



Editorial

A WHOLE LOT OF SHAKIN' GOIN' ON ?

As a new Christian back in the seventies I quickly learned to be sceptical of overly dramatic and overly confident claims from the pulpit about "What God is doing in these days". OK at first it was exciting to be told "Revival is just around the corner", or "God is at work throughout our land in a mighty way", or another favourite, "People today really are searching for God, I've never known such a time of spiritual hunger." As I say, exciting at first but far too frequent, far too grand and far too often not substantiated by the facts. Sadly I soon became accustomed to reaching for a pinch of salt when the preacher shifted into prophetic mode.

So what are we to make of the recent statement by David Coffey that God is shaking our denomination? An accurate perception from one who should know or a case of wishful thinking? Should we praise God or reach for the salt pot?

Certainly we are living through a time of rapid change when well established institutions are being deeply questioned - patterns of ministry, the superintendency, the method of ministerial settlement, the BU council, the administration of Home Mission, the method of ministerial training, patterns of local leadership and forms of worship - all of these have been very much on the agenda in recent years. Let me offer one or two observations about two other bastions of Baptist life, associations and ministerial training colleges.

Associations and associating seem to be a hot issue on the denominational agenda at the moment. In my view rightly so. There can be few who don't see the need for the renewal of association life. Inevitably, and again quite rightly, many of the observations made in these pages, in the BT and at various meetings have been highly critical of what already exists. The debate should be encouraged. Radical alternatives should be actively investigated. However we must be careful in all this not to fall into the trap of painting association life as an unmitigated disaster with no redeeming features and no signs of hope.

Please don't read into these comments a criticism of the recent exploration of the possibility of establishing a Word and Spirit Network. I have been more than happy to be in the thick of these discussions. I am simply asking that for once we avoid a simplistic black and white treatment of a complex and important issue. Association life is in desperate need of renewal. A cussed independence is a curse and yet clearly what is currently on offer is, for a good number, failing to meet the need of meaningful association. Many of our churches and ministers have voted with their feet both by opting out and by looking elsewhere. And yet we will do the Baptist cause no favours by falling into a kind of Orwellian sloganising, "Associations bad, networks good" or vice versa. The truth is that the quality of association life varies from place to place. Mindless iconoclasm rarely achieves anything of value. Careful and balanced criticism often does.

NEWSLETTER No. 48 - NOVEMBER, 1993

Articles:

Roger Sutton - God Comes in Peach and Blue:
Seeker services - part 1.

Paul Beasley-Murray - Reflections on Returning
to the Pastorate.

Justin Dennison - Letter from (North) America

Glen Marshall - Associations - A sign of Hope?

The Mainstream Newsletter is designed to encourage life and growth among churches within the Baptist Union. On the understanding that contributors are in sympathy with this aim, they have full liberty of expression. Views contained in the newsletter are those of individual contributors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Mainstream executive.

Editor: Glen Marshall
Wakefield Baptist Church
Belle Isle Avenue,
Wakefield, WF1 5JY

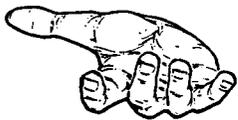
Subscriptions: Steven Hembery
27 Crabtree Road, West Green,
Crawley,
Sussex, RH11 7HL

Unlike association life it seems to me that not nearly enough has been said about our Baptist colleges. Or perhaps I should say that one particular thing has not been said loudly enough. I would have thought that if God really is shaking our denominational life then one of the things that we can expect to fall to the ground is at least one of our colleges. Perhaps I am being naive and simplistic but I would have thought that in times of financial stringency, indeed even in times of financial ease, a denomination of our size can't afford the waste of resources that it takes to support seven colleges (or five if you exclude Bangor and Scotland). Would it not be enough to maintain a college in Wales, one in Scotland and two in England - one in the north and one in the south? Would this not enable a wider

range of courses and expertise to be offered by each college (an increasingly important need in this days when we are at last recognising that full time ministry can take a variety of forms)? Would it not lead to a saving of money spent on buildings as well as other economies of scale? Trouble is who's going to do anything about it? Any minister who has tried knows how hard it is to shut things down, but equally any minister worth his salt knows that at times the nettle has to be grasped. Trouble is we are likely again to run into the obstacle of Baptist independence (as virulent amongst colleges as amongst churches?) Trouble is only the colleges themselves can take this kind of decision. Trouble is self interest is likely to get in the way. Unless of course God really is about to do a little shaking.

GOD COMES IN PALE BLUE AND PEACH

SEEKERS' SERVICES - PART ONE



(Observations after a year's trial in a church)



For two years she had walked past the church. For two years as people walked in to worship, she walked on. With her life in ruins by the young age of 32, she desperately needed and wanted God. However, she recoiled at the thought of church; it was reasonable for she perceived God as harsh and judgmental, cold and lifeless, dark grey and black. And yet her need eventually forced her to take the risk. She finally entered. The shock was immense: inside the colours were soft pastels with soft chairs and a soft carpet. She thought to herself, 'I didn't know God came in pale blue and peach.'

This true account summarises for many the perception of church, and therefore God, as being so far from the reality we as committed Christians know. Why is there this gap?

The answer is very complex, and probably different for each individual non-churched person and each church. One of the reasons is cultural. Our church culture is different from the culture of the non-churched. For a 35-year-old person to walk into one of our churches and find Christ they would have to first cross a cultural divide. The building would probably belong to another century. The person would have to cope with the fear of the unexpected: What will happen? What will be expected of me? When will I have to sit, stand or kneel? How long will it last?

After the visit they will be convinced they were in the wrong place. The service was not directed at them, it dealt with issues relating to the fully committed Christian life. It presupposed a God, a Christ, an experience of salvation and an understanding of specialised language. Even the music was from another century, or at the very best the 1970's.

Some indeed brave this cultural divide and, amazingly, relate to the timeless message in another time setting. Usually those who make it are blown through the obstacles either by a desperate need or because they have some past experience of the church culture. Sadly for most people the journey is never envisaged in the first place.

Before we started our Seekers' Services we asked 500 non-churched people why they didn't go to church. A few answered in predictable fashion: too boring, too old-fashioned, full of hypocrites. The surprise was that most answered that they 'didn't understand the question, church was so irrelevant.' What on earth did church have to do with their everyday lives? We have gone beyond the bounds of being 'out of date' into the area of irrelevance.

Seekers' Services are just one response to this desperate situation. They tackle the issue radically and ask the fundamental question of communication from the listener's point of view and not from the committed Christian perspective. They are inherent-

ly different from most previous attempts at guest services, which answer the question 'How can we make what we do normally a bit more relevant?'

Once you stand alongside the non-churched person walking into your church you ask questions that you never thought of before. Does he like a beaming deacon at the door ready to embrace him, or would he prefer a degree of anonymity? What music would she prefer to listen to in the service? Does he want to give any money? Does she want to stand up and sit down like a yo-yo through the next hour? Does he want to listen to someone speak for 40 minutes?

It is when these questions are faced honestly that you can then begin to try and create something to which non-churched people can relate: 'A safe place to hear a dangerous message', as Bill Hybels puts it.

WHAT IS A SEEKERS' SERVICE?

1. A regular event
Held once a month (or possibly more often if resources can cope), involving a presentation (using a variety of creative arts) of the Christian faith, to the person who is not a fully committed Christian. The regularity is important as people need to get into the habit of attending, whether once a month or once a week. Most of our evangelistic events in church life are irregular one-off's.
2. Culturally sensitive
Its content and style are such that a non-churched person would feel comfortable and secure in attending.
3. A signpost on the road
It is designed to draw somebody closer to God than they already are. It is a signpost on the way that will show them the next step. For the atheist, it opens up the possibility of a God; for the God-fearer, it points to personal faith. It operates at a number of different points on the Engel scale from -10 to 0.
4. Seed-sowing
It is not primarily a reaping ministry but a seed-sowing ministry. John 4: 34-38 says: 'One sows and another reaps.' It could be called 'pre-evangelism.' Although we have had conversions, we are not anticipating mass response in the early years. Willow Creek estimate that it takes an average of 9 months for someone coming every week to make a profession of faith.
5. Kingdom teaching
Teaching the values of the Kingdom of God into people's everyday lives. One man who

attended a service on family life had, that day, packed his bags to leave his wife and children. He went home afterwards and unpacked them. Conversations may not have taken place but the kingdom of God had advanced.

WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENS?

To answer this question let us imagine you are a non-churched person who came to our last service on October 3rd. As you entered the church you would have been handed a programme for the evening and shown to a seat. The building is blacked out with a stage that is lit. The subject for the service is the second in a series called 'HELP'. This month's service looked at the reality of pain under the heading 'Help I can't bear it.'

Five minutes before the start the P.A. plays the Annie Lennox song 'Why' and then goes on to play her hit single 'Walking on broken glass', during which the lighting dims and video clips from the movie 'Die Hard' are shown. The scene shows Bruce Willis walking over a floor of broken glass. Someone welcomes people, introduces the theme and informs them that an offering is about to be taken up. It is however stressed that this offering is for regular weekly church attendees and that visitors are treated as guests. As the offering is taken a video is shown of Mr. Bean visiting the dentist.

Following this the first drama is performed. A woman arrives home after work. Assumes her husband is upstairs, she engages in a light-hearted conversation until she finds a note. He has left her. The actress then responds and delves into the pain of the situation. As she sits on the floor in anguish the lights are dimmed, a Clannad tape is played and a slide projection shows scenes of starkness in nature. Someone then stands and speaks for 10 minutes unpacking the theme, focusing on what pain is and what it does to people.

The second drama is about a man who has lost his wife, just after his retirement. It is set in a laundry as he tries in vain to do something his wife had always done before. A song is performed linking the pain of emotional turmoil to the pain Christ felt and experienced for us. The second half of the talk deals with the doorway pain can be to a new life, new relationships and then to God himself. Jesus is talked about as the suffering God who understands and seeks to embrace us in our suffering.

A poem is then read about the pain Mary felt as she saw Jesus in agony. This then leads into prayer for the pain around the world and in particular pain being experienced by those attending. You are encouraged to join in the singing of a final hymn, 'There is a green hill far away', if you would like to. It is sung with everyone seated. No altar call is given. However, people can come and talk to

someone at the end if they feel it is appropriate for them. Some do that; others stay and chat with their friends and go downstairs for a cup of coffee. Some walk out after it is finished - no attempt is made to intercept them; anonymity is protected.

Of course, the content changes from subject to subject. Some services are educative, like one we recently did on 'Does God Exist?' Other services are more ministry orientated. However, in each service we try to keep to some basic principles:

1. Respect peoples' right to anonymity.
2. Do not force people to give anything, say anything or join in anything.
3. View the service from the non-churched person's standpoint, not the committed Christian's.
4. Keep the subjects and especially the drama, life-related and down to earth.
5. Break up the talk into segments.
6. When possible, use culturally relevant music.
7. Avoid jargon, never assume a non-churched person's level of knowledge about Christianity.

A lady wrote to us recently explaining that she had started to attend the church. She had herself been a Christian for some ten years. However, her husband was not, and in fact moved further away from any sympathy with her faith. She managed to persuade him to come, under duress, to the seekers' service. She says,

'He was hooked; for the first time in his life he is acknowledging that there is a God, and he wants to come to church. Thank you so much for giving my husband and me a chance to sit comfortably together in a church'.

(THE NEXT ARTICLE will look at the theological challenges of seeker services and examine some of the problems associated with their implementation.)

ROGER SUTTON.

FROM COLLEGE TO CHURCH FROM PRINCIPAL TO PASTOR



REFLECTIONS ON RETURNING TO THE PASTORATE

It is now six months since I returned to the pastoral ministry having spent six years as principal of a theological college. Inevitably a number of questions arise in people's minds: what is it like to be back again in a church? How does leading a church compare with leading a college? How has church life changed since you were last a pastor? So at the request of the editor of the Mainstream newsletter, let me attempt to give some answers to these questions.

STEPPING DOWN OR STEPPING UP?

As I begin to reflect on these questions my mind goes to conversations I had with a few friends, who had left the pastorate for denominational positions and who now were seeking to dissuade me from returning to the pastorate. One, for instance, felt very strongly that after having experienced the heady world of "translocal" ministry I would soon feel

bored with the pastorate. In similar vein a superintendent advised me to look for a church I could run with a hand behind my back so that I could concentrate on those things that really interested me.

The clear assumption was that it may be fine to cut your ministerial teeth in a local church, but if you've got any pretensions to be a high-flyer then you'll certainly not want to return. Well, in spite of such advice I'm back in the pastorate - and glad to be back. I am certainly not bored. So far I have not felt frustrated - although honesty compels me to admit that I am probably still in the honeymoon period. What is more I feel fulfilled.

While I was at Spurgeon's I grieved the loss of my former pastorate - leaving Altrincham was a bereavement experience which I never fully overcame. Now I have returned to my original calling. My one

sadness is to discover that there are those in denominational positions - whether in colleges, super-intendency, or at Baptist House - who appear to regard a return to pastorate as a 'step-down'. Surely for us Baptists, with our understanding of the local church, a return to the pastorate is a return to the front-line - for it is the local church which is at the cutting edge of the kingdom.

BACK IN TOUCH

The local church is at the cutting edge of the kingdom not least because it is in touch with the real world. Thus although Spurgeon's, for instance, is in the heart of South London, in reality it is isolated from the suburban realities around, indeed, unlike our other colleges, it is isolated even from similar theological institutions. For me as principal the remoteness was exacerbated in that the college insisted I lived on campus, with the result that many a day I would not even move off the site. All day long I was surrounded by Christians - and most of them evangelically-minded Baptist males at that! True, every now and then I would make a foray out - but for the most part this was to preach at a Baptist Church or to attend a Baptist Union meeting.

Frankly, in contrast with the variety of people one encounters as a local Baptist pastor, I found it a suffocating experience. For instance, as I look back on what has proved a very ordinary week, part of one evening I was with a high-flying city banker, part of another evening with a raucous crowd of businessmen at their rotary dinner, yet another evening was spent having dinner with a leading non-Christian forensic scientist and his wife, while the final evening of the week was spent relaxing with a solicitor and his wife. Lunch-times this week have seen me at the Roman Catholic presbytery meeting with my town-centre counterparts, at the local Harvester helping a managing director of a nearby firm begin to sort out his life, at the home of a retired liquidator and his wife, as well as down at the church for an ecumenical hunger lunch. In a very real way I feel I have now broken free from the narrow confines of a small specialist college and am now enjoying again the fresher air of the wider world.

I very much appreciate working with a super group of gifted deacons who between them represent a wide variety of callings. I delight in the intellectual cut-and-thrust of debate of these spiritually minded men and women. "Iron sharpens iron", declares the Book of Proverbs: thanks to their keen minds and the breadth of their experience I now find myself on a sharp learning curve again.

REAL COMMUNITY, DEEP LOVE, CLOSE BONDS

As was the case in Altrincham, so here in Chelmsford, Caroline and I have been overwhelmed by the love shown to us. I shall never forget my first

meeting with the deacons here - at the end of my first exploratory meeting with them first this deacon and then that deacon prayed for me, for Caroline, for the children. Those loving prayers have continued, and what is more prayer has translated itself into so many acts of kindnesses. The work that people have done in the manse, the invitations to people's homes, the interest shown in us as a family - all this has far outstripped what was our experience in college. From the perspective one who taught - as perhaps distinct from one who studied - while in a theological college one may talk of community, such talk bears no comparison with the reality enjoyed within many a local church.

Another difference between a theological college and a church is that in a college situation the opportunities to relate with people at crisis-points within their lives - and thus to bond more deeply with them - are rare. In a theological college the principal does not normally lead people to Christ, nor does he normally bury people! In going to Spurgeon's I had hoped that I would be able to be a pastor to the college community - but I rapidly discovered that, even had this been possible, such a role was not welcomed. Indeed, sadly as far as most of the students were concerned the principal was often perceived as a threat - after all he is the one who commends people for ministry; he has the power to advance or block a career - and so students either had to feel pretty sure in themselves or alternatively to feel pretty desperate if they were to open up to me. How different from the role I now play as pastor of a local church.

Already in the relatively short time I have been at Chelmsford people have opened up to me and shared all kinds of things. I confess that I have been overwhelmed by the sense of pain in so many church families. Marriage breakdown, rape, abortion, children running away from home, people living together you name it, and it is there. In the last six months of ministry I have encountered far more trauma than I encountered in all the thirteen years of ministry in Altrincham. Is this because of the way in which society has changed in the last six or seven years? Is this an indication of the way in which the world has invaded the church in the last six or seven years? Is this perhaps an indication of the way in which I have changed in the last six or seven years?

PASTORALLY PRESSURED AND SPIRITUALLY SPRIGHTLY

As a result of all the pastoral demands in a church with 460 members I am certainly having to work hard. Even though I have the services of a full-time associate, a part-time administrator, and scores of volunteers (two of whom in particular give me two days a week each), my workload is a good deal higher than would normally be experienced at a theological college. Indeed, I now work harder in Chelmsford than when I was at Spurgeon's - and

that is saying something. Although Ernest Payne was probably being unfair when he said the softest job in the denomination is being a tutor in one of our Baptist colleges, the pressures on pastors of our larger churches can be immense. The one great advantage pastors have, of course, is that they can be relatively flexible in the use of their week provided they plan ahead with care!

Pressure, however, can have its advantages. On reflection the pressures of the pastorate probably cause ministers in-pastorate to be more spiritually alert than those out-of-pastorate. Wow! I realise that I have set the cat amongst the pigeons. And yet, the very pressure of having to prepare fresh sermons every week means that the average pastor has to grapple more intensively with the Word of God and on a more regular basis than many a college tutor. What is more, the pressure to be fresh and varied in one's leading of prayers is also conducive to keeping on the spiritual *qui vive*. In my experience at least a college situation provides more of a temptation to rest on one's spiritual laurels than the pastorate itself.

I find it also more spiritually enhancing to be proclaiming Christ rather than selling a college. The sheer grind of having to preach in never the same church Sunday after Sunday primarily because this is deemed as helpful to the college - is soul-destroying. One of the great joys of the pastorate is to be free from fund-raising: the burden on a college principal for finding money for the ever-increasing costs of the college is quite considerable. So this Sunday, instead of surreptitiously cultivating donors, I shall in the morning be challenging VRS to "expect great things from God, and attempt great things for God"; and in the evening in the context of a baptismal service I will be appealing to people to build their lives on Christ. That is a privilege indeed.

PRACTICE AND REFLECTION

Perhaps the one thing I do miss at the moment is time to write. In the six years I was at Spurgeon's I managed to write four books and edit a further two. In my first year back in the pastorate I need to devote myself wholeheartedly to my people. However, I intend to make time to write. Furthermore, one of the joys of being back in the pastorate is that I am now finding fresh material about which to write. For, as I see it, one of my strengths is the ability to reflect on pastoral practice with the result that the longer I was in a college situation, the more difficult it became to do such reflection as with the passing years I became increasingly out of touch with the real world of the pastorate. Now, thank God, I am daily provided with grist for my reflective mill. Furthermore, I am exceedingly blessed in that, in addition to normal holiday allowances, my church has generously granted me a further four weeks a year for wider ministry, when hopefully I can share

with pastors and others the fruit of my reflections. Indeed, now that I am into my second pastorate, I have so much more to share with my fellow pastors than ever before.

TUTORS TEMPORARILY

Yes, I know from my own experience, the longer one is in a college, the more out of touch one can become with church life. For this reason, George Carey once told his staff when he was principal of Trinity Bristol that none of them should stay at the college any longer than five years. Fortunately for them he moved on to Bath and Wells before his policy could be implemented! The fact is that preaching in different churches every Sunday does not keep one in touch with the changing dynamics of pastoral life. Nor even does the accepting of moderatorships or being made a local church elder keep one in touch with the pressures of pastoral responsibilities. Perhaps we need to encourage our college tutors to adopt the New Zealand Baptist model and charge each tutor to plant and develop a church of their own while at the same time teaching their students. Alternatively, maybe we need to set a limit to the time a tutor can be out-of-pastorate. I hear at once cries of protests: how can we expect our tutors to pursue academic excellence if their time in a theological college is limited? But surely that is not the issue: our colleges are not in the business of academic excellence - or if they are, then in comparison with the university theological faculties they come a poor second - but rather they are in the business of ministerial formation. For the sake of excellence in ministerial formation short-term appointments in our colleges should be encouraged!

There is so much more I could say - but space is at a premium. Suffice it to say I am, thank God, enjoying life back in the pastorate!

Paul Beasley-Murray



LETTER FROM (NORTH) AMERICA



Imagine living in a country where the inhabitants have never heard of Kylie Minogue, Brian Clough, Ted Dexter, Terry Wogan, EastEnders. Where the names of Clive Calver, Steve Chalke, David Coffey, Steve Gaukroger, Derek Tidball are not to be found in any of the various Christian publications. Where the word Mainstream means conservative, predictable and unexciting. Seems hard to believe? Sounds really attractive and inviting? Does such a utopian paradise really exist this side of glory? As someone from the "other side" let me assure you that indeed it does! Not a million miles away from where you are right now, in fact only a few thousand, is the mountie-infested land of Canada. Your editor has "made contact" and so this is a message from one "who has crossed over".

CULTURE, THE COLONIES AND CRICKET!

Someone described the relationship between North America and Britain as "two countries divided by a common language". It seems obvious to say, but in fact needs to be said, that the culture of North America is a very different one to that of Britain. It may seem less obvious to point out that the culture of Canada and the United States are also very different from each other. Canada is a member of the Commonwealth, the States is not. Canada's Governmental system is patterned on our Parliamentary system. The health care, welfare, taxation systems are different, north and south of the border.

The culture of the two countries is different and so are their respective church cultures. Canada in many ways is a halfway house between Britain and the States. Canadians play football (the proper type where only the goalie can handle the ball). Some Canadian schools play rugby and even cricket, so the place is really quite civilised!

SEPARATION AND GEOGRAPHICAL DISTANCE

The one word that strikes me about Canada is the word "Separation". Canada is the largest country geographically in the world. I am now minister of a Baptist Church in the province of Ontario, near the city of Toronto which is on the east side of the

country. It is almost as far to Vancouver on the west coast as it is back to London. Yet the population is only 26 million people. The country is therefore divided by distance. I can't just bomb down the M1 or scoot round the M 25 to visit half of Christendom as I could when I lived in Britain.

People also tend to live further from their church than in Britain, the term "local church" is not used here, it's meaningless, it is simply "church" and people travel for many miles (actually kilometres) to worship. The church at a national and grassroots level is therefore more fragmented. You have to work harder at working together and communicating across the geographical and denominational fences.

SEPARATION FROM "THE WORLD"

The influence from the States has brought a strong separatist mentality where the world of the non-Christian is to be avoided. The Christian subculture means that a person can spend almost their entire life cocooned away from the "great unwashed". It is possible for people to attend Christian schools, colleges, universities; enter exclusive Christian businesses, and receive all their household services from Christians. All of which might seem wonderfully spiritual, but it does produce an isolationist mentality which makes friendship evangelism very forced and false.

The plethora of cable television channels means that the very best and very worst of everything is constantly available. This sadly also applies to the Christian input. Most of the programming is not particularly edifying or suitable evangelistically, and is no more than "pot-shots from the ghetto" and frankly seems to be a squandering of the Lord's resources. It must be said that there are some real gems which restore my faith in the media and I thank God for the way in which television can genuinely be used to reach people.

However, the real number of people from unchurched backgrounds who are profoundly influenced and converted to Christ by television, when all the hype

is said and done, is still statistically minuscule. I am convinced that God is more than able to bring revival to Britain without Christian television/radio stations. They may help in some way, but in my view friendship evangelism, not tele-evangelism will be the determining factor. So don't fret for lack of Christian TV, motivate your congregations to build those bridges and make those friends!

SEPARATION AND CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

The separation is also a factor for people within a church. Communities are more spread out, congregations and church facilities can be larger. My own church has a congregation of 1000 on Sunday mornings, in an auditorium that can seat 2,200 on a 6.5 acre site. I lead a Pastoral Team of six, with another additional seven Pastoral Support Staff, plus an army of volunteers. In any large church there is always an inherent danger of superficial relationships and people being lost through the net. I have to work hard to avoid the "revolving door" syndrome and the "Teflon Church" mentality. I want people to stay and stick in the church.

Surprising, as it may seem, most North Americans are not as open nor as easy to build friendships with as their British counterparts! The stereotypes are really very misleading. Small group ministry, which many evangelical pastors and churches take for granted in Britain are still quite a novelty over here. Again often the talk about them exceeds what is actually happening in reality. However, that is now beginning to change and growth groups are now at the top of the agenda of many growing churches and the picture will change radically over the next few years. However, so far Britain still leads the way!

SEPARATION AND DENOMINATIONS

Another way in which Britain also leads the way is our ability to work together across the denominational boundaries and fences. The North American church is prone to be a separated one. In Canada there are four major Baptist groups, in the States there are scores of distinctive Baptist groups - they divide and multiply by the year!... Come back Spring Harvest all is forgiven! For all the conferences and conventions over here, and there are many, nothing like S H exists. Many Christians here marvel at the concept of different denominations worshipping freely together, and speakers from "opposing" theological viewpoints sharing the same platform in love and harmony. I believe the church in Britain owes much to the spiritual leadership of the likes of Clive Calver, David Coffey and others whose eirenic spirits have paved the way for the removal of suspicion and prejudice.

Again, though, the picture is changing. I had the privilege to be involved in the Toronto Praise March in June and to lead the closing worship which was attended by 13,000 people. This was 3 times the

number of the previous year, and we hope to double it for next year. Throughout Canada 125,000 people were involved in Praise Marches, whereas surprisingly only 65,000 took part across Britain. So there is hope that the mindset from the past is being changed and reshaped, and a spirit of live co-operation and mutual trust is beginning to prevail.

WORSHIP AND THE SPECTATOR MENTALITY

The hardest spiritual sacrifice in moving from Britain was to leave the freedom and contemporary nature of worship which many British Baptist churches take for granted. Most Canadian Baptist churches are plagued by a Sunday spectator mentality. People refer to those who lead the singing and music up front as being on a stage performing to an audience, which, of course, reinforces the entertainment mindset of the spectator. Whereas in actual fact those up front are on a platform leading a congregation in worship. A subtle shift of words perhaps, but a significant shift in perception and response. But there is hope on the horizon, Kendrick choruses have reached these shores, perhaps we might even get a visit from the Pope (Dave, that is, not John-Paul)

LESSONS TO LEARN - GIVING AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S WORK

But it is a two-way street, yes there is much the Canadian Church can learn from the British Church, but it also has much to share. Canadian Christians on average give more generously financially than the British counterpart. Tithing as a norm is accepted teaching and practice. It can become legalistic, that is certainly a danger, but it is not a necessary outcome. There is no doubt that thousands of dollars and resources to both local and world mission are released through the generosity of God's people here in Canada.

Canadian Churches have had a long tradition in Children's and Youth Ministries. For many churches a Christian Education Pastor and Youth Pastor are a must. Most churches run imaginative and excellent Sunday School programmes for adults and children alike prior to a morning service which are well attended. Creative and contemporary youth programmes are the hallmark of many an alive church. These ministries and programmes are often staffed and run by the most committed church members and sow the seeds for the next generation of believers. After all the church is but a generation from extinction and we need to ensure the baton of faith is faithfully passed on and securely grasped by those who follow us.

It seems ironic that the concept of the Sunday School which originated in Britain, has been taken up and expanded with such creativity, commitment and effectiveness "over the pond" in North America. Non-adult ministries in general and Children's ministry in particular, in many British churches often leave a

great deal to be desired and do not occupy the place of importance or sense of priority they should in the life of the church. Steve Chalke, Youth for Christ, Scripture Union can not do it all, individual churches need to catch the vision and motivate people into these vital ministry areas.

A ONE WAY TICKET?

"But", I am asked, "don't you miss England? How long will you be ministering out there in the colonies? Why did you leave? Who upset you?" Well, the truth is yes we do miss you all. It has not been all plain sailing in making the necessary adjustments. But we feel sure that it was God's call and direction which caused us to go and we have known his peace and presence along the way. Will it be a lifelong call? - I really don't know. The BU in their wisdom removed me from the Accredited List (thank you Malcolm!) which I had always assumed like the

call of God was irrevocable! However, I am sure that should I return to the fair shores of Britain I would be welcomed back with open arms (thank you Malcolm!).

The experience of the last year has been a great adventure of faith and both challenging and enriching. Should it all fall apart, or I miss Manchester United more than I can bear, and if you are thinking of moving on from your church then I can be contacted via the editor!

Justin Dennison,
Senior Pastor, Bramalea Baptist Church.

ASSOCIATIONS - A SIGN OF HOPE?

This article is a modest attempt to describe one association initiative which to my mind is a bright spot, indeed an example of how associations could develop - as flexible servants of local churches and not as self-serving institutions over fond of the vocabulary of duty and prone to purvey oughtage and mustery. The example in question, an experiment in training for elderships and church leadership teams, comes from the Yorkshire association, neither the best nor the worst of associations.

A chance conversation between a newly appointed member of a newly constituted church leadership team and the area superintendent, about the need for a form of training that was at once more practical and less formal than that offered by say the CTP, and more local than could be offered by any of the colleges, has led to a six month pilot scheme.

The superintendent and the association secretary took the initiative and called together the ministers of four churches in and around Leeds who had elderships or leadership teams rather than the traditional minister(s) / diaconate pattern of leadership. It was agreed that there was a need for training for such leaders and a number of subject areas were identified.

Four meetings were planned covering the following areas:

1. UNDERSTANDING LEADERSHIP - a look at the biblical models of leadership with particular reference to the adequacy or otherwise of the currently dominant pastoral model.
2. SERVING GOD AND SEEKING THE KINGDOM - a look at a leader's personal life and how to handle the demands of family, career church and the world in an integrated way.
3. WORKING AS A TEAM - a look at biblical models of team work with particular reference to issues such as support, accountability, shared responsibility and specialist roles within a team.
4. ENVISIONING THE CHURCH - an examination of how vision becomes reality; receiving the vision, sharing, accumulating feedback, consolidation and timing.

It was agreed that each session would be led by a minister of a church that had recently moved into new patterns of leadership involving elderships and/or leadership teams and also that each session leader as well as giving up-front input would also encourage joint reflection and sharing of experiences. The course was then advertised to other churches within the Y.B.A. with elderships/leadership teams in the hope that they would send as many as possible of their leaders.

So far only the first session has taken place. This attracted leaders from different churches across the association. As well as providing useful input and helpful fellowship the evening also encouraged sharing of insights and experience. A practical exercise in associating.

A number of features of this experiment seem to me to constitute a success and a possible pointer for the way ahead for association life.

1. The initiative was in response to a felt need from the grass roots and not a top down bright idea.
2. The role of the association officials was that of background facilitators, using their local knowledge and contacts to enable the event to happen.

3. The scheme got off the ground without having to grind its weariome way through a complex committee structure, the whole thing has been handled with the very gentlest of administrative touches.
4. The scheme has successfully identified those with a shared need and a common outlook who can genuinely benefit from associating together.

As I said earlier a modest example maybe, and one that has still to run its course, but an encouraging instance of how associations can work to promote effective associating.

Glen Marshall

THE MAINSTREAM EXECUTIVE

The members of the Mainstream Executive are:

Paul Beasley Murray - Chelmsford

Terry Griffiths - London

Jane Hassel - London

Steven Hembery - Crawley

Glen Marshall - Wakefield

Andrew Rigden-Green - Torquay

Roy Searle - Wooler

David Slater - Kingsbridge

Roger Sutton - Wakefield

Rob Warner - London

John Weaver - Oxford

Derek Wick - Sutton Coldfield

Nigel Wright - London



