



Scratching the Surface

People are thirsty. Thirsty for God - for the Living God. Not only the unchurched or the unbelieving, (though they are) but Christians, Baptists even, a thirst for reality and all too often finding the official channels are broken systems full of words.

Two articles in this issue of Mainstream make this point for those who with ears to hear. Mike Beaumont wanted brothers who would open their hearts to him and challenge him to personal and practical holiness. Of course, he could have got that at your local fraternity? You must be joking!

Alan Pain saw 8,000 people flocking to the Dales - a comparison with our own assemblies and rallies prompts the question - why? The answer is thirst. A thirst for God, that there is no sign we have even seen, let alone met.

A few weeks ago, I spent 5 days at a Leaders' Week, run by a noted charismatic community. I went with questions about power and came back with answers about holiness. For the first time in many years a conference treated me not as a mind to be filled, or a professional to be trained, but as a sinner needing to be forgiven and taught again the character of holiness and holiness of character without which no-one will see the Lord.

In front of me as I write is the programme for this year's Baptist Union Assembly. It is all very worthy, necessary, even inevitable. Above all, it is a true reflection of our Baptist life - busy, caring and sensible, but it lacks passion. It will draw the loyal and the satisfied and they will be puzzled and hurt that we who are thirsty are unenthusiastic. But it will not make any difference in the Kingdom of God.

Tear Fund presented the needs of the thirsty to us this year in the slogan - 'We're not just scratching the surface'. Our Churches, and Mainstream, could well adopt the same motto.

The Editor.

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GROWING TOGETHER IN COMMITTED COVENANT RELATIONSHIPS

When the Editor asked me to write this article, I was hesitant. Putting pen to paper might be taken to imply that I had discovered all the answers, when in reality I was still unearthing all the questions. Yet, what I am in the process of growing in has blessed me, deeply; and it seems right to share it in the hope that others might be encouraged to set out on the pilgrimage too. What follows in no way claims to be a definitive statement on, or theological appraisal of, committed covenant relationships. It is, quite simply, a testimony of one man's journey so far.

By the end of 1980, my wife and I had virtually "dried up". Two things lay behind it. First, the deep committed friendships of College life had not found their equivalent in this, our first pastorate. Second, we had a vision for our church coming into Renewal, and realised that we would have to back-track a lot to begin where our people were. In doing so, however, we became spiritually dry. We felt isolated and frustrated; and we could see no way out.

As usual the Lord knew the way, and it was opened up to us through a visit of Nigel Wright from Ansdell who had felt led to come and share something of his vision about Renewal and the place of Covenant relationships. The two hours we spent together that day was like an oasis in the desert, and proved to be the beginning of a turning point in my ministry. In the New Year he invited me to spend a day with the 'Covenant Group' that he was already sharing with. This was a group of four men who had come together in weakness and who had committed themselves to meeting together for one day every month in order to pray and share with one another and who had found enormous strength in doing so. At the heart of their Covenant together stood four points.

- to grow together in a committed covenant relationship in order to exercise a ministry of encouragement and correction toward one another and to be enriched by opening ourselves to one another's lives and ministries
- to explore the New Testament vision for the church as a radical and spiritually powerful community and to encourage one another in the fulfilment of that vision in our churches
- to reach out in love to fellow ministers encouraging them to participate in the vision we share
- to explore the meaning of the translocal ministries of Ephesians 4:11 and to work toward their full implementation in our lives and the life of the church.

(See Mainstream Newsletter No. 9).

My first experience of it was a most heartening one. The day began very leisurely, with numerous cups of coffee and an exchange of news and jokes. A lengthy time of praise and prayer followed, with an opportunity to share needs before lunch. A gentle stroll after lunch led into more sharing, thinking and praying and the day ended with us breaking bread together. As I reflected on the day, what stood out to me more than anything else was the obvious depth of commitment that these men had to one another; and I recognised immediately that this was what I desperately needed. It took only a couple of more visits to the group before I knew I was ready to commit myself to them too, and they received me into their Covenant. I shared this with my deacons - rather hesitatingly, I must confess! But they rejoiced with me in it, knowing that anything that blessed me would inevitably bless them too. In due course, we also shared it with the church.

I have now been meeting regularly with these Brothers for over two years, and have found this period to be one of the most formative ones of my Christian pilgrimage so far. The Covenant Group has been a source of strength, vision and input into my life and has stretched me in ways I could not have foreseen.

At the heart of our relationship, in practical terms, is still the day we spend together every month, when we seek to fulfil the first aim of the Covenant towards one another. Things shared often have to be followed up in the coming days, generally by telephone as we are scattered throughout the North West. Our second aim is not only discussed, but also put into practice, and we have ministered with one another in our churches as steps towards this end, sharing whatever input has seemed helpful. We have shared together in preaching, teaching, and presenting monthly 'Celebrations' where we encourage folk to come to experience at first hand some of the things we are talking about. We have organised a 'Bible School' Week, with evening classes on the theme of "The Believers' Church" where we were able to share in more depth something of our vision. (The average attendance was 150 a night). So our second aim is not mere talk. We are constantly working at the need to express it.

Our third aim is the one that keeps us from being insular and inward looking. Those of us who belong to the Covenant Group (there are now eight of us) came into it because we desperately needed it and someone recognised that need. We believe there are others with similar needs and we want to make ourselves available to them and encourage them with what we are growing in. We therefore began, some eighteen months ago, to hold "Open Days" to which all who share our heart are welcome. The day begins with the inevitable coffee and chat, followed by a time of worship and waiting on God. Someone will share something from the Scriptures - not last week's sermon(!) but something that God has been showing them personally and that is beginning to shape their life. After lunch we divide into groups of three or four to share particular needs, not just about our church but about ourself. We come back together for a final time of praise, personal ministry and breaking of bread. Those who come invariably enjoy the day. But the purpose is not just to provide a good days fellowship, but to get men to see the need in their own hearts and to establish similar covenant relationships with others.

The fourth aim of the Covenant took a step forward last year when we stood with Douglas McBain as he began his wider, 'apostolic' ministry, and we now look to him for apostolic input into our lives and, to differing degrees at the moment, into our churches. Douglas was a real help in my own situation during the birth pangs of renewal, and his wisdom and encouragement was much appreciated by our leaders. Once again, the value of having a Brother alongside was demonstrated.

So much for my personal pilgrimage and an outline of some of the ways in which we try to make our Covenant work. I end with some final reflections on what this Covenant relationship has given to me.

1. It has brought me back to the very heart of the Gospel - the Way of the Cross, the way of weakness. I am not an omniscient superstar, but a bruised reed; only such is the Lord prepared to use.
2. It has challenged me to do what I am constantly calling others to do - to remove their mask and enter into New Testament koinonia. Pastors are notoriously bad at practising this!
3. It has kept me in life by enabling me to keep growing in my experience of Renewal through sharing with others who are walking the same path.
4. It has built vision into me, both for my personal walk with the Lord and for my church. The values of the Radical Discipleship wing, which the Brothers have adopted, have challenged both my theology and my life.

5. It has enable me to relax! A whole day out of the working diary is splendidly refreshing.
6. It has enabled me to be myself. I do not have to pretend to be clever/strong/intellectual/cheerful/successful or anything else. My brothers receive me exactly as I am.
7. It has supported and encouraged me as our ship has passed through the waters of Renewal. My Brothers have been through those waters and can look back and encourage me that there is a good way through, despite all the cries of the pundits and pessimists. Without their encouragement and wisdom, I would have abandoned ship or changed course long ago. With their support, our church has come through to a good place, and I am now in a position to start helping others too.
8. It has challenged me to get a big vision of what God is doing in these days, and to face up to areas of ministry that I had neglected but that were an obvious part of my Brothers' life and ministry.
9. It has led me to an apostle, whose wisdom and experience has blessed both me and my church.
10. It has blessed my wife, who all along knew that her husband needed something like this and couldn't work out why it was taking him so long to find it. Our wives are obviously blessed through our blessing one another, but we also meet from time to time as couples.

Finally, let me repeat what I said at the beginning. We still have more questions than answers. We are still working many things through. We have not got the final word to say on these matters. But we do believe we have hit on something that has revolutionised our lives and ministries, and we would encourage you to try it and see.

Mike Beaumont, Minister - Sale, Cheshire.

THE DALES BIBLE WEEK, FRIEND or FOE?

"Will you write an article about the Dales Bible Week?" The request resembled an invitation to commit career suicide. I now imagine the fatal words, "regularly attends the Dales Bible Week" added to my Curriculum Vitae which Area Superintendents circulate to churches which are really desperate. At least I'm allowed to speak for myself in this denominational obituary. The impression I gained at this year's Mainstream Conference, - so helpful in most respects - that we were casting fearful and sometimes hostile glances over our shoulders at the teaching represented by the Dales Bible Week, persuaded me to agree to the editorial request. I have in fact returned from three Bible Weeks intact in body, mind, and spirit; and at Sutton Coldfield Baptist Church we still hold church meetings where all members are able to participate and vote.

Let's attempt this in the form of question and answer.

1. What Is The Dales Bible Week?

It's a "whoopie Keswick" distinguished more by blue N.I.V.s than by black A.V.s. Well, you must admit that the facetious reply is often more succinct and accurate than the reply of balance and research.

The Dales Week is held each year at the Great Yorkshire Showground, Harrogate. It was first held in the mid-seventies, and now attracts 8,000 - 10,000 visitors, most of them camping on site. The meetings

are unashamedly charismatic and the week is organised from Harvestime House, Bradford. Similar Bible Weeks have sprung up, like the Downs Week, the New Forest Week, and this year the Wales Week at Builth Wells. The main speakers are men who lead Apostolic teams which operate from Bradford or are in relationship with them. They include Bryn Jones, Keri Jones, Dave Mansell, Mike Stevens, Hugh Thompson, Arthur Wallis and Terry Virgo among their best known names. The majority of campers probably come from members of churches which are under the oversight of these Apostolic teams, but there are also many members of Baptist churches at the Dales.

The week consists of morning seminars, free afternoons and an evening meeting for worship and teaching, usually an hour of each. Children are catered for in morning and evening meetings, according to age.

2. Why Do I Attend The Dales Bible Week?

I have been a Baptist Minister since 1968. For 12 years I despaired of finding "spiritual re-charging" through my summer break, despite some lovely holidays. Several friends testified to blessing at the Dales Week, and in 1979 thirteen went for the week from our church. They returned with tremendous enthusiasm and with new love and commitment to the Lord and to the church. That can't be bad. Through family generosity we were able to go to the Dales in 1980, and we've been in '81 and '82, with plans also for '83.

I go because I find at the Dales a freedom which I cannot find anywhere else to express in worship my own experience of spiritual renewal. I have queried so much of the Dales Weeks, yet I have returned home each time with fresh vision for the church, with keener desire to preach and with stronger conviction in personal faith. Important issues are tackled without fear or hedging. The challenge of discipleship is presented in detail, together with the challenge of pastoring in discipleship - which we tend to fend off by scaremongering about authority and submission. Leadership seminars assume that ministers and elders will worship with that joyous intensity which we covet for our home congregations. My wife has shared fully in my experience, and our three children, aged 14, 11, and 8, are eager 'Dalers,' which means two 2½ hour meetings each day for them.

3. What Has The Dales Bible Week Done For Our Church?

For three years a party of c.100 has been to the Dales, out of a church membership total of c.380. That is tailor made for a split....but we have not had one. It's people who cause splits, not Bible Weeks. We have stressed the fact that those who go to the Dales are a group from the church and no more than that. Our loyalty is to the whole church and there can be no hint of a distinction between first and second class christians.

The Dales Weeks have been traumatic for a lot of us. We were unprepared for the exuberance of the worship; we were not expecting the searching work of the Holy Spirit; and we had not adequately foreseen that challenge to our assumptions of church life and structure which easily provokes defensive and fearful reactions. But, there is a week to come through all this, and we have seen beautiful and powerful things happen each year which have been possible because there have been 7 days for the Lord to bring His purpose to fulfilment. In 1982 a woman, aged 29 and recently deserted by her husband, came with us. She was completely 'locked up'. In the course of the week the Lord 'melted' her - (her own word) - and this centred on her conversion on the Tuesday evening. She has since progressed to baptism and church membership. Several marriages have been profoundly affected as the

Lord has given time for reconciliation and adjustment. The children of the church have been greatly influenced by the Dales Weeks. As a result our Family Church has become a place where conversions are expected, genuine follow-up takes place, and children pray with and for each other. A number of families now attend our evening service because the children objected to being left at home. The Dales' arrangements for children are an important part of the whole week and much is expected from this work. What about the eight year old boy in our group who said to his parents one lunchtime, "I was going forward for the baptism in the Spirit but I realised that it would make me late for lunch".

We have benefited by many new worship songs, which won't interest you if you're 'B.H.B. only'. It's true that some of these songs are a bit much, but many of them are wonderful, and the proportion of mediocrity cannot be higher than that in the B.H.B. (can it?). It's also true that we take our critical faculties to the Dales as firmly as we take them to B.U. Assemblies and Mainstream Conferences.

Inevitably there has been apprehension and suspicion in our church concerning the Dales, not least as a result of well spread scare-stories. But those who attend the Dales have, in my view, negated such concern by their attitude, and those who are not 'Dalers' have themselves been consistent in love and trust. Some of them like us go to the Dales because they think we're happier when we return and they remind us that the Church Offering hardly notices our absence (I reckon they save up for months to ensure it's a bumper week while we're away.) One deacon who has not been to the Dales and is not likely to go, said to me recently when I was somewhat defensive, "Alan, you should realise that the Dales Week is no longer an issue in our church". Hallelujah for men like him; and we come together to Mainstream Conference.

4. What Is The Distinctive Message Of The Dales Bible Week?

This is summed up in the word, 'Restoration'. Harvestime House publishes a magazine under this title and the message of Restoration is also expressed through Arthur Wallis' book, 'The Radical Christian', reviewed in a previous Mainstream bulletin by Nigel Wright. As I understand it, the essential burden of Restoration is that God is active in these final days by His Spirit to restore His Church to the form and vigour of the Apostolic era. When each local church is restored it will receive the input of Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist and Pastor-Teacher, as described in Ephesians 4:11. Of these, Apostle and Prophet at least will be 'trans-local'. It was a disappointment to me that we didn't have someone like Terry Virgo expounding this at our Mainstream Conference this year - not because I necessarily agree with Terry at every point - but because he puts it so ably, and with loving and gracious authority.

To be fair the message of the Dales Week is more than Restoration, but Restoration is its distinctive. Bryn Jones' four evenings in 1980 on the death of Jesus were highpoints of preaching which enlarged for me the scope of Jesus' achievement in His Cross. Terry Virgo's two evenings in 1982 from the story of David called us to personal holiness in sexual matters and brought hundreds of christians to repentance.

5. What Is Wrong With The Dales Bible Week?

I can only describe this in the form of personal reaction and impression. Theological niceties and worship arguments have been almost exhausted elsewhere and lie outside the scope of my article. I

leave you all to cling to your respective proof texts. I know that I'm often angry and critical at the Dales Weeks, and surprised by the blessing they bring me. I share the following observations, not in the form of scholarly assessment but of personal reaction.

The Dales Weeks are too preoccupied with Church structures. Speakers frequently give the impression that once a local church has recognised its Apostle and Prophet all it has to do is to submit to their authority and massive revival will be inevitable. Of course, they never intend this impression, but we preachers have to learn that what people say we're teaching is more important than what we claim we're teaching! I would see more flexibility and variety in the leadership structures of the New Testament church than I 'hear' at the Dales. For example, I suspect that the 'deacons' of Acts 6 came into being to ease a heavy work load, not to become a Baptist be-all-and-end-all 2,000 years later.

Dales speakers react too defensively to the rumours which abound. (Don't we all?) In fairness, many of these rumours are an appalling commentary on christian integrity. They ought therefore to be less carefree themselves in their humour and satire which relates to existing denominational churches, not because I don't appreciate that humour but because it leads us all into "caricaturing and caricatured".

Some of the preaching, frankly, is sub-standard. Any group which majors on "gifts" and "ministries" and "anointings" must keep its own house in order. I have listened to men preaching to 8,000+ congregations and have wanted to say, "that man has no preaching gift for such a gathering as this". Despite the covenant of loyalty which exists between the Dales leaders I sensed an uneasy acknowledgment when I challenged one or two of them on this matter that they agreed with me. I feel concerning some of the speakers as I did several years ago of men at Keswick, "brother, in all love, you need a break from the Convention platform".

But when all is said and done, people are attending the Dales Week and similar ventures in increasing numbers.

I make a plea in conclusion that we Baptists raise the level and tone of our debate on these matters. The vitriolic and uninformed nature of many letters to the Baptist Times, and the prejudiced and unresearched nature of some of its articles which relate to Worship and Charismatic Renewal are no credit to any of us. The hasty use we make of labels to categorise each other is a fearful short-cut which we dare not embrace. It's not enough to pen cheap criticisms of worship songs or of "informal" orders of service. I believe there are clear and valid principles which often guide freer forms of worship and I cannot take seriously any objection to the form of worship I lead unless it rests on an enquiry into the clear convictions which motivate that worship. The article I would have preferred to write would have explored some of these principles which our 'experts' on worship (i.e. men who write on the subject!) seem not to examine.

Two ladies whom I watched at the 1981 Dales Bible Week have become my vision for our church. They sat side by side, each of them around seventy years of age. Both looked rather forbidding in dress and hairstyle. When the evening meeting began, one of them stood to sing, holding her hymn-sheet as tenaciously as thousands of Sunday worshippers cling to their denominational hymn-books. She sang, quietly and unemotionally, but without any trace of awkwardness. Her companion needed no hymn-sheet. She used her hands and her arms in a beautiful mime of the words of the songs, and she danced freely and radiantly, moving up and down the aisles with lovely dignity. Sometimes she danced alone, other times she joined the teenagers who were young enough to be her grandchildren. She looked heavenly in her praise of the Lord, but otherwise she was ordinary. These two ladies were obviously close friends. They

praised God side by side. They have become my longing for the church.

Alan Pain, Sutton Coldfield.

POST SCRIPT: (On receiving this article I sent Alan the Yorkshire B.A. paper on the Bradford House Church Movement and invited Alan to comment briefly, saying whether this paper showed the raised level of debate he is asking for. His reply follows and readers are recommended to obtain a copy of the Y.B.A. paper from 1 South Parade, Headingley, Leeds LS6 3LF enclosing 17½p in stamps. Editor).

The green paper produced by the Commission of Christian Witness for the Yorkshire Baptist Association, entitled 'The Bradford House Church Movement', presents an alternative view to mine concerning the Dales Bible Week. I'm happy to commend it for consideration partly because of its calm and reasoned tone, and partly because it makes extensive quotations from Arthur Wallis' book, The Radical Christian, and from other Bradford material. These quotations do allow the authors to speak and to be judged for themselves.

It's the method of the paper which disturbs me.

It details Bradford teaching on various subjects relating to church life and structure. It appears to offer cautious and provisional acceptance to this teaching at many points, but proceeds to describe several dangers in the application of this teaching, for example in its style and spirit of local church leadership. For me, there's a natural conclusion to be drawn - we should encourage our Leaders to meet with men from Bradford in a spirit of loving trust and openness. They would rejoice in what they have in common, share fears and concerns, and learn much from each other. The green paper however comes to a different conclusion, "we should strongly discourage our members from having contact with Bradford Church House and the events it sponsors such as the Dales Bible Week."

Do the authors of this paper want us to apply a similar method to the Anglicans and the Roman Catholics? If they do, I for one would insist that they draw similar conclusions. If we applied this method and its conclusions to the Baptists, and space won't allow me to describe the fun I've had at home in experimenting with it, Baptist Church House would become a very lonely building in which to work!

Let's not "discourage our members", let's encourage our Leaders to seek to meet with Leaders from Bradford in a courageous and fearless openness, insisting that they reject the suspicion and the prejudice which are tools of our common Enemy. I'd be thrilled to be part of such a get-together. What about it, Mainstream Executive?

Alan Pain, Sutton Coldfield.

(Note: This article was intended to partner Pam Kerr's article in the previous issue, but it missed the bus! It is not a reply to it, but the two articles should be studied together by any Church wanting to improve its efficiency. Editor.)

MY SECRETARY IS ESSENTIAL TO MY MINISTRY

If churches are to grow, then ministers must be set free to minister. Ministers are called to be preacher of the Word and shepherds of the flock, but all too often they turn out to be glorified (!) office boys. Most ministers, if they were absolutely honest, would have to confess to having spent many a frustrating hour engaged in 'admin.' or secretarial work rather than getting down to the task to which God has called them.

Listening to some people, you might imagine that secretaries are luxuries, which only the larger churches can afford. I heartily disagree! Secretaries are essential to the ongoing work of any church. For a church to refuse its minister a secretary is to quench the Spirit - it is to straight-jacket their past into a one-man-ministry role.

I write strongly because I feel strongly. One of the best moves I ever made was to create two offices on our church premises - one for myself and one for my secretary. I don't think I was too popular at that time - space was and still is at a premium in our church. But inspired by what I had seen in the States, I was determined to seek to do God's work in as efficient a manner as possible. We need to be professional in our approach to ministry. Indeed, this is part of what good stewardship ('management') is all about.

Our present position is that I have one lady who comes in three mornings a week and another who does one morning a week. I confess that I wish it were more. Indeed, the whole matter is currently under review by my deacons and I have no doubt that at the end of the day an even better service will be provided. Nonetheless, it is amazing what can be achieved in this time.

One point, however, I should make clear. My secretary is far more than a secretary - or rather, she does more than shorthand and typing. She is also an administrator. "Personal Assistant" is perhaps the best description. This means, therefore, that a secretary cannot be obtained by going to the local employment bureau or whatever. Along with her secular skills, commitment to Christ is vital - as also is a close knowledge of the fellowship. My secretary is effective precisely because she is at the centre of church life.

I have been fortunate - sorry: blessed! - in my Mildred. She works all hours for me - for, in addition to manning the phone in the morning, she often has to make arrangements of an evening. She is one of those ladies who can do almost everything for me - apart from writing my sermons, alas. Why she even prepared a draft for this article! Or rather she listed some of the jobs she has to perform. Let me list some of them, together with some of my comments:-

1. Preparing a list of names and addresses of members and friends. Once or twice a year a list of members and friends is produced and distributed around the church. This is quite a task, in so far as we seem to have a constantly moving population. At the moment the job takes a considerable length of time. However, this is an area where we are actively exploring the use of a computer. Hopefully this will be sorted out before the next list is required (yes, we always live in hope!)
2. Along with this list goes the family church prayer calendar. We divide up all the members and friends between the days of the month. In this list, we also include all the names of the children. It's quite a job getting everything right, but we believe that the personal touch is vital in a large organisation.
3. Until we get into the computer age, all our members, friends and contacts are listed on a mammoth card index and the colour of the card will vary according to the activity in which the person is involved. In fact this system can be very useful: e.g. when we need to get in touch with all the Holiday Club contacts, all we need to do is to pull out all the buff-coloured cards. Even so, it does take time and effort. A computer is a 'must' (Yes, I know my Treasurer will be reading this article!)
4. Sending out letters to those who visit the church for the first time. Every Monday morning we check through our visitors cards and through

the visitor's book (we have a twin system - in this way visitors are less likely to escape through the net) and a duplicated letter, albeit personally signed by me, is sent to them. From experience we know that this service is greatly appreciated.

5. Arranging for readers and other participants (e.g. people to lead in prayer) in the Sunday services. The cry today is for participation, but as any minister knows to his cost, it involves a good deal of phoning around to arrange. Until recently my secretary has been responsible for this. However, in order to give her a quieter Friday night, she now simply phones another member, who has taken on this particular responsibility.
6. Arranging hospitality. Here I refer not just to visiting preachers, but rather to all kinds of people who seem to be passing through.
7. Arranging 'Friendship Sundays'. Twice a year the whole church is divided up into small groups and then off they go to have tea or coffee in one another's homes after the evening service. "Groups" is perhaps too technical a word, for they only meet once. The whole idea is for people who do not normally meet one another, to meet. On Friendship Sunday evenings all youth activities are cancelled - in this way we seek to ensure that there is mixing right through the age groups.
8. Typing and duplicating: e.g. my letters, magazine articles, extracts from books indexed for future reference, Bible study notes for Fellowship Groups, church calendars and a thousand and one other things beside.
9. Ordering films, books, leaflets from C.P.O., posters, stationery..... a task in itself.
10. Organizing the local missionary auxiliary, of which I am nominally in charge, but for which my secretary does all the dirty work.
11. Manning the phone. Perhaps I should mention that we have one phone in the church with two extensions. The 'master' phone is in the church office. If necessary, my secretary will keep calls away from me. She will also make innumerable calls on my behalf (our telephone bill is to be seen to be believed!)
12. Doing work for other church members: e.g. the Church Secretary will want the deacons' minutes typed and duplicated, and likewise the agenda for the deacons meetings. The Youth Fellowship will want their programme printed, the Sunday School will want a letter sent out.....You name it, somebody seems to ask for it!

Yes, a secretary is a must. To expect a minister to do without a secretary is to expect him to have all the gifts of the Spirit. Whether Paul was actually referring to minister's secretaries in 1 Cor. 12:28 is doubtful: nonetheless I am convinced that my secretary in offering her services to the church is exercising a gift in God's service.

Paul Beasley-Murray.

KINGSBRIDGE BAPTIST CHURCH

There are few Churches in the Union with a longer history than ours. Founded in 1640, in the days of the Five Mile Act, there are accounts of persecution of our Baptist forebears in Kingsbridge, of gathering for

worship on the 'Salt Stone' in the middle of the Salcombe estuary, and of having to bury their dead in a graveyard several miles out of town.

But while God is interested in history - after all, He made it! - He is the God of the present, and still at work in His world and in the Church today. What is more, He is at work today so that more and more people will hear the good news of Jesus in the future.

When a Church has been relying almost continuously on the support of the Home Mission Fund (praise the Lord for such a Fund!) for thirty years or so, it is time something moved and happened. For several years before our arrival in Kingsbridge, the Lord has been giving a vision to the people in the Church. The 'hard core' of about a dozen members of the Church could see that God wanted growth and spiritual life in Kingsbridge. He was assuring them that He was going to build up the Church.

The vision came about by a series of events. In 1974 a young couple moved to Kingsbridge and began to worship at the Church. At the same time as their arrival the Lord told one of the senior members of the Church to call a small group together and form a House Group. With the Pastor's support, the House Group met every week for five years, learning to pray together and love one another. From time to time during the five years people came to Church as they moved into the town, but rarely stayed, much to the disappointment of the Group. But they were being reminded that God's timing is always perfect, and that they needed to trust Him completely. Late in 1978 the young couple who had been such a strength in the Church and House Group moved on to Plymouth. 'Has God forgotten His promises?' they wondered.

During that winter (78/79) there were times when only a dozen or so would meet for worship on Sunday. But God was preparing the way. In the summer of 1979, having already left Spurgeon's College and travelled 5,000 miles in pursuit of God's place for me, I received a 'phone call from the Church Secretary in Kingsbridge. That was 22nd June. Benjamin had been born two days previously, and Lynne was in hospital. We talked it over. We prayed. We agreed. The Deacons interviewed me. I took a Sunday. By 5th August we were settled. By 24th October, we had moved into a newly-acquired manse! When the Lord works He moves quickly.

Kingsbridge is a small town of 4,000 people but by no means sleepy, despite the soft Devon air. What has happened during the past three years has demonstrated to everyone in the Church the power of God to change peoples' lives. How has it all come about? One thing is for sure, not through any one individual. The foundation was the group of people coming together to pray years previously - it was only a small group! Now God has been making the members grow together in their fellowship with Him and with one another. That, as it always does, has created tremendous tensions for all of us - but we are learning to forgive one another.

Neither has growth come about by a programme of evangelism. There has been no door-to-door visitation or 'Evangelism Explosion', no inner mission or 'One Step Forward', even though these things are good and necessary. God has been renewing our worship and so encouraging us to share our faith with our friends and neighbours. He has also sent into the area a number of mature Christians who have encouraged our work together. For instance: when Lynne and I first moved to Kingsbridge there was only one other young married couple in the Church and they weren't able to be very involved. Now we have a Young Marrieds' House Group which numbers over twenty and has doubled in number since it came into being at the start of 1982. We shall have to divide it soon.

Another policy we have pursued is to encourage newly converted Christians to share their faith in all its immediacy with their non-Christian

friends. A number of people have become Christians this way.

God has also been extending our vision of His work in the future. As each step has been taken in faith, God has shown us the way forward. But just in case you think everything in the Kingsbridge garden is rosy, I have to say that with all the blessing God is giving I have never before been so aware of Satan's work. Sadly, there have been those who have come to faith and fallen away either in the first few weeks, or later. Sadly, there have been personal differences and arguments over changes in the Church. Sadly, there have been those who could not agree with the direction in which the Church is moving. There have been errors made by myself and others which have reduced the effectiveness of our witness for Jesus.

We have grown. Taking into account a revision of the Church roll, our membership has doubled. That's good, and we are encouraged. But better is the fact that we are beginning to meet people's needs in the strength of the Spirit. Marriages are being reconciled, people in trouble cared for, sins forgiven and eternal life is being experienced in all its richness by an increasing number of people. As I look around the Church and its work I cannot point to any area of ministry in which it excels - it would appear that God has been working in spite of ourselves rather than because of us. Hudson Taylor once said, 'I used to ask God what He wanted me to do. Then I began to ask if I could help Him. Now I ask Him what He wants to do.'

The foundation of our encouragements in Kingsbridge were laid by the people of prayer. We are looking forward to what He has for us in the future.

'Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us.....with every spiritual blessing in Christ.' (Ephesians 1:3).

David Slater.

A NEW WAY FOR HERTFORD

Worshippers at Hertford Baptist Church have been busy reaching out to the folk in their town. "Mission '82" was the title given to ten days in the middle of September when, helped by eighteen students from Spurgeon's College (the theological college in South London for the training of Baptist Ministers), a concentrated programme of door to door visitation was embarked upon. The visitation was supported by a full programme of events all of which were designed to enable Christians to share their faith in Jesus Christ with others.

Nothing like Mission '82 has happened in Hertford before. It was a new experience for the Church and town alike. Vision for the Mission was first shared by the Minister, Michael Collis, with Deacons in July 1979. By March 1980, a firm commitment had been made by the Church members to hold such a mission.

A small mission committee was born, and thus began eighteen months of detailed planning, committed at every stage, by prayer, to the Lord. With the appointment of Andrew Rigden Green as Leader of the Spurgeon's College team, a close liaison between the College and the Church developed. From early 1982, regular visits were made by members of the College team to Hertford, each student making his contribution to training seminars and Sunday services of worship. Planning continued, now having the benefit of the student team input.

Preparation for the mission was not just of a practical nature. It was realised that spiritual preparation was just as vital and the Church would

neglect it at its peril. Therefore, from January to July 1982, a One Step Forward programme of study in home groups and training specially geared to the mission, was undertaken. This proved to be immensely worthwhile and provided a firm foundation from which to reach out with the Gospel.

During the Mission period many activities were arranged including coffee mornings and supper meetings in the homes, the showing of the film 'Tanglewood's Secret' to the children and parents of the Sunday School, special lunches and a dinner, bookstalls in the town and a book display in the library. Members of the student team were welcomed into two of the town's secondary schools and privileged to take assembly, R.E. classes and speak at Christian Union Meetings.

Over three hundred people gathered on the second Wednesday in the Castle Hall, Hertford to hear a piano recital given by the International concert pianist, Mr. Richard Meyrick. In addition to giving a sparkling performance of works by Beethoven, Chopin and Khatachurian, Mr. Meyrick spoke of his faith in Jesus Christ.

The following day, two showings of the film 'Joni' attracted to the Castle Hall over 500 people. The film starred Joni Eareckson playing herself in a real-life drama of her shattering experience of being paralysed from the neck downwards following a diving accident when she was just seventeen. The radiance of her Christian faith which transformed her broken life was clear for all to see.

Hertford Baptist Church joined with all the town on the day of the Hertford Carnival. The hall and garden were open all day, providing a welcome chair, tea, coffee, cakes and biscuits to weary shoppers and visitors to the Carnival. During the afternoon, the hard and devoted labours of a small group in the Church were deservedly rewarded as they saw their scale replica of the Pilgrim Fathers' 'Mayflower' sail off with the first prize in the Carnival procession.

The theme for the whole of the mission, both in its pre-publicity and on all of the publicity for the mission events, was illustrated by the NEW WAY symbol. The Church wished to share with the town, the NEW WAY of life that they had found, and which is available to everyone through Jesus Christ. Thus it was that during the house to house visitation (approx. 1700 homes were called upon) people's religious views were sought by use of an opinion poll. So that every home visited should have the opportunity of learning more of the Good News of the Christian message, a copy of Luke's gospel in a modern version was given as a gift from the Church. The gospels were attractively presented in dust jackets personalising them to the people of Hertford, and picturing the Baptist Church and other scenes in and around Hertford. A word of invitation to people to the activities of the Church listed on the cover was also a feature of the gospels. Over 1400 such gospels were placed into homes.

"Was the mission a success?" someone will ask. There are, of course, many measures of success, but in at least five ways the mission met its objectives. Firstly, people were converted to Christ - just a couple within twelve days - but we feel sure that in the future others will come to Christ. Secondly, Christians were challenged concerning their commitment to Christ. As a direct result of the mission, one man came to a deeper faith in Christ and has since been elected to the diaconate, while a member of another Church, who was contacted in the door-to-door visitation, came to a real assurance concerning her relationship to Christ. Thirdly, we have made many new contacts and at least two people are now attending the Church services regularly.

We have also re-established contact with several people who had ceased to attend the Church, sometimes many years ago. Fourthly, the Church itself

was equipped and enthused for mission and a number of the Church members who are living in the nearby town of Ware, have begun services there every Sunday morning. Finally, the students themselves were given an insight into the wonderful privilege of declaring the gospel of Christ.

B. P. Harley, Secretary,
Michael J. Collis, Minister.

BOOK REVIEWS

I BELIEVE IN PREACHING, John R. W. Stott, Hodder & Stoughton, £5.95.

A book review in many ways ought also to be a personal testimony. Some books may be read without any very obvious lasting impression being made on the reader. For anyone who aspires to a preaching and teaching ministry, and has been called by God to such, 'I believe in preaching' is required reading. Not only so, it should be read from time to time by any busy pastor just to make sure he has his priorities straight. It has been a most helpful book.

The book falls naturally into two halves - the first four chapters written basically as an apologia for preaching and the latter four dealing with some aspects of the practice of preaching. John Stott begins by giving an historical account of the glory and value of preaching since the beginning of the Christian Church, moves on in the second Chapter to refute some of our modern objections to preaching and then outlines the biblical basis for preaching as building bridges between the Biblical authors, their culture, the preacher and the modern congregation of the '80's to whom he is preaching. Of those chapters, particularly helpful and challenging were those dealing with contemporary objections and preaching as bridge building. The author takes the anti-authoritarian mood of our Western culture to task, gives the Christian response to it and goes on to show how preaching may have a far greater significance in the lives of our congregations than any of the modern micro-electronic gadgets including TV and audio-visual information systems. Whilst pointing out some of the problems arising from these means of communication, John Stott argues that preachers should use every means available to them to make the communication of the message of Christ more effective - it is not only listening that will help people to understand, but watching, discussing and discovering for themselves. In this chapter he concludes by encouraging the Church as a whole and the preacher in particular to have greater confidence in the Gospel and to regain that excitement about the person of Jesus Christ and his message to a needy world.

In his chapter on preaching as bridge-building, John Stott helped me to understand more clearly the vital necessity of making the Christ of the Bible relevant to modern life. It is the job of the expositor to bring Jesus alongside people in their ordinary everyday living. It is, therefore, important to preach about topics which hold our attention day by day - the possibility of nuclear war, the peace movement, sexual promiscuity, the family and the erosion of family stability through divorce, and the division between the rich and poor countries and peoples of the world. We must be seen to grasp subjects that are controversial and bring the Biblical perspective to them, so that they can hear 'this is what the Lord says' in today's society.

In what I have called the second half of the book, the author deals with some of the more practical aspects of preaching. Having established the value and necessity of Biblical exposition from the pulpit Sunday by Sunday, he helps me to do it better. There is 'the call to study', a chapter on 'preparation', and the final two chapters concerned with the preacher's inner attitudes to his work in the pulpit - 'sincerity and earnestness' and 'courage and humility'.

If I have any criticisms at all, they would come in these chapters. If the book were to be simply an apologia for Christian Biblical preaching, then it might have stopped after the fourth chapter. But if it was designed to be a handbook on practical aids to make the preacher better at his talks, then there isn't enough in the last four chapters to do it. That's not to say they weren't practical, challenging and helpful, but I wanted more. I suppose, being a good preacher, that was his intention! The call to study had a profound effect on me in challenging me about the amount of time I spend in study, not just for preaching, but also for my own personal benefit. His minimum would be one hour per day, one morning, afternoon or evening per week, one day per month, and one week per year, which would amount to over 600 hours per year spent in deep study. I was soundly rebuked and rightly so. As preachers, we are commended to have a constant vigilance so that we discipline ourselves to consistent Bible study, so that we don't run dry.

The final chapters on the way a sermon is delivered especially impressed me. Someone who has 'fire in the belly' will preach with conviction and for a response from the congregation. He will preach with boldness and great courage, even when opposed, but without the arrogance that accompanies the danger of the preacher's super-inflated ego. Above all, as Christ is proclaimed, people will come because they are hungry for God's word.

One other small thing - I was left with a faintly disturbing thought that if a pastor didn't have an IQ of 140 or more, he might not fare too well in his role of preacher! Even if you don't have an IQ at that level, read the book. Your preaching will be the better for it, and God's Kingdom stronger.

David Slater.

A GUIDE TO EFFECTIVE EVANGELISM THROUGH THE LOCAL CHURCH, David Greenaway,
O.S.F. Publications.

This manual, produced by the British Director of One Step Forward Ministries, is a resource book of ideas and information related to a wide range of possible approaches to local church evangelism. It has been put together with the needs of local church leaders and members in mind, in order to introduce basic principles of evangelistic theory and method and to encourage the planning of a church's evangelism strategy by considering the many suggestions put forward.

There is much that is familiar here, especially for those who keep abreast of Church Growth findings. The emphasis is on the simple communication of thoughts and ideas across a broad front, rather than an in depth treatment of any approach. The manual is, as a result, easy to read and its contents easy to share. The book is arranged in sections with coloured dividers with material for leaders, for membership training, and for use in small groups. There are teaching charts with illustrations, ready for direct copy onto overhead projector sheets.

Every aspect of possible local church evangelism gets a mention somewhere, even if only as a one-sentence suggestion: the Biblical basis, roles of members in evangelism, methods of outreach, training and preparation (much practical advice here), use of buildings and home groups, counselling, and the special needs of various areas and groups. The healthy emphasis throughout is that the use of the manual will actually lead to planning and effective evangelism, rather than a happy time talking about it.

Though large and attractive in format, the manual is not substantial, and here lies my main frustration with it. In attempting such a wide overview of evangelistic ideas, it is inevitably sketchy and much that is only

touched on needs a fuller treatment. A particular example of this relates to the evangelism of men. In David Greenaway's words, 'men have become the neglected area of evangelism'. 'To reach the family unit effectively, we need to win the man of the house'. Amen to that! But we find no help in this vital area in the manual. Short sections are devoted to 'the family', 'the elderly', and 'the young', but nothing on men. Can someone produce something stimulating and helpful for us on this? Different social settings are also briefly looked at, but the one on 'council estates' is particularly thin.

Perhaps it is unfair to expect a general manual to be more thorough on specifics; there is an excellent resources index of names and addresses at the back which should prove invaluable. There are helpful emphases on the supportive role of all ministries to the work of evangelism; on encouraging new disciples to reach their 'web' of contacts; on the evangelistic potential of much pastoral visiting; and on local churches using and building on what they have at present.

We can thank David Greenaway for putting so many possibilities together in one book. Any church taking a fresh look at its strategy and effectiveness will find help and stimulation here. Those of us needing to dig deeper into particular challenges or areas of need can do a lot worse than pursue the further resource material David himself recommends.

David Barter, Trinity, Bexleyheath.

YOUR CHURCH MUST CHOOSE - IF IT WANTS TO GROW, Andrew D. MacRae,
Pickering & Inglis, £3.50.

Ministers and Church leaders who are looking for practical guidance in bringing about growth in a local church setting will find this book invaluable. Andrew MacRae has admirably accomplished his stated aim of providing 'step-by-step guidelines'. There are many books written on the subject of Church Growth: many points and chapters in this one I found to be particularly helpful and challenging.

The opening chapters lay the Biblical basis, with challenge to choose relevant growth goals on the New Testament pattern. These chapters deal with AREAS OF GROWTH - discipleship, fellowship, service, witness, experiment and giving; and also TYPES OF GROWTH - biological, conversion, transfer, and with the significance of Leadership in bringing growth about. Helpful hints are given on the DON'TS which mitigate against progress, and there are chapters on the BARRIERS TO BE OVERCOME, SPIRITUAL PREPARATION necessary and the PRACTICE AND PRINCIPLES OF EVALUATION. Then follows a very helpful series of chapters giving practical suggestions on such matters as helping the immature, those at the edges of the church, neighbourhood outreach, evangelistic worship, pastoral and personal evangelism.

Finally, a number of chapters on what it costs for a church to grow in terms of tradition, finance and personnel.

I found the chapter on MAKING THE CHURCH CENTRAL particularly challenging.

"For too many, the church is precious but peripheral". Andrew MacRae tells us that we should never be afraid of thrusting the church back into the world - not to compromise with its materialistic, secular, sinful standards, but to snatch men as 'brands from the burning' and to establish the reign of Christ in other lives.

Christopher D. Haig, St. Annes-on-Sea.

SUCCESSFUL HOME CELL GROUPS, Paul Yonggi Cho, Logos £3.00

Or - how I grew a Church to over 100,000 members.

This book will not tell you how to run cell groups. This is a clear call to faith, to big thinking and to delegating ministry to cell leaders - a tonic rather than a diet. The most interesting thing was prominent role of women in cell leadership.

R.A.C.

MAINSTREAM CONFERENCE 1984

The 1984 Mainstream Conference will be held at the Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick, Derbyshire from Monday 16th January, 1984 - Wednesday 18th January. The general theme of "God's holy people" will be examined in three ways: 1) Personal holiness, 2) Corporate holiness, 3) Social holiness. Details of the invited speakers will be announced later.

The cost of the Conference will be £25 and a place can be booked by a £5 non-returnable deposit sent to the Revd. Jack Ramsbottom, 2 Lovelace Dr., Kidlington, Oxford.

MAINSTREAM CONFERENCE TAPES

Details of the Conference Address tapes are available from Mr. Neil Pimm, 71 Waverley Avenue, Kidlington, Oxford, Tel: Kidlington 6426.



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