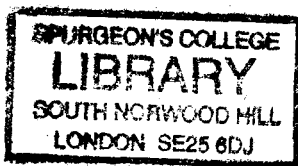


A WORD AND SPIRIT  
MAINSTREAM  
NETWORK



**Magazine Issue 66. March 2000**

**Issue Theme:**

***Searching for the Future –  
Conference Reflections***

# Searching for the Future –Conference Reflections

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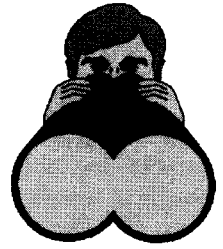
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# Introduction

How novel! Just when we all thought we'd come to the end of the season of retrospectives, the first Mainstream magazine of the new millennium is looking back – at last month's conference!



This will be one of **four** magazines you receive this year – because, despite promises and good intentions, we simply didn't deliver the full range of goods in 1999. We want to make it up to you. The good news is that we now have Steve Ibbotson overseeing the production of the magazines, and the next 3 have all been planned and commissioned.

The theme for the next magazine is '**Prayer**', followed by an edition on '**Clustering**'. The end of year edition will be following up Roger Standing's Conference seminar on '**New ways of doing Church**'.

But back to this time's magazine. The 2000 conference was born in uncertainty and trepidation. Bookings were unusually slow in coming in. The Executive had spent much of the previous 6 months praying about the future direction of Mainstream, and at one point we were not even sure whether we had a future in God's plans! Hardly a firm foundation for a conference!

But in the months preceding the conference bookings speeded up, our prayer times began bearing fruit, and a new confidence was emerging that God had a future for us. Then the conference arrived – and God turned up! I can honestly say that I thought this year was the best ever – no hype needed. There was a precious awareness of God in our midst and some stimulating input. But I'll leave the reflection to others...

I have genuinely found it a joy to put this magazine together. Apart from "Conference Reflections", all the articles are written by the leaders of the various seminars, and I'm convinced that the quality of each contribution means that this will be an issue that is equally valuable both to those who were there and those who couldn't make it. **It also serves to remind you to make sure you are at Swanwick in 2001.** Put it in the diary now: 15 – 17 January 2001. Enjoy!

**Craig Millward.**



# Conference Reflections

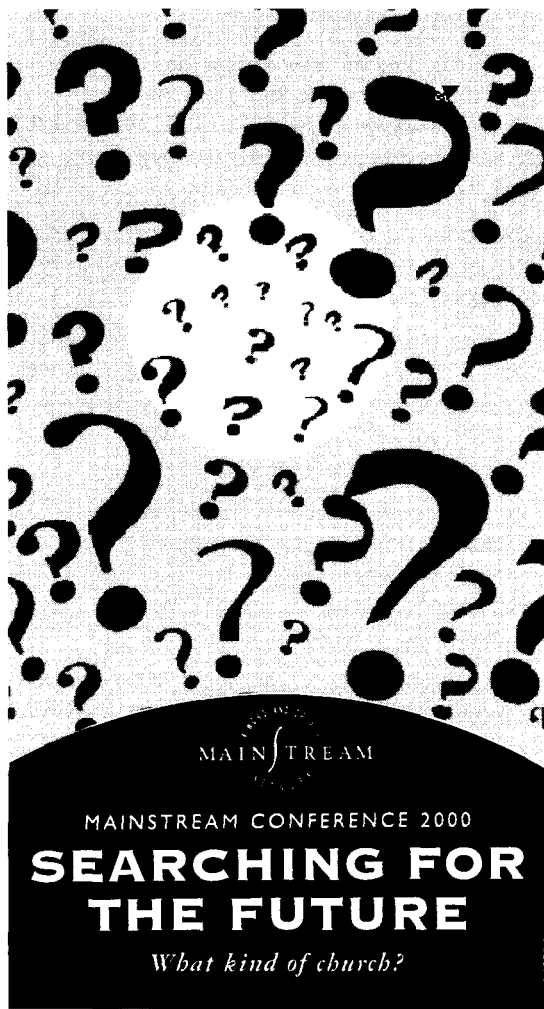
*The recent Mainstream Conference was a definite hit in so many ways. But before we delve into the programme, Paul Gough (a 'first-timer') and Terry Broadhurst (he's hooked!) reflect on their experiences of the gathering:*

Having had a very disappointing Christmas suffering with the flu [sympathy cards happily accepted!] I did not look forward to motoring all the way to Swanwick for a ministers' conference. But I'm glad I made the effort.

It was my first time at Mainstream succumbing to the pressure of my ministerial friends to make a go of it. And I did enjoy. The atmosphere was relaxed and the worship had a lovely informality about it. There was a genuine openness amongst the brothers and sisters I met; we talked about everything and nothing, the serious and trivial.

The teaching was relevant and accessible, challenging and humorous and God met me there and ministered to my needs - as the musicians led in worship and as someone laid hands on me I was bathed in the love of the Father and his acceptance of me was almost breathtaking. Word and Spirit it certainly was.

What did I take away with me? First, the challenge to take the gospel to a 21st century society indifferent to it. I was both frustrated and stirred by the talks by Michael



Moynagh who spoke about making church relevant in this way; frustrated because it appeared that we were meant to play to the world's tune, play the world's games and frustrated too because in my situation I ask myself where are the resources to do that. I was stirred however because we have to take these challenges seriously if we are going to break down the barriers of indifference that we constantly meet. It is right that the small fragments of the Christian world join together to support and resource one another. It is right that we share the gospel in ways which are accessible to all and if that means making those fit [e.g. worship which enables us to have 'our own, personalised experience'] then perhaps we need to say, so be it. It is right too and scary to examine honestly the kind of image we give to the unchurched - is there quality there, is there something attractive in the way we portray our faith?

Secondly, I came away believing that God loves the small church and for me, the minister of one, that's great! I appreciated the way Craig Millward focused on the attitude of the small church and challenged us to see that whether big or small every church has a God-given purpose; that size isn't the issue, it's what you do with it that counts; that there are blessings in smallness including intimacy, working closely with others and the freedom of not working to programmes all the time.

Finally, I met old friends, some I'd not seen for years and made new ones.

I'm definitely booking it for next year. So, see you there!

**Paul Gough, Harestock Baptist Church, Winchester.**

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"Excellent" is how I would describe Mainstream 2000. I have been attending Mainstream for many years and always look forward to the conference. This year I attended as the Pastor of Cosmeston Christian Fellowship, Penarth, South Wales - a church plant from Tabernacle Baptist Church in 1992 becoming a Baptist Church in its own right in 1996. I became the first full time Pastor of the Fellowship in August 1999.

Each year I have always returned home stimulated, encouraged and challenged, no less this year. It was great to explore and discuss the culture of our day and the way the future is shaping up, with talks from Michael Moynagh and various seminars. Michael raised numerous thought provoking issues on not only 'how our society is now' but 'the way in which it is developing'. Throughout he also asked the important question 'how are we as God's church going to respond to such issues?' This was particularly relevant to us as a young and developing church.

If that challenge was not enough more followed as R.T. Kendal shared God's word with us. Basing his three talks on 1 Samuel 16:1 he asked and challenged everyone to consider whether we are 'Yesterday's, today's or tomorrow's men and women?' Let's say 'R.T. didn't pull any punches' as he shared God's word. If you missed Mainstream this year, buy his book 'The Anointing' or order the tapes of the three sessions.

Once again Leon and his excellent band led us in worship. Helping us all to 'get right into' God's wonderful presence. I returned to my church intellectually stretched and challenged, spiritually encouraged and inspired, and with my passion for 'building God's kingdom' fired up! Thank you to Mainstream. I look forward, together with members of my church, to another inspiring conference next year.

**Rev Terry Broadhurst. Cosmeston Christian Fellowship**

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**What a great conference! There couldn't have been a better way for Mainstream to start the new millennium.**

At last I felt that there was a sense of Movement to Mainstream - not, of course, that it hasn't been building heretofore - but there was a togetherness and an expectancy throughout the time together. For me, anyway (and others mentioned it to me), there was an underlying sense of, "We're Baptists, alive to Word and Spirit, and we want to be a relevant church in our age; we want to move forward".

I believe that having only two main speakers was very positive. The inspirational challenge given by Michael Moynagh and the challenging inspiration brought by R. T. Kendall combined to make a healthy and enjoyable diet for both head and heart. The cross-section of seminars, all but one of which was led by our own people, was varied, pertinent and educative.

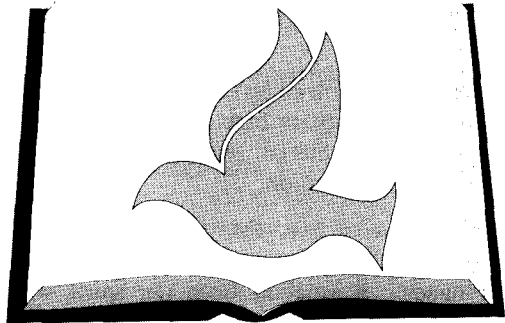
We were led strongly, pastorally and sensitively into God's presence by Leon Evans (ably assisted by his band), as we worshipped. Leon's role as a church leader, I believe, shows through as he leads with a mixture of songs, Scriptures and wise words.

It was also good to be able to share brief thoughts about the way forward for Mainstream - is the accent on relating together regionally and in cells, finding extra expression through a conference and a magazine, or is it on a conference and a magazine, with relationships being strengthened through the year where possible? Relationships are certainly at the centre of our vision - in regions where it is feasible, but conference time clearly has a huge part to play too.

So, all in all, I reflect, a most encouraging and enjoyable time together, with the realisation that you wake up to the reality of local church life, some 48 hours later, to put it all into practice!

**Rob White. Poynton Baptist Church**

# **What does it mean to be Word and Spirit Centred?**



I want to begin by asking the question whether you believe yourself to be more committed to Word or Spirit, or whether you are genuinely committed to both. It is quite possible to be committed to neither, of course, and some won't even like the question on the basis that the two are inter-related. We can only understand the Word through the Spirit, and can only be safely in touch with the Spirit by a grounding in the Word. Accepting this is the case, I still want to pursue this question.

By the word we mean scripture, Old and New Testaments. By the Spirit, we mean the Holy Spirit, third person of the trinity who was poured out upon the Church at Pentecost, and who will be the life of the church until the second coming of Jesus.

Most of us like to think that we are committed equally to both, but are we? Let me touch on a number of different aspects that Christians believe to be important that come under these two headings.

Where would you place yourself on the following continuum?

1. Careful exegesis of scripture. The truth is in the Bible. Thorough study is necessary to discover its meaning, so therefore study, research, and theological accuracy is crucial.
2. God's will is discovered through the principles outlined in scripture. Clearly the Bible does not give the A to Z on every issue, but we can draw out biblical principles to guide our decisions on issues the Bible does not directly address.
3. Encouraging disciplined reading of the Bible for every Christian. The Bible is the source of truth so every believer needs to become familiar with its content otherwise they will not be able to see the wood for the trees in their daily living and choices.
4. New Testament prophecy is different from Old Testament. The forth-telling element is now superseded by the gift of preaching. The predictive aspect is no longer relevant.

5. Revelation is given by the Spirit. The Holy Spirit wants to speak to us. He communicates God's mind and will, and so Christians need to learn to hear his voice.
6. Openness to the leading of the Holy Spirit. We have a strong commitment to this aspect just in case we miss the Spirit's more immediate direction. Even the more unusual 'readings' or possibly certain strange phenomena are given serious attention.
7. Personal response to the word and the Holy Spirit. This will probably include the help of another Christian who may wish to pray with us and lay-on hands. Revelation from the spirit would be encouraged, especially prophecy and word of knowledge. Teaching from the Bible may be given a lower priority.
8. Disappointment if there seems to be no Holy Spirit manifestation. If certain things don't happen, we haven't had much of a meeting. Great emphasis is placed on the more evident signs of the Spirit, like being overwhelmed with God's love, tongues, prophecy or manifest joy.

Or perhaps this exercise is not sharp enough for you. You can easily think of yourself as a word and Spirit person, and you don't see a real distinction between the two.

## What does the Bible say?

### 1. Both word and deed.

We see in the ministry of Jesus that both doing and teaching go together. Luke 24:19 says that Jesus was a prophet powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. Acts 1:1 says that Luke wrote about all that Jesus began to do and teach. Jesus combined Word and Spirit in equal measure, but I persist in suggesting that most of us are more happy on one side than the other or are excited by one more than the other. Let's look at some characteristics of each:

#### **Word (teaching)**

Truth as revealed in scripture  
 Gospel of the Grace of God  
 General teaching of Bible  
 Preference for the Epistles  
 Acquiring knowledge

#### **Spirit (doing)**

Experience/supernatural  
 Gospel of the Kingdom  
 The 'Now' word  
 Preference for Gospels and Acts  
 Emphasis on Power

### 2. Action before preaching

Both in Acts and the Gospel of Luke doing goes before teaching, practice before preaching, deed before word. Some would argue that it is only after the ministry of the Spirit that we intelligently shape our theology.

In Acts 2 the church experiences the outpouring of the Spirit and only afterwards does Peter explain in the word.



Acts 3 the man is healed at the Temple and then Peter preaches the explanation.

Acts 5 the word of knowledge about Ananias and Sapphira keeps the church pure.

Acts 6 Stephen's miraculous ministry opens the ears of unbelievers to his sermon.

Acts 10/11 Cornelius receives a series of visions followed by the explanation.

I think this is an issue that needs thinking through and is one of our greatest challenges. People today are often experiencing God before they come to believe in him, yet we are still expecting preaching to be the method through which people will believe. Clearly preaching is effective, but not as effective as a power ministry that then needs explaining.

### **3. The Word must be clearly presented**

The powerful ministry of the spirit is not enough on its own if it does not lead to saving faith. We can see from Peter's sermons that he needs to emphasise the death, resurrection and exaltation of Jesus for the acts to lead the way to faith. What we call 'The Gospel' must be preached and communicated clearly.

In Acts 6:4 the growing church recognises that the Apostles need to devote themselves primarily to prayer and the word, not healing ministries.

In Jesus' ministry it was the word that took priority. His ministry was one of healing and miracles, but he needs to travel to new towns and villages so that they may hear the word. (Mark 1:38)

Are we in danger of setting aside this basic ingredient of the proclamation of the word. We might lay hands on an individual and they might manifest signs of God's presence, but do they know how to respond to God and learn his ways?

### **Tests of our commitment**

#### **1. Make sure your church is receiving adequate teaching.**

You may not be the person to perform this role, but make sure that the word of God is being taught with a clear anointing from God. I hear that some churches have stopped providing the taught word as a central part of God's people coming together, and this is dangerous.

An important aspect of this teaching is to teach the ways of the Spirit.

#### **2. Always provide an opportunity for response.**

We will vary in how much of an issue this is among us. I remember hearing about one of our local C of E's describing their commitment Sunday service. They invited individuals to respond to Christ by filling in a card, and then said that they intended to do the same thing again next year. This had apparently caused a few ripples! Few of us will be in this position, but it is something we all need to attend to.

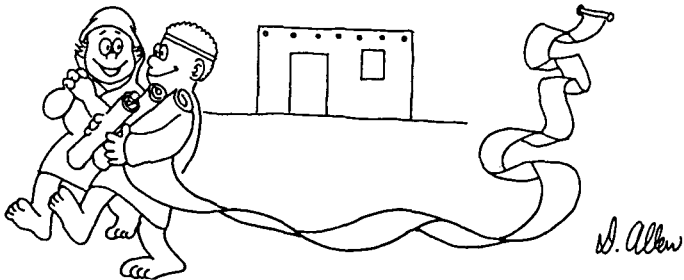
At every act of worship response needs to be taking place. Be careful to allow different forms of response, and ask the Spirit to help you be creative.

We have moved in the last 10 years or so from little emphasis on response to it becoming the main ingredient in many places. There can be a feeling that we are enduring the preliminaries of worship and word in order to get to the real stuff. (i.e. the ministry) I think this is an unhelpful attitude and can quench the Spirit.

3. Be prepared to learn and move.

There will probably always be seasons when one receives more emphasis than the other. Be ready to enter into these seasons because they are usually times when we are getting back into balance again.

Peter Nodding  
Millmead Baptist Church



“YOU'RE SO SWEET TO CARRY MY SCROLLS HOME FROM SCHOOL FOR ME.”

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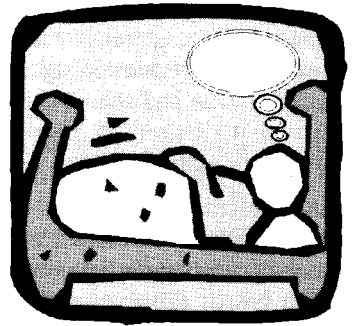
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Tony Campolo

# DREAMS CAN COME TRUE!



What is it about tears? Sometimes they speak so much more clearly than any words we can say. And she couldn't find the words at all. We had prayed together and she just sat there beaming the most glorious of smiles with tear tracks running down her cheeks. It was the first time that Sabrina had been to church since she was christened. Now aged 20 she had walked in to our "First Sunday" event, and a presentation that looked at the person we aspire to be alongside the person we know we are - "*Love is ... Me and me alone together*" was the subject. The Lord had profoundly touched her life and, there and then, she asked Jesus into her heart. As she repeated the words of a prayer after me, praying was such a new experience to her that she didn't even know to close her eyes [I was peeking!].

In the November issue of the Mainstream magazine I wrote about some of our experiences with a monthly "seeker" style event, both the joys and the pains. Following that, at the Swanwick Conference we gave a couple of presentations and talked about some of the mechanics we had encountered in putting together the talk and the technology.

What follows are some of the things we shared at the Conference. "*Dreams can come true*" is our experience. West Croydon Baptist Church is only a middle-sized congregation with a membership of around 200, and we are not particularly wealthy either. Yet, as the Lord has led us down this particular path we have found that He has provided both the people and the resources we have needed, when we needed them. As they say, "*Where God guides, He provides*".

So what are some of the things we discovered on this journey into a very different way of doing evangelism? As we have sought to make what we do more accessible to those who are not yet a part of us.

***New skills in preaching.*** I guess we are all most comfortable with the things we know. And, when it comes to Baptists and sermons, expository and preaching go together as obviously as the bread and wine at Communion. Yet, taking a Bible passage and systematically working through it is not the most helpful approach to attract, interest and hold the attention of those who are not yet Christians and aren't therefore committed to Scripture.

Jesus often began with the immediate experience of His listeners, so we too have adopted a topical approach that seeks to plug in to the experience of our visitors just as relevantly. A generation ago topical preaching was seen as the domain of liberal churchmen who had abandoned the Bible altogether. Now it needs redeeming. But in doing so it demands a whole new approach, and to get it biblically right is a demanding discipline indeed.

In the presentations we have done we have sometimes begun with the life of an individual and used that as a starting point, asking what Jesus would say to them. The sermon becomes more of an overheard conversation and, let's face it; we're all pretty nosy at heart! Preparation then begins with thoroughly researching the individual's life. Bill Clinton and the Spice Girls were a little easier than James Bond and Barbie but Wesley Owen doesn't carry much stock on any of them! Added to which, these were not subjects that figured highly among my books either. Other times we have picked up on issues like health, "*Viagra, Jane Fonda, Trainspotting and Mr Blobby – what's that all about?*" and materialism, "*It's all about the money!*" Each one has required finding new avenues to research– but more about resources later.

In preaching we also wanted to move from a more traditional, declarative style to something more conversational. To do this it was suggested that I sit on a barstool. This has worked well and for me has really helped to release a different kind of feel in my preaching. Conversely, my colleague Joe Davis, has found it to be quite constricting and prefers to wander about to enable the same effect, albeit with not a lectern in sight! Interestingly, one time I tried to preach this kind of sermon from a pulpit and felt incredibly uncomfortable, like a fish out of water.

Along with the conversational approach comes a more inductive methodology. That is, the talk is more of a journey. Hopefully it starts close to people's personal experience and then it invites them to come along to see where we end up. The points made are more implicit than explicit and the listeners make their own connections. The contrast with more traditional deductive preaching that spells things out more clearly and systematically is really quite marked.

Using video clips, computer graphics, audio files, dramatic reading and other media during a talk has a downside as well as an upside. The upside is pretty obvious, the downside for me is the script! To have other people making a contribution during the talk means that they have to know exactly where I am so as not to miss their cue. That demands far greater discipline than is at first obvious. Straying from what you have prepared can be disastrous. Like the meeting I attended where the technical crew had no idea which page of the eight pages of notes the speaker was on and the graphics bore no relation to what was being said. Thankfully I wasn't the guilty party on that occasion!

One other observation from our experience has to do with spotlights. We have looked to model our presentations on theatre and cinema. A darkened church also enhances the video screen projection of clips and graphics, so we have done most of our work under spotlights. The disaster for a preacher is that you can no longer engage people's eyes as you preach. Yet, I have found myself looking where I knew the eyes to be as I

have attempted to establish that rapport with the audience. I'm reminded of the observation by preaching guru Haddon Robinson who maintained that successful preaching always establishes intimacy, even where intimacy would be thought to be impossible.

***A new way of preparing.*** I began preaching in 1976 and preparation has always been a solitary time of preacher, prayer, Bible and commentaries. It has been a completely novel experience for me to be part of a team preparing each presentation. Two months from the event we set the title and do the initial brainstorming. One month before it happens we are establishing potential issues, approaches and illustrative material. Then, two days after it's all over, we do a thorough debrief of what worked, what didn't, and why! I love the approach with its teamwork, creativity and camaraderie, but it is not the most comfortable place for a preacher's ego. They may say that "*faithful are the wounds of a friend*", but they still hurt!

Of course, the technical involvement means a rehearsal. The video operator needs to know when the clips begin, when they end and where in the script they come. Precision is vital. The computer boffin may have loads of ideas of what to use to illustrate the talk, but to do that he needs the talk. Late Saturday night is no longer an option. If I am not to stretch pastoral relationships to breaking point, then the script must be ready a week in advance, save for final tweaking.

Encouragingly, we have found that we have more people with technical expertise than we anticipated and, to our surprise, some who had previously sat very much on the fringe of the church's life have been very willing to commit to this aspect of the ministry.

***A new set of resources*** is required to pull events like this off. Our planning group has had an indispensable role in advising and assisting in the preparation of talks. I couldn't do without them! In addition, the Internet is invaluable. Search engines can give leads on where to find vital information. Take Barbie, for example, I had no idea that there is a whole sub-culture of Barbie doll collectors and that a first edition Barbie still in its box, with or without Ken, is worth \$1000's. I personally prefer the altavista.com search engine for its simplicity and thoroughness. Other favourites include askjeeves.com, lycos.com, google.com, or the more British based engines such as uk.yahoo.com or excite.co.uk.

Then there are the books. Pioneers in Internet book sales amazon.com [and its UK sister site, amazon.co.uk] are brilliant. It was at Amazon that I discovered a serious book on the history of Barbie that revealed her past life as a sex doll sold in German tobacconists before Mattel abducted her! Books are paid for by credit card over a secure server and they have never yet had a case of card fraud. It's worth noting that sometimes it can be both quicker and cheaper to order from the US rather than the UK site.

As for more general resources, the Willow Creek Association and the Reaching the Unchurched Network are both worth joining. They run conferences, compile databases of resources and are an invaluable support network for any church wanting to travel down this road.

Willow Creek Assoc – UK, PO Box 622, Maidenhead, SL6 0YX

www.willowcreek.org

Reaching the Unchurched Network – PO Box 387, Aylesbury, HP21 8WH

www.run.org.uk

Some specific books that are worth a look include:

“*Cracking the Church Cocoon*” by Mandy Watsham and Nicki Matthews (BRF)

This book explores creative evangelism through the performing arts.

“*Starting a Seeker Sensitive Service*” by Ed Dobson (Zondervan)

What you see is what you get, this is about starting a seeker service!

“*Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*”, ed. Michael Duduit. (Broadman Press)

Is a good starter for exploring different preaching styles in bite sized chunks.

“*Picking Up The Pieces: can evangelicals adapt to contemporary culture?*”

David Hilborn (Hodder & Stoughton) a more serious read about wider issues.

**New technology** can be quite intimidating. Many churches are investing in the purchase of a video projector and there are few church offices that don't have their own computer now. These are fantastic resources, but the absence of finance need not deter you. While a top of the range set of kit including projector, computer, software, VCR, vision mixer etc can take the shine off £10,000 it need not be so. Why not get three or four old TV's and wire them together with some leads from Tandy. Likewise, you don't have to have the latest all singing, all dancing computer. An old 486 machine that someone wants to get rid of may well service your needs. And for software, you may find you already have Microsoft PowerPoint because the church office is using MS Office. If not there are other, much cheaper products that do a similar job, try Star Office for example. However, when you begin be sure to ask if anyone has experience with these things and is prepared to help. Be ready to have your faith encouraged!

**Copyright** is one of the big issues that everyone wants to know the answer to regarding the resources we use. Evidence from the Mainstream Conference seminars certainly gave voice to the widespread confusion and differing advice that is proffered. As far as we have been able to ascertain from various leading sources, what follows is the best understanding of the present situation available at the moment. However, it may be subject to further clarification, alteration or change.

No church wants to break the law in these matters, holiness is as important today as it has ever been. However, there is no easy, centrally administered scheme to join, as is the case with other worship resources. Present accepted practice and informal guidelines actually leave a lot to be desired. The important issue for each church to wrestle with is keeping integrity intact before the Lord.

As far as we can ascertain, this is the present situation:

- Some churches have purchased Performing Rights Society licences (PRS), however; these only cover the use of music.
- While it is technically best to write off for permission to the copyright holder for every video clip you wish to use, this can be a fruitless pursuit.

Most do not reply as it is not worth their time and expense to write back to you!

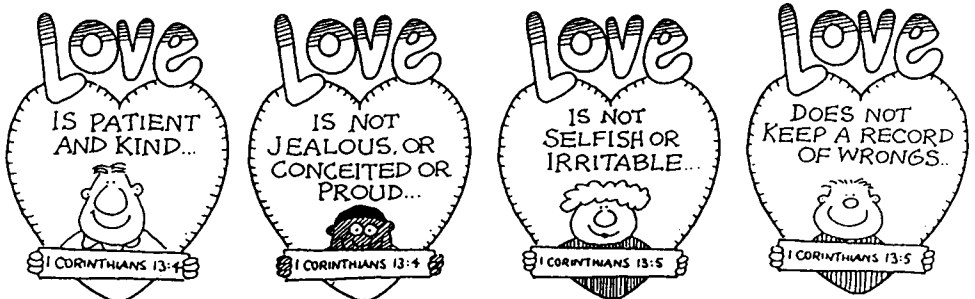
- Many companies do operate a verbal consent that, if there is no charge whatsoever for the event and you are a completely non-profit making organisation, then it's OK.
- Educational institutions are often copyright exempt and it may be that some events could be classed as "adult education".

What to do? Strictly speaking the copyright law is there to protect the artists, filmmakers and production companies. Many churches therefore endeavour to purchase a copy of any video they use so that the appropriate amount of money goes to the appropriate places. When taken with the fact that video clips can have a promotional value for the product and that churches are non-profit organisations seeking to explore and educate on religious/spiritual issues, this may offer a workable way forward, with integrity. [If you get further light or advice on this matter, let us know and we'll print the details in a future addition of the magazine.]

All this experimenting with different preaching styles, patterns of preparation and multimedia resources is a means to an end: communicating the gospel. On the day that Sabrina's encounter with the Lord unlocked tears of joy, in another part of the church sat David. He had worshipped with us twice before and had previously sampled Anglican and New Church services. A thirty-something professional convinced that there was more to life than success in marketing, he was hungry for spiritual reality. Talking to my colleague Joe Davis, who had spoken that morning, he said, *"I just had to keep pinching myself throughout the service today, it is just the most relevant event I have ever been to!"*

You see dreams can come true, gospel preaching and contemporary culture can come together in the power of the Spirit. And in heaven, they rejoice!

Roger Standing  
West Croydon Baptist Church



# MISSION

# through

# the



# SMALLER CHURCH

Someone I know a little, and bump into at various places has a phrase that he invariably uses before answering any question on the state of life in his church. The phrase is “We are only a small church...” and what follows is often a series of apologies followed by a list of things that are impossible for his church to achieve.

As a Pastor of a small church constantly trying to help our folk catch a vision for the Kingdom of God, I know what is like to be discouraged by size and lack of resources, but I also know that attitude is just as important as what you haven't got. The real issue is what you believe church is, and is called by God to be. So if I waste time comparing my church with a larger one with numerous resources (this is often a fallacy – large churches face just the same issues as smaller churches) I am simply dragging myself into a state of depression that makes it impossible to focus on God's plans and purposes for us with any degree of faith. In fact there are always other churches that would feel positively envious of what you've been entrusted with – but envy is also counterproductive, because it prevents you doing the best with what you have!

I minister in a Norfolk village of around 4000 people. It has joys and it has frustrations, just like anywhere else. I think I have made both mistakes above, many times, but I'm still there. I've learned that the key place to start is with the recognition that we are a church. That may sound stupid, but it's not. Because since we are a church, we therefore have a Lord who loves us and answers prayer, we have a purpose and a future, we have a Holy Spirit who promises to indwell and empower us, and we have each other.



## 1) Church is Mission

Many churches seek to disqualify themselves from ministry. But I read the book of Acts as saying 2 things about every church:

The Church is God's Mission – Acts 2, 4 + 5

The Church is God on a Mission – Acts 3, to the Gentiles, Samaria and the world...

In Genesis 12, God states that He has chosen a people (Israel) to bless other people (the nations). His heart is always the same. Jesus' visit to the Temple in Mark 11:12f, and Peter's vision in Acts 10 both illustrate that Israel soon lost their understanding of why God chose them. The Church is often full of the same sort of self-preoccupation + self-centredness. We don't want to be made into a blessing, so God doesn't bless us. Is this the reason why Baptist Churches are good at talking about 'the priesthood of all believers' but find it so hard to practise it! Is it that people don't want to give God away? If that is the case, this surely indicates that there is still some converting to do amongst the converted.

Look at Acts 1. The 'church' is waiting - just as Jesus had told them to. Then in Acts 2 they receive the gift God promised and were immediately thrust out into the world to fulfil God's mission. Home base looks like it's become a pretty impressive place too! The difference is the Holy Spirit, but so few Christians I know seem to desire him. I've been in churches where to ask God for 'more' is tantamount to heresy. And yet those churches are also satisfied with looking more like the gathering in Acts 1 than the God filled missionaries of Acts 2. Did Jesus mean nothing in John 14:12?

My conclusion is that if we don't feel we need the Spirit it is a sign that we don't understand the reason he was given. And if we don't think we want the Spirit we are saying that we're happy to remain selfish!

So, mission doesn't begin with what we do, it's us living out what we are being made. That's the reason why I'm not going to be giving you a list of mission ideas that work in smaller churches. I've learned the hard way that although God's purpose is the same, he fulfils it in different ways through each church. So whilst a Mission Statement plays an important role in sending us out into our communities, the strategy will be different each time.

## 2) Size isn't the issue – its what you do with it that counts!

My Church thought it had reached its desired status as a 'true church' when it could enjoy 'full-time' ministry. It's as if when that status was achieved everyone could relax. But we don't realise how locked in we are to patterns + structures, and ideas of church that need maintaining and hamper mission effectiveness.

**My Bible says that God loves to work by combining people who are prepared to take risks of faith + be obedient with his resources given through the Holy Spirit. Size and location are significant, and they help determine a church's character, but they don't make God any smaller.**

**But although size isn't the issue, churches are the size they are for one of 3 reasons:**

- They are comfortable with it that way.
- They are resigned to it that way
- God wants it that way

Only one of the above is OK. Frank Damazio writes about barrenness as resulting from unbelief which causes us to rely on our own resources or vision rather than God's. And Malcolm Goodspeed says: "The kind of attitude that can spoil your image as a proper church are those that give the impression that you exist only for your own enjoyment and that you are interested in other people coming to your church simply to keep it going for your own sakes." (Small and Rural. BU Pub. p 12)

**Again, size needn't hamper effectiveness, but there are at least four spiritual principles that dictate that growth is expected in the Kingdom of God:**

- Mark 4:26. God intends and produces growth. But the Farmer has a task too:
- Heb 11:6 Faith is essential
- 2 Cor 9:6f Generous sowing produces generous reaping
- Mt 7:15, 13:19 The Gospel produces fruit

### **3) The blessings of Smallness**

There are many pressures in being small, the main one being that the faith is lacking to enable a painless move out of maintenance mode. But there are also many blessings of smallness, which may be the reason God allows some great churches to remain small.

- Lifechange happens best in small groups. This is why many churches run small groups. But small groups don't necessarily produce lifechange unless there is love and commitment to people in evidence too.
- You don't have to try and do everything. There is a freedom that comes with knowing your calling and playing to your strengths. Try and do a few things well.
- Change can happen faster in small churches because people are closer to each other. It is so easy to look for the obstacles that we sometimes miss this fact. But first we might need to get rid of the big church models that hinder closeness and streamline decision making.
- A small church will (hopefully) be less reliant of programmes and more focused on relationships where the best things happen.
- A small church will (hopefully) recognise their need to work with other churches. But those other churches will probably have to be other small churches. It is hard for large and small to work together unless there are good relationships between leaders and members that won't tend towards paternalism/inferiority.

- There are more ‘impossible’ things for a small church to achieve! (Eph 3:20; Heb 11:6).

Attitude is everything. What is your attitude to where you are?

**Craig Millward. Ormesby Baptist Church + Mainstream East Anglia.**

**Booklist (best first):**

Small + Rural: Baptist Union  
 From Barrenness to Fruitfulness: Frank Damazio  
 Celebrating the Small Church: Martin Robinson  
 Small Church, Big vision: Lynn Green + Chris Forster

# Managing Conflicting Constituencies



**Scheduled for the smallest room. Two minutes to go and already overcrowded. Rapid deployment to the main lounge. Well over 50 consider the topic. Conflict is alive and well amongst us.**

Diversity has always been with us. Some familiar *factors shaping diversity* have been

- Temperamental differences and needs
- Socio-economic factors
- Ecclesiastical diversity - The main denominations grew out of the Reformation question, “What is true church?”
- Theological diversity - Then perennial question, “What is the true gospel?”

But there is a new factor driving diversity today: *cultural fragmentation*. Sure, cultural diversity has always been with us. But it’s the sheer range of cultures on offer, all at the same time and in the same local area that pushes this factor to the forefront. It sometimes seems to me that people are more culturally driven than they are by theology. Witness the seventies/eighties debates about hymns and songs – that

could really generate a humdinger of a church meeting. Factors behind this cultural fragmentation are much studied and talked about.

- The word “globalization” has been coined
- We live in “the age of migration” as it has been called. Post-war Europe has witnessed the influx of ethnic groups from various parts of the globe
- Communications in the global village and the all pervasive presence of the media serves up cultures into our living rooms
- Lifestyle groups and politics – the rise of feminist movements and gay issues
- The ever present and unseen hand of “The Market” (to be uttered in hushed tones)
- The rise of affluence and the power of choice
- Etc. etc.

We live in what one major cultural analyst has called “*the time of the tribes*”. We congregate towards “People Like Us” (PLU’s). This is not just out there in the ever so wicked world – it is also within our churches, and in each of us. The idea that the church community is able to embrace everyone is definitely a thing of the past, even if it was never a thing of that idealised past.

However we should never give up on integrating believers. How could we think otherwise when we worship one in whom all things are destined to be brought together? I would suggest that the *degree of integration* found in any local church will depend on

- Having *an adequate theology* of church. The Church’s trinitarian character requires that as the community of the Father, it is catholic in character and must embody the embrace of God for his family. As the community of the Son, it is evangelical and must express the sign of God’s kingdom as his witness. As the community of the Spirit, it is charismatic and must be a focused but not exclusive channel of God’s presence within his body. Most Christians are happy to operate in basically one or two of these sectors of the Church’s character. Few operate in such a way that allows all three dimensions dynamic interplay. The one who emphasises integration is almost certainly working within a strong catholic understanding of the church. Where this theological understanding is lacking it is likely that the church will be defined around its evangelical or charismatic character. This is likely to exclude and marginalise some Christians. We urgently need an emphasis upon the catholicity of the church if it is to be a genuine sign and channel for God in a fragmenting culture.

- Arising from this, the degree of integration is likely to depend on *the understanding of pastoral practice* that operates in the local church. If pastoral leadership sees its primary task as leading the community to a greater charismatic openness to an anticipated revival, there is little likelihood that it will also generate an atmosphere that fosters integration. Or again, if pastoral leadership sees its task only in terms of defining the truth of the gospel in a tight manner, that community is likely to suit only those that fit in with that understanding. Integration requires pastoral leadership that draws out and celebrates any given diversity within the community.

What might *the practice of integration* look like?

- *Diversity will be respected and embraced* rather than controlled and coerced towards a particular stance
- If integration is to be achieved then those *factors that limit* it will be confronted. For instance we need to recognise our preferences easily turn into prejudices. Frequently dominant cultural groups impose uniformity upon others without realising it. It is a question of being aware how power operates within our communities. Self awareness is especially important in leaders who want to achieve specific targets.
- Here's one we are not used to: a *need for episcopacy*. By this I mean that there are some people who have a gift at being able to cross over different cultural and theological groups. They feel at home in a variety of expressions of the faith and not just one. They have the capacity to integrate and encourage, release and give permission.
- Finally we need to encourage *networking and joint ventures* with other Christian communities and groups in the local area.

Finally how can we *handle diversity*?

- By *creating a culture of tolerance*, understanding and acceptance. Being part of a community that hold beliefs dearly means there is always a tendency for our culture to move towards judgement of those that do not share our beliefs, views or lifestyle. Christian communities are often experienced as judgmental and coercive institutions. We must counteract this cultural drift through our preaching, teaching and practice.
- We need to develop a *practice of listening* to one another. Here I would commend "Christian Listeners", a ministry of the Acorn Christian Healing Trust. They produce a range of teaching material that help us develop listening skills. Such skills are particularly relevant to church meetings.

- *Mediation and conflict resolution* is a growing area of interest. Here the work of the London Mennonite Centre is of immense value. Go on one of their training courses.
- *Judging the amount of diversity* is essential for effective handling of diversity. One technique used by the Mennonites is the use of “the human rainbow”. In a meeting you ask people to position themselves along an axis between opposite extremes. If people are strung out along the rainbow you know there is a lot of diversity. If someone is trying to climb out the window at one end, you know they feel alienated on the issue! It gives voice to the inarticulate. It might also provide food for discussion in small groups. It will be a visual aid to help people *see* diversity – they’ll probably even sympathise with a leadership that is trying to handle the diversity!
- Finally it has to be said there is a *need for confrontation* because of the abiding presence of sin and human weakness.

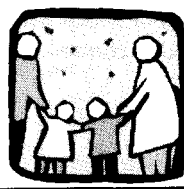
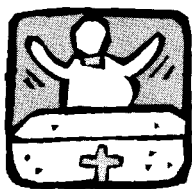
Stephen Ibbotson  
Senior Pastor, Sharing Life: a Baptist Church network in North Leeds

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## Can you really balance



## Ministry, Marriage and Family?

The short answer is – Yes, but with difficulty, and for short periods of time, because the balance changes constantly.

I view the relationship between the three demands rather like a see-saw. Marriage is the pivot in the middle with ministry and family at either end.

Most people felt that marriage and family had a certain priority over ministry but that in reality it worked the other way round.

Possibly this was because most ministers have a very high sense of calling and place very high demands upon themselves. Add to that the expectations of others and it is all too easy to feel guilty if we are not working at full pelt all the time.

### **Aids to a better balance:-**

**Intimacy** - everyone needs to have a certain level of intimacy with a small number of people. The most important relationship for intimacy is with one's spouse but also within the family where we are known hopefully for just being ourselves.

Maintaining a level of intimacy with our partner on all levels is extremely important. This has to be worked at constantly and we need to ensure that we are spending plenty of time together to do this. Without that extra 'spark' life can become mundane, routine and boring.

**Accountability** - older, more mature Christians who understand the nature of our lifestyle and have struggled with the same tensions are good to talk to and pray with, and can also alert us to any pitfalls they can see ahead of us which might be avoided.

**Rest & Relaxation** - a day off each week is a command, not an option. "For six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day YOU SHALL REST", and that is obviously not a Sunday! There also needs to be time for spiritual renewal. This should not be seen as a pressure but as something which is absolutely vital and those who are older should be first in setting the example to the younger men and women.

Holidays in this job are essential. Short breaks away as a couple are very helpful and making sure there are good family times of holiday is also necessary – in my opinion far more important than a new carpet or furniture. Our children look back and treasure the memories of having fun together, laughing and relaxing and not rushing to answer every phone that rings!

Try, particularly when your children are younger, to have a special family time each week so they know they are important and respected as much as anyone else who demands your time.

**Common sense** - I know the greatest gift is love, but I am sure the next one is common sense. Simple things like taking practical steps to guard the people who are the most precious in your life by turning the ansaphone on at mealtimes or when you are reading bedtime stories fall into this category.

In all these things we are actually serving our families, ourselves and our church, because a good marriage makes for a secure family, and a fulfilled and content person makes a much better minister.

**Work hard at your juggling skills and your balance will improve!**



## Inviting response to Christ in a worship setting.

My experience is that we live in a time when many people find it easier to respond to Christ than they have in the past. It has become more expected, and culture has changed to make response more acceptable.

My background as a Cliff College evangelist taught me how to make appeals, and during that time I learned a lot and also made mistakes. I also learned to be comfortable when people do not respond, and saw that there seems to be an anointing upon certain people that encourages a response in others. So I have seen occasions when a message has not been that inspiring, and yet a leader has led others to respond in a meaningful way. Of course this is a gift that should be handled carefully!

There are also times when encouraging a response from people is not the right thing to do – especially when obedience is the main response required. Offering prayer on such an occasion can dilute the calling upon the one who has been challenged by God to simply go away and put the message into practice.

Behind the purpose of inviting response to God is the knowledge that this could be the time when a person has been challenged by God and needs to do something to receive from Him. The fact is that every word from God needs to be responded to in some way because humans were created for response to him. Many years ago Colin Urquhart discovered that people were frequently taught about God, but never asked to respond. The teaching thus remained simply in their heads.

**There are a number of practical things to learn about inviting a response.**

### **1. Don't pressurise.**

Some people respond to a little bit of pressure, whereas others recoil in fear. But the Lord does occasionally choose to put people on the spot, and if we love people we will develop a sensitivity to God's leading and minister from a desire to do his will rather than manipulate a response.

### **2. Follow the leading of the Spirit.**

This may mean not being afraid to allow times during a service to listen for his voice, and to develop a habit of asking God to direct us. We often don't know until the end whether we've gauged it right.

### **3. There are many ways of encouraging response.**

**As part of communion** Invite people to come forward to receive bread and wine, to make it easier for them to ask for prayer.

**Develop a varied pattern** at the end of the service to avoid the situation where the same people are prayed for in the same way every week.



**Word of knowledge** Find the people who have prophetic gifts and ask them to pray for directions from God.

**Ask those around the person to pray for them**

**Vary the method of asking** Stand up, look up, put hands up, or sit down if everyone is standing already.

**Invite the Spirit to come** And then go and pray with people who are engaged by the Spirit

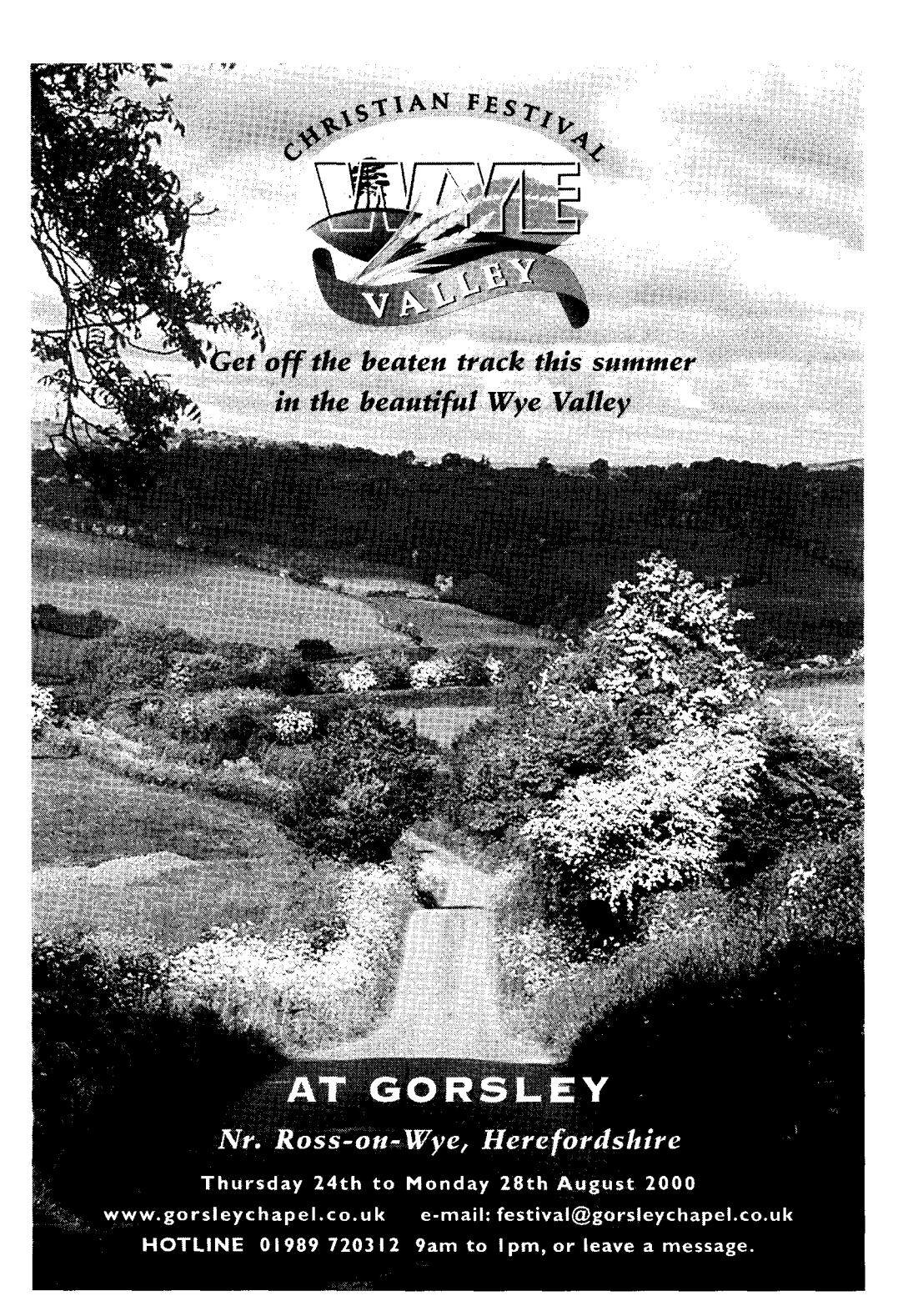
We must always trust the Holy Spirit to do his work and not try and do it for him. So if we have a ministry team in the church engage them in praying throughout the service and not just to wait until there are people to pray for – because God is working in all ways at all times.

Recognise that not everything happens in one moment, and that the way we interpret what has happened for an individual does not necessarily bear any relation to what has happened. Confidence in God and in who we are in him is also a vital factor in inviting response, which means that it is probably not something everyone is equally equipped to do.

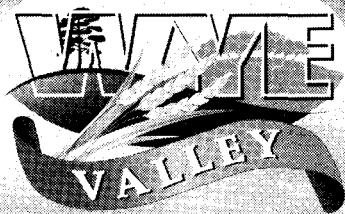
**Peter Nodding**  
Millmead Church, Guildford.



"GOLIATH HAS ONE BAD DAY, AND THERE GOES  
OUR UNDEFEATED SEASON." SEE 1 SAMUEL 17:51-52.



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

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