness of the scheme and are beginning to refer homeless people to us for assistance. In 1993 we also launched 'Happy Hour' for the provision of a hot cooked meal once a week for homeless and needy people. Here we seek to meet the real needs of people through conversation and regular contact. 'Happy Hour' has been the means of seeing people won for the Lord, and for this we rejoice!

SOCIAL ACTION

We also have a Social Action group that help the church think through contemporary issues facing Christians today. 1993 saw the finalisation of our anti-pornography campaign, which resulted in W.H.Smith's locally agreeing not to supply pornographic magazines to those newsagents who do not want them. We were involved in the 'Keep Sunday Special' campaign and although the decision was lost, if not the argument, we ensured that the Christian voice was heard. The Social Action Group also got involved in a project concerning Third World Debt and wrote to all four major Banks to see what their attitudes and proposals, in relation to these debts, are at present. The group collated all the relevant information and have made a very professional presentation, making clear what we can do as individuals and as a church.

This past year also saw them identifying with a very needy part of the

town. In co-operation with a children's work we started some while ago, we were able to present 20 food hampers to children for them to give away as Christmas presents to families they knew to be in need.

CHURCH PLANTING

11 years ago, as Town Mayor's Chaplain, we were challenged to start a Christian children's work in the area of social deprivation just referred to. That work has continued to this day and is now stronger than ever. We are exploring the possibility of developing that work in co-operation with our Social Action group, into a culturally relevant congregation. Because of the relationship that we formed with the Borough Council when they opened a new Community Hall in a more prosperous part of town, they invited us to help form the management committee and to establish a Christian work there. That became our first congregational plant in the Easter of 1992. In the November of 1992 our second congregational plant had been established in a nearby village of 10,000 souls. Both congregations have been phenomenal success stories. Each plant is different from the others, but we praise the Lord for the evangelism growth that both have seen and for the numbers of people that have been baptised there and are moving on in discipleship. I remain convinced that Church Planting is the best form of evangelism.

CHYP BOARD

The children and young people's Board was formed to co-ordinate the work of children and young people at Tabernacle and to promote their spiritual growth. Once again, having the right structures has released the work from a maintenance to a mission mentality. The Board oversees the training, programming, resourcing, recruiting and envisioning necessary. The Board has acted as a point of contact in the district both denominationally and ecumenically and also with our own Mission Board.

PUBLICITY DEACON

Our Publicity Deacon fills a vital role on the Mission Board. The role as liaison officer maintaining the church calendar is just one of the key roles. She has also developed a policy of publicity and public relations with the Mission Team and oversees the implementation of that strategy. Our PD also keeps the church in the view of the public and of the wider church through creative Media publicity.

MISSION BOARD

Last, but not least, and in fact the first group to be really released into action, was our Mission Board. Encouraged by large numbers of candidates for the ministry and missionary service, a missionary policy for Tabernacle was necessary. Working on the experience and advice of other 'Missionary' Baptist Churches, a policy was agreed and implemented. 1993 saw us organise our first 'Global Fiesta' bringing together missionary organisations with whom we work. Using the best audio visual aids we were able to see the work going on

in various parts of the world. We have missionaries in Brazil with the B.M.S. - in Spain with W.E.C. - in Nepal with I.N.F. - in Lesotho at a Christian school. We also have a number of our members working with missionary and evangelistic organisations in this country.

David and Betty Chapman, known as 'Mr. & Mrs. Poland' in this neck of the woods, visit Poland regularly at the request of the Polish Baptist Union. They head up the official East Glamorgan Association BUGB contacts with Poland. Tabernacle, Penarth has twinned with the Baptist Church in Gdansk. Each year we bring a Pastor, and if appropriate, his family, across for an educational visit which also serves as a holiday. We also try to organise a couple of groups to visit Gdansk and other places in Poland to meet specific needs.

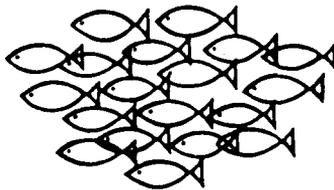
In closing, I would summarise the benefits of our present practice in the following ways:

- * The church has been released from a maintenance to a mission mentality.
- * The church is released from the power struggle often seen between Diaconate and Elderate. Both roles are Biblical and complementary. Here, both work side by side harmoniously.
- * The church's gifts are released, members and leaders are fulfilled. Creative ideas are turned into practical projects.
- * The Church is released to grow and the Holy Spirit finds freedom to achieve His purposes.

We have found a strategy that works and so we will stick with it.... as long as we believe it to be the Lord's will.

John James Senior Pastor Tabernacle Baptist Church Penarth

July 1994



YOU CAN'T CHOOSE YOUR NEIGHBOURS



My parents were Council tenants and

I grew up in the London borough of Lewisham, an unpretentious part of the great city. I remember my home church - Crofton Park - needing a new Manse but finding it very difficult to locate a house with four bedrooms anywhere in the area. Nonetheless, social deprivation and human need were not prominent emphases in the Christian faith I embraced in 1958 at the age of fourteen. Theological consciousness came later but most knowledgeable people would call my Christian upbringing 'conservative-evangelical' and Spurgeon's was the natural college to choose when the Lord called me to the Ministry in 1962 at the end of my 'A' levels - a decision I have never regretted. I entered College two years later, and inevitably discovered the language of labels. Throughout my course I shared with most fellow-students a concern to be truly evangelical and an impatient dismissal of anything we judged guilty of the current heresies: 'social gospel' or 'servant church' for example.

My first Pastorate was in rural Northamptonshire. I preached a gospel which satisfied most church members that I was 'sound'. They were glad to have a man who was theologically educated and faithful to the gospel. Charismatic renewal met Lyn and I at a point of personal need when we longed to be more effective. We moved to Sutton Coldfield in 1977 with a commitment to renewal which we saw largely in terms of worship, fellowship and personal devotion. It was a renewal which reinforced my theological understanding at that time more than it challenged it. That was a calm waiting to be disturbed.

The Old Testament Against Injustice.

I did a spell of teaching 'A' level Religious Studies when each of my three children decided that Dad's R.S. might be a better bet for a decent grade than anything on offer at school. Others joined the classes and the school allowed our family arrogance to take the riskand then claimed all public credit when they did well! The syllabus included a major study of several Old Testament prophets and I was gripped in a new way by their relentless message which condemned the people of God for its costly failure to be a community

protecting those who cannot protect themselves - widows, orphans, foreigners, strangers. It is a searching indictment. Sometimes we use the word 'passion' too easily, but surely we can speak of a passion for righteousness and justice as characteristic of prophets whose calling was to address God's word to His people. 'But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream'.... 'For I desire mercy, not sacrifice'.... 'He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God'..... 'Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow'.

The New Testament Against Racism.

I began to explore Romans in depth and, more recently, to appreciate Galatians. The more I study these letters, the more comprehensive they seem, especially in their insistence on an Atonement which eliminates those human divisions of the ancient world marked by gross injustice. This act of Atonement creates a new community - the church - where the reconciliation of such divisions is to be visible: Jew and Gentile: Slave and Free: Male and Female. Is it too stark to argue that the essential thesis of Romans is a decisive rejection of racism? It may be that Paul accepted too easily some realities of his day - particularly the plight of slaves and women - and that he failed to apply his understanding of the Gospel to their position as radically as he applied it to the position of Gentiles. If only the Council of Jerusalem had considered the implications of the Gospel for slaves and for women as thoroughly as it did for Gentiles!

It has been vital to my recent involvement with black South Africans to show that the biblical rejection of racial prejudice is not only rooted in the prophetic demand of the Old Testament, but also in the heart of Paul's exposition of the Gospel in which he rules out any form of religious inferiority or superiority which is based on race. Paul calls Jew and Gentile alike to faith in Jesus Christ. It's hard to overstate what it has meant to Black Ministers (and to me) to see that social commitment as well as personal conversion stems from the death of Christ. This enables them to major on the same document - Romans - as do those who have hitherto lived comfortably both with Christian faith and with apartheid.

Friendships across the Continents.

My first visit to South Africa in 1985 introduced me to the churches of the predominantly Black Baptist convention of Southern Africa, but I had no idea at that time of the significance of our meeting. Those who were with me from England shared an indignant impatience at what we felt to be the smug satisfaction of some white Baptist leaders - and of one in particular - at what had been done to improve the lot of Black people. If that was 'improvement' what sort of conditions were there before it started we reflected?

All this, and much more, had prompted our church to sponsor nearly 30

MAINSTREAM GOES REGIONAL



At its June 1994 Meeting, the Executive agreed to organise four Regional Mainstream Events this Autumn. In the North, the Midlands, London & the South East and the South West. At the time of going to print not all the details were available. Contact telephone numbers for the various Regions can be found below. What follows is the Programme for the Midlands Event.

SIGNPOSTS TO REVIVAL?

We invite YOU to a

Mainstream Away Day.

FRIDAY NOVEMBER 4th 10.30am - 3.30pm

at Retford Baptist Church, Hospital Rd., Retford, Nottinghamshire. DN22 7BD

Cost: £6.00 payable upon arrival

- 10.00 Arrivals and Coffee
- 10.30 Introductions and Worship -
led by Michael Bochenski & John Brewster
- 11.00-12.30 *Speaker and Talkback* : 'Signposts to Revival?'
Revd. Nigel Wright (Spurgeon's College) and, with
firsthand experience of Toronto, Mark Abernethy
(Church at Bushey Meads)
- 12.30- 1.30 Lunch (please bring a packed lunch, drinks will be provided)
- 1.30- 2.00 Regional Mainstream - Word and Spirit update
- 2.00- 3.30 Sharing... Ministry... Prayer... Lord's Supper
- HOME

You can, of course, just turn up on the day but it would be helpful to know if you are planning to come. If so, please could you let Derek Wick know 021 - 378 - 3020 or 021 - 355 - 5088. For travel directions please send an s.a.e. to:

Tom Coulson the Church Secretary, 13 Bank Side, Ordsall, Retford, Notts.
(0777 - 706417)

Other contact numbers:

North	:	Glen Marshall	0924 - 382966
London & South East	:	Rob Warner	071 - 274 - 5445
South West	:	David Slater	0548 - 852770

'Together we will serve the Lord, together not alone'

MAINSTREAM CONFERENCE 1995

16th - 18th JANUARY 1995

WORD & SPIRIT



The conference is being held at High Leigh, Hoddesdon.

The conference this year is a consultation in respect of the proposed Word & Spirit Network. There will be more time for sharing and discussion both in regions and all together.

Our speakers for the conference are:

- Michael Quicke - Bible Studies
- Faith Forster - Word & Spirit - Inner Being
- Derek Tidnall - Word & Spirit - Convictions
- Rob Warner - Word & Spirit - Vision
- Rob White - Word & Spirit - Relationships

To be sure of a place at this year's conference please return the tear off strip below to:

Mr Derek Wick, Mainstream Conference Secretary, Sutton Coldfield Baptist Church, Trinity Hill, Sutton Coldfield, B72 1TA, enclosing a deposit of £10.00 *per person*.

Conference Fees:

- Main House - £60.00 per person,
 - The Cedar Wing - £75.00 per person
- (limited number.... en suite facilities).

There will be no refunds of conference fees after January 4th.

✂ -----

From:

Name:

Address:

Telephone:

- I would like to book places in the Main House @ £60.00 per person.
- I would like to book places in the Cedar Wing @ £75.00 per person.
- I enclose a deposit of £10.00 per person.

Black people - Ministers, their wives and young people - to visit England; several Members of our church to spend time in the townships of South Africa; my two music-student daughters to spend several weeks each in the townships studying various aspects of Black music for their graduate dissertations; and myself, to make seven trips, four of them with my wife. The most recent was in the first three weeks of June of this year.

We've lived in and seen first-hand the consequences of apartheid: over-crowded ghettos; garbage-ridden townships; shanty towns; serious poverty; pathetic educational facilities; no water, electricity or jobs for a rural community which - ironically - is situated alongside a luxurious river-sports complex. We've known anger as we felt the impact of an arrogant dismissal of people whose love, welcome, hospitality, music, linguistic freedom and humour combine to create a culture of rare dignity. Black people have welcomed us into the townships, despite the stupid insistence of some whites that we are flirting with danger. Incidentally, the only problem for my daughters was the occasional threat from some White people who discovered their South African address. They came home overwhelmed by their experience. They also came home indignant at the humiliation of men, who long to be fathers providing a future for their children, but who find themselves too disadvantaged to offer anything.

We've made incredible new friendships among those whose Government's ruthless legislation had insisted that they were too ignorant, too worthless, too numerous and too dangerous to be considered citizens in their own country.

Where Next South Africa ?

The world has watched the huge changes in South Africa which have been inevitable from that day, 11th February 1990, when Nelson Mandela walked free from prison, ending an appalling sentence of 27 years. This culminated in the elections on 26-27th April, and the new atmosphere of uninhibited enthusiasm is a privilege to share. Black people realise that, at last, they belong in their own land. They are accepting responsibility for the future and believe the law will protect them from the injustices which have pursued them for longer than they can remember. Whites and Blacks are fiercely proud of being South African and this unashamed patriotism is the source of my tentative optimism for the future of this in some ways favoured country. It can't all happen overnight, but I saw no evidence personally of the much-publicised, but completely unrealistic, Black over-expectations. Wrong attitudes of racial prejudice, fixed by generations of practice won't disappear easily. I drove a Minister and his wife to a hospital appointment in Pretoria. He is one of the most influential Black Baptist leaders in South Africa. He suffered a breakdown several months ago. An Afrikaner Nurse attempted to discuss him with me, wrongly assuming I was the boss of two 'illiterate' black people who could not answer for themselves. She even asked me if he wanted his urine tested, and those who know me well will marvel at my restraint in restricting my answer

to 'I don't know!' We joked about it afterwards but the incident was insulting to an experienced Minister of great dignity who can preach fluently in several languages.

Local Church Mission.

I am aware that my exposure to South Africa has challenged the core of my faith, even as it has immeasurably enriched my life with wonderful new friends. It is not necessarily a smooth process to translate personal indignation into valid theological convictions . My journey still ruffles some feathers in Sutton Coldfield. But South Africa has made its impact on our church over several years, and it is probably no coincidence that we appointed a Community Worker two years ago. We hope she will help us respond better to the fear, poverty, deprivation, loneliness and despair which are around us, especially on a large estate in the town. We are trying to make social justice an integral part of our agenda, our prayers, our worshipand our budget.

This is not a dramatic story and some who read this article (requested, not volunteered) will feel that it is neither radical nor vital. It is, however, an honest record of a journey for a Minister and a church which is far from over or complete. It represents an attempt to serve God and those who, in the terms of Luke 10:25-37, claim us as neighbours, wherever they - or we - live.

Alan Pain Minister of Sutton Coldfield Baptist Church,

July 1994.



SEEKERS' SERVICES - PART TWO

OR THE PRODIGAL AND HIS BROTHER

After the first year of holding Seeker's Services on a regular monthly basis, I suddenly realised that most of my energy, time and prayers had been focused not on the Services themselves but on the Christians in the church. It was a cautiously enthusiastic Church Meeting which voted for a one year trial period. Some were very keen, others more suspicious, some were openly opposed but the majority were prepared to give it some time. So, we entered a 'wait and see' phase. The trial period itself was indicative of the radical nature of the proposal. The transition had begun to move us to-ward becoming more 'Seeker' targeted. As the year progressed we had to seriously debate many issues and this inevitably led to some people becoming still more worried and agitated. Why then do Seekers Services, which are simply an evangelistic method, produce so much caution and sometimes outrage? In the United States some churches have split over the issue and many have lost members. I would like to suggest a number of reasons for this reaction and go on to perhaps give some advice as to how people may learn from our mistakes and thus make the transition for themselves a little easier.

REASONS FOR A REACTION

(i) What ...Change?

It is probably true that you can change most things in church life ... except tampering with Sunday Services. Renewal produced such a reaction in our churches in part for that reason. Renewal, however, involved just a change in style and order. Seekers Services radically change the content as well! Little or no singing, talks instead of sermons, small amounts of prayer, songs most Christians would not have heard of (secular hits etc.). Need I say more?

(ii) The elder brother is alive and well and living in.....

It is during such a transition that you understand the inclusion of the elder son's reaction to the prodigal returning home in the Gospel. I am sure he had comforted his father during his brother's absence, perhaps even said he felt the same way, but when the prodigal actually arrives home and a party is thrown; when the robe is out and a ring is on - then his true feelings are seen. It is one thing to 'say' we exist to reach the world but quite another to allow your schedule to be radically changed in order to make that happen. "What about me?" is the cry? "I need to be fed every

week". "I need to have my service of worship". One member admitted to a friend of mine that they were basically against Seekers Services because they did not feel I quite loved them as I used to!

(iii) Reversing the cultural gap.

Much is said of the cultural gap between the world and the church. How a non-churched person enters a time warp as they walk into most churches. However, this of course also works in reverse. When you change the service to fit the culture of the non-churched then you automatically force the churched to walk into a different culture themselves. They become shocked. It is dark; there are stage lights and popular music being played. Often videos are used! Nobody gives them a hug at the door and there is very little congregation participation. Of course, for many Christians this is a welcome relief from the monotony of the 'normal' service, for others it can also be very threatening.

(iv) Theology.

Some of course have had theological objections. These mainly emanate from those with a more Reformed background, although Charismatics too find the lack of worship hard to cope with. The main issue has centred around the progressive approach to evangelism that the services are based on. They are designed to educate and minister to non-Christians over a period of time. Giving people space to think and consider the Christian way. Seekers services are trying to move someone down the Engal scale from -10 (no awareness of God) to +1 (commitment to Christ). Willow Creek estimate that this process takes nine months. Some find it hard to allow this process to happen; rather they want the 'Full Gospel' preached and a challenge given at every service. To allow people time and to perhaps deal with only one aspect of the truth of God, is seen as compromise, and a watering down of the Gospel. If, of course, you add to this the dreaded 'entertainment' factor, where secular music, drama and video are used, then you have a range of arguments for representing Seekers Services as simply following the ways of the world.

Our process of transition was far from comfortable and we have a church that was used to change, active in evangelism and emphasised friendship with the non-churched people. I shudder to think what the reaction would have been if these essential foundations had not been in place before we started.

MISTAKES

Introducing Seekers Services into any church is likely to cause tension. That said, I am sure our own problems were heightened by our own mistakes and our inability to enable the process of change to happen smoothly. Listed below are a number of principles I would recommend to enable a smoother transition process to happen; some of these we achieved successfully, others are the

product, after reflection, of our mistakes.

- (i) Drip, drip, drip. Over a period of at least a year, drip the principles of the services into the life of the church. Talk about the cultural barrier, emphasise how non-churched people view us. Put before them the vision of reaching the whole community and pose the question of how we can reach the most isolated within the community from church. Emphasise the failure of the church this century to reach 'the people of the land', challenge them to think about how we can and must change and 'do all things' to reach the world.
- (ii). Survey the non-churched. Ask them why they don't come. Ask them what they would like to see in a service designed for them and ask if you could provide something they would be happy to come to. When and where would be most convenient?
- (iii) Pilots and trial. Run at least three or four pilot services. Do not be fooled into thinking that just because you have told them what it will be like, they will automatically understand. It is also important that you do not allow judgements to be made on one performance alone. If you are aiming, for instance, to start on a monthly basis, then have at least a year's trial in order to allow time for people to see the vision.
- (iv) Don't mention 'That' word. We used the word Willow Creek too often in the early days. Big American churches are not good role models to use in the sometimes smaller British church context.
- (v) Answer objectors. Hit the objections straight on from the beginning. Do not allow them to go underground. Answer the 'entertainment' question, react to the 'compromise' allegation, teach on the principles of anonymity, creativity and excellence.
- (vi) Keep in perspective. Remind people that Seekers Services are just one part of evangelism strategy and not the whole. Because they are so prominent they can be perceived as being larger than they really are.
- (vii) Bring friends and tell stories. Conversions to the services invariably arose after people had brought non-churched friends. They saw for themselves the benefits as their friends responded so positively. As you receive back reports of people's reactions and comments, shout them from the pulpit during normal Sunday services. Tell the stories, share the reactions. People will need to know these are working because actual conversions to Christ will be small in the early days.
- (viii) Protect your team. As leaders it will be your role to take the flack as it comes. Obviously some comments will be valid and changes will need to take place. However, some will arise due to ignorance and misunderstanding. Protect your team from these. They will need motivating and encouraging all the time. You become very vulnerable when breaking new ground.
- (ix) Come back to basics. When 'the Opposition' hits you, you will need to

remember some very basic things:

- * The unchurched deserve a better deal than they have previously had from the church. They have, on the whole, not had the priority they deserve.
- * The older son you will always have with you and he always complain. Don't take it too personally.
- * Bill Hybels says 'Do it not because you want to but because you have to'.

AND NOW?

Two years down the road, we have overwhelming approval from the church membership, a growing number of non-churched converts and increased attendance of Christians and non-Christians. I look back and forget the times of the pain of transition, but it was very real and costly. However, so was the salvation won for us by Jesus. This land will not be takenwithout sacrifice.

Roger Sutton

Altrincham

July 1994

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THE MISSIONARY CHURCH

TURNING TALK INTO ACTION

'Every church a mission base'. I can still hear those words ringing in my ears. They were spoken by a long-serving missionary from Brazil some months ago in our morning service, but what does that mean here in our increasingly pagan, secularised society? I write as one who has been in full time ministry for four years; having come from some years teaching experience I came into ministry with few naive expectations. I appreciate how far most folk are from any concept of God which goes beyond folk religion. As for the church, for many we are no longer even irrelevant - we are unreal people preaching an incomprehensible message. How are we tackling this? How far is the church not just aware of and discussing the problem but actually turning talk into action?

My own experience to date has raised more questions than suggested answers. In many ways I am encouraged. I hear some good reports from other churches and in my own pastorate we have seen conversions and spiritual growth and that is not just me putting a brave smile on - I thank God it is a reality. Yet certain elements of our life as people committed to the principles of renewal and mission disturb me. It seems I have come into a national church where there is no shortage of ideas. You can be into church growth, Willow Creek, signs and wonders; you can attend great and worthwhile Conferences on how to encourage growth and reach the lost, but am I the only one who looks around and wonders how far the theory is getting beyond our church doors? How far have we to go before we can echo the words of our Brazilian friend, 'every church a mission base'?

FROM TRAINING TO THE REAL WORLD

I have already commented that I was hardly a fresh-faced youth when entering the Pastorate. I was acutely conscious of the relative failure of the church to impact the real world. It was with that concern that I entered training at a Baptist College. I have much to thank that Institution for by way of preparation and learning. I would not have done it any other way. Yet in the relatively short time since I left I have found myself confronted with a need to alter my conception of the role of 'the Pastor'. I have had to undergo, to use Thomas Kuhn's phrase (which incidentally is in grave danger of becoming hackneyed) 'a paradigm shift'. I was prepared for Ministry among the people of God. My gifts of teaching and pastoral care were nurtured and developed and they remain at the centre of my Ministry. Churches need teachers and preachers and people need to be built up in their faith. The problem I felt unprepared to face was how to enable these same people to look outwards... to become missionaries in practice.

Some personal comments are necessary here. I was greatly helped by having a Senior Friend who was, and is, truly a friend and confidante. I did not feel alone. Secondly, we had one member who was embarking on church-based training in evangelism. The church agreed to take this person on and thus a team was born early in my ministry which helped my personal journey as well as the changes in the church. Even given these great advantages, however, still the shift I felt I had to make was significant. How much more challenging must it be for people not so readily supported and assisted? It seems to me that our Colleges must continue to examine ways of aiding students in the practical application of the necessary learning. I know this is already happening to some extent - I would encourage it further and suggest the need for increased dialogue between the churches and the Colleges.

FROM MAINTENANCE TO MISSION

Much has been written about the change a church has to go through in turning from self-centred maintenance of the status quo to real commitment to mission. My purpose is not to re-invent the wheel. I simply want to reflect on the personal aspects, the feelings, the inner conflicts, the mixture of joy, when this starts to happen and the frustration when you realise how far you've still got to go!

Again I have been encouraged by many good people around me who have supported me and shared some of the journey so far. There are those who share the dream and see the distance between the vision and the reality. I do wonder what becomes of those who are less fortunate. Do they simply go for it alone? Our existing networks of support are very patchy.

One of the conflicts is time management. If the leaders of the church are to encourage the people to get out alongside non-Christians that can only be

credible if the leaders set an example. It is not good enough to exhort others to do this and then spend every moment in church work. So, join the club! Sport, music, whatever is your forte. Ah, but then comes the guilt. Shouldn't I be spending this time with some needy person in the church or preparing for the next meeting? What happens if an important call comes in while I'm out? This is where the paradigm shift tyre hits the road as it were. If I am to be committed to the church as a mission base, I have got to become a missionary pastor. That is not easy and the inner sense of conflict is very real, but if I don't model it how can I expect others to follow? Seeing a church move from maintenance to mission is costly for the church and for the leader. It's not just a new way of thinking, it's a new way of being. It's not just a cosy idea, it's a practical challenge.

FROM STRATEGIES TO ACTION

For the church the change is just as significant. It means moving beyond that model of church life where many members remain inactive and passive, to one of real participation in all areas of fellowship life. One way in which we have sought to facilitate that is by developing a team strategy with groups of people taking responsibility for initiatives and co-ordination in certain specific areas - evangelism, social action, worship, pastoral care. Again, the idea is well established but the practical implementation is quite a different proposition. The danger is setting up 'think-tanks' which talk and then talk more. There is a high risk that such a strategy fails to be translated into action. A team can too easily become a committee; as someone once rightly said 'a committee can be defined as a dark alley where good ideas are lured and quietly put to death'. Teams must include doers and those who can inspire others. Of course one of the problems in a growing church is that during this process of establishing teams a lot of good ideas come forward, many of which require more human resources than is available in the membership. Difficult choices have to be made.

Moving from strategy to action is fraught with potential pitfalls. Breakdown in communication can happen all too readily. People released into new responsibilities can easily miss the target. Plans need co-ordination and as a consequence, the existing structures for decision making start to creak. Then some start to voice concerns that things aren't what they used to be! If I have learned anything it is that mission is messy. There are no nicely tied ends; there are no perfect plans; people need space to make mistakes and then learn and have another go, and that applies to me too. There are misunderstandings that arise and sometimes the cart gets before the horse. No-one told me it would be like this - but at least it's exciting!

SIGNS OF HOPE

We have much to learn as a church. In many ways although we have been

active in mission we still run the risk that we talk about it more than do it. That is much more comfortable and much less messy, but we are moving and starting to get our hands dirty and I sense many churches are moving the same way. Is it so? If it is then that is good reason to be encouraged. There are signs of hope in the local area too. We are part of a local district which is working well in terms of networking and mutual support. Our Association is seeking to re-structure itself and so greater priority to mission. Time will tell whether this ever moves beyond talk into action. There are signs of hope in some of our Colleges as well. I sense a growing awareness of the need to train leaders of varied gifting who will not just learn the techniques but also develop the application of all that is learned in the real situation.

All of these signs allow for considerable optimism concerning the future health of our churches. There is a long way to go if we are to fulfil a dream of seeing 'every church as a mission centre'. Dreams are there to be pursued however. Perhaps our greatest need now is to move beyond the planning and into action in mission. After all you can only talk for so long.

Graham Watts

Haywards Heath

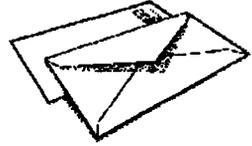
July 1994

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Please write to Steven Hembery to subscribe or make a donation.

LETTERS



Dear Michael,

Just a note of congratulations on the new look Mainstream Magazine. It really looks very good - well done! I particularly appreciated your editorial on 'Recycling Baptists'; it was your usual thoughtful, helpful stuff. Keep up the good work. With warm Christian greetings.

Revd Stephen Gaukroger (President)

I fought hard with my modesty for several seconds before deciding to publish this - the Editor!

Dear Michael,

Congratulations on the new format of the Mainstream Magazine! Yesterday was a beautiful warm Summer's day and I lay on the grass and read the whole magazine cover to cover. Most stimulating. In fact I was prompted to put pen to paper with a contribution to the present interest in networking. I hope it is of some use.

There is much in the recent interest in the Word and Spirit Network to warm the heart. The cry from many a minister for a depth of relationship with others, often missing in 'formal' denominational structures, echoes in my own spirit. Likewise, even a 'sniff' of dynamic church life with Christian fellowships exercising culturally relevant ministries, networked together, sets the pulse racing but..... Why on earth a but? During the last ten years I have experienced koinonia at two different levels. On the one hand I have sought to be a 'good' Baptist pastor; I have no desire to be otherwise. I have always been of the mind that to be part of the denomination, with integrity, is to share in its structural life and so..... NBA General Committee, Executive Committee, Area Pastoral Committee, Minister's Secretary, Association Moderator have all benefited from my tender concerns! I have been glad to serve.

On the other hand I have enjoyed the benefit of friendships, chiefly with three other Pastors with whom I trained, but

with others, too, who crossed my path, and with whom I shared part of my life. These friendships have been with Baptists and non-Baptists (horrible patronising phrase!) and pastors and lay-folk (even worse!). Without exception these more ad hoc friendships developed in surprising ways, evolved over time, passed through difficulties (which somehow deepened the friendship) and met those deeper heart/soul needs of 'knowing and being know' which we all long for. That is not to depreciate at all the 'friendships' I have enjoyed with others in the NBA (an Association I am glad to belong to) but it is to say that there is a quality of friendship which happens outside of formal structures, indeed thrives outside those structures.

It seems to me that the plans for a Word and Spirit Network reach pretty close to a central human need. One which has been recognised and placed on our agenda, if it was not already there, by the Mainstream Executive. To become truly human there is a need of 'committed friendship'; we cry out for it and many have expressed disappointment in not finding it within our present denominational structures. However, might it not be that to attempt to systematise those friendships would be to stifle them; perhaps even to kill them? We might have to wrestle with the thought that the deeper spirit needs of

people (certainly pastors) cannot be met from within a formal structure. There are within the structures too many conflicting interests. In a true friendship, the friend is one who values the other for who they are and not for any ulterior reason. Within formalised church and Association structures there are simply too many power interests for genuinely disinterested friendships to blossom. How many pastors who have allowed a friendship to develop (particularly if outside the Diaconate!) have then been accused of 'favouritism'? "The Deacons ought to be your friends" comes the cry, but it often just does not happen that way. Friendship is of a different order.

I have a further suspicion that such friendships cannot be legislated for, in the sense 'all those who live within such and such a geographical location.....be friends!'. It is not about being Baptist or Northern, or Evangelical or Charismatic or Mainstream. If then my suspicions are correct and the Word and Spirit Network becomes a formal structure, there will still be the need for those within the new structure to form friendships outside it. In a few years' time the next generation of 'under forties' will want to break out of the structure to meet their inner needs of true friendship - Word and Spirit Mark 2. True friendship cannot be 'structured' and so perhaps it will simply not happen in Word and Spirit Network. Sisters and brothers will be frustrated and disillusioned, in much the same way that many are when 'given' a 'Senior Friend'.

Surely, what we are looking for then ought to be present within our existing structures. Our problem is that often it is not. Do we abandon them then? Not at all! God-given structures in the fullness of time may yet be redeemed (perhaps that is why we continue to wrestle with them). Nor is this to say that we abandon all thought of Word and Spirit Network.

It may well be that this is God's timing for a challenge to that which exists. I am simply registering a caution: If we think we can produce committed friendships by establishing another structure we may well be disappointed. Perhaps it would be better to recognise that there will always be the hard work of reformation within the structures, old or new, and to positively encourage 'communities of character' (Stanley Hauerwas).....small bands of people who share a depth of committed friendship outside of the formal structures of the denomination, which will in turn enrich the denomination they exist apart from.

Andrew Fitz-Gibbon, Stocksfield.

Editor this has been condensed from a letter/article received soon after the publication of the June issue.

Dear Michael,

I have just read my copy of the new style Mainstream Magazine. It offers both hope and inspiration for the future within our denomination.

I have been in my present pastorate for a year now. Like many Ministers' families, my wife and I do feel very isolated at times. We have had lots of support from the Church Officers and Area Superintendent but we have missed an 'outside' circle of friends with whom we could share our feelings and frustrations within a safe and secure relationship. It is fifteen years since I left College and I often feel that because Ministry has changed so much in that time that I need completely re-training. The sabbatical system is helpful but it seems to me that the real need is for on-going systematic training programmes run by Associations and resourced by the Colleges.

I like the new format of the Magazine and shall go on supporting Mainstream because it has so often been a life line in

the past when vision was overwhelmed by frustration. I have had some doubts about the proposed Word and Spirit

Network but the Magazine has made me see it in a more positive light.

Rev. David K. West, Littlehampton.

News from the Executive:

- * New members of the Mainstream Executive are Lynn Green (Wokingham) and Rob White (Poynton). It is hoped to further increase the Executive after the 1995 Mainstream Conference, not least with more Regional representatives.
- * Nigel Wright is returning to the Executive this Autumn after his sabbatical.
- * There are still places available for the 24 hour Consultation for Senior Pastors being held at Gorsley on November 7th-8th. This Consultation is concerned especially with Team Work in Christian Leadership. Details from David Slater 0548-856848 / 852770.
- * The date for the next of the Executive's regular meetings with the Baptist Union's Senior Management Team at Didcot is now fixed: Friday, October 7th 1994. Prayers valued.
- * The Mainstream Executive have received a holding letter from Douglas Sparkes concerning the Superintendency Review. We look forward to being further consulted as the Review proceeds.
- * 1995 Conference: As reported in the last issue, the theme of the 1995 Mainstream Conference is to be 'Word and Spirit'. The venue will be the High Leigh Conference Centre, Hertfordshire. As from September the places are open to any and to all on a first application basis. Dates January 16th-18th 1995. Cost £60 or £75 according to room. Speakers already booked include Faith Forster, Rob White and Derek Tidball. Michael Quicke will be the Bible Study Speaker. Further details if required from Derek Wick 021-378-3020 / 021-355-5088.
- * Finally, why has it been 'initially by invitation only?' for 1995 we have been asked. Financial considerations have affected the decision to change venue as has the desire for a different ethos for the Conference next year. Less 'free' places will be available, of necessity, in 1995. We have also been particularly concerned not to see High Leigh filled with dozens from only a few Churches and yet none at all from many others.
- * Please note, then, that there is no hidden Executive agenda to transform Mainstream into an exclusive club for the very initiated! Mainstream remains fully open to all Baptists committed to 'Life and Growth' within our Union. Interpret that phrase as you will!

© Sept. 1994 Mainstream. This magazine continues to be designed, printed & despatched by

MOORLEY'S Print & Publishing

23 Park Rd., Ilkeston, Derbys.

Tel: (0602) 320643

using the Editor's data sent on disk.