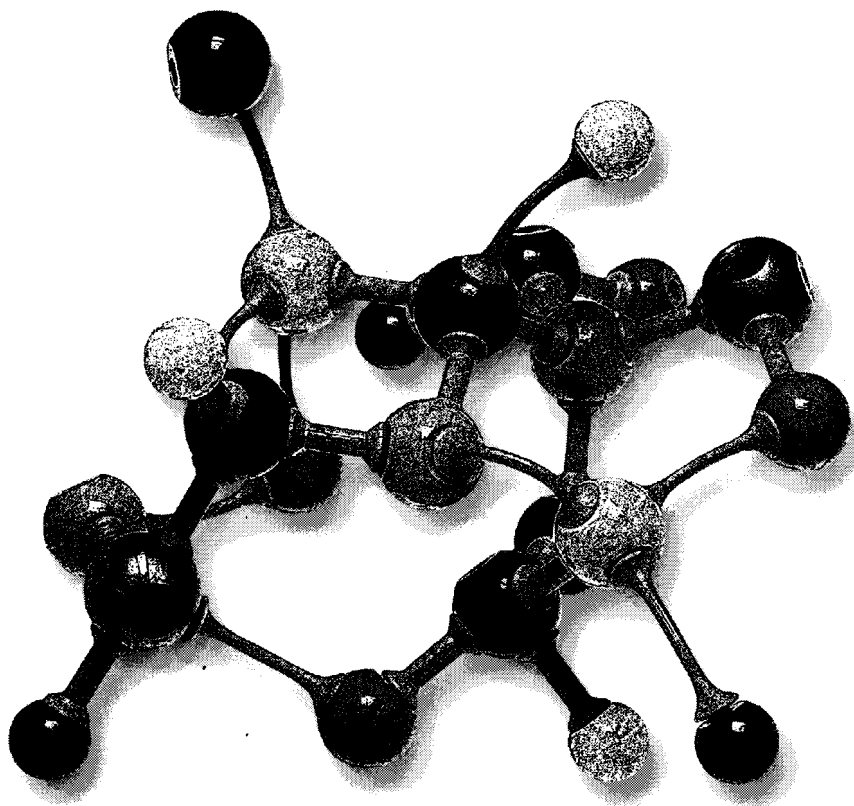


TALK

The Mainstream Magazine

Autumn / Winter 2003-4



Connecting leaders

Mission: Possible

Greg Haslam
Chris Stoddard
Geraldine Latty
Darell Jackson
Simon Jones
Nic Harding
Andy Hawthorne
Philip Deller
Rodney Breckon
Nigel Wright
and more ...

MISSION: POSSIBLE

The 2004 Mainstream Conference
12-14 January 2004

The Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick, Derbyshire

At the Mainstream Conference 2004 we will be developing the third of our core values
'Get Stuck Into Mission'



Our main speaker this year is Greg Haslam. Born and raised in Liverpool, Greg studied Theology and History at Durham University. After teaching high school he trained for the ministry at London Theological Seminary before moving to Winchester where he pastored for 21 years until his recent call to Westminster Chapel, London. Greg has traveled widely as a preacher and conference speaker, both in UK and overseas. He believes strongly in the recovery of strong healthy churches, characterised by a strong and vigorous God-centred focus. He is author of numerous articles and books. His latest book *Elisha – a sign and a wonder* is published by Kingsway.

Other conference leaders and speakers include **Geraldine Latty** – worship leader, **Andy Hawthorne** and **Peter Nodding**. Some of the issues we will be considering:

- Mission in the city
- Mission in suburbs
- Prayer and mission
- Becoming a world mission church
- Rural mission
- Mission in small towns
- Worship and mission

MAINSTREAM CONFERENCE 2004 BOOKING FORM

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Address _____

_____ **Postcode** _____

Telephone _____ **Email** _____

Number of people:		Totals:
	Standard accommodation	
	Single @ £105 per person	£
	Double @ £95 per person	£
	En suite accommodation	
	Single @ £120 per person	£
	Double @ 120 per person	£
	TOTAL ACCOMMODATION	£

How to Pay: £30.00 non-returnable deposit for each place booked. Balance due on 1st December 2003. Full amount due for any cancellation after 1 January 2004. Cheques payable: **MAINSTREAM**. Please detach (or copy) and return this booking form to: Ian Frith, 1 Kenilworth Close, Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands, B74 2SE

Questioning mission



Mission is something we take seriously even if it's done with mixed effectiveness. Just listen to the language at one of our national assemblies and you realise how mission-minded we are. I'm sure this is the fundamental reason why, out of all the main-line denominations, we are not declining but actually slightly growing (Darrell Jackson's article). But before we pat ourselves on the back let's ask ourselves a few questions.

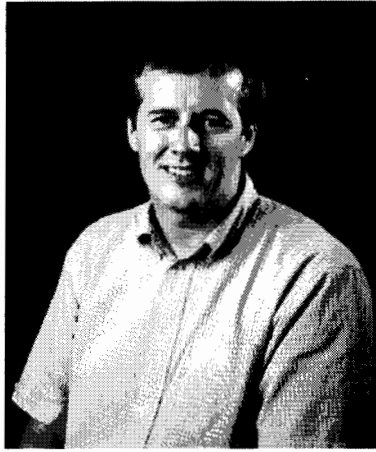
- I. Have we neglected forming the kind of people Jesus dreamed of as missionaries as we busy ourselves in activity? Are we too focused on *doing* and not enough on *being*?
 - II. How sharp has our missionary agenda been as a denomination in the last ten years as we have spent most time on internal structural reform and a marketing makeover?
 - III. Do we need to spend more time reflecting on how we define and articulate the gospel for our times? An urgent need I think having listened recently to a world-leading gospel preacher at a recent event, and as we consider the serious plight of Christian influence in our land (Greg Haslam interview).
 - IV. In a society where the plausibility of the Christian message is shot apart, do our actions indeed speak louder than words? (Rodney Breckon's article)
 - V. Are we sufficiently experimental in our missionary dreams and action?
 - VI. Are we in danger of being locked into certain sectors and cultural groups of society while we pass others blissfully unaware? (Nic Harding's and Simon Hall's articles)
 - VII. Is the assumption that big event evangelism is passé called into question by Festival: Manchester (Andy Hawthorne's article)?
 - VIII. Have we taken seriously enough that the denomination that plants churches will grow and those that don't will decline?
 - IX. Do we need more adventurous expressions of church?
 - X. Do we need to spend more time thinking about the social and political implications of the gospel so that we re-position ourselves as God's alternative community?
- Mission is possible and there's much to encourage in this pre-conference edition. Let's share the stories and go on asking ourselves the hard questions. And what a way to do it as we share in conference together? Be a part of it!
- And it's only months away till we take the next step forward as a mission focused network and release Rob White for apostolic work amongst us. This is just the start. Join us on the journey!

Stephen Ibbotson is the Editor of *Talk*. He is also a member of the pastoral staff of Altrincham Baptist Church, Altrincham, Cheshire.

Contents

main feature	
Sharp-edged on the edge	
Chris Stoddard	4
theme features	
On the frontline	
Nic Harding	7
PR and no spin doctor in sight	
Rodney Breckon	10
Mission Possible in the Cotswolds	
Philip Defer	24
Is big-event evangelism back?	
Andy Hawthorne	20
interview	
Stephen Ibbotson interviews Greg Haslam	14
baptist speak	
Why aren't we growing?	
Darrell Jackson	19
regular columns	
the conference column	
Peter Nodding	12
the wright stuff	
Nigel Wright	27
worship file	
Geraldine Latty	6
the x files	
Simon Hall	11
world church	
Simon Jones	25
off the shelf	8
newsdesk	18
network news	22
surfers' guide	13
Latest from our website	26

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Sharp-edged on the edge

by Chris Stoddard

Chris Stoddard is the Development Director for RUN (Reaching the Unchurched Network). An ordained minister he served in churches in Northamptonshire, worked for YFC and spent 14 years on the pastoral staff at Southcourt Baptist Church in Aylesbury, Bucks where he had specific responsibility for seeker services, evangelism and worship. He was one of the co-founders of RUN in 1994 and is now responsible for envisioning, resourcing and networking hundreds of churches across the UK and beyond as they seek to be effective in their mission to reach those who do not yet believe. Chris lives in Aylesbury and is married to Liz, they have two daughters.

Bible College missions were a formative time in my life, usually for good, but occasionally providing those 'I-wish-the-ground-would-open-up-and-swallow-me' moments. One of those occurred while we were conducting some 'coffee bar' evangelism (remember those days?) in Liverpool and discovered that two rival gangs had decided to use the venue that night for a fight. The mission team leader, sensing imminent disaster, told me he felt I should stand up front and lead some *Youth Praise* songs on my guitar – I still carry the scars, miraculously not physical ones! Another 'memorable' occasion was an open-air service on a sea-front promenade; one of our students got up to speak, looked at the considerable crowd and with great passion misquoted John 9:25: 'One thing I do know, once I was blind but now I'm lost'!

Many church leaders are experiencing both a sense of loss and of lostness as they try to get to grips with what it means to be church in the twenty-first century. The 1940s and '50s saw the great stadium and tent crusades; the '60s and '70s witnessed the birth and development of the renewal movement; the '80s were deeply influenced by the ministry of John Wimber, signs and wonders and church planting. As for the '90s – you could more or less take your pick which model of church growth you wanted to pursue: Willow Creek, JIM, Toronto, Cell, Pensacola, G12, Purpose-Driven, to name but a few. All good and valuable

in their own ways, but none has proved to be 'the key' to mission in today's society.

Although most church leaders dread hearing the words 'Things aren't like they used to be', the fact is that they themselves often feel a certain longing for some of those days, and experience a sense of loss that such times of high expectation and faith are less common today. RUN, the organisation for which I work, recently held a consultation day with about 100 leaders from around the country. One of the day's activities was to write out some anonymous prayers on 'Post-it' notes and stick them on to the windows around the building so that we could all pray for one another. The most significant thing about the exercise was how many prayers had the same basic theme: 'How can I know the way ahead for my church?' A sense of 'lostness' in regards to what to do next was strikingly evident.

This is, of course, only part of the story. There is much to cause us hope, excitement and encouragement; the issue is one of perspective and focus. The church is in a very different place in society from the one which it occupied forty, even only twenty, years ago. It no longer holds centre-stage but has, in the majority of the population's mind, been pushed to the margins, and it is from here that it needs to learn how to communicate effectively to a world that has long since stopped listening to words. However, the margins are not necessarily bad places to be. Some of history's most significant move-

ments (including the early church) have arisen from here, and it is from here that we need to be creative, innovative, resourceful and real. Faith on the margins needs to have an edge, to be bold and courageous, while full of compassion, grace and love. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Revd Dr Rowan Williams, remarked to the General Synod recently that 'This is where the unexpected growth happens, where the unlikely contacts are often made; where the Church is renewed (as it so often is) from the edges, not the centre'.

So what is happening on the margins in terms of mission and new ways of being church?

The short answer is 'Quite a lot', but the more complex issue is trying to identify and analyse different types of mission and emerging church expressions. You may be interested to visit a new website that RUN and some of its partners have helped to establish. www.emergingchurch.info is dedicated to telling stories of new forms of church, as well as offering some theological reflections.

One of the positive things about losing a central position in society is that Christians are now being forced to be more creative, more thoughtful and more prayerful about how they share the gospel. Post-modern people are seen as 'spiritual' beings; the very term 'spirituality' is not only acceptable today but 'cool'. The problem, though, is that the church is one of the last places people look for spiritual answers. Rob Frost's new Alpha-style course, *Essence*, has been

'This is where the unexpected growth happens, where the unlikely contacts are often made; where the Church is renewed from the edges, not the centre'

created for this very purpose – to help those with an interest in spirituality to engage with God through the teachings of Jesus. It is designed to be run in non-churchy venues such as local colleges, libraries and schools. Many people have serious difficulty in overcoming their perceptions of church, and as a response to this, a whole raft of initiatives are developing outside the traditional congregational context which are being encouraged by both established and new forms of church. In recent months, as I have traveled round the country, I've spoken to people who have planted churches specifically to reach bikers, surfers, artists, students,

the tide. Adopting values such as cultural relevance, spiritual encounter, visionary leadership, relational community, creative excellence and a passion for prayer means that churches may express mission in many different ways, while emphasising that church is more about who we are than what we do.

We have tried and experienced many different methodologies, many of which still serve us well. However, a clear trend is emerging that in many ways brings us back to the place where it all began – the developing of relationships, which was primarily Jesus' model. Alpha's great draw is the relational aspect, sharing a meal

released to develop friendships and learn how to 'have fun'! In a society where relationships are fragmenting and the pressures of living can be intensely stressful, finding a place to enjoy the company of others who share beliefs and values that are inherently wholesome can be intensely attractive to those who do not yet believe.

There is not one single model or key that will suddenly enable us to evangelise our neighbourhood with spectacular effect. The fact is there are many models, lots of keys, all sorts of tools in the tool-box; we need discernment to know which ones to use in our own context. There is, however, a great deal we can learn from one another. One of RUN's principle aims is to network hundreds of churches together from right across the denominational spectrum. Sharing stories, successes and difficulties is one of the most effective ways we can support each other in the difficult task of mission.

There is a real need for visionaries, risk-takers and prophets today. This is not a time to lose our 'edge' but to sharpen it, because God is calling us again to communicate the gospel from the margins right into the heart of twenty-first-century society. We will do this most effectively together, not in isolation, and by recognising that God grows his kingdom one life at a time.

RUN, PO Box 387, Aylesbury, Bucks, HP21 8WH, Tel: 0870 787 3635 Email: info@run.org.uk; www.run.org.uk

He misquoted with great passion, 'One thing I do know, once I was blind but now I'm lost'!

clubbers and shoppers!

This is all far removed from the 'one-size-fits-all' model that most of us are familiar with and were perhaps trained to lead. The twenty-first century is another world and another time; the gospel message is reassuringly the same, but our methods to communicate it require radical overhaul. There is currently no one particular model of mission emerging, but there does appear to be some commonality in the values that churches from a wide variety of backgrounds are recognising as vital if they are to turn

together each week. 'On the Move', the free barbecue outreach that has seen huge success in towns and cities across the UK, is based on the same premise. Emerging churches which are intentional about mission recognise that 'programme' can never be the main thing; it has to be about connecting with integrity and developing friendships, because people are important to God. Many churches are now recognising the importance of streamlining their programmes so that their members can be

Dances with God

by **Geraldine Latty**



Photo: Kelvin Reeves Design, Bristol

Geraldine Latty, a graduate musician, conducts workshops in leading worship. She also leads worship at national and international conferences such as Spring Harvest, Baptist Assembly and Worship Together. Previous to this she taught as head of music in a secondary school for 12 years. For further details please contact Geraldine on geraldinelatty@hotmail.com.

Having just returned from a song-writing course, I've been struck by an interesting realisation. Yes, I have been challenged in this intense environment with excellent practical teaching, tips and inspirational creativity, but what has filled my heart is a sense once again of how great our God is and how little I am! I am amazed at the fact that our most holy God, judge of all, calls us into a place of relationship where he *loves* us, and I've realised afresh how diverse is God's world, how in love with his world he really is, and how vital and transforming is our 'God story'.

I acknowledge again with a sense of wonder the fact that we join with a huge gathering of people from this nation and every nation / people group, with people from this age and from every age, with angels too and all of creation, to praise this awesome God. It certainly puts our lives into perspective – and this 'Worship File' column too! I remind my head and heart as I write that worship in the fullest sense is really all about God and his purposes and intentions for us in his world. I know we know that, but I know that I forget, and I get caught up in the work and not the One. So I write these words, not because I haven't got anything else to say (I'm sure I could think of plenty!), but in this my last contribution to this column, and from one learning servant to others, may I encourage us all to go on being enthused, humbled, challenged and inspired by our God.

Another picture clarified for me in my time away was that of

the 'Dance of the Trinity'. I had been thinking about this for some time, and in fact it was at this year's Mainstream conference that a delegate explained to me a 'picture' she had of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in dance: the reality of the Holy Spirit taking our worship to Jesus, and Jesus, who praises the Father in the midst of the people (Psalm 22:22 and Heb. 2:12), lifting our worship to the Father. What a beautiful picture of fluidity and interaction and mystery – the place where intimacy and 'beyond-words sovereignty' meet.

I'm challenged too that here, as in Isaiah 6, our God then lifts his eyes to his world and says, 'Who will go...' to be the students, shopkeepers, classroom assistants, church leaders, accountants, neighbours, teachers, single parents, managing directors, carers ... and (dare I

I suggest you study your Bible on the character of God, the worship of God and the interaction of God with his world. Take a walk in the autumn fire of a nearby wood, study your fingerprints, listen to a friend who is going through Gethsemane, take faith steps into your Monday-to-Saturday world, knowing that you are part of this dance. Keep praying to 'be being filled' with the Holy Spirit, and put yourself in a place where you can be challenged by, and moved into response to, the compassion of God for his world.

I am no expert here, but I endeavour to be one among many others on this journey, as we learn to be worshippers that make sense to God. This is both our struggle and our fulfillment.

Oh what a wonderful God we have! How great are his riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us

Worship is about the dance with the Trinity out into the world God so loves

say) 'music, art, movement in worship' leaders? Who will go? People who have glimpsed God in this space, who know the cleansing power of Jesus' blood, despite their sense of inadequacy and sin, and who are willing to go in the power of the Holy Spirit. This challenges me, for it is not only about us being included in the dance with God *with* God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but also about the dance with the Trinity *out into the world* God so loves.

to understand his decision and his methods! For who can know what the Lord is thinking? ...For everything comes from him; everything exists by his power and is intended for his glory. To him be glory evermore! Amen.

And so, I plead with you to give your bodies to God. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice – the kind he will accept. When you think of what he has done for you, is this too much to ask? Romans 11:33-12:1, New Living Translation.

On the frontline

by Nic Harding



Crawling across rotting floorboards through rubble, broken glass and decaying vegetable matter, I wondered what on earth I was doing in this derelict property in Liverpool's clubland at 2am on a Saturday morning. It was winter 1992 and the now much-vaunted renaissance of the city was still just a longing in our hearts...

But first, back to June '91: twelve intrepid explorers plus offspring and pets set off from the comfort and security of wealthy, southern, middle-class Bristol to plant a church in Liverpool, with its double-the-national-unemployment-rate and its reputation for drugs, crime and violence. The early days were marked by an influx of students who had heard of our arrival, plus one or two local people. On week two of opening shop, a mum who one of our mums had met at a mother and toddler group turned up, promptly got saved and was subsequently healed of cancer. It was an encouraging start to what was to become Frontline Church.

Within months of moving from meeting in our front room to the local youth centre (the darkest, dingiest, dankest, dirtiest, most dismal venue you could ever imagine), I met my new co-pastor, Dave Connolly, who was leading a similar-sized group a mile away, comprising mainly working-class and unemployed Scousers. It was love at first sight: the two churches took to each other immediately and joined forces at Easter '92. The 'marriage' worked because we shared a similar passion and commitment to reaching Liverpool

with the gospel. Everything else was secondary.

...And so it was that in the winter of '92 a group of us found ourselves searching by torch-light among the debris of a derelict house for men and women sleeping rough. The offer of soup, sandwiches and human contact was all we had to offer, but it was the start of a thriving ministry to the homeless and street people. This ran fruitfully for ten years, having been started initially by Chris, who had himself been long-term 'on the sick'.

During the summer of that same year, my wife Jenny had run a holiday club for the local kids of inner city L7 (Edge Hill), where the church was meeting. Little did she realise that from this small beginning would develop a kids' ministry that would touch all parts of the city, the UK and other countries (latest one just established in Poland). Kidz Klub was subsequently developed by Captain Dave (Sharples) and then with Celia grew until the ministry was reaching 2,500 kids through weekly home visits and about 1,000 through the various weekly clubs.

When the father (a rare commodity in Toxteth) of one of Dave's Kidz Klub kids died, Dave, who had been visiting the family for years, was asked by the mum to be one of the pall-bearers. He was the only white person at the funeral – a profoundly moving experience. To go with Dave on his visiting round on a Thursday or Friday afternoon (each one lasts three to four hours) is to witness a 21st-century incarnation of the Pied Piper. To so

many he is a surrogate father, a trusted friend and role model.

Through the Kidz Klub, many mums have been reached. During this last year, following the unexpected death of the sister of one of the Kidz Klub mums, nine other members of that family have been added to the church. The Mums' Night Out, which attracts up to 250 unchurched Kidz Klub mums, is the highlight of the year for many. After a hilarious evening of stand-up comedy, quizzes, competitions, karaoke and food, the ten-minute gospel message touches many hearts.

Time and space don't permit detailed sharing about other outreach ministries that individuals in the church have established over the years – after-school homework clubs, pensioners' tea and bingo, sticky fingers parent and toddler group, a café for the local community, English classes for asylum seekers ... As a friend of mine says of reaching the lost: 'If it's not illegal, immoral, unethical or against the Bible – try it!'

The bigger challenge in our vision to see 'every man, woman and child repeatedly reached with the gospel' has been to ensure that every member of the church is reaching out through personal witness. As the church has grown significantly over the last twelve years, we have worked hard to achieve this, and, as senior pastors, to model it.

It remains our dream (along with other churches in the city) to see the whole of Liverpool reached with the gospel through every member of the church winning souls, making disciples and opening cells. Why not?

After a successful career in general practice **Nic Harding** has pioneered Frontline Church in Liverpool which is now 5–600 strong.

off the shelf



compiled by Daniel Pritchard

Daniel Pritchard is a member of the pastoral staff at Downs Baptist Church, Woodingdean, Brighton. He has an interest in theological studies and compiles reviews in each edition. Reviews and suggestions for reviews can be submitted to: daniel@thepritchards.freeserve.co.uk

The West Wing Series 1, Series 2 parts 1 and 2 all available on DVD from Warner Home Video. Prices vary.



Proof that Americans do get irony after all. Proof also that they still produce the best television in the world. *The West Wing* is a fast-moving, wise-cracking serial set in a newly Democratic White House. President Jed Bartlet and his staff struggle to stay faithful to their ideals in the cut-and-thrust world of politics.

A funny, 'must-watch-the-next-one', feel-good series that is often moving, always clever and rarely corny, *The West Wing* deals with big issues, many of which are of interest to Christians. There's the AIDS crisis in Africa, homosexuality, religious persecution of Christians, asylum seekers, potential nuclear conflict, racism, the Christian Right, the environment, faith and politics – and much more.

However, what makes for such gripping watching are the beautifully drawn and superbly portrayed characters. There's the Catholic president – intellectually brilliant, often impatient and sometimes scared that he's out of his depth. (Watch out for his

masterly first appearance.) The Chief of Staff is a good-hearted, hard-nosed political operator, who is also a recovering alcoholic. The Jewish Head of Communications is a dry-witted, irritable former journalist with a deep sense of right and wrong. His assistant, a hotshot New York lawyer-turned-speech-writer, has a knack for complicated relationships.

Do yourselves a favour – buy, beg or borrow the DVD's. Two words of warning though. If you get hold of Series 1, you might want to book two or three days off work. It's seriously addictive. Also, if you're not careful, it just might restore your faith in politicians – and Americans. God bless American TV.

Glen Marshall,
Wakefield Baptist Church

Frederick Buechner, *The Longing For Home* (Harper Collins, \$21 hb, ISBN 006 061191X)



After my review of *The West Wing*, I'm scared that I'm turning into an Uncle-Sam-o-

phile. *The Longing For Home* is the kind of Christian book that only America seems to produce. Would that we had an Annie Dillard or a Eugene Peterson.

If I tell you that this is a collection of essays, meditations, poems and mini-sermon-type reflections, it will probably put you off. Don't let it, please. This is a book to do your soul good. Deeply personal and acutely spiritual, it will move your heart and open your eyes.

The author, Frederick Buechner (pronounced Beekner), is a Presbyterian minister in his seventies. Taking as his theme the concept of home – the home that we remember and the home to which we are heading – he explores issues of family relationships, the inter-connections of community life, death, birth, the spirituality of creation, grace, hope, faith and love.

Inevitably with such a collection, some pieces have more merit than others, but the overall standard is very high. At times you can detect the odd bit of desperate editorial work to make previously existing, independent pieces fit into the theme, but that's the most minor of irritations.

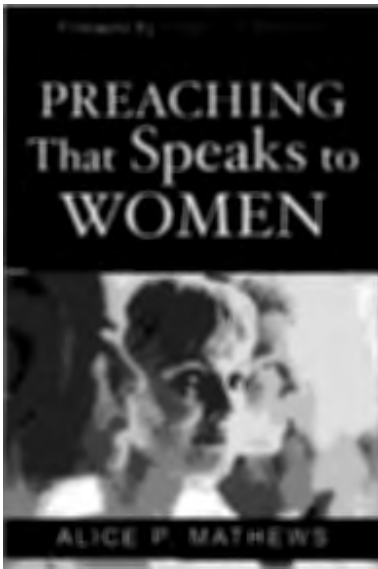
I read the book in two sittings while on holiday. I plan to read it again – for the sake of my soul.

Glen Marshall

Alice P Mathews, *Preaching that Speaks to Women* (IVP, £8.99 pb, ISBN 0 85111 990 5)

Sixty per cent of the members of our weekly congregations may not be hearing from God in a way that enables them to respond effectively.

That is the concern presented by Alice Mathews in this



fascinating book about the intersection of the subjects of gender and preaching. Years of experience as a pastor's wife, teacher, conference speaker and missionary, plus researching her PhD in women's studies and working alongside Haddon Robinson on preaching courses and books, have all given her great insight into the differences in the ways that men and women hear and make application from Scripture. This understanding has brought her to the conclusion that many women in our congregations may actually be hearing a very different message from the one the preacher is trying to communicate. Alice Mathews explains this theory clearly and logically, presenting her findings along with much wise advice to preachers on how to ensure they are communicating to all their listeners.

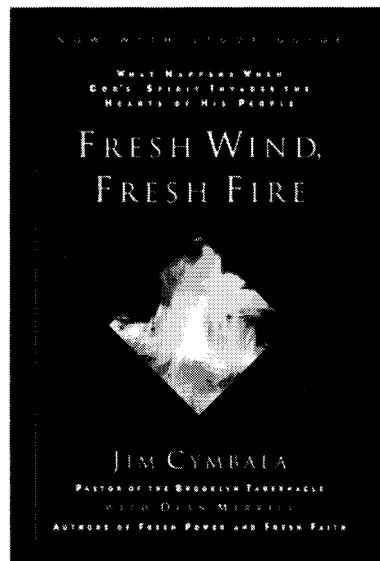
Mathews describes preaching in terms of helping people to 'love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and your neighbour as yourself'. She devotes a chapter to each section of this verse. For example, in 'Preaching for Moral Decision-Making', she systematically demonstrates first how our hearts govern our making of ethical decisions, then how men and women differ in this area, then gives useful pointers for applying this understanding to the preparation and delivery of sermons. This format continues in the subsequent chapters. She explores aspects of women's psychology;

the varying epistemologies (how we 'know what we know') of different types of men and women; how epistemology relates to spirituality; empowering women to use abilities and gifts with confidence; differences in male and female styles of leadership; pointers for identifying and ministering to those women who may feel marginalised by the church. Another excellent chapter explains the effects of modernity and post-modernity on our thinking and understanding of the preached word.

I would highly recommend this book as an excellent resource for all preachers. Alice Mathews is clearly passionate about her subject and presents an informed, up-to-date guide which will give food for thought to all those endeavouring to communicate God's word effectively to men and women of the 21st century.

Fiona Gill,
Battle Baptist Church

Jim Cymbala / Dean Merrill, *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire – What happens when God's Spirit invades the hearts of His people* (Zondervan, £11.89 pb, ISBN 0310251532)



It is easy for us as leaders to get caught up in the latest trends and techniques in a desire to see our churches grow and our communities won for the Lord. So a book telling the story of how a church grew from twenty

members to over 6,000 might well catch our eye! However, Jim Cymbala's account of how God broke into the lives of a tiny congregation in a run-down Brooklyn church comes as a refreshing contrast to the many 'how to' books which line our bookshop shelves. First published in 1997, it tells the story of the Brooklyn Tabernacle, from the time Cymbala took up the challenge of leading the church.

The church had reached the point of desperation in the early 1970s. Cymbala was close to giving up when God spoke to him – not to impart a new method or technique, but to call him and his church to pray. *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire* tells the story of how this tiny congregation took God at his word and began to pray. The prayer meeting became, in Cymbala's words 'the barometer of our church', and the results were extraordinary. At the start the church did nothing new, except to rise to this challenge, but soon the church began to change and adapt, as God added to their numbers. The impact of the Brooklyn Tabernacle on the needy and destitute in their area is particularly impressive.

The theme of the book is disarmingly simple. It is a call to recognise our absolute dependence on God, to seek him constantly in prayer. Cymbala asserts that 'we are always either drawing near to God or falling away, there is no holding pattern'. So prayer and seeking God has remained central to the life and work of Brooklyn Tabernacle, regardless of what outward success they may have seen. He is not dismissive of new ideas, techniques or programmes, but recognises that they will achieve nothing without prayer and a sovereign move of God. This, Cymbala argues, is the truth which has produced every great revival.

If you have not already read this book, do get a copy. It isn't a long book (I read it in one day) but it is packed with insight and wisdom. If you enjoy this, look out for the follow-up books, *Fresh Faith* and *Fresh Power*.

Daniel Pritchard

PR and no spin doctor in sight

by Rodney Breckon



Rod Breckon is pastor of New Life Baptist Church, Northallerton, North Yorkshire

'Northallerton...where's that?' is the most usual response when telling people about our church. Located about fifteen miles south of Darlington, and with around 15,000 inhabitants, it is in some respects an unlikely place for a church to see significant growth. Here's the story of an amazing journey.

During the late eighties, steadily increasing numbers meant that the purpose-built chapel was becoming too small. In 1992, a momentous decision was taken to move into the local Community Centre. In retrospect, the move was more significant than we realised. It not only *physically* moved us out of the church but *symbolically* moved us nearer to the community. In a small market town, word soon gets around that something very unusual is happening – a church is growing! The public nature of the building meant it was less of a culture shock for people to 'cross the threshold', so more people 'checked us out' and some stayed.

Several key developments took place around this time. The first was that I attended the Evangelists' Conference at Swanwick and heard representatives from Willow Creek Church in the USA expounding their understanding of evangelism: 'coming to where people are', being 'all things to all men' – the whole 'seeker-friendly' deal. This was revolutionary stuff and without a doubt a defining moment in my understanding of ministry. While I didn't necessarily buy into the whole package, the principles were staggeringly simple and ones we were just beginning to

see the benefits of in Northallerton – being accessible to ordinary people; removing obstacles like archaic musical styles, language and jargon; giving a warm, friendly welcome; viewing the whole church experience through the eyes of a non-churchgoer. God was at work ... but this was just the beginning.

I began to pray earnestly that God would help us to bridge the gap between community and church. About a year earlier, a small group in the church had begun gathering aid for Romanian orphans. This ministry virtually exploded, and in a very short time we were being asked to take assemblies in twenty-three different schools, to share the needs in Rotary Clubs, women's groups, the hospital, the police headquarters, as well as in local shops and businesses. Suddenly, 'New Life Baptist Church' and 'New Life for Romania' were being talked about in amazingly positive terms everywhere in the community and in the local press. We could not have devised a better PR campaign if we'd tried – God was answering prayer in a most unlikely way!

From these links, the idea of 'themed services' was born. Different sectors of the community were invited to Sunday morning services to hear how the gospel related to their lives. Education (teachers, dinner-ladies, support staff), health care (GPs, nurses, OTs ...) and politics (with a visit from our local MP and the then Leader of the Opposition, the Rt. Hon. William Hague MP) were all covered, and the services were a great celebration of joy, declaring the heart of God for all people.

We even had a farmers' service, complete with green-wellie-and-wax-jacket-wearing minister entering on quad bike! I learned on a visit to Australia that church can be fun too, without losing any respect or reverence for God's presence.

In the mid-nineties we began to pray for our own building, having discovered the limitations of not having one up until then. In 1997, the town cinema and bingo club were up for sale at £300k, and so in spite of the fact that it would need another £100k to re-fit, and with just £20k in our building fund, we set out to acquire the property. Space allows me to tell only a small part of the truly miraculous journey of faith. I made some amazing discoveries in my own walk with God – notably that when God is in a vision, he gives you the faith for it and finance follows. No vision, no finance! Our gift day was astounding, with over £70k in cash on the plate, and a further £80k in promises over three years, which totally blows away the idea that Yorkshire-men are Scots with their pockets sewn up! And so it was that on Easter Saturday 1998, a beautifully re-fitted building was dedicated to God's service with the prayer, 'May God meet with all who enter, and bless all who are sent out from here.'

No one is more conscious than I am that the blessings we are seeing in Northallerton are down to one thing only – the grace of God. I don't know what's next, but one thing I do know is that I'm enjoying the journey.



Home alone

by Simon Hall

The Mainstream conference theme of 'Mission: Possible' is obviously heavy with possibility. Things are hard, and among young adults they are hardest – 'Mission: Impossible' springs to mind. People talk eloquently about the departure of teenagers from our churches, but the lowest church attendance figures are for those in their twenties. I have no doubt in saying that the largest unreached people group in my own city of Leeds is white working class young people aged 16-30. While we have Christians working with all the ethnic minorities, and fantastic ministries to asylum seekers for the new communities that are building up, as far as I know there is no mission in Leeds for these people. We have children's workers, youth workers, family workers, elderly workers, but no-one reaching out (specifically) to that increasingly large group of people who have left their family but haven't started their own. The government's own figures suggest that by 2040 over a third of all properties will have just one person living in them. This is why we need to build so many more

or no 'social capital': investments in their friends and community. These are not people we will meet at the school gate, or even see at the rugby club. They truly seem to be 'mission impossible'. An increasing number of people on the edges of **revive** have declared themselves unwilling to come to any of our events because they don't like meeting new people...

The few churches that have success in reaching young adults tend to be located in urban centres and cater for students, graduates and young professionals. These are generally people who are gifted, motivated, disciplined, relationally conscious, and able to find their place in a large institution. This obviously represents a small proportion of the population. Yet I think hope may be coming from an unexpected quarter. The Alpha Course, created and marketed by the ultimate yuppie church, Holy Trinity Brompton, is working silently away at our understanding of mission ... and church. Let me explain...

In the last couple of months I have had conversations with

to attend Sunday meetings. A young woman had told one church leader quite explicitly: 'I came to Alpha because I wanted to find out about God but I didn't want to go to church. Now I've found out about God and I still don't want to go to church.' This is not about a lack of teaching, but about a change of culture. If you are not used to having lots of acquaintances, how will you deal with church? I was brought up on how we needed to allow people to belong in our communities before we asked them to believe or behave. Now I'm finding that people don't want to belong, or at least don't know how to. Instead, they want some help in living their lives. For me, it's a big change in perspective, but I think we may find ourselves running a lot more 'how to' courses alongside our parenting classes. Right now **revive** is planning a course in how to live simply enough so that you can pursue your goals in life.

Ministering to those who 'bowl alone' is going to be a new challenge involving community-building on the net, 'network church', small groups, something like industrial chaplaincy to help people work out how to find meaning in their work, and a whole host of new approaches that we haven't heard of yet. While Christians have been busy discussing the academic issues surrounding postmodernity, more subtle changes have been happening on the ground. It's time we took notice.

www.bowlingalone.com
www.postmission.com

Simon Hall

has been involved in youth ministry since his theological studies at Oxford. He is presently the Pastor of **revive**, a congregation linked with Sharing Life, reaching out to the extensive night club and pub culture of Leeds. He has become known as a writer, speaker and thinker about Church, mission and youth culture.

people don't want to belong

houses: not because we are growing as a country, but because we have an increasing population of young adults who are not 'settling down'.

Robert Puttnam's book 'Bowling Alone' describes the world in which these new urban loners will live: one in which they will have few friends, watch a lot of TV, and have no-one to turn to in a crisis. They will have little

church leaders from all over England about a strange and recurring problem they are having. Like many churches they are running Alpha courses, and like many (I am coming to believe) they are finding it relatively easy to get people to come to an Alpha course, quite easy to get people to consider continuing to explore faith after Alpha, but very, very difficult to get people

We can do it!



by Peter Nodding

Peter Nodding chairs the Mainstream Leadership team and is the Senior Pastor at Purley Baptist Church, Surrey.

Several years ago, sitting with the Mainstream executive (as a relative new boy), I sensed that we were re-running a well-worn discussion. It was good material, but we were in danger of being a talk-shop. Mainstream had done a good job, but was its job over? A brave decision was made to call together a significant group of leaders from the regions to pray. Over the next year we heard the Lord say that Mainstream still had an important role, and that prayer, relationships and mission were central.

I want to outline what God is asking of us in the next few years.

Releasing people

What Rob White will be doing in a part-time capacity we want many others to do, although they have less time available. What do I mean? Rob will be ending his full-time position at Poynton Baptist in April 2004. He will then be free for about three days a week to serve Mainstream. He still has important ministry in the Manchester area which will occupy more of his time. However, others of us will be invited to give some of our time to serve the same vision. This will require church leadership teams to release their most gifted leaders.

So what sort of role?

Clearly, Rob will have a central role in building a team of those with a national vision, and developing/encouraging the regional networks. Rob will have the time, but more importantly,

possesses the gifts of leadership and vision to make it happen. In due time, there may be others released from full-time local church ministry, who will give significant time and gifting as well.

WHAT SORT OF MINISTRY?

Apostolic input to churches

No one in Mainstream leadership is interested in status, or an authority that is not God-given and recognised. But we all see the pressing need for inspiring vision, wisdom and just 'good experience' to share with the local church. Surely all of us recognise the need for such Spirit-filled input, and especially as it will be given through continuing relationships. To help us understand the nature of this ministry and what it means within our own context, Mainstream is hosting a conference on apostolic ministry in December 2003.

Mentoring the emerging generation of leaders

Mainstream has found itself in this role already. As a result of a one-off conference with younger leaders to 'listen to them', the Holy Spirit forcibly impressed on us that we had a key role in this area. Since November 2001, when this conference took place, we have been amazed how the Lord has 'knit' a large numbers of these leaders together, and we have felt their impact on the movement as a whole.

Serving the regions

It has been so encouraging to witness the growth of several

new regional leaders' meetings. Why has this happened? Usually a leader has caught the vision and has been willing to give the time to make it happen. This needs to be multiplied within the country. Mainstream wants to serve these gatherings with inspiring Bible teaching and vision.

Listening to the Spirit

What is the Spirit saying to the churches? What is the Spirit saying to the section of the Church to which most of us belong? Mainstream wants to model the centrality of listening to God. The Church will only be transformed as her key leadership give themselves humbly to heartfelt prayer and to the necessary action which follows. He is certainly saying 'Mission', no one questions this, but the how and the what require more boldness and detail.

I really love the job of being a local church minister. However, those in the ministry know that we can easily fill the week with our own church needs. But what is the Lord saying? In my first two churches I tried to serve the wider church, but sometimes this led to neglecting days off. In my present church, I have seen the wisdom of putting the wider church ministry in the job description. The congregation at Purley understand the implications of this and have given me their blessing. I will always want to do a faithful job in serving my local church, but I believe we are all the richer when we can give part of our time to the needs of others. What is the Lord saying to you?



Simon Jones is BMS World Mission co-ordinator for London and the South East and author of *Why Bother with Church?* (IVP 2001), *Discovering the New Testament* (Crossway 2001) and *Discovering Luke's Gospel* (Crossway 1999). A former editor of *Christianity* magazine, he was pastor of Peckham Road Baptist Church from 1989 to 1996.

Mapping mission

by Simon Jones

'The pastor / apostle is one who forms congregations into mission groups shaped by encounters with the gospel in the culture – structuring the congregation's shape into forms that lead people outward into a missionary encounter.' So says Alan Roxburgh. If our ministries are going to achieve this, we need good models that will challenge and inspire – as well as God's Spirit to energise and propel us into the world.

www.missionalchurch.org/pages/faq.pdf is a good place to start as it deals with the basic questions of the missional church: what is it? How do I make mine one? Nearly every denomination is talking about missional church these days. A good Canadian Mennonite perspective can be found at www.mcec.on.ca/missional. www.episcopal-dso.org/pages/conven02/12signs.pdf offers a single-page handout listing the twelve marks of the missional church. You'll need an Acrobat Reader to access it, but then you can print it off and use it to get your leaders to talk the issues through as they relate to your church.

Equally fundamental is George Lings. Check out www.encountersontheedge.org.uk. Lings works with the Church Army, advising churches on how to reach out to our needy culture. Click on the conference reports link on the left-hand bar of the site welcome page. There's a wealth of great stuff. Especially good is his 'August 2003 New Zealand presentations' – it's all there including the PowerPoint.

Lings has also recently co-authored a Grove booklet with Stuart Murray-Williams, examining the experience of church planting through the 1990s. There's more of George at www.woodlandproject.com

There are a number of sites run by emerging churches. Some of them are focused on mission. Among the best are www.emergent-uk.org. One of the minds behind the worldwide emergent network is Brian McLaren – all his stuff is worth checking out.

www.phuture.org is an Australian site dedicated to serving the second reformation. There's a host of information on culture and lots to read on the whys and wherefores of the missional church. And www.futures.actionweb.co.nz/index.htm is a New Zealand site dedicated to linking new expressions of church. There is a fair amount of post-evangelical angst here, but also some excellent models to check out.

www.organicchurch.org.uk is one of the best blog sites around. Here bloggers dream dreams and share insights and issues. It's inspiring, challenging, exasperating, annoying and absolutely essential. Another interesting bloggers' site is www.e-church.com – an American-based portal that functions as an online spiritual community that people can link to.

We often limit our mission to what churches do. This is a mistake. The world of politics and public life is our mission-field as well. A fairly new site – www.ekkleisia.co.uk – contains a wealth of Christian thinking on every area of public policy. It's a rich mix of news, opinion, theology, discussion papers and stories of good practice from around the UK.

The Henry Martyn Centre in Cambridge is dedicated to missionary research. At www.martynmission.cam.ac.uk you'll find tons of stuff on overseas mission. There's a collection of papers that is really worth checking out. Last year, the UK

sociologist Grace Davie published a book on Christianity around the world called *Europe: the Exceptional Case*. In it she tried to account for why the church is growing everywhere around the world except in western Europe. The Henry Martyn Centre commissioned three scholars from around the world to respond to her thesis. They are fascinating and located at www.martynmission.cam.ac.uk/cwimpapers.03.htm

Those concerned with all aspects of urban mission need to visit www.astoncharities.org.uk/research/urbmiss.shtml to find lots of material by Greg Smith from the 1980s and 1990s. Greg worked in Newham in east London for many years and has a wealth of wisdom to share on social involvement and community audits.

Don't forget to visit the BMS World Mission website every week at www.bmsworldmission.org. Also worth checking out are www.globalconnections.co.uk and www.globalmission.org – the site of the World Evangelical Alliance with loads of good stuff on mission and globalisation, as well as stats and stories of good practice from around the world.

www.rejesus.co.uk is a good site for those looking for a user-friendly and challenging introduction to the Christian faith, so why not set up a link to it from your church's website?

Of course, not everything is available on the web. The London Institute for Contemporary Christianity has produced some fascinating research based on focus-group-style research with non-Christians in Nottingham and London. You can order it at www.licc.org.uk – click on the Beyond Belief link. It's worth getting hold of.

Not ashamed of the gospel

Stephen Ibbotson interviews **Greg Haslam**



'Mission Possible' is the hopeful title of Mainstream's conference. Doesn't it at times feel like 'Mission Impossible' to you?

Yes! I live in the same world as you do, and I know just how much we've all been affected by the intellectual climate in Britain today – its secularism, relativism and syncretism. I also look with envy on the scenes of massive church growth that others are experiencing in Latin America, Africa and Asia, and think, 'It all seems an uphill struggle for us'. Nevertheless, I am a biblical optimist! The gospel hasn't lost its power, the Spirit is still with us, the future is bright because it is *his* future! And God is shaking all the false foundations around us that people's lives have been

churches are experiencing steady and significant growth. We will yet see more!

But Christianity has virtually disappeared from other areas of the world throughout history – particularly those affected by the expansion of Islam from the 7th century onwards? Why should we think western Europe should be any different?

If it came down to our 'just deserts', it shouldn't. We have seen massive apostasy from God, his absolute truth and his great gospel, within nearly all of the mainstream denominations, just as they did in the early church. Generations of leaders and preachers have been trained by liberal theological seminaries to accommodate the gospel to 'the spirit of the age'. The results have been powerless religion, empty churches and massive moral and spiritual decline within society as a whole. The resulting vacuum has been filled by a lemming-like, headlong rush into reckless eroticism and drug-induced occultism everywhere. But the answer to this still remains what it has always been – a re-

many realise this, and are attempting to do it!

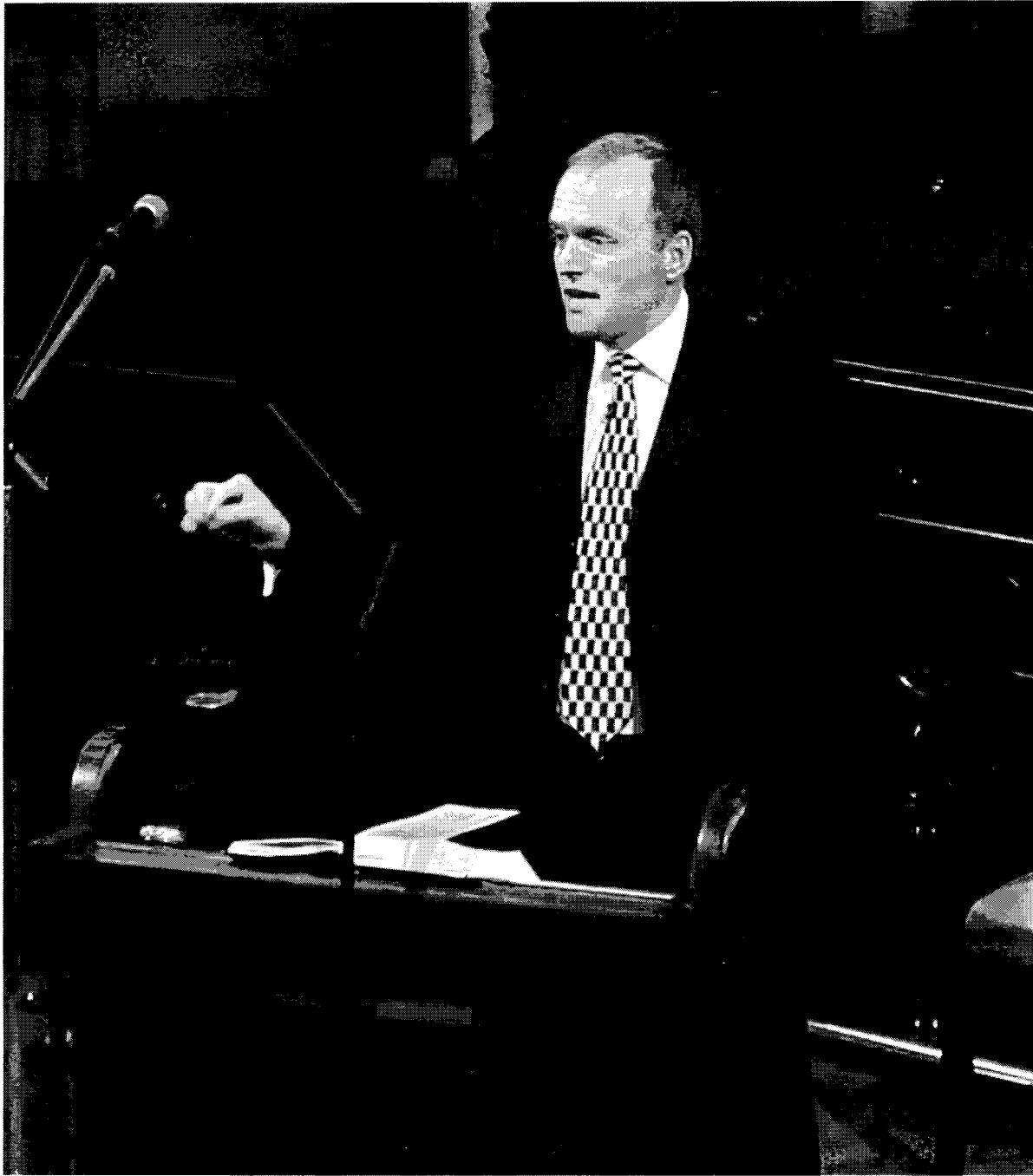
Yes, but my point is that we've seen the virtual eradication of the Christian faith in places where it was once strong. Could it be happening under our very noses? I'm not trying to be a Jeremiah – although that's no bad thing if God's calling is that – but rather a feeling that we need to wake up to the dire situation in which we find ourselves.

It was the Apostle Peter who warned, 'For it is time for judgement to begin with the family of God...' (1 Pet. 4:17). The primary responsibility for the increase of avoidable decay and darkness in society is surely that the Church has failed to be the salt and light she is meant to be, preventing rot and expelling gloom. In a climate intolerant of truth, we have abandoned our devotion to apostolic revelation in Scripture. The faith hasn't so much been eradicated by its enemies as abdicated by its friends! We have looked for some other message than the gospel, delivered by some other means than proclamation. Our nation is allergic to truth, and we've helped to ensure that they are never exposed to it! This lost ground was shamelessly surrendered by a largely silent and cowardly Church. Popular myths like Evolutionism ('We all got here by chance and natural causes'), Freudianism ('Others are responsible for my wrongs'), Materialism ('There's always something I can buy to make me happy') and Annihilationism ('When you're dead, you're dead') are all embraced as reliable guides for popular belief and human conduct.

**the future is bright
because it is *his* future!**

'jerry-built' upon. There is growing evidence that people here in the UK are awakening to a new interest in Christ and his message again, e.g. the numbers on 'Alpha', 'Y-Course' and 'Christianity Explored'. Many

covertly of spiritual authority and confidence in the preaching of the message of the cross, combined with reliance on the power of the Holy Spirit with signs following. There is evidence that



They have no foundation in truth. These myths need to be violently exploded! The Church greatly needs a wake-up call, a trumpet-blast to call her to battle once again. This is not a time for cowards.

What are some of the essential ingredients to reverse the statistics of ongoing decline in church attendance in the next couple of decades?

We need to re-discover the gospel in all of its raw crudity and beautiful power, i.e. Christ himself, his rugged message, his bru-

tal and bloody death, as well as the reality and full implications of his return from the grave with his body. This is 'cosmic' in its implications. It not only rescues individuals; it will one day restore and recycle the planet and the whole universe above us. This is the 'Big Story' that post-modern fragmentation needs to be confronted with.

We also need to restore the church. Watchman Nee once said, 'The necessity of a revelation of the church to the believer is as great as the need for the revelation of Christ to the unbeliever.' I agree. We need to

become Christ-centred and church-based in our thinking again. The 'wow-factor' has to be restored to our churches. Our man-pleasing, tightly orchestrated, democratised and 'nice', bland styles of leadership within a 'clubbish' denominationalism and Spirit-quenching ecclesiology all have to be renounced. Christ wants his church back!

Finally, we need to let the Bible loose again – all of it, in its entirety, to stun a virtually biblically illiterate emerging generation. Again, as William Willimon once said, 'Our task is not to make the Bible more relevant to

the world, but rather to make the world more relevant to the Bible! This is to recover the prophetic dimension in our entire ministry. The Church has been a 'non-prophet' organisation for too long.

Your talk of 'rude crudity' and 'rugged message' of the gospel brings to my mind the fact that we are finding it particularly hard to get a hearing amongst men. What are your observations on this?

The prevailing mind-set is that of relativism, and so it's hard to get a hearing for truth. Our temptation is therefore to look for 'relevance' and cosmetic attraction. There is no way we can 'tart up' the cross, and make it or its message about human depravity and the need for human re-creation in Christ more appealing. It's not our message, we did not invent it; we were simply given it. Our responsibility is to let it loose in the power of the Spirit and see what God does with it. According to Paul, there are only two occasions appropriate for preaching: 'in season and out of season' (2 Tim. 4:2), i.e. in tough times and easy times, whether we're popular or unpopular. We are *always* to do this. It should command the best skills we can bring to the task – hard study and accurate exposition, clear and forceful communication, vivid, arresting illustration, as well as biting application, but we must know that the results are finally in God's hands.

As pastor of a church that has had a significant status as an evangelical beacon in the past, what do you see as the main roles of pastors in setting a 'mission possible' agenda?

The greatness of Westminster Chapel in the past has been bound up with the bold and sustained manner in which its ministers have thundered the message of the Bible to their contemporary generation. Thankfully, that legacy continues, as it is mostly all still in print. Campbell Morgan, Martyn Lloyd-Jones and R. T. Kendall have won widespread

and deserved fame. Preaching like this can never become passé. It was Spirit-filled, converting and life-transforming. We long to see more of its kind, and we will. God will call another generation of preachers to minister his word in power.

But we also need to take seriously the thrust of Ephesians 4:11-16. Churches are not just 'preaching centres'. They are to be built as communities of the Spirit, dynamic, related and growing, both quantitatively and qualitatively. The word-ministries listed in verse 11 are diverse in character and style; thus there is a need for widespread exposure to and engagement with these modern-day apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastor-teachers. Sadly, many fiercely

member going with my father as a young lad to hear 'the Doctor', and peering down at him from the upper balcony. Presumably that has changed now.

Dr. Lloyd-Jones' ministry was both immensely important, and *unique*. Many have tried to imitate his style, and failed. I don't even attempt it! He was a kind of 'Moses the Law-giver' in the post-war decimation and fall-out from a century of liberalism within the churches. His massive intellect and Spirit-filled passion ignited many fires that had well nigh gone out. In addition, he helped spearhead the recovery of evangelical confidence and renewed biblical scholarship. He promoted a new interest in our Puritan-Reformed heritage, helped raise up

the great need in the Church today is to recover a 'can't-do' mentality!

'independent' churches have no connection with them, and church doors are 'barred' to their access and impact – except perhaps briefly at the 'annual conference'. Yet they *all* exist to 'equip the saints', i.e. all believers, to be mobilised to carry out the life-calling that God has given to every Christian.

This alone will foster and advance the (1) Mobilisation (2) Unity (3) Maturity (4) Clarity (5) 'Clout' (6) Christ-likeness and (7) the 'Wow-factor' vitality that marks churches that will change the world. Pastors should not only play a part in all of this themselves; they must give room for others to join them in this task. The emergence of team ministries both within our own congregations, but also serving them from outside, is still a high priority for us all.

Is there a particular role for beacon churches today? If so, what might that be? For instance, under one of your predecessors, Westminster Chapel became famously a place for exhaustive – some might say exhausting – expository preaching! I even re-

a new generation of pastors and preachers, and fostered a vital dependence on and longing for the power of the Holy Spirit and revival. He single-handedly undermined much of the entrenched cessationist theology of the Reformed community, whilst helping charismatics and Pentecostals to anchor their experience within a more solid doctrinal framework.

Westminster Chapel was indeed a beacon to many. The balconies have only rarely been used since, but I firmly believe that both my predecessor, Dr R. T. Kendall, and myself, stand loyally within this legacy of priorities, and expository preaching still lies at the heart of all we do. A beacon church must be one which acts like a lighthouse amid dark and dangerous conditions that threaten to sink the shipping that braves the deadly seas of a stormy world. Our nation needs thousands of such churches! They're marked by loyalty to Christ and his word, dependence on his Holy Spirit, lively and committed congregational relationships and a great heart for unity.

Westminster Chapel is developing more and more in this way.

A number of our readers may not know you, so it would be good to hear a little of your background and your journey to this point.

I was born in Liverpool in 1953 and converted to Christ at a Billy Graham relay in Liverpool's Central Hall in 1967. Early on, faithful mentors gave me a longing to be filled with the Spirit and a love of good books. Along with the Bible itself, Lloyd-Jones, Spurgeon and Stott were my staple diet from my teenage years onwards. In fact, I was called to this ministry listening to John Stott on 2 Timothy at Keswick in 1969, and began preaching at sixteen! I became a schoolteacher, married Ruth in 1975 and we had three sons, now all grown up. After training at the London Theological Seminary (Lloyd-Jones's 'baby!') in '78-'80, I moved to Winchester and served Winchester Family Church for twenty-one years, until my recent move to London in 2002.

We were connected with Terry Virgo and New Frontiers for the last thirteen years of my time

do to get a serious hearing in today's society?

Very often theological positions are caricatured and misrepresented. This has been very true of New Frontiers' stance on many things, including 'men and women'. In fact, you can judge a theology partly by its fruits. Women are highly esteemed, liberated, promoted and valued both in the local church and in apostolic teams. They are trained and released into all kinds of wonderful ministries within New Frontiers – more than I have seen anywhere else, in fact. Those of us who believe that men and women are different by design and therefore not interchangeable, take seriously the whole of the biblical data on 'Man and Woman in Christ', particularly when it comes to male headship in the home and in church government, and find it uncomfortable to ditch the theology of our Lord and his Apostles on gender distinctions and role relationships, consigning them to the 'dustbin of history'. Eagerness to do this is rooted in relativism and the desire to be relevant to 'the spirit of the age'. We are here to *challenge* 'the spirit of the age', not get in bed with it! My under-

Why is mission close to your heart?

Primarily because it is close to Christ's heart and is an inevitable evidence of renewal and authentic spiritual life. Pioneer missionary Henry Martyn said, 'The Spirit of God is the Spirit of Mission, and the closer we get to Him then the more mission-minded we will become.' Evangelism, church-planting kingdom expansion has to become the heartbeat of every Christian and local church. Without it we are already dying, if not dead.

Without spilling the beans or having your thunder stolen, can you give us an idea of the kind of things you feel we need to explore in this conference?

There's a good chance I will be drawn to consider Jonah. If so, we will be concerned with the perennial relevance of such themes as God's call, our reluctance, the prophetic mandate, human deviance and sin, God's powerful word, his surprising mercy, and results beyond our wildest dreams! There's more of course, but I haven't even started my preparation yet! But there's a few 'spilt beans' to be going on with.

Finally, Greg, would you like to say in what kind of spirit we should approach not only this conference but its theme – 'Mission Possible' does sound like a 'can-do' mind-set!

True. Yet the great need in the Church today is to recover a 'can't-do' mentality! There are some things only God can do. Surely we all know that? If we come hungry, dissatisfied, eager to meet with and hear from God, then determined to do anything he tells us to do, no matter what the cost, then there's a good chance this will not be an ordinary conference. Smith Wigglesworth once said, 'The only thing I am satisfied with is the fact that I am dissatisfied!' Sometimes, when God makes you that hungry, great blessing is not far away.

We are here to challenge 'the spirit of the age', not get in bed with it!

in Winchester. I loved the wedding of word and Spirit I found there, combined with strong commitment to friendships, renewal, relationships, unity and biblical clarity on all the controversial issues of today. After the call to Westminster Chapel in 2002, I left New Frontiers to come here, but not the values I came to hold and believe, nor my passion for Christ and his worldwide church.

Many of us have been helped by our contact with the new church networks. But doesn't the position New Frontiers takes on women in leadership point up just how much work we have to

standing of the biblical teaching on men and women is that it is more liberating than the 'feminism' some so eagerly embrace. In my view, feminism has only served to encourage even more oppression, exploitation and the sexual and physical abuse of women, and has resulted in further loss of their dignity. In the name of 'women's rights' it has advanced promiscuity, unfaithfulness, marital breakdown, and negative attitudes towards motherhood and child-rearing. It is part of our mission to point out the truth. The world has got it wrong at this point, as it has on so many other issues.



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

Your page...

If you are linked with a ministry or are involved in an event which would be of value and interest to a national readership, please let me know:
craig.millward@ntlworld.com

It takes a team

Many of our churches have been greatly helped and inspired through interacting with the ministry and philosophy of Willow Creek. The latest offering from the Chicago suburbs comes via a conference on teamwork. It is a two-day event, followed-up with a third day of workshops, and has been 'designed for every man and woman who has

Money management for the 18-35s

Ronald Blue are a Christian presence in the world of financial planning. They aim to base all their advice upon the 'Treasure Principle':

- God owns everything. I'm his money manager
- My heart always goes where I put God's money
- Heaven, not earth, is my home
- I should live not for the dot but for the line

- Giving is the only antidote to materialism
- God prospers me not to raise my standard of living, but to raise my standard of giving.

They are in the process of developing a website for the emerging generation, a preview of which is at <http://ebread.intrica.net> They hope the website will be a resource that will provide teaching and

practical tools to help the target age-group make life-style decisions that lead to generous giving to their local churches and wider kingdom projects. Please take a look and send any feedback to steve.fairhall@ronblue.co.uk – especially if you have any young people who may be willing to help them review the site.

True Freedom

The issue of homosexuality has once more become a stick with which to beat the church, and the recent debate has stirred up genuine pain and confusion amongst some in our churches for whom this is a live issue. True Freedom Trust is a Christian support and teaching ministry

offering hope and help to men and women struggling with homosexuality, lesbianism and similar issues. They also offer support to families, friends and church leaders of those who face these issues in their lives. Contact TFT at chris@truefreedomtrust.co.uk

Jubilee video

If your church was involved with Jubilee 2000 and the debt campaign, then Tearfund's new video will bring you bang up-to-date with the views of Gordon Brown (and many others) on what has been achieved and what remains to be done. It costs £5 from Tearfund (0845 355 8355).

Children's Ministry

Early next year Children's Ministry is hosting a conference 'for all with a heart for children'. It will include forty optional seminars and workshops including prayer ideas, crafts, age-appropriate teaching, children's culture, teamwork, story-telling, drama, active learning, dealing with disruption, flags, puppets, fun ways to teach the

Bible. There will also be five celebrations / concerts featuring interviews, news, reviews, reports of children's ministry conferences around the world and a 'try this at home' showcase. It is to be held in Eastbourne just after our own conference, 23-25 January. Visit www.childrensministry.co.uk for more info or call 01323 437759.

Preach the word!

Greg Haslam has called together a team of gifted communicators to share their wisdom at a preaching school which has been designed to raise the profile, quality and central importance of preaching in the Church's mission today. The Westminster Chapel Preaching School runs one Saturday per month from

11th October through to 22nd May 2004. The wide range of outstanding teachers, preachers and communicators invited includes Joel Edwards, John Stott, Terry Virgo, J John, Steve Brady, Mike Pilavachi and David Pawson. Each has been invited to share their skills, wisdom and convictions on a host of themes related to

this great task. Each day consists of several main sessions and a choice of seminars. It costs £100 for the whole term and you can download a registration form from www.westminsterchapel.org.uk or call 020 7834 1731 for information on the whole course.

John Archer

John is a comedy magician who has served us at Mainstream conferences in the past and gained a number of bookings as a result. You may like to know that he is still available and has just updated his website. Take a look: <http://website.lineone.net/~archini>

Why aren't we growing?

by Darrell Jackson

Decline is growing – particularly if religious commentators are to be believed. A handful of recent book titles, *God is Dead*, *The Death of Christian Britain* and *The Church Faces Death*, reinforce the picture of the church in terminal decline. Recently a *Newsnight* journalist put pressure on church leaders at a news conference by asking, 'What will it take to persuade you that nobody wants your product any more?' Taken together, it seems that the decline of the churches in the UK has already been scripted, with only bibliography and index to be completed. The narrative of decline has defined the mainline denominations since the mid-twentieth century.

Few of us will have noticed the demise of the British Church Growth Association earlier this year. Its former resources will reside in an institute dedicated to church health and vitality – concerns vital to the future of UK churches. However, its closure and the attempt to re-focus activity in this way should at the very least alert us to a possible shift in the way that churches are defining successful ministry and mission. By measuring quality it is possible to avoid the ecclesiastical headaches brought on by dwindling numbers.

Perhaps though, the shift in emphasis is not quite as seismic as it might at first appear. Maybe it's time for some theological soul-searching about why we think it's so important to ask the question, 'Why aren't we growing?' Is it really the most important question to ask? What about, 'Why aren't we transforming society?' or, 'Why aren't we living more authentically Christian lives?' or, 'Why aren't we more prayerful?' or again, 'Why aren't seeing more broken

lives made whole?' and so on. There is something about growth (or a lack of it) that concentrates the mind and demands our attention. Failure to grow is a failure of reproduction. But, how are Baptists in Britain doing? The story is quite mixed and not as terminal as the title of the article might suggest.

Baptist church membership has been declining steadily from a high of just over 400,000 in the first decade of the twentieth century to the current 141,000. However, according to Peter Brierley, regular attendance at worship has increased by at least 5% between 1985 and 2000. Figures for member churches of the Baptist Union in 2002 suggest that membership may have risen for the first time in over fifteen years, by between 50-100. Not a large increase, but against the general decline across the wider UK church scene it is some encouragement! Additionally, there were a recorded total of 3,930 professions of faith – almost eleven people a day who discovered a personal faith in Jesus through the witness of a Baptist church. The numbers of those being baptised has been steadily increasing since 1996 with the calculated total for baptisms in 2002 suggesting 4,660, an increase of several hundred over the previous year. The numbers of children and young people attending programmes run by our churches increased from 123,000 to 138,000 between 1990 and 2000. So, there is some good news to talk about!

Where there *is* lack of growth there is no unitary pathology. There are many reasons we are 'not growing', and it will not do to point to external factors and blame trends in society. In his recent book, *Hope for the*



Church, Bob Jackson points out that churches in the UK are placed in similar contexts and yet some manage to perform better than others, attracting people to faith and into church membership with greater regularity. This is stating an obvious fact, but it is not always comfortable to have to face it. In fact, during 2002, there were nearly 800 Baptist churches that saw an increase in membership. These represent outstanding examples of faithfulness allied with fruitfulness.

Too many local churches are not growing because of either lack of vision, laziness, lack of concern, failure to grasp opportunities to engage in the local community, a refusal to relocate premises in order to follow population movement, or simply a loss of nerve or confidence in the gospel. I have heard too many church leaders buttress their rationale for declining numbers with the conviction that gospel fruitfulness is the inevitable casualty of faithfulness to the gospel. I remember the words of a pastor who was listening to a local church leader lament the loss and steady decline of the membership of his church. The pastor leaned over and whispered to a neighbour, 'This is an apology for failure.' The neighbour responded, 'This is a polemic for failure!' The moment that a church in the West offers decline as evidence of gospel faithfulness is the moment that such a church has forfeited its right to be known by the name of the one who commissions it to make disciples in that name.

Darrell Jackson has just spent seven and a half years working as a Mission Adviser with the Baptist Union of Great Britain. He is a Director of Christian Research. In January 2004 he leaves for Budapest to take up a three-year post researching Mission and Evangelism for the Conference of European Churches.

Is big-event evangelism back?



photo: Howard Barlow

Andy Hawthorne reflects on Festival: Manchester

Andy Hawthorne is Director of The Message Trust which has birthed The Tribe, EDEN, the Xcelerate evangelist training school, The Life-Centre, Planet Life, EDEN bus ministry and lots more. Andy is also a popular conference speaker and has spoken at Spring Harvest, Soul Survivor, New Wine, Stoneleigh, Easter People and many more. He is Manchester born and bred and has a burning passion to see the young people of his city transformed by the gospel.

A radical 'celebration of faith, hope and life' came to a grand finale as Festival: Manchester drew a crowd of 55,000+ to enjoy live music, extreme sports, family fun and powerful preaching in the city's Heaton Park. The event brought to a close one of the largest Christian events ever staged in the UK.

The Message Trust partnered with The Luis Palau Evangelistic Association, as well as over 500 churches, Manchester and Salford City Councils, Greater Manchester Police, dozens of corporate and private supporters and many cutting edge youth ministries to produce the event, which combined community service and social action projects with a massive free two day festival.

Around 5,000 delegates from throughout the UK and Western Europe worked on over 300 projects in some of the city's most deprived areas. Over four days, some 75,000 hours of work were contributed to the cleanup,

repair and upgrading of public and private facilities in dozens of estates.

Dozens of letters have flooded into our offices since the event, here are a few extracts:

I would like to say a big thank you to all the volunteers who helped and worked so hard to clean up my local area (Lower Broughton, Salford) and Peel Park which I have not seen so clean in along time. Thank you again.

Elaine, Local Resident, Lower Broughton Salford

I've been looking around at a lot of the projects that the young people have been involved in and I'm overwhelmed by the commitment, the energy and the enthusiasm and all the fantastic things that you've been doing all this week.

Hazel Blears, MP Home Office Minister

Hi I just wanted to drop in a quick note to say that the whole

week was immensely enjoyable. I went along with my church, but couldn't actually class myself as a Christian. Through this event, I have come to know God, and I have become a Christian. It was fantastic helping the children of Openshaw ... Thank you ever so much for giving me these opportunities.

Heather (delegate)

I am sure that the festival will have a lasting impact on your city, but I want you to know that you have had a big impact on those of us from other places in the UK. The group of young people we brought along have just been electrified by what they saw and what they did in Manchester. Although we have been taken away from Manchester, what we experienced in Manchester can never be taken away from us.

Neil, Youth Leader

'Fantastic', 'awesome', 'a defining moment', 'an outstanding example of how good Christian events can be', 'brilliant - from start to finish' - these are just a few of the superlatives and expressions used to describe their day by those we took along on the coach to Festival: Manchester.

John, Church Leader

We have two small children (9 and 11) and they loved it all ... Most of all we enjoyed hearing Luis Palau speak and held hands to say the prayer recommitting our lives to Jesus together on the hill. Thanks.

Paul, Ruth, Suzanne and Sarah



photo: Howard Barlow

Photos: facing page; top Andy Hawthorne with Luis Palau; bottom left the crowd at Heaton Park. Bottom right addressing the crowd.

Just wanted to say a big thank you to the whole team for Festival Manchester. I came with my sister on the Sunday evening and she publicly gave her life to Christ. We both went to church the following Sunday and were mightily blessed and filled with the Spirit. My sister is now on fire for the Lord and we look forward to serving him even more.

Caroline

Festival: Manchester will leave a lasting mark on the city, from the over 1,500 new believers who made decisions for Christ during the week to the massive skate park, built by volunteers with donated materials, which will soon be permanently installed at a Manchester recreation facility.

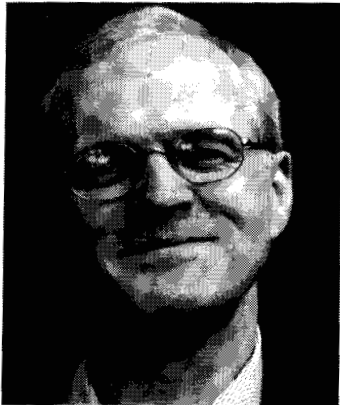
The full impact of the festival of course will only be known in heaven. For a long time we've dreamt of a church community that's not only for the like-minded, but one that gets involved with broken communities that desperately need Jesus. At Festival: Manchester that dream started to become a reality.

The challenge of course now for the Church is not to rush back under the bowl with our lights, as we so often do after a mission like this, but having learnt that 'our light really does shine in the darkness and the darkness, no matter how dark, really can't overcome it' but to instead continually and contagiously let our light shine so that people will see our good deeds and praise our Father in heaven.

“ Around 5,000 delegates from throughout the UK and Western Europe worked on over 300 projects in some of the city's most deprived areas ”



photo: Howard Barlow



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.
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Regional meetings: The North East joins the flow

For many years, those of us in the North East have clocked up the miles travelling to the deep south of Lancashire, Yorkshire or Derbyshire to get to Mainstream events! A number of us regularly take our leadership teams to the conference and have found it an immensely encouraging experience. However, on Thursday 26th June we reversed the flow, and enjoyed our first Mainstream North East day at Westgate Baptist Church, Newcastle. We had reckoned that there was an itch in the North East waiting to be scratched: pastors were networked and resourced (and prepared to travel on occasions!), but wider church leaders were not. We were proved correct when around forty people turned up – many of them in leadership teams and representing the length of our region.

From Northallerton (in the south!) to Alnwick in the north (nearly 100 miles apart),

we gathered to worship, to pray and to listen as Rob White encouraged us to catch the 'heartbeat of leadership'. Powerfully and practically, he made us think through our aims and motives in leadership. If we are seeking to develop people's passion for God, what is *our* passion like? If we are to be real in relationships, then what are we doing to promote maturity in one another? Speaking openly from recent experiences in Poynton, he challenged us to think practically about how we build relationships that foster spiritual growth and effective mission, reminding us that, as leaders, we are especially prone to getting tied up in church activities rather than relationships with God and people. Leadership, he reminded us, is primarily about appetite for God.

All this talk of hunger ensured that a good lunch was required, though it must be noted that when we sat

down to eat at the café in St James's Park, Rob (claiming to be a rugby fan) was completely oblivious to the fact that it was a football stadium! Our final session looked at the third Mainstream commitment – to get stuck into mission. Rob challenged us to be more intentional about identifying and using our own 'grace stories' (accounts of how God has affected our lives), and equipping others to do the same.

In all it was a great day of meeting together, inspirational challenge and concrete issues to chew over. The response was clear – 'When can we do this again?' – so watch this space. If you are in the North East (or close), come and join us! For more information on our next day, contact me on 0191 265 7044 or office@heatonbaptist.org

Iain Macaulay,
Newcastle

Keeping in step with the Spirit

The 1980s were exciting days for many of us, especially at the advent of the 'Wimber revolution'. The 'power evangelism', which John Wimber spoke of, was something that seemed accessible to all of us: reaching the lost through the demonstration of God's power was no longer restricted to a few specialists.

However, the narcissistic excesses of the 'Toronto Blessing' caused many who had been open to the renewal of the Spirit to withdraw to the safer ground of social action. As a result,

there has been some timidity towards such important issues as the gifts of the Spirit.

For this reason, Peter Morgan and I decided to host the first Mainstream meeting for churches in Hampshire on Wednesday 21st May 2003. Roger Standing spoke on 'Keeping in step with the Spirit', and encouraged us to make sure we did not sacrifice the wildness of the Spirit for the safety of the latest bandwagon.

What was clear from the meeting was that the thirty or so leaders who came wanted to see the power of the Holy

Spirit at work in the life of our churches. What was not clear, however, was how we are going to see this happen. No one wants to re-invent the past, but at the same time, no one wants to lose the ground that has been gained. We need the fresh inspiration of the Holy Spirit to show us the way forward for future Mainstream meetings in Hampshire. Peter Nodding will be speaking at our next meeting in November.

Sean Blackman,
Southampton

Consultation with younger leaders

In mid-June I travelled from London through the Cotswolds to the Community of the Open Door to attend Energise, a Mainstream retreat for young and emerging leaders. This was to be my first involvement with Mainstream beyond reading the magazine, and I'd never heard of a young and emerging leaders' group. That was until one of them, Ellen Hussey – a fellow student at Spurgeon's College – invited me to this event, so frankly I had no idea of what was going to happen.

Twenty or so people were at the retreat, most of

them young ministers with between five and nine years' experience. They'd been meeting as a group (Mainstream's Young and Emerging Leaders' Network) for about seventeen months. Everyone was incredibly welcoming and open.

We began with worship, and from that opening session together, I felt a strong sense of God being present with us. Listening to the speakers, including Peter Nodding, Rob White and Graham Jefferson, sharing their experiences of ministry and their desire to be as sharp as possible for God was fantastic. I was really inspired

by the enthusiasm and passion they showed for walking with God. The group expressed a concern to engage with and try to understand difficult and controversial issues, and I found this really refreshing.

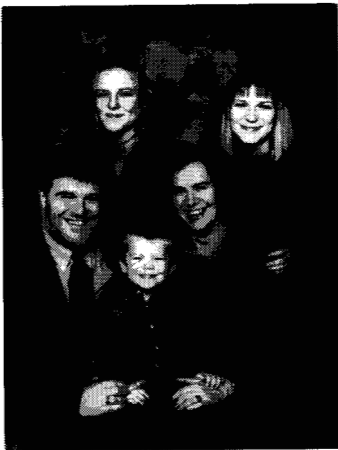
Peter, Rob and Graham's investment of time to be with such a group of young leaders was a real blessing. They, along with the rest of the group, were keen for us all to develop as leaders, and to help each other as well as to learn from them. I felt very strongly that being involved with this group could only benefit my development as a leader and minister-to-be. I,

like them, want to be 'as sharp as I can' for God and want to be guided by him in all things.

As the group was leaving, it was felt that it was important for us to commit ourselves to be as passionate about God as possible, and to keep working until we saw God breaking through in our communities. The willingness to commit and seek with such passion made me really excited about what God will achieve through his church in this country. What is God going to do in your community? I can't wait to see what he's going to do in mine!

Ian Pearce

Personal Profile: Roger Standing, Regional Minister, Southern Counties



I was born and brought up in Norfolk' seems a pretty mundane and uninteresting way to start, but it's true. It also explains why I'm a member of Norwich City FC, but that's more about roots and the triumph of wishful thinking over reality than it is about me.

1978 was an important year for me. It was the year I left Norfolk, married Marion and began my ministry. I had been called to work as an evangelist based at the Methodist Central Hall in Liverpool.

We saw hundreds of young people come to faith during our time there, most notably through the evangelistic 'Jesus Disco' we ran. It was great fun living in the city centre, just up the road from the Adelphi Hotel, and our eldest daughter got to be born a Scouser.

From Liverpool we moved to Manchester, where I trained for the Methodist ministry, got my theology degree and went to work in Strangeways Prison Chaplaincy each week. My first pastorate was in the Leeds, Horsforth & Bramley Circuit where, alongside my personal wrestling about whether I was ministering in the right denomination, we saw God do some great things! My convictions about believers' baptism and scriptural authority meant that ultimately, when I'd been interviewed by the Methodist and Baptist authorities, everyone concluded that I was a Baptist, and a 'free transfer' was arranged.

I was called to be the Senior Minister at West Croydon Baptist Church in 1990 and the '90s proved to be a fantastic decade. We had an excellent staff team, over 120 people came to faith and were baptised, an ecumenically-based ministry with refugees was initiated and we experimented with an exciting theatre / cinema style of outreach.

Having come to faith in a charismatic context and been filled with the Spirit right at the beginning of my Christian life, it was good to discover Mainstream at the outset of my time as a Baptist, and to have the opportunity to serve on the national leadership team for the last few years. Personally, my passion remains to see a Spirit-filled, culturally relevant and evangelistically effective church serve the purposes of God in our generation.

Having felt very much at home and welcome in the Baptist Union, it was a privilege in 2001 to be the last

appointed and shortest-serving Area Superintendent prior to the BUGB changes. Since last year, I have been the Regional Minister / Team Leader of the new Southern Counties' Association, based in Berkshire. Our family has been changing too and growing into a new stage. Debra, our eldest, left university and got married last year, and now lives in Chatham. Our second daughter, Ruth, had a year out with a BMS Action Team in Calcutta before going to Manchester to study. She has since got engaged and is planning to marry next summer. Marion is now a deputy head in Sandhurst (actually acting head teacher for the last term), and oh, of course, I couldn't forget Nathan who was born five years ago. Would you be surprised to learn that, like his dad, he supports Norwich City?



by Philip Deller

Philip Deller
Minister of Chipping
Campden Baptist
Church since 1996.
Trained at Spurgeon's
College and began
ministry at Leigh Road
Baptist Church in
Essex.

Having nearly closed three times in its history, a Baptist church in the Cotswolds has changed from a dwindling handful of members in the late 1970s to a thriving fellowship that is seeing growth in all areas (over 100 baptisms since 1996), has planted one church and is now seeking to plant another.

In 1987, God sent to Chipping Campden Baptist Church (CCBC) a young, newly-trained pastor, Howard Jones, whose ministry the Lord greatly blessed. A young pastor attracting young people to a church with older established members is sometimes a recipe for disaster – but not at CCBC, where everyone was delighted to see the Lord at work. Membership rose steadily to over seventy, and a firm foundation of love, unity and expectation was established for the future.

All this I sensed when I arrived in 1996 and sought to lead the church toward a vision for revival. This began with a complete refurbishment, transforming the church interior from a traditional rural chapel to an inspiring place of worship and community outreach.

Worship and prayer are cornerstones of the church. The church business meeting, referred to as the Church Vision Meeting, and deacons' meetings consist primarily of prayer and worship, as pastor, leadership and congregation constantly seek God's will for the future. *Alpha* has been our most successful tool for outreach based on friendship evangelism, and is supported by the whole church as all home-groups provide the meals.

The 'culture of invitation' is well established.

At CCBC we have a vision for growth, firmly believing that church planting is the best way to make kingdom growth happen within our rural context. In 1999, we planted a new church in nearby Shipston-on-Stour (SVBC) with thirty-four of our members plus children. It has now grown to a congregation of about 100. CCBC and SVBC retain close links and the two congregations worship together every Sunday evening.

The concept of working together in covenant relationship was introduced in 1999, and it now comprises a cluster of four churches, which we call Cornerstone Churches. We all share the same vision and resources to facilitate church growth, church planting and revival. The ministers meet together regularly to pray, we share joint celebrations, prayer and praise meetings, and hold a weekend away for all Cornerstone Churches every year. Cornerstone gift days are held annually for the Vision Fund, a resource which can be used by any Cornerstone Church to support major developments in line with our vision. Currently we are seeking a Director of Children's Ministry to work across our churches.

It has been a joy to see God raising up leaders for full-time ministry at home and abroad. Through these people, we have links in countries as diverse as Papua New Guinea, Turkey and Romania, as well as countries in which our BMS Link Missionaries are working. We work with other local churches, and have been

instrumental in bringing together a wider group of clergy and their partners from all denominations to encourage and minister to one another. We believe that these bi-monthly meetings are very significant for the area: called 'Days of Refreshing', they take place at a local Christian retreat centre.

At CCBC, we are committed to both Word and Spirit. Preaching is primarily biblical exposition, consisting of both teaching and evangelism. As a church we encourage one another into a deeper passion for Jesus. I believe that under God's anointing the church of Jesus Christ can be again a prophetic voice in our communities. Our worship times together are led by a dedicated and gifted group of worshippers, and there is a real atmosphere of love and care within the church. In comparison to only twenty years ago, the Lord has brought about a tremendous transformation in response to prayer: from a handful of members to a joint congregation of nearly 250 between CCBC and SVBC today! We believe this is just the beginning.

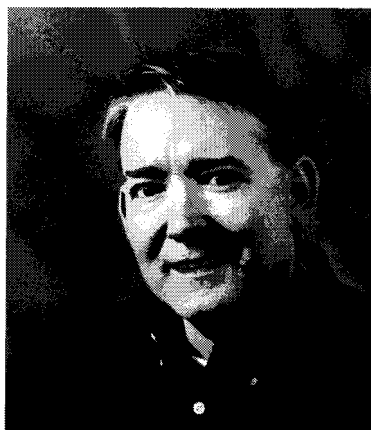
Our vision remains:

- To proclaim Jesus Christ to people today
- To make disciples
- To build God's church and see revival
- To plant new churches
- To reach the nations

The more effective we are in worship and fellowship, the greater will be our effectiveness in mission.

Shining as lights in a dark world

by Simon Jones



*'When I'm holding you tight,
you give me the power
To burn like a torch
in the darkest hour
Tell me what you need
I will surely come through
Anything, anytime, anywhere
For you'*

Not many of you will have thought of applying Bruce Cockburn's lyrics to missionary support. But the truth is that we each shine brighter in this dark world when we stand together. People who work in faraway places, often on their own, tell us that they're only able to do it because they know of folk back home praying for them. And when we hear news of trouble or challenges, our response is 'Tell us what we can do – anything, anytime, anywhere ...' And we mean it.

That's easy to do when the countries our people work in are safe, open and tolerant like ours, and our friends can tell us in great detail about their lives and work. It's not as easy when our folk are working in places that are not so welcoming of outsiders, especially Christian ones. And yet often these are the places where the light of God is most needed. How do we support such people? How do we make meaningful links with them? What can our contribution be to making their mission possible?

BMS World Mission works in a number of areas around the world described as 'sensitive'. Our witness to the love of God in these places is entirely through

aid, development, medical and educational work. Most of our people are in small, multi-national teams and are able to derive some strength and support for the task from their colleagues. But all of them stress how important it is to have people back home praying regularly for them.

'I can only face the really tough challenges of this place because I know that people at home pray every day for me,' says one. Another says, 'People praying at home were the difference between me cracking up and hanging together.' She was reflecting on how she coped in the wake of the shooting dead of a close colleague. The trouble is that it is difficult to generate and maintain interest in work and workers in countries you can't talk openly about in your churches. 'Getting people enthused about mission overseas is difficult enough, and a link to a sensitive area compounds the problem,' says Karen Kaneen, BMS General Committee member, whose church is linked to Kitty working in south central Asia. 'We can't get the day-to-day detail and stories that workers in other countries are able to supply.'

Forming a personal relationship is vital to generating prayer and other kinds of support, she continues. 'We've had letters and lots of information from BMS about Kitty, but she often has to be vague about some of the things that are happening,' she says. So a recent visit to Karen's group was really valuable in cementing relationships. 'It was

great to see her face-to-face,' Karen says. 'We saw pictures, heard about where she works and lives and shops. We were able to put the pieces of her life together, connect up the various bits of information we've received in the past.'

But Karen is keen to ask how much information do we really need in order to support someone in a difficult place? Is there a tendency in a celebrity-driven culture to invade the privacy of those working overseas? 'I felt people asking questions were pushing for every last ounce of personal detail. Why do they need to know that? It was almost voyeuristic.' We need to ask ourselves, 'Why are we involved in link-up?' she continues. 'Is it to satisfy our curiosity about people, places and situations? Or is it to pray and stand with these people?'

So Karen's link-up group meets every two months to pray for Kitty and the general situation in south central Asia. They have been able to find lots of information on the web and in the media about the country. This is supplemented by the pool of knowledge acquired by the group from prayer-letters, emails and personal notes from Kitty herself. The rest, of course, is up to God, who not only knows the situations our friends are in, but works in response to our prayers, leading to the light shining more brightly in more of the world's darkest places.

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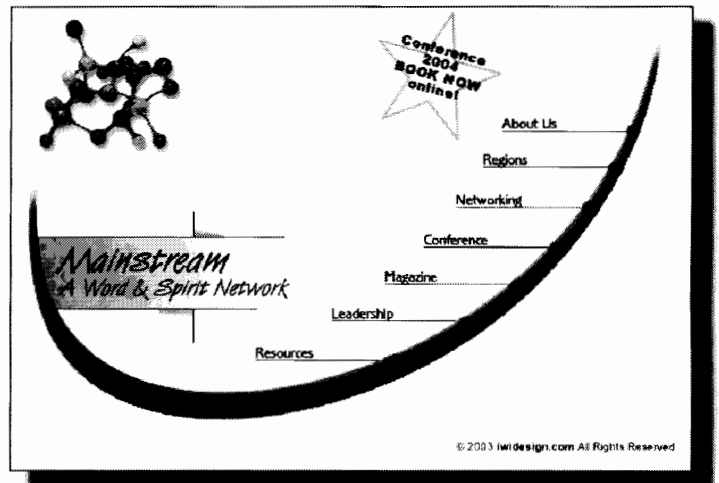
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Latest from our website

Did you know that you can find out details of what is going on Mainstream-wise in your region, dip into the latest

Details of how to pay for each course are also included.

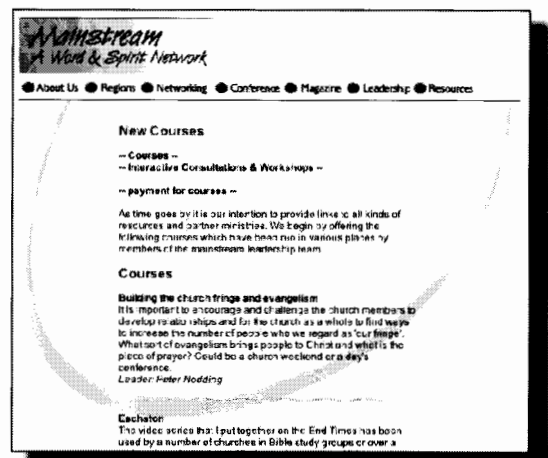
As we promised at conference, the website is



magazine, read key articles from past editions and place a subscription for the next one, find out how plans for the next conference are developing and place a booking – all by visiting www.mainstream-uk.com?

The very latest section to appear on the website is a list of nineteen courses and interactive workshops that members of the Leadership Team have developed in their own setting and are happy to make available to you for use in yours. They are to be found on the Resources page of the website, which also carries details of the kind of context each course is best suited for. So, if you're looking for a theme for a forthcoming church weekend or a ministers' gathering, check it out.

gradually evolving into a useful one-stop shop for all Mainstream-affiliated churches. You'll also find brief details of the main themes the Leadership Team are currently praying through. And we're expecting that as Rob White is released amongst us next year, this will provide the impetus for us to develop the 'Links to Related Ministries' section of the website.





Stories and systems

Stories are provocative, suggestive and evocative, but need to be at the service of joined-up thinking and preaching

by Nigel G Wright

Much attention has focused in recent years on the power of story, on the predominance of narratives within Scripture in general and the teaching of Jesus in particular and on the place of story-telling as a primary genre for preaching. This is all well and good. I wish I could do it better. We all know the formative and communicative power of stories from our own experience. But in this column I enter a plea for the parallel rediscovery of the systematic communication of *ideas*. Stories which are not backed by a clear and systematic exposition of the content of faith are apt to entertain without transforming.

I recently read an exposition of a theologian with whose writings I have had a lot to do. John Howard Yoder was one of those Christian thinkers who didn't like 'systematic theology'. He was happier with a more conversational, interactive style of theological reflection and this was expressed in dozens of articles, published and unpublished, in which he pursued his ideas in dialogue with others. For this reason, they were highly specific, reflecting and engaging the concerns and controversies of his conversation partners, many of whom remained unknown to the general reader. Systematic theology was suspect because it was thought to confine God, or the church, within a 'system' and this itself was inclined to become oppressive. God, and people, can't be treated like this.

This is an important insight. But noble and true though it is,

Yoder's approach has unintended consequences. For one thing, it makes many of his writings seem like one end of a telephone conversation, with the other half being known to him and nobody else, or at the most a few others who could hear the other end of the conversation as well. For another, it means that he fails to spell out comprehensively exactly what he is saying with the result that he is consistently misunderstood. Somebody else then has to come along and do what Yoder refused to do – write a book which systematically sets out what he was trying to say. Overall, the unsystematic approach reduced the influence and impact he could have had. Because he declined to give a systematic outline of his ideas, they were known only to those few who had read everything he had written, which was hardly anybody.

Preaching is intended to influence people and shape the way they think and live. I'm all for the use of stories, but behind the stories we tell there has to be a clear understanding of the ideas we are communicating to people, so that they will be motivated in certain directions: there has to be a 'pattern of sound words' or a 'rule of faith' which constitutes the essence of the message. We might otherwise describe this as the intellectual content of our faith which requires a response. Without this, the stories we tell become woolly and say nothing of enduring significance. In short, we need a systematic theology, so that a

connected sequence of ideas is planted in people's minds and begins to operate upon their wills.

It is clear that Jesus, the story-teller *par excellence*, had such a pattern of connected ideas. It began with the conviction that the awaited reign of God had drawn near to people and was eliciting the response of a changed mind and a transformed heart. The stories he told were shot through with these convictions, which in turn were born of his reading of the Hebrew Scriptures and his understanding of how those Scriptures were fulfilled in himself.

It worries me that in the swing towards story-telling, we might end up with a less firm grasp of the fundamental convictions that constitute our faith. People who have a clear message are more likely to persuade others about the meaning of existence and the way to live in accordance with God's purpose. Stories are indeed provocative, suggestive and evocative, but need to be at the service of joined-up thinking and preaching. We need to attend more than we do to what those fundamental ideas are if we want to avoid producing a church which knows the stories but is unable to articulate its essential message.

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