



Mainstream *baptists for life and growth*

Newsletter No. 1

March 1979.

"Behold I am doing a new thing!"

This word from the Lord first addressed to Israel (Isaiah 43.17) has suddenly become excitingly relevant to many of us. We believe that God wills to do a new thing in the life of our churches today. He is already doing a new thing. In the churches of the U.K. generally, there is a new sense of confidence in the Gospel - a confidence reflected in the launching of the Nationwide Initiative in Evangelism this January. In the churches of our denomination in particular, there is a new spirit of optimism and faith - the years of decline and consequent depression seem to be coming to an end. A new era of advance is opening up. The purpose of this newsletter is to share something of this spirit with you, and thus encourage one another.

But what is "MAINSTREAM - Baptists for life and growth"?

As the title implies, MAINSTREAM is composed of people who see themselves as standing in the mainstream of Christian life in general and Baptist life in particular. Believing that our denomination is on the verge of one of the most exciting periods of its life, the aim of MAINSTREAM is:-

- i) to encourage, co-ordinate, publicise and support every venture which will lead to further life and growth within the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland, and
- ii) to give wholehearted commitment to the gospel as expressed in the Union's Declaration of Principle and also to the life and work of the denomination.

The initiative is concerned primarily with the growth scene of our denomination. It is not a protest, but a progressive group. It is concerned with freshness rather than construction of monuments, - for church life needs constant renewal.

MAINSTREAM intends to be more a movement than an organisation. By that we mean to build up a list of subscribers to this newsletter, rather than encourage membership of an organisation. Apart from the legal necessity of a small Council of some twenty members, there is no formal membership as such. Within the Council there is a small Executive composed at present of a President, the Rev. Dr. Raymond Brown; a Chairman, the Rev. Patrick Goodland; a Secretary the Rev. Clifford J. Roseweir; a Treasurer, the Rev. Peter Grange; together also with the Rev. Douglas G.T. McBain and the Rev. Dr. Paul Beasley-Murray.

Mainstream assembly fringe meeting

One of the first events MAINSTREAM is organising takes place on Tuesday 24th April from 8.30 - 10. pm, when MAINSTREAM takes over the Westminster Central Hall Lecture Hall and Library. Along with free coffee for the first five hundred takers, there will be interviews, visuals, drama, music

and worship - all based around the theme of "Life and Growth". We want to share our experience of what God is doing in the Church today, stimulate ideas and gain mutual encouragement. If we say that the music will be supplied by Grenadier guardsmen, you'll realise that this fringe meeting is a "must". See you there!

Mainstream Conference 1980

Another event in the pipeline is the Swanwick Conference. Under the overall title of "Church Alive" Dr. Barrie White, (Principal of Regent's Park College, Oxford), Lewis Misselbrook, Evangelism Consultant in the Mission Dept. of the Baptist Union and Tom Houston, Executive Director of the Bible Society have agreed to come as our speakers. The dates are 28th-30th January 1980. The Place is The Hayes, Swanwick, Derbyshire. The Cost is £14.50 (including a booking fee of £2.50). Further details will be available in the next issue of the MAINSTREAM newsletter. However, if you wish to assure yourself of a place, use the form at the end of the newsletter and book now!

NB. This conference is for ministers and lay people alike. We know of one minister who is bringing all his deacons; why not do the same?

Mainstream Publications

One of our more ambitious aims is to produce a series of booklets on issues of importance and relevance to our churches. Those of you familiar with the "Grove" Booklets issued by Colin Buchanan will perhaps gain some idea of the type of publication we have in mind. At the moment we are in the process of commissioning a number of titles.

In the meantime our only publication that has seen the light of day is this newsletter. At this stage may we draw your attention to the form on page 9. If you wish to continue on our mailing list, please fill it in and return it to the Rev. Peter GRANGE along with a subscription of £2.



A Misselbrook Perspective on Growth

Five years ago you would have been hard pressed to find a dozen English Baptist churches growing steadily. Today there are about 200 and the number is increasing.

They stretch from Berwick in the North to Broadstairs in the South, from Barry in the West to Basildon in the East. Some are well known, like Guildford, Stockton-on-Tees, or Poynton. Others are in less-known places like the village of Kidlington or the Council estate at Dalton, Huddersfield. Some, like Harehills, Leeds, owe their increase to the coming of a new minister (and often a team leadership). Others, like Moortown, Leeds, do not. Some, like Barrow-in-Furness would call themselves "Charismatic". Some, like Altrincham, would not. Most are conservative in theology.

Figures need care. Some churches might appear to be growing only because they never revise the church roll! Others are in fast expanding areas. We surveyed a church recently that rejoiced in a 9% growth rate. We had gently to point out that all their growth was by transfer from other churches and that the area was growing at a rate of 12%.

1. The basic sign of renewal is a new expectancy in so many churches. (Matt. 13.58). We are becoming more Christ-centred, less problem-centred.
2. There is a new concern for aims. One church took six months working out aims together. They decided on "total committal to Christ, a total committal to one another as the Body of Christ and a total committal to the mission of Christ in involvement and witness". All know the aims

and everything works to them. Every agenda is brought to the test of the 3-fold aim and rewritten if it fails to reflect it. That church is growing.

3. There is a call for more care of new members. The infant mortality rate has been too high for lack of long and thorough feeding and nurture to maturity.

4. House groups - where well understood, well used and well-led - are a new source of strength, sharing and growth in many places.

5. There is also a fair amount of reaction to anything new in our denomination.

(a) I have watched with interest how the Roman Catholics have contained the charismatic movement and how often fear has been the Baptist response.

(b) I note the opposition to talk about numerical growth - some of it wise and some not. Growth must be in maturity, depth and involvement as well as obedience to the great commission. One church has publically said "We are not here for growth in numbers but for service". I note that as they decline in numbers they do so also in influence and service!

(c) I note with compassion how often people want the church to be a refuge from the fast-changing world about us and how easily this leads to the search for our comfort rather than total and glad obedience to the mind and will of Christ. This is a time of sifting as well as a time of blessing.

We are entering a time of increased opposition and in it we are being offered a time of opportunity and blessing - if we are willing to pay the costs of it.



A growing church reviewed.

We arrived in Stockton ten years ago after a decade in Torquay. Stockton is a drab town of 85,000, North of the River Tees. It is part of an industrial area of 600,000 people. The Church is in a central situation. We have all the parking we need and every bus stops five minutes from the building. Heavy car traffic passes throughout the day and we have a plum publicity site. Immediate population is low through demolition, but the total population live within a 2½ mile radius.

The Church - We had a 1906 building with the previous 19th century building used for Sunday School. The membership roll said 350; it lied! The pews told the true story.

Statistics - In 1973, after four years and roll revision, we had 285 members. Congregations were bigger than for many years, but the roll was the smallest this century. We are now 460 and 60% are under 45. Our strength is in young marrieds. 360 have been received into fellowship in ten years and almost 300 baptised. Well over half of these were adults and none have been under 16. Our baptismal drop-out rate is under 10%. The total roll includes our Portrack Church which will soon become independent.

Church Life - Our services are fairly traditional, though more informal than some. We have a great evangelistic people and the vast majority of our converts have come through personal work. We have made no great innovations as regards worship. Charismatic and non-charismatic live and serve together, though a few have left us, preferring Pentecostal fellowship. Significantly all who have left us were converted through our people.

Methods - All the traditional evangelistic methods have been used. We hire 3 double deck buses each week to bring people in to morning service. We have ten wives' Groups meeting weekly in homes - two more begin this month. They were not organised in an overall pattern, but "grew". At least 50 are in our church after conversion through these Groups. We have a leaflet visitation programme three times a year covering 15,000 homes.

Fellowship - We have Neighbourhood House meetings once a month. I provide notes for the leaders who meet together bi-monthly.

Last year necessity demanded an Eldership for "people ministry".

We have five Fellowship holidays per year, catering for different age groups from children to seniors.

Premises - In 1972, losing our decrepit Sunday School we made major alterations to our Church premises; continued growth meant buying the Co-operative Store and Restaurant next door. We now have two large halls, large kitchen, youth coffee bar and a Christian bookshop, run by volunteers.

Stewardship - Income in 1969 was £5,000. Last year £52,000. 30% was given to missions, home and abroad.

Problems - Many - mainly pastoral. Many of our converts had no traditional church background. In 1974 we appointed a second pastor.

Factors involved in Church Growth

1. Church Philosophy - We accepted many church growth principles before we ever heard of Wagner and McGavran. Our programme is geared to reaching the lost.
2. We preach and teach the Bible and lay large emphasis on prayer.
3. We stress that faith is a positive attitude - in contrast to British negative thinking.
4. There is a high involvement in bold and direct personal work.
5. American influence - We have been willing to learn from the U.S.A. Three Crusades, in 1972, 1975 and 1978 have given more impetus to us. They were not substitutes for continuing evangelism but a spur to it. In all three there were many converts; in all three we did not like everything that happened, but in all three we learnt a great deal.
My personal contact with Americans and American literature has made a great difference to my personal ministry.
6. Work - We carry a heavy work load. No Church will grow without back-breaking toil.
7. Music - We have been blessed with great musical talent and use it.

Conclusion - We are more conscious of how far we have to go than how far we have come. The large organisation has been built bit by bit and could be duplicated in many British situations.

We are grateful to God for all that He has done and for the high privilege of working in partnership with Him.

Neville Atkinson
(Minister, Stockton Tabernacle)



It was a Great time.

Under this heading John Perry has launched the first edition of Partnership Mission News. He writes: "Our 1979 Partnership Missions heralded a significant breakthrough into active evangelism in a number of our Baptist Churches. From Liverpool to Longfleet and from Saltash to Shoeburyness the reports say it again and again....it was a great time!"

Statistically 376 Americans came to 53 Churches. Two thirds of those Churches had under 150 members. 454 professions of faith were recorded with 329 re-commitments.

By way of evaluation, four significant results of the Mission can be singled out.

1. Many of our ministers have been wonderfully encouraged. No small gain!
2. There has been a deepening within the fellowship of our churches and also in the Districts and Associations where these were involved.
3. The converts of the Mission are now being nurtured in enlivened churches as a result of this enterprise which engaged the whole Church.
4. A number of our Churches are again looking outwards in evangelism. As most of us know this sort of motivation to look beyond our Church premises is priceless!

If you wish to receive further information about Partnership Missions or to be put on the mailing list of Partnership Mission News, write to Rev. John T. Perry, 11 Elmshott Lane, Slough, Berkshire SL15QS.



BU Leadership Training Programme – a Welsh Assessment

In many of our churches, large and small, there is a crisis of leadership. In all our churches there is a real need for those in leadership to be equipped for the job. It was with this situation in mind that the Leadership Committee of the BU Dept. of Mission set up the Programme which is, at the moment, being tested as a pilot scheme in 12 areas.

I was asked by the Gwent English Baptist Association to head this up in the County and John Brandham of the Mission Dept. asked me to conduct one of the Pilot Schemes.

The Programme, as we are interpreting it, is for the wide range of people. Those already in leadership, who want to develop their skills, those who are uncertain as to whether they could or should lead, and those whom the church desires to encourage to train as leaders. The response has been most encouraging with about thirty people involved. They come from a variety of churches, small country churches, quite large town churches, churches on new estates, some from the New Town and from the valleys.

There is also a very wide range of experience of leadership in the group, from Church secretaries to teenagers who have started taking a Sunday School Class. It has also been encouraging to find that ministers have brought their folk along and have not only participated but also provided an on-going evaluation of the programme. We are about halfway through the programme and are finding it a most enriching experience. We looked first at the biblical concept of leadership and have been most struck by the evidence for plural and corporate leadership in the New Testament. "Eldership" in the New Testament seems to have a very much wider meaning than we generally give it, even in "charismatic circles". Here we thought

the Lord was telling us things that we had not known before. Next we looked at relationships, clearly placed in a context of christian love in the programme. The programme is so structured that we had to be open with each other in order to learn and work together. We say that only when the relationship was right could we lead effectively. In the section on communications, which we are just completing there is no emphasis on "public speaking". Communication is thought of more personally, with method and variety being the key. I like the conclusion that communication is only effective if it is understood and acted upon. It has been very pleasing to see that the material has so wide an appeal and use and requires the participants to experience a variety of methods of teaching, learning and doing, participation is clearly the key in its methodology. The programme is more a scheme of work than a series of teaching notes and this is good because one does then have the opportunity of adapting it to the needs of a particular situation.

We look forward with enthusiasm to completing the programme which will, I am sure, with only minor specifications be of real value to the denomination and bring honour to the Lord.

Clive Knight
(Minister: Griffithstown, Pontypool, Gwent)



An Association training day.

On being told by Lewis Misselbrook that about ten per cent of church people have a special gift for evangelism, most of the Norfolk Baptists gathered in conference at Silver Road Baptist Church, Norwich, sat back with considerable relief. However, the speaker went on to say that the other ninety per cent also have a responsibility to speak a word for Jesus in everyday life and need simple training for it.

This fact was illustrated by his wife, Molly, who recounted her own experience at Chelmsley Wood, Birmingham, where not only she, but many more quite unsuspecting people found that with some training and help and filled with the love of Christ they could talk to others about Him more simply and convincingly than they had ever believed possible.

Split up into groups of four the Norfolk Baptists found themselves surprisingly able to discuss with one another their weaknesses and strengths in this field of evangelism.

This conference, arranged by the Norfolk Association, drew more people than the organisers had dared to hope, and there were fears that the soup would have to be watered down. The teaching wasn't! Mr. Misselbrook spoke with frank conviction of our responsibility to share our faith and to train the people of our churches to do so.

The afternoon was given over to a consideration of the value of surveys. We need to know our neighbourhood - and our congregations. We learned that outside in the neighbourhood this will teach us what the needs are, so that by providing for them we can cut channels for the love of Christ. Inside our churches it will show us what potential we have, and in many of them this in itself can be a most encouraging exercise.

We learned that evangelism is a bit like gardening. There is God's part and ours. We went home asking ourselves, "What do I expect from my church?", and "What am I prepared to give for my Lord?"

"Training Days" on these lines are being run in most of our Associations by Lewis and Molly Misselbrook and we would heartily commend them.

Stanley Hall
(Minister: Dereham, Norfolk)

Rich Christians in an age of hunger by Ronald J. Sider

This is a prophetic book written by a man who has a burden to share with the church.

Dr. Ronald Sider is an American Baptist theologian and has produced in this book a finely argued challenge to the lifestyle of affluent Western Christians. What excites me most about it is its theological competence. Sider is motivated to write by the Biblical witness that God is the God of the poor and the oppressed. He not only acts in history to liberate the poor, but in a mysterious way that we can only half fathom, the Sovereign of the universe, identifies with the weak and the destitute. His concern is to work out in the light of Scripture the appropriate Christian lifestyle in a world where in an average year one billion persons are malnourished. According to Sider "750 million people in the poorest nations live in extreme poverty with annual incomes of less than 75 dollars".

The facts of world poverty are reviewed with compassionate insight ("World poverty is a hundred million mothers weeping because they cannot feed their children"). Quoting Paul's words on economic equality among believers in 2 Corinthians 8. 13-15, Sider asserts: "It is a sinful abomination for a small fraction of the world's Christians living in the Northern Hemisphere to grow richer year by year while our brothers and sisters in the Third World ache and suffer for lack of minimal health care, minimal education and even just enough food to escape starvation".

The section "A Biblical Perspective on the Poor and Possessions" covers areas of theology and practise which, to our shame, many of us have neglected in favour of adopting the prevailing standards of our age. But the book is more than theory. The final section entitled "Implementation" contains helpful and practical guidelines on how to withdraw from the structural evil of our economic systems and to adopt a lifestyle genuinely consistent with the Kingdom of God. Inevitably, not all of these will or even ought to find acceptable among all of us but they will make us assess our ways of living critically.

This is a radical book. It should be read, heard and acted upon.

Nigel Wright
(Minister: Ansdell, Lytham)



CAN BRITISH CHURCHES GROW? A Workbook compiled by Robin Thomson £2.95 - obtainable from BMMF, 352 Kennington Road, London SE11 4LF.

This is a self-study course consisting of 9 units of study material and an appendix. Each unit involves one hour of basic study and one hour of practical assignments or reading. At the end of the course it is hoped that the reader will be able to:-

1. Apply certain key principles of church growth to the local church with which he is connected.
2. Use certain tools and methods of measuring and evaluating the growth of a local church.
3. Prepare a provisional plan for the growth of the local church.
4. Understand the significance of church growth in the context of the whole mission of the church.

For those already familiar with the work of Donald McGavran, David Wasdell and Eddie Gibbs, this workbook will offer little new. For those for whom "church growth" is but a term, this book may offer a useful induction course.

THE MESSAGE OF GALATIANS. New Year Bible Study 1979. Exposition by John Morgan-Wynne - with notes for discussion groups by Alan Smith (minister at Highams Park) and sermon ideas by Bernard Green (minister of Horfield, Bristol). Price 30p - Published and distributed by Bristol and Regent's Park Colleges.

There is little doubt that small groups are one of the keys to church growth. Alas, it is not always easy to find the right material. We congratulate Bristol and Regent's Park for seeking to come to our aid. Unfortunately, John Morgan-Wynne's 19 pages of excellent exposition are probably written at too high a level for most groups. Further, even given the suggestions at the back, the booklet is difficult to break down for discussion. Yet for all that, we welcome this pilot-study booklet and look forward to the next.

Quavers and Crochets

'Of the writing of Hymn books there is no end'. Official denominational volumes and their official supplements are being supplemented by dozens of new books of varying length and content. A major title is just about to be launched by Collins 'With one Voice': a hymn book for ALL the Churches' is a comprehensive collection of 579 hymns, is a considerable offering by a group of Australian Clergy and organists. Representing Anglicans, Congregational, Methodist, Presbyterian and Roman Catholic, it is in the classical style with such strengths and weaknesses with which the traditional Churches are inevitably bound. The type and music settings are most commendable, with alternative tunes on the same page. Three cheers for resurrecting some older hymns and including additional verses to 'Golden Oldies'. The claim that it contains the best of the new hymns from all over the world is far fetched. For instance what happened to Timothy Dudley Smith's significant 'Lord for the Years' and many of his other notable hymns? Sad to relate it's a backward looking collection retaining archaism in language and idiom.

New major collections are being prepared by the Church Society, purveyors of the English Hymnal and the Scripture Union. The former is to be more in the classical format while SU's content has yet to be uncovered.

Among the more adventurous groups at work is a considerably enlarged group, who have given Youth Praise and Psalm Praise to the Church. 'Thees and Thous' and 'Ye and Thys' will hardly be seen in the 250 or so classical hymns while a considerable quantity of excellent new hymns are promised. This book will complement the Good News version of the Bible.

Publication date will not be before 1982! By then it will not seem radical to our fast changing world. I can hardly wait!

Pat Goodland
(Minister: Gorsley, Herefordshire)