

**Evangelical Alliance Council, 16<sup>th</sup> September 2009**  
**Afternoon Seminar Discussions**

**Role of Agencies – Steve Cave**

Several themes emerged from this group. There was a real sense that we are much better when we work together and we need to create more creative partnerships, passing on the wisdom of walking with God, placing value on authenticity. Mission can be an opportunity to make disciples; the question was also raised as to whether we should be putting much more focus on the fact that 93% don't go to church rather than gearing stuff for the 7% who do? This needs to include focusing on life-stage rather than whether the young people are Christian or not. Agencies can help people understand how the Bible should be communicated and help the church create learning communities that go beyond a preaching moment. It was felt that it is important to give young people a range of ways to learn; we also need to realise they often want to hear from older generations. There's a need with this generation for agencies to be talking seriously about sexuality. Agencies need to be planting seeds and ideas and hope that some churches get them!

**Fresh expressions of spirituality and church – Marijke Hoek**

Discussion revolved around the new Café Churches; so far 54 have been started in the UK. Key characteristics include creativity, listening attentively to the younger generation and enabling them to be godly in their culture. Creating different styles of worship are important and churches need vulnerable leaders who have learned to give away control. It requires a team with a variety of skills to prepare the content and format of the meeting. While churches do their best to be welcoming, the style may be too intrusive for the 18-30s, who often need a light touch on relationships. Church needs to connect with the journey young people are on and investigate it without being intrusive. Hence, offering an eclectic mix of ways to engage: art, conversations, silent prayer, film, and teaching that responds to their interests (self image tops the list) and topical issues. Offering lots of space to opt in and opt out can be helpful.

There is a longing with this age group for frank, open leadership style that is consistent as there has been little consistency in their life. Often there is a longing for authentic community. Recommendations for the EA include sharing the stories of good practice as well as mistakes, Biblical reflections and papers written – Fresh expression are often accused of 'watering down the gospel', 'diluting', 'selling out' etc. Hence a biblical reflection on methodology is needed, signposting to resources and finally communicating the urgency about the need to connect with this age range.

**Reaching the Unchurched – Justin Thacker**

Working with unchurched young people can be messy / difficult and requires sacrificial love. There's a real need for authentic relationships and incarnational ministry – open homes, open hearts and lives rather than just seeing young people as evangelistic targets. Primarily reaching the unchurched is not about vision and strategy, its about heart – having a heart / passion for the unchurched. Change may only come from the margins rather than the centre.

Andy Hawthorne spoke about the example of the Eden project, some of the early initiatives were a disaster, running events and so on, but eventually it stopped meetings and started loving people through a relational approach, which has been much more effective and is now replicated in other areas. Loving communities make a difference in young people coming to faith – this has also been Rachel Gardener's experience at the Romance Academy. What's required are authentic relationships which challenge, equip, mentor, disciple young people. Their main issue is disappointment with their life. They've been told they can do anything – and now face the reality that they can't. Community and stability is vital.

In poor areas there's a poverty of aspiration / hope. Therefore incarnational ministry is key but it's going to take a lot of Christian leaders to go and live in these communities and raises the question about how we prepare churches for these young people?

It was acknowledged that too much has been made of attending events – this is foreign to the New Testament understanding of church. What matters far more is sacrificial, genuine relationships and being a gathered community even if the church may be messy. The church needs to be working from the outside in, we won't bring change from the centre outwards.

#### **Student track – Mike Talbot**

Krish Kandiah presented two key questions – how do we retain the age range as they go to University, and (given that University is a great bottleneck) how do we get over the politics which can lead to this sector being fought over by various tribes?

Much of the discussion focused around the first question, recognising that each point of transition (school to University/University to work etc) heightens the risk of dropout. There is a need to create more effective discipleship pathways. There was debate around the value of church involvement versus CU, with the view that by the third year many students were transitioning away from the CU (apart from specifically mission focused activities) into local churches. Those who commit to a local church are more likely to remain in the locality after they finish University. At the same time, there is anecdotal evidence that those who were involved in CUs are more likely to get stuck into a local church when they move on after University. There is an ever present danger of activism – whether in CU or church. In some (too many?) cases there can also be the challenge of ghettoisation, leaving students with little contact with those who are not yet Christians. There was also recognition that (in some situations) local churches and CUs offered differing (but complementary) ways of presenting the gospel – and that there is a need for many 'portholes' through which the gospel can be seen.

On the second question, it was noted that there is a problem with competing Christian campus ministries, that there was space for 'creative conflict' but that it was important that each learnt to speak well of one another. Relationships need rebuilding each year with new intakes. Questions were raised as to what unity looks like – visible unity is important. Does this mean one group, or many working well together? Campuses are a 'closed town' with the Chaplain very often being authorised to act as the gatekeeper, deciding who comes onsite.

## **Gender – Elfed Godding**

The question was raised in the initial presentation as to why the church is not attracting more men? There is a crisis of masculinity in this age group, with a misunderstanding of the full person of Jesus. However we shouldn't promote masculinity at the expense of femininity. The point was raised that if the church can reach and keep men, it will keep women too. The role of women is still limited and often there are a lack of female role models. People outside the church are used to equality, when they come into it, church culture can seem very alien. Women are often expected to lead in 'male' ways rather than expressing their femininity.

Discussion included consideration of how men and women can lead together, that more training together needs to happen together, emphasising the strengths that both bring rather than saying that everyone can do the same.

Mentoring is really important and everyone in the church needs to be empowered to do it, not just the leaders. We need to get the message across that everyone has a responsibility to help others. Often this is an issue of confidence.

The question was asked as to whether women have to work harder to prove themselves? We need more balance in the church – where there is balance, gender becomes less of an issue. We need to be creative about how we reach men, looking at the style of how we're doing church. At the same time as attracting men though we also need to see more women released into leadership.

## **Developing/Mentoring – R. David Muir**

This group considered the role of mentors and commented that we need to note the importance of value-based discipleship rather than concentrating so much on the actual method of mentoring. We need to think about the cultures we're creating in our churches – we want to create discipling communities and cultures, so a shift in our thinking is needed until we create a culture in which we're all being disciplined by each other. It's difficult to pass on what we haven't experienced though. Young Christians haven't just taken on Christian values now but also lots of values from culture – this is the problem.

The question was asked about whether we've lost something in terms of parenting? Our culture no longer has the same community spirit so it's important to develop these significant adults again in our time and to recreate this community. Mentoring was described as skills training as well as character training. It's like being a 'spiritual father/mother' – women find this easier than men do but there's a real need for men to do this. It's like a 'God-parent' idea – they come back to you & want to know your take on things. The most popular reasons why Girls Brigade members said that they felt loved were because they were sent birthday cards and they felt their leaders were always there for them.

The group discussed their experiences of being mentored. We all need a mentoring paradigm which includes: a Paul (mentor), a Barnabas (peer) & a Timothy (mentee). It's not ideal to be the only person someone looks up to – it's better to have a circle of people around us. Peer to peer can be a powerful way of mentoring although values can be helpfully learnt from older people. Points to note include making sure we are

making disciples and not dependants and that mentoring is not about controlling. Mentoring in the Bible is about training and teaching. There is a need for caution and clarity regarding expectations, otherwise unhealthy dependency can develop. A lot of 18-30s *want* a mentor but find it hard to connect with the right person. One idea is to get all interested mentors in the church to share their passions etc. one-by-one, allowing possible mentees to 'spot' an appropriate person and follow them up.

The question was asked as to how we can we do mentoring in terms of our churches? It is important to create value based rather than rule based mentoring. We need to make mentoring more normal and accessible for everyone in the church to do, 2 Timothy 2:2 – "teach others also..." – it's a command and so important! It was suggested that we could have programmes for leaders and new beginners. Great mentors are father figures, listeners, challengers, encouragers – it doesn't have to be a professional thing. We can segregate adults from youth – we need to work hard at making adults 'local heroes' to our younger people and breaking down the boundaries. Jesus mentored his 12 in the context of mission – young people are looking for someone they can be like – if they caught this then there'd be more mentoring & everything else in our churches as we all become role models.

### **New Technologies – Alistair Stevenson**

Introductory presentations included comment on some of the pitfalls of new technology. This was mainly focused on the internet, looking at issues such as: the power/influence of pornography (30% in Christian leadership struggle with it), breakdown of "normal" relationship and community through social networking sites, people not interacting with the real world and the danger of easy access making it extremely difficult for parents etc. to police what their children are viewing. The issue of 'information overload' was also addressed. There was a feeling that the democratisation of knowledge was more negative than positive – it means that 18-30s are increasingly wary of authority figures who claim to know more than they do. This can make it difficult to lead/pastor in a church context. New technology may also be increasing the divide between rich/poor in Britain and also the West/ Developing World.

However on the positive side the breakdown of geography transforms the way we can do mission. The internet makes it relatively cheap to access many people, networking becomes easier, contacts can be followed up.

The question was raised as to whether Christians can start to shape the internet culture instead of always playing catch-up? Is there a need for some theological work to be done on the universals/ big issues behind the medium of the internet that is driving it forward.