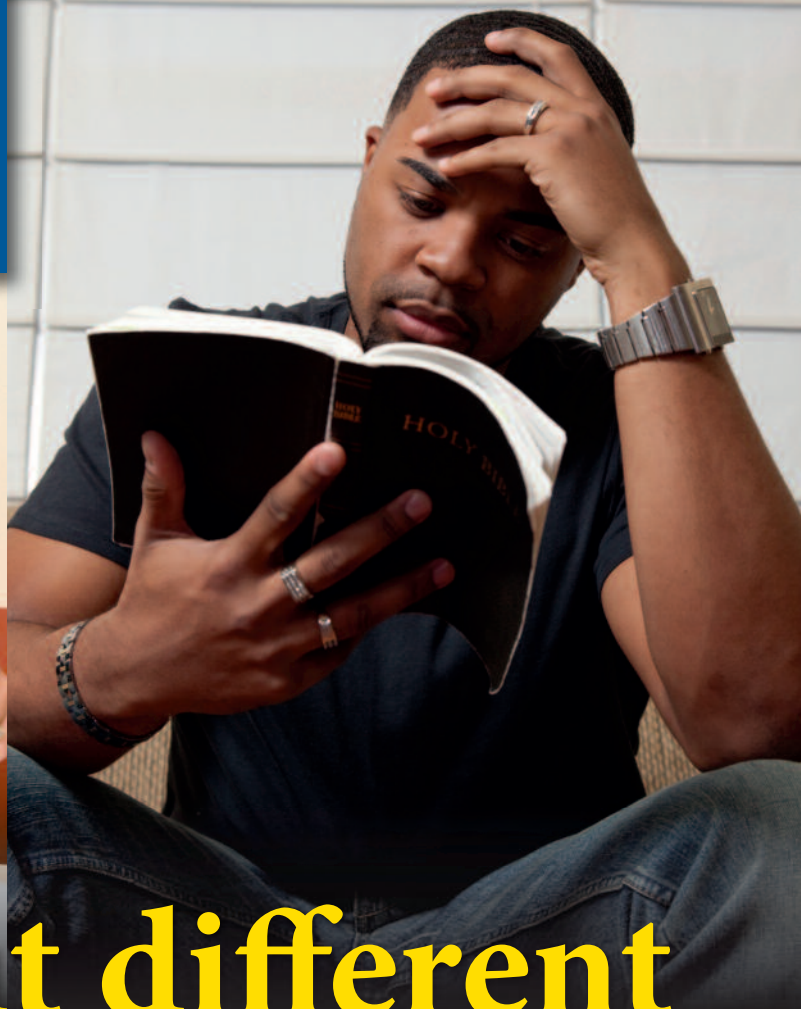
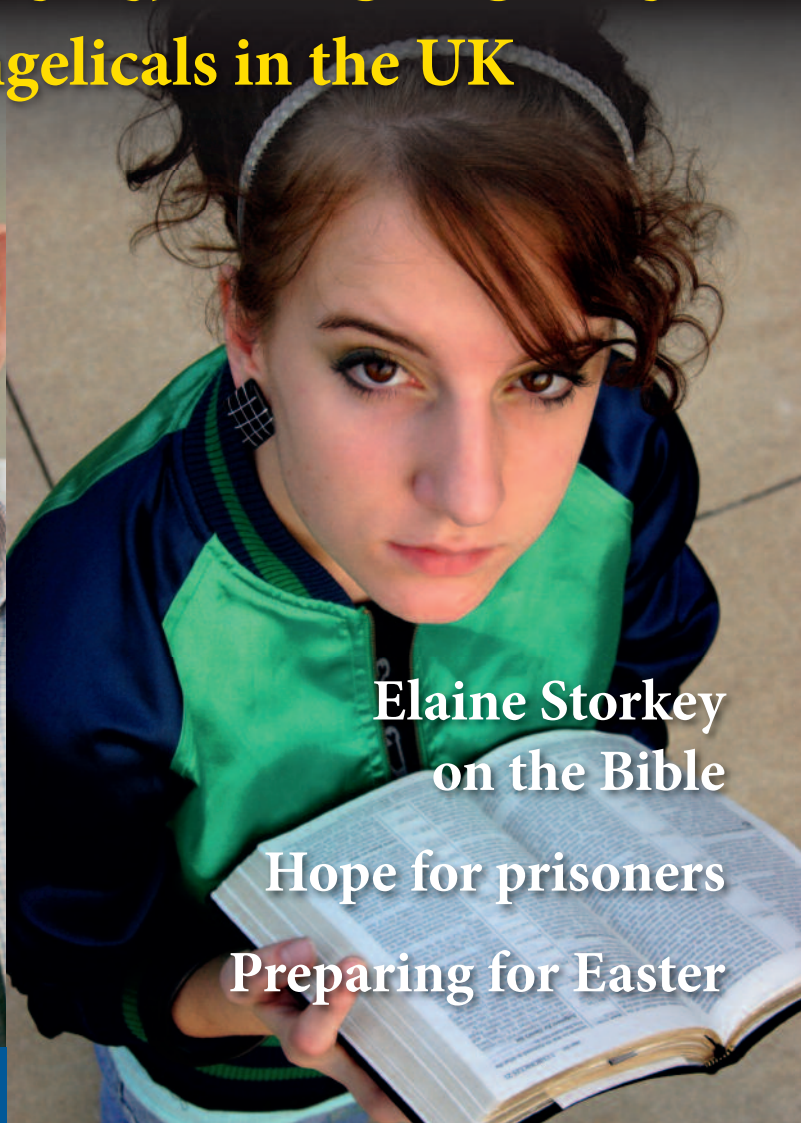


idea



United but different

21st century evangelicals in the UK



Elaine Storkey
on the Bible

Hope for prisoners

Preparing for Easter



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Editor's Note

Welcome to your first edition of *idea* in a rather futuristic-sounding 2011. There's a buzz of excitement in the air at the Alliance – not just because of this year's Royal Wedding – but as we look forward to all the amazing things God has planned for us in the coming months and beyond.

We kick off 2011 with the results of an Alliance-commissioned survey (page 16) which takes a snapshot look at evangelicalism in the UK based on answers from more than 17,000 evangelical Christians. And the picture is filled with colour and texture, illustrating the sheer diversity not just in terms of race or class, but views, beliefs and practices. As our cover image demonstrates, there's no such thing as a typical evangelical.

General Director Steve Clifford saw this diversity on a global scale when he attended the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelisation in Cape Town in October. In his *Last Word* (page 30), he tells us Lausanne reminded him that Christianity is alive and kicking. In our essay (page 14), Churches in Mission Director Krish Kandiah explores the relationship between how much we read the Bible and how active we are in our faith. Don't forget 2011 is the year we rekindle our love of God's Word as part of the Biblefresh initiative.

Despite our myriad backgrounds, beliefs and faces, we have the same heart for transforming society with the Good News written of in Scripture.

I hope you'll welcome me as a new face and permanent fixture on these pages as your new editor. Many thanks go to Rich Cline, who has edited *idea* over the past six and a half years and has guided me in producing this, my first issue.

Chine



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evangelical alliance
uniting to change society



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your voice

Make a plan

Thank you for information about Biblefresh, but where is a Bible-reading plan to encourage and challenge folk to read through the Bible in a year? Surely the Alliance is big enough to produce its own in time for 2011.

Philip Horton, Lichfield

EDITOR'S REPLY: Alliance members already offer a huge range of Bible-reading materials for a variety of uses, ages and interests. One was highlighted in the last *idea* (Soul Survivor's *Bible in One Year*), and many more resources can be found at: biblefresh.com

A positive spin

There's been an awful lot of talk in the press, and in *idea* as well, about David Cameron's "vision for a Big Society", but after the carnage of the Government's Spending Review, it's difficult to find a positive spin beyond the deficit reduction. The more cynical see this as abdication of financial responsibility that will save the Government billions of pounds while poor people fall through the cracks. Reducing access to university education is only one area in which we all will suffer for generations to come.

Steve Clifford (*Last Word*, Nov/Dec) is right to say that working in local communities is something the Church is already doing. Yet I can't help but feel that my neighbours who are struggling know that the local church can't really help beyond prayers that often sound hollow to people in pain. When times get tough, churches have even less money than governments.

Urging people to celebrate the Bible in 2011 is all well and good, but perhaps beyond reading, training, experiencing and translating, Biblefresh should also be encouraging people to live Christ's message by helping our neighbours in

practical ways that actually cost us something.

Lucy Benes, Carlisle

Christian entrepreneurs needed

In *Hot Topics* (Nov/Dec), Marijke Hoek refers to "the rich heritage of the Quaker business ethic". Yet, while it seems likely that UK job losses will continue well into 2011, the UK Church still seems to suffer from the assumptions of the religious/secular divide in which work, unless it is "Christian work", is not seen as the business of the Church.

I believe all work is Christian. And almost any church of reasonable size



should have its share of entrepreneurs who will be able to creatively respond to the challenges the country faces by developing ideas that create jobs for Christians (see Galatians 6.10).

There must be many opportunities to create businesses such as co-operatives that primarily benefit customers and staff. If Christians here are unable to take the initiative, then I suggest the Alliance imports some American expertise and forms a business forum here in order to give things a kick-start.

Roger Philpott, Winchcombe, Gloucestershire

Gifts or chance

I have been surprised to see Christian

groups staging competitions to "win" gifts subject to one's name being "drawn from a hat". Of course, this procedure and incentive is miles away from the super-casino, the bankers' risk-taking and the poorer people's gambling mentioned by Marijke Hoek in *Hot Topics* (Nov/Dec), mainly because no loss is incurred.

However, the principle of the possibility of gaining something for nothing by pure chance is exactly the same and, in my view, should not be promoted by Christians. I certainly don't think that Proverbs 16.33 can be used in its defence as this was a dispensational act (see also Acts 1.26) where God's will was discerned by this method. Rather, we should underscore the importance of Marijke's quote from Peter Heslam about gift and grace rather than chance and fate.

Les Potter, Bristol

Advertising policy?

I was surprised to see the Alliance's magazine carrying an advert on the inside back cover (Nov/Dec) for an ecumenical training product that highlights the contribution of the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Westminster. The Roman Catholic doctrine is diametrically opposed to historic evangelical Christianity, and the Alliance should not be publicising something from a compromised ecumenical stable.

John Brand, Edinburgh

AD MANAGER'S REPLY: According to the Alliance's advertising policy, "Adverts or inserts may be rejected if the appeal, product or service is thought to be in opposition to the aims of the Alliance, likely to cause scandal/offence to a section of our constituency or irrelevant to our members." This must be weighed against the broad base of Alliance members and all Christians' call to unity in John 17. It should be noted that the course advertised is by no means a Roman Catholic course. And many Alliance members draw on ecumenical events and resources for the benefit of evangelical churches.

idea

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idea is published in accordance with the Alliance's Basis of Faith, although it is impossible in every article to articulate each detail and nuance of belief held by Alliance members. Articles in *idea* may therefore express views on which there is a divergence of opinion or understanding among evangelicals.

Letters and story ideas from members are welcome, and will be considered by the editorial board, which reserves the right to edit letters and stories for length and style. We regret that we are unable to engage in personal correspondence. Unsolicited material will only be returned if accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

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More than 60m respond on 10.10.10

From Carlisle to Penzance thousands of Christians in the UK joined an estimated 60 million people across the world to stand up for the poor on 10.10.10. The iconic date saw prayer events and gatherings across 70 nations with one aim: to end extreme poverty through the Millennium Development Goals.

Micah Challenge inspired Christians across the world to pray and promise to play their part in seeing an end to poverty. There were also special church services in Australia, India, the UK and Zambia. Worship leader Darlene Zschech set the ball rolling, with a packed worship event at Hillsong church in Sydney, while in

Chennai, South India, more than 5,000 people came together to pray for vulnerable children.

In Cornwall, Churches Together in the Penzance Area reached their target of getting 10,000 local people to make promises. They presented them to MP Andrew George, who pledged to deliver the promises to Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg.

In the aftermath of 10.10.10, the Micah Challenge team in London is expecting a deluge of promises to be posted through its doors. One recent promise came from former Prime Minister Tony Blair (pictured), who pledged to encourage his Faith Foundation's volunteers and supporters across the world to give at least 2,015 hours of community service to help further the United Nation's targets.

Andy Clasper, UK director of Micah Challenge, said, "The number of people involved in this initiative shows the Church clearly cares about poverty. After the disappointment of the last UN summit, the efforts on 10.10.10 can convince the world that an end to poverty is possible." micahchallenge.org.uk

Cape Town calls for unity

Leaders from around the world gathered in Cape Town in October for the Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelisation, nearly four decades on from the first Congress in Lausanne, Switzerland. This once-in-a-generation event was set up to confront critical issues such as poverty, climate change, ethnic conflict and the impact of secularism and globalisation.

The main themes emerging from the event were calls for unity and integrity among leaders, as well as a recognition that the centre of gravity of the global Church is now in the south and east. Some of the most memorable stories told were of Christians who had been persecuted for their beliefs, including an 18-year-old girl from North Korea who told of her father's conversion to Christianity and subsequent disappearance in the closed communist country.

While attending the event as a delegate, the Alliance's General Director Steve Clifford wrote, "The Church of Jesus Christ is truly global: 4,000 delegates are here from almost 200 countries. As I look around the conference, my brothers and sisters come with wonderful stories of God at work in their nations. We have heard about martyrs for their faith. We have laughed together and cried together.



We have worshipped, prayed and been challenged as to our place in reaching the nations with the Gospel." (See also *Last Word* on p30.)

As this was the first Congress held in the digital age, there were opportunities for people to engage with the gathering remotely, making it a truly global dialogue. GlobalLink sites were set up at theological institutions and mission organisations around the world, with participants having access to various seminars, including the ability to give feedback. The Lausanne Global Conversation has been and will continue to be an online hub for ministries, groups, educational institutions and individuals to engage in significant dialogue. lausanne.org AM

In brief...



CHAMPIONS NEEDED. As the 2012 Olympic venues are completed around London, Christians are mobilising for outreach. More Than Gold is a coalition of organisations working together to help churches make the most of the 2012 Games. After a series of briefings around the nation last autumn, More Than Gold is challenging churches to appoint their own Gold Champion to share ideas, plans and opportunities with other churches around the UK. The first event will be a More Than Gold weekend of activities in August, a year before the Olympics kick off. morethangold.org.uk

BEATING THE BEEB. Alliance member broadcaster HCJB Global beat the BBC to win the top prize in the shorts category at the Jerusalem Awards. The winning five one-minute spots, titled *Jesus Meek and Mild? As if...*, played on local radio station The Pulse of West Yorkshire on Good Friday last year. "It's hard to find any mention of the real meaning of Good Friday on commercial radio stations anymore," said producer Colin Lowther. "We wanted to explore a few myths about the Son of God using a fast-moving mix of music and voices. You could call it a God slot with attitude." hcjbglobal.org.uk

HELPING FLOOD VICTIMS. Alliance member Barnabas Fund continues to reach out to people who are still displaced by severe flooding in Pakistan. Long after the headlines have stopped, thousands of people are still homeless, with their communities destroyed, badly damaged or still under water. Many are still sheltered in temporary relief camps, seeing the floods as a punishment from God. Barnabas is working on long-term rehabilitation for these families, many of whom are Christians. Churches in the UK are urged to pray for victims and help provide support to build new homes. barnabasfund.org





a voice in Parliament

BUDGET CUTS.

The Government's Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) announced significant cuts to public spending, totalling £85bn by 2015. This review followed the emergency budget introduced by the coalition Government shortly after taking power and set out how much money each department had to spend over the next four years. It also provided an outline of how some of the savings would be made and what programmes would be cut as a result.

Apart from the departments for International Development and Health all areas of government spending have been affected. The Department for Education remained relatively unscathed, with only a 3.4 per cent cut over four years, while in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport the administration budget will be reduced by 41 per cent.

The CSR allows the Government to plan its expenditure over a number of years, and through this process departments examined their spending to decide what to keep and what is considered unnecessary or unaffordable. Some of these spending changes are already clear. For example, there will be a significant reduction in funding for Housing Benefit. In many other areas, such as schools and hospitals, the implication of this review will take time to become apparent. The Government's stated aim was to protect frontline services; however, with such large cuts planned services will undoubtedly be lost.

The Alliance has joined with many Christians in calling on the Government to ensure that the vulnerable are protected. Responding to the cuts, General

Director Steve Clifford said:

"The Church already is, and must continue to be, a place of shelter for those most in need. I hope that in spite of these cuts the Government still supports the incredible and cost-saving community work by Christian groups across the country." The Alliance's ongoing Life Beyond Debt campaign aims to advise and inform churches on how to better support their members and local community who are facing hard times as well as help prevent and deal with debt.

In the face of the cuts, Steve Clifford went on to say, "We support the Government's plans to protect, and increase, spending on overseas aid. It is essential that even in very difficult economic times we do not forget our responsibility to the poorest in the world."



WELFARE REFORM.

The coalition Government has published wide-reaching proposals to reform the welfare and benefits system. Secretary of State for Work and Pensions Iain Duncan Smith (pictured) announced that a single, universal credit would replace the myriad different benefit and tax credit payments currently in operation.

Plans for reforming the benefit system have proved controversial. Following the Spending Review and announcements that child benefit would be restricted to lower rate taxpayers and housing benefit would be capped at £21,000 a year the Government discovered opposition from within its own parties as well as from Labour. One of the most vocal critics of the housing benefit reforms was Conservative Mayor of London Boris Johnson, who suggested the plans might lead to 'Kosovo-style social cleansing'.

Changes to the welfare system have also sparked concerns from church groups. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, cautioned against plans to withdraw benefits from unemployed people who did not partake in voluntary service, suggesting, "People who are struggling to find work and struggling to find a secure future are – I think – driven further into a downward spiral of uncertainty, even despair, when the pressure is on in that way." While Niall Cooper, Coordinator of Church Action on Poverty, said, "We ask the Government to talk to people in poverty and base their policies on combating the problems they face daily. Government welfare policy needs to be based on a realistic assessment of who is living in poverty and what they really need to get back into the workforce." eauk.org/pq DW

Get snappy

Here's your chance to share how the Bible has influenced your life. Enter Biblefresh's photo competition by answering the question "How has the Bible changed your world?" on a sign and uploading the photo to facebook.com/biblefresh and making the picture your Facebook profile photo. The most thoughtful and imaginative entry will win an Apple iPad.

The competition launches on Christmas Eve and is being co-ordinated by Biblefresh, a movement of more than 100 agencies helping the Church engage with God's Word in 2011.

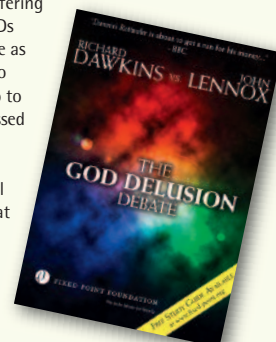


CHILDREN IN PARLIAMENT. This autumn in Uganda, 12-year-old Violet and 14-year-old Derek handed their nation's Speaker of Parliament a ground-breaking petition containing 4,000 original signatures from adults all over the country promising to put children first, keep them safe and remind community and government leaders to honour their commitments to the poor. Violet and Derek are cared for through Viva's Kampala-wide network Crane, and were accompanied by children sponsored by World Vision and Compassion. Children make up 56 per cent of Ugandan society, so Viva is asking them to be a priority on the governmental agenda. viva.org



LOCAL CHURCHES TAKE ACTION. At an October conference hosted by Cumbria Rural Housing Trust and Churches Trust for Cumbria, a representative from the Housing Justice coalition stressed the importance of getting local churches involved in meeting the need for local housing. "We know that we need to increase dramatically the supply of affordable housing," said Alastair Murray, deputy director of Housing Justice. "Churches are uniquely placed in the community to support this aim where they have surplus assets. Providing housing is a very practical solution to creating social benefit and preventing rural hardship." housingjustice.org.uk

CHALLENGING SCEPTICS. Kingsway is offering a series of study guides to accompany DVDs from the Fixed Point Foundation. Available as free downloads, the guides are designed to facilitate small-group discussions and also to help an individual explore the ideas discussed in the films. Written by Fixed Point's Associate Director Bill Wortman, they are intended to be fair to the debaters, as well as provoke the viewer to fully process what they are hearing. Fixed Point Foundation is committed to publicly defending Christianity through education, events, and the development of innovative resources that empower Christians and challenge sceptics. kingsway.co.uk





Leaders at the
Hope Together
launch in July

'The world will never take us seriously unless we do something that they can't do'

Church leaders focus on unity

At its annual general meeting in late-September, the Alliance's Council made a public commitment to cultural diversity after a group of top African-Caribbean pastors called for greater unity across ethnicities among Britain's two million evangelicals.

Bishop Wilton Powell of Church of God of Prophecy said that Britain's black-majority churches need to make concerted efforts to mirror the country's increasingly multi-cultural population. "As a black man living in a white society, my challenge is to aspire beyond fears and doubts and see that we are one in Christ," he said.

Bishop Powell was joined by Pastor Agu Irukwu of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, who said that only when unity is achieved among churches can Christians begin to impact the wider society. "The world will never take us seriously unless we do something that they can't do," he said. "The United Nations has not been able to do it. If we can, the world will sit up and take note."

In response, the Alliance's leaders pledged to work toward greater unity over the next year, saying they would review the crossover between churches and community organisations and develop stronger ties between groups.

"The Bible is clear that in Christ there can be no division based on ethnicity, class or gender," said the Alliance's Executive Director of Churches in Mission Krish

Kandiah. "We are looking forward to greater partnership, learning and mutual challenge and encouragement from churches across the cultures."

Weeks later, black-majority churches made a commitment to reach out to the white working class. Rev Tade Agbesanwa, minister of Custom House Baptist Church in London, said, "It is a matter of realising who we are. We are Kingdom people, whatever our race. If we are a black-majority church in a white-majority area, we can't close our eyes to them."

Agbesanwa recognises that there are lingering problems in the culture. "We have

had the issue of 'white flight' in some churches when black people have become the majority. Why is this so? It is an uncomfortable question the people of God should ask," he said.

Meanwhile, Hope Together is creating lasting links among all of the major denominations, including black-majority groups, for the first time. Pastor Agu Irukwu and Hope Together Executive Director Roy Crowne have been working to get evangelical churches co-operating regardless of tradition or cultural difference, warning that talking about unity without achieving it isn't good enough, because people can see what's really going on.

"We may differ in the things we do, but we need to celebrate diversity and understand that we have strengths when we work together," said Crowne. "We must find a way to work together for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and for the sake of those outside of the Kingdom."

hopetogether.org

Uniting to change society

The Alliance is working to build unity among its half a million members across 79 denominations, 3,300 churches and 700 organisations. Members are linked through a UK and worldwide network of evangelical Christians who share in ministry and expertise. Benefits for churches are especially valuable, including access to resources, programmes and campaigns, as well as media training. For more information, visit eauk.org/getinvolved

Meanwhile, the Alliance welcomes 25 organisations and churches...

ORGANISATIONS

British Pakistani Association, Ilford
Redeeming our Communities, Manchester
Northern Inter-Schools Christian Union, Carnforth
Marina's Cars, Chelmsford

CHURCHES

Greater Works Chapel International, Lewisham, London
Potters Temple – Covenant Word International Ministries, Cardiff
Riverside Christian Fellowship, Gorseinon, Swansea
Acts Community Church, Tylorstown, Rhondda Cynon Taff
All Nations Church, Coventry
Barnsley Elim Pentecostal Church, Barnsley,
Father's House Elim Church, Lancaster

Lighthouse International Christian Church, Southampton
Praise Tabernacle Family Church, Southampton
True Vine Fellowship, Luton
Elim Christian Centre, Northampton
Calvary Ministries Worldwide, Reading
Bethel Church, Penge, London
Christ Evangelistic Ministries, Norbury
King's Temple, Walthamstow, London
Majesty Christian Centre, Uxbridge
Victory Family Church, Liverpool
House of Faith, Thamesmead, London
Goleudy Community Church, Criccieth
Hatterley Community Church, Hyde
Life Changing International Ministries, Southwark, London

In brief...



A WINDOW OF HOPE. Alliance member Tearfund has launched a new appeal for Zimbabwe aimed at helping the nearly 2 million orphans who have been left to fend for themselves. Nearly half of Zimbabwe's population is undernourished, and life expectancy there is only 44 years. With the power-sharing government, the economy has started to turn around, but with unemployment at 80 per cent, the country's infrastructure is in a state of disrepair. Tearfund is working with local churches to address these issues and help people plot a more promising future. tearfund.org

RAISING AWARENESS. Watoto Child Care Ministries brought their Restore Tour, *Child Soldier No More*, to the UK in November and December, drawing attention to children whose lives have been ravaged by war and disease in countries like Uganda. In 2004 alone, some 20,000 children were abducted from their homes in northern Uganda and forced to become soldiers terrorising their own communities. Through music, dance and drama, the tour lets audiences meet the people and hear their stories. Proceeds help fund key long-term development projects. watoto.com

KOREAN CHRISTIAN SPEAKS OUT.

A Christian who defected from North Korea was one of the main speakers at Release International's UK conference in November. "In Korea, Christians are treated without mercy. Up to three generations of Christian families are rounded up and thrown in prison camps to try to eliminate the faith," said Andy Dipper, CEO of Release, which serves persecuted Christians worldwide. Speakers from Sri Lanka and Eritrea also described persecution in their home countries. And a former missionary to China explained what it's like to be a Christian in a land that clamps down on unregistered churches. releaseinternational.org

Coffee with a warm welcome



Revellers in Morpeth, a busy market town in Northumberland, now have an alternative to the usual pubs and clubs. Stewart Evans and Matty Curry, along with other local Christians, have launched Mighty Oaks Café to offer those who are "oot on the toon" free coffee, tea and hot

chocolate. The project originated from the desire of Morpeth churches to do practical work in their community, calling on believers to be "mighty oaks" for the "display of His splendour" (Isaiah 61.3).

Each Saturday night between 10pm and midnight, Mighty Oaks is manned by

a team of five to seven people with a mix of genders, ages, skills and life experiences, so that they are able to relate to the wide range of individuals who stop by. Training to be one of the team is based on street awareness and a willingness to serve in the community. Barista training is done on the job, as the café serves more than 100 hot drinks each night.

"Mighty Oaks has become well-accepted by the public, and indeed expected by the bouncers, food retailers and police who are on duty, as well as the revellers in need of some more sober solutions to drink," said Stewart Evans. "There are many tales to tell of joy and sadness, plus examples of the great Northumberland humour. Real relationships have been forged, trust established and lots of seeds have been sown."

AM



Pastors make streets safer

Street Pastors in Southampton have been praised for helping to significantly decrease the number of violent and alcohol-related crimes on weekends in the city centre. Southampton's police forces have noticed a 30 per cent reduction in the number of reported crimes relating to nightlife in the 18 months since Street Pastors started their work.

Street Pastors are trained volunteers from more than 30 local churches, ranging in age from their 20s to a volunteer in his 80s. They patrol the city area every weekend between the hours of 10pm to 4am, providing care, help and assistance to people out on the streets. They work in close partnership with the police, ambulance service and local authority.

Rev Graham Archer, vicar of Highfield and chair of the Southampton Christian Network, said that Street Pastors are extremely dedicated and passionate about what they do. "The people who do it enjoy it, and people are surprised that they give up their time to help," he said. "They help calm things and are hugely respected." streetpastors.co.uk

AI

Writer unites South Asians

Playwright-turned-property tycoon Manoj Raithatha has been appointed to unite Britain's estimated 75,000 South Asian Christians. As the national co-ordinator of the Alliance's South Asian Forum, his job will be to draw together the range of customs, cultures and languages among people from eight nations who now call Britain their home.

Born in Watford, 38-year-old Raithatha wrote the Bafta-winning TV series *My Life as a Popat*, about an Indian family living in Harrow, as well as the award-winning play *BBA and Proud* (BBA means British-born Asian). He then moved into property speculation, brokering one of the UK's single biggest residential deals when he

bought Clarence House in Leeds for £34.5m.

But it was a dramatic conversion to Christianity in 2008 that was his biggest turning point. After their two-year-old son was miraculously healed in hospital, Raithatha and his wife Maria joined a local church. He now studies theology at St Paul's Theological Centre while working with South Asian evangelicals.

"At one time my main focus was on making money and being successful in business," he said. "Nowadays, my ambition is to bring together fellow South Asian believers as well as connect with people of other faiths." eauk.org/saf



RESPONDING TO DISASTER. Alliance member Operation Mobilisation came to the rescue of a Hungarian village in the wake of a toxic sludge spill in October. Its Bus4Life was made available for emergency workers and volunteers helping residents in the heavily damaged town of Kolontar. Within 48 hours of the disaster, the bus was delivering drinking water and food supplies, as the team assisted aid workers and helped comfort the bereaved. Bus4Life is a ministry that takes Christian literature, resources and entertainment to unreached villages across Eastern Europe. uk.om.org



FROM CRIME TO CHRIST. A new prayer and support group has been launched in Brighton to help local addicts and ex-offenders. Working in partnership with Daylight Christian Prison Trust (see p20), Park Hill Evangelical Church is reaching out to people who have been marginalised in the local community. "We are delighted to be working together to reach this local community with the only thing that will really transform lives – the Gospel of Jesus Christ," said Daylight CEO John Scott. The Brighton addicts and ex-offenders group is one of 11 that Daylight works with throughout the UK. daylightcpt.org

KITAB GOES ONLINE. A new mission resource designed to enhance cross-cultural witness has been launched by Interserve. Kitab (the Arabic word for book) started more than 20 years ago, but this is the first time that its products – books, DVDs, tracts, leaflets and pamphlets in more than 35 languages – have been available for purchase online. Many of the products are rare and not available from other UK suppliers. The Kitab website is designed to help those who work with people of other faiths, cultures and languages, allowing enhanced facilitation of "work and witness" in their communities. kitab.org.uk



Bring the Bible alive

Born in Wakefield, **Elaine Storkey** is a noted philosopher, sociologist and theologian who lectures around the world and has written numerous books and magazine articles addressing evangelical themes from a feminine perspective, including *Mary's Story*, *Mary's Song* (1993) and *Word on the Street* (2005). She currently serves as the chair of Fulcrum, the Church of England thinktank, and is also an advocate for Micah Challenge.

idea: How do you keep your Bible-reading dynamic?

Storkey: For me the greatest refreshment is actually to read the Bible together with a bunch of people from halfway across the world and hear how they hear it, hear those Bible stories (especially the parables and the Gospels) come alive in a completely new context.

What would happen if the Church rediscovered the power of the Bible?

If the Church really got engaged with the Bible, it would have a bigger vision of God, and then it would have a bigger vision of humanity, a bigger understanding of human love and the need for love between people, a bigger understanding of justice and God's heart for justice. It would just have a bigger grasp of all the issues that matter, and a greater desire to communicate this to other people.



'You just open the Bible ... it's not rocket science'

What are your earliest memories of reading the Bible?

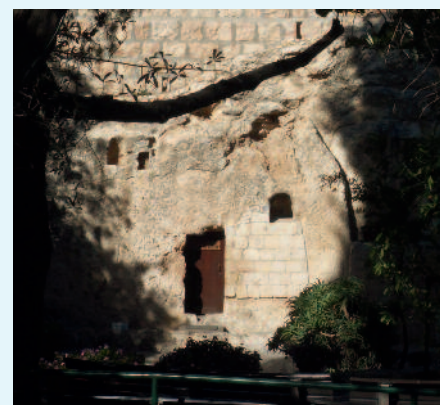
Not long after I'd learned to read – I was probably about 5 or 6 – I decided to read the Bible from cover to cover. I read and I read and I read, and my father said, "What are you doing?" And I said, "Daddy, I'm reading the Bible. I've read the whole of the book of Genesis." And my dad was totally unimpressed. He said to me, "Yes, but how much of it did you understand?" Which was very deflating.

How difficult is it to get people engaged in the Bible?

I don't think it's a challenge at all to get people engaged in the Bible. You just have to read it. You just have to let them see how exciting and dynamic it is. I've been in all kinds of contexts where you just open the Bible, often starting with the Gospels, and they are riveted. It's not rocket science. It has stories accessible to everybody.

biblefresh.com

AM



In Jesus' footsteps

Later this year, the Biblefresh initiative is sponsoring two pilgrimages to the Holy Land, so Christians can experience the words of Jesus in the places where He spoke them. This "ultimate Bible experience" starts in Tiberius, where pilgrims will be able to be baptised (or reaffirm their faith) in the Jordan River and take a boat across Lake Galilee, reflecting on accounts of Jesus calming the storm and walking on water. There's also an opportunity to read the Sermon on the Mount on the place where Jesus first spoke those momentous words and visit the site of the feeding of 5,000.

Travelling South to Nazareth, the tour will include the location where Mary received the angel's news of her pregnancy and the former synagogue where Jesus announced his manifesto to the world (Luke 4:16-21). In Jerusalem, visitors can pray the Lord's Prayer on the spot where Jesus first taught it to His disciples, then follow the Passion account on the page and on foot from Gethsemane to Calvary and the Garden Tomb (pictured).

Speakers include the Alliance's Krish Kandiah, Andy Frost of Share Jesus International, Cindy Kent of Premier Radio and Pam Rhodes, presenter of the BBC's *Songs of Praise*, with worship led by Dave Bilbrough.

The pilgrimages take place 13-20 June and 21-28 November.

For more information, see advert on adjacent page, email

info@special-pilgrimages.co.uk or visit special-pilgrimages.co.uk/tour

AL

STANDING UP TO TERRORISM.

Demonstrators gathered outside the Houses of Parliament in November to stand in solidarity with Iraqi Christians following an al Qaeda-led massacre in a church in October. The 350-strong demonstration at Westminster called on the British government to do more to protect those who are frightened for their lives in Iraq. Mike Hill of Alliance member Open Doors said, "Most believers in Iraq don't want to leave the country and believe that the presence of the Church there is an essential thing. It is up to the rest of the Church around the world to rise up and strengthen those who have lost their freedoms." opendoorsuk.org



CHARITY MARKS 10M OPERATIONS.

Actress and author Abby Guinness has written a special monologue to celebrate overseas disability charity CBM's 10 millionth cataract operation. Mrs Bartimaeus is available in script or as a video clip on CBM's website. "For me, this telling of Bartimaeus highlights the way CBM is continuing the work of Jesus, restoring health and reviving relationships," said Guinness (pictured with cataract surgeon Will Dean). "I really hope churches will use the script as a fun resource to engage with a Bible story that reflects real life today for so many people. I was staggered to hear that 80 per cent of the world's blindness is avoidable, and I would love CBM to be enabled to touch the lives of thousands more people with life-changing eye care." CBM marked its 10 millionth cataract operation on 28 October in Moshi, Tanzania. The operation was performed by Dr Heiko Philippin. CBM's first cataract operation was carried out in 1966 in Afghanistan. cbmuk.org.uk



Holy Land Tours

13-20 June and 21-28 November 2011

Rev. Rob Cotton, Dr Krish Kandiah, Pam Rhodes, Rev. Martin Turner, Rev. Richard Watson, Rev. Tony Miles, Rev. Cindy Kent, Rev. Colin Smith, Rev. Phil Gough, Andy Frost, David Bilbrough and Steven Hughes

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Forming a church without walls



People in the heart of Bristol's docklands area have a new place to gather to explore the Christian message. Called BC3 (short for Bristol City Centre Church), the initiative was launched in September and is already drawing university students and others to a relaxed space where they can enjoy a coffee, watch or join in worship.

"We have essentially formed a church without walls," explained team leader Mark Detzler, an evangelist with OAC Ministries. "It's a place where people can come in for coffee and a pastry and stay to be part of praise and proclamation. BC3 aims to draw in and disciple the lost rather than gather believers."

The core team of 30 includes more than a dozen young evangelists. Typically, a time of contemporary music, praise and prayer is followed by a simple Gospel message. And people are responding to the Good News. One young woman who came to Christ three years ago brings her non-believing husband to the church, where team leaders have started a Bible study with him.

Mark Detzler and his wife Cathy are members of Bristol's Kensington Baptist Church. This innovative approach began with support from their church but includes members from other denominations. They are part of the South West Gospel Partnership. Alliance member organisation OAC Ministries works in partnership with the local church "presenting Christ by all means everywhere", with particular emphasis on open-air and outgoing evangelism. oacgb.org.uk

Exploring every aspect

A conference this coming spring has been designed with an emphasis on the fact that God is interested in all that we do. Taking its theme from Psalm 24.1 ("The Earth is the Lord's and everything in it"), the Everything Conference will be held on 26 March at the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre in London.

Sponsored by Alliance member Newfrontiers, the conference aims to reaffirm the Church's call as people made in the image of God to cultivate, protect, take care of and bring order to God's creation, working together for the common good.

Organisers recognise that the outworking of this call will look different for people who live and work in different settings, and the conference is designed to equip Christians for involvement in every aspect of life.

Author and speaker Andy Crouch will lead the teaching sessions, which will also feature a varied programme of interviews, short films, worship and networking. everythingconference.org



media matters

by Lizzy Millar, press officer

The barrage of protests sparked by Tony Blair's autobiography *A Journey* clearly demonstrates how the question of war can divide a nation.

As the country marked Armistice Day in November, another headline emerged of another young soldier killed in action in Afghanistan. The arguments about whether British forces should be in Afghanistan in the first place, whether the blood price is worth paying for and whether we can ever defeat the Taliban are raging as never before.

But if there's one thing that's clear, it's that public opinion has swayed from one of mild indifference to outright disapproval to

rallying around our boys on the front line.

Nothing seems to support this agenda more clearly than the extensive media coverage given to Help for Heroes, a charity for wounded soldiers. Not surprisingly it's "The Sun that Done It" by giving ample pages to the campaign that is also being supported by *X Factor* contestants who have re-released David Bowie's 1973 hit *Heroes*.

Suddenly, when we're all bemoaning another lost life from the front line or rioting and fears of a double-dip recession, all attention swings to a pending Royal Wedding taking place later this year.

The big stories emerging are who will be invited, where will it take place, who will design the dress and make the cake, as well as commentary on how the nation might receive Kate, a non-traditional royal bride, as their future queen, and who will pick up the bill for the wedding?

Nothing seems to unite a nation at odds over its view on war, strife and debt, than a right royal knees up. But you may not feel so joyous if Kate and Wills' big day is booked on the same day as yours.

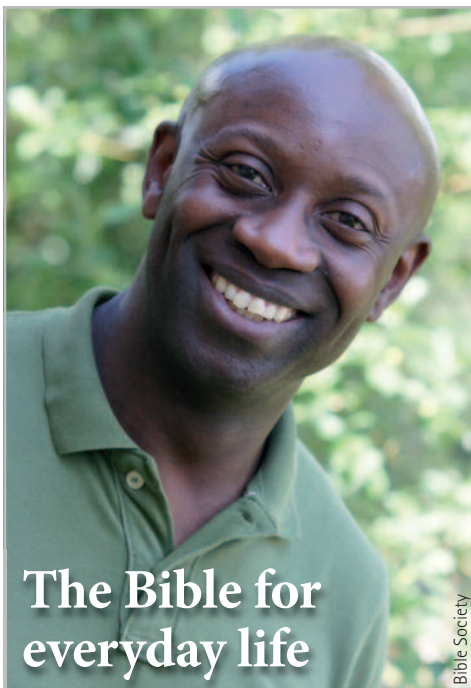
CHARITY LEADERS UNITE. More than 300 delegates attended the three-day Aiming4Excellence conference in late-November organised by the Alliance with Spring Harvest, Stewardship, Global Connections and Anthony Collins Solicitors. Held in Stanwick, Derbyshire, the conference gathered trustees, chief executives, finance directors and others from 180 Christian organisations for fellowship and networking. "There was a real buzz, with lively worship and excellent plenary sessions," said the Alliance's Finance & Services Executive Director Helen Calder, "The challenge of working together in unity ran like a thread through it all." The event was designed to help Christian charities develop closer working ties. aiming4excellence.org

BEST-SELLING AUTHOR TO SPEAK. Premier Media Group has announced that Anne Graham-Lotz, daughter of evangelist Billy Graham and one of only two women to make a list of the top most influential preachers of the past 50 years, will speak at its Woman to Woman (W2W) conference in October. Over the past two years, more than 4,000 women have attended W2W events in Bath, London and Manchester. The gatherings attract a diverse group including Pentecostals, Catholics, teenagers and pensioners. One of last year's speakers was former professional ballet dancer Julie Sheldon, who challenged the audience with her personal story. premier.org.uk



MISSION CENTRE LAUNCHED. Alliance member the London School of Theology launched its Centre for Missional Leadership in October to train and equip Christians to live as mission-minded leaders in the world. Based on the Watford campus, the goal is to help leaders be influential in every sphere of life. Vice Principal Chris Jack said, "Providing a second LST campus in the heart of Watford, the Centre of Missional Leadership, with its strong, practically grounded course, reinforces in an innovative and strategic way our commitment to equipping God's people for ministry in today's world." lsta.ac.uk

► For updated news from Alliance members, click on Your Stories at eauk.org/idea



The Bible for everyday life

Bible Society

Riding Lights Theatre Company has assembled its biggest-ever cast to make the Bible accessible in a whole new way. Bible Society's *You've Got the Time* sees the New Testament dramatised in 40 half-hour audio clips for those who say they haven't got the time in their busy lifestyles to read the Bible. Andy Bissex, Bible Society's head of community giving, said, "*You've Got the Time* is about

bringing the Bible back into everyday life, about renewing our relationship with God in the midst of life. It's something everyone can do."

Based in York, Riding Lights Theatre Company put 31 TV and stage actors to work on the project, including Royal Shakespeare Company actor Israel Oyelumade (pictured).

Oyelumade, who plays Jesus in John's Gospel, said that while recording the Last Supper, as Judas betrays Jesus, "There was just silence. We sat there as the truth of that hit us. It was actually quite soul-searching."

Paul Burbridge, Riding Lights' artistic director, said, "Working with the Bible Society on this project ties in with our vision to get theatre everywhere. This recording is fresh and surprising in many ways, giving every verse a human voice."

You've Got the Time comes with a resource pack to get people talking about what they've heard. It's hoped many churches will follow the 40-day listening plan during the Lent period. The material is free to download, but Bible Society is asking for donations to help change the lives of thousands of Christians in Africa who can't afford to buy an audio Bible. biblesociety.org.uk/yggt

Reach for a million

The Archbishop of York, Rev Dr John Sentamu, has challenged youth workers to reach a million young people every month by 2020. His message came at Youth for Christ's annual commissioning day in October as he joined Youth for Christ National Director Gavin Calver to commission new staff and volunteers for service.

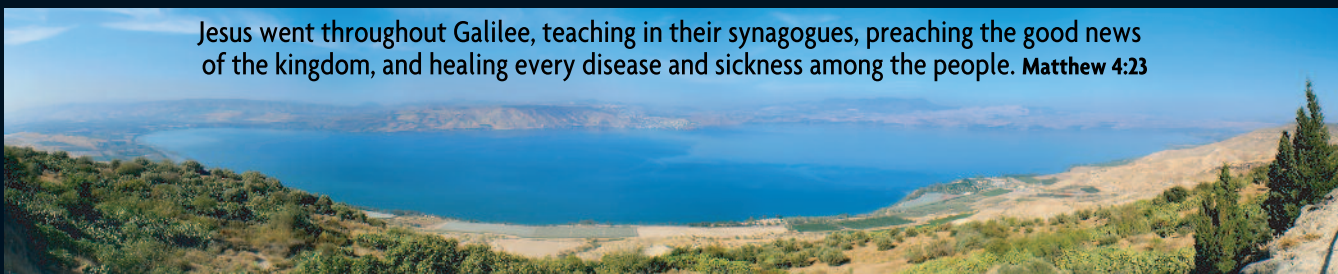
Sentamu also met with overseas volunteers and staff, giving a short message from Ezekiel 47. "Look where the river of life comes from: the place of crucifixion, the place of sacrifice," he said. "For us, that is Calvary. Where does it go? Out in the desert. And where it goes what does it do? It gives life and it makes us into fishermen, we fish for people and see the fruit of the Spirit overflowing."

In 2009, the Lord gave Calver a vision of Youth for Christ reaching a million young people every month, far more than the 300,000 young people currently touched by Youth for Christ's ministry. Statistics indicate that, by reaching one in seven young people, an entire generation can be changed. Sentamu said, "Youth for Christ is standing on the threshold of a real transformation of this great nation." yfc.co.uk

When Jesus visited here, it changed the world.



Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. **Matthew 4:1**



Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. **Matthew 4:23**

When you visit here, it will change your life.

To find out more about organising an individual or group trip to Israel, please visit

www.WalkWhereJesusWalked.com

To bean or not to bean



Research shows that the more Christians read the Bible, the more active they are in their faith. Executive Director for Churches in Mission *Krish Kandiah* explores what this means for the Church...

I'm feeling restless. I have been in back-to-back meetings, had far too many cups of coffee, and my personal space is being invaded by several strangers simultaneously on the Underground. The caffeine is doing strange things to my body and my brain, and I am itching to do something active.

So the moment the train pulls into the Tube station, I sprint up the escalator and all but hurdle the turnstile at the top. I am full of stimulant and looking for a way to put it to use. My bike is waiting for me at the station, so I jump on for a five-mile race against the clock to make sure that I can get home to be with my family.

Mission accomplished. And the first thing I do after greeting my wife and kids? Tired and thirsty and in need of an energy boost, I put on the kettle for more coffee.

As the caffeine kicks in once more, my brain goes into overdrive. Does the caffeine cause the need to expend energy, or does expending energy necessitate the caffeine? This reminds me of another chicken and egg correlation conundrum that I am working out at the moment: does reading the Bible cause us to be more active in our faith, or does being active in our faith inspire us to read the Bible?



**It doesn't matter where you start;
the result is a perpetual cycle
of appetite and action**

The puzzle derives from the Alliance faith survey, which reported: *The more time an evangelical Christian spends reading the Bible each week, the more active they are in other areas of their faith. They are more likely to volunteer, to give money, to pray frequently and talk about their faith.*

We seem to be confronted with two reasons for this: either feeding on God's Word gives us spiritual nourishment that is converted into energy for God's mission, or involving ourselves in God's mission by serving fellow Christians in the Church, or serving our communities, makes us hungry for the spiritual nourishment that the Word of God is to us.

The Bible seems to argue both sides of the conundrum. On one hand the word of God is likened to milk, bread, meat and honey – a nourishing and appetising diet that is a staple for spiritual life (1 Peter 2) and stimulating for a maturing palate (Hebrews 5.14), equipping us to action (2 Timothy 3.16–17).

On the other hand we are told that too much knowledge puffs us up and turns us into what some have dubbed "constipated sponges". Thank God the Bible is also likened to hammers, trumpets, torches and swords – vital tools to keep us going in active service. As we struggle to live out our faith, we are forced back to God's Word (Psalm 119.9).

Perpetual motion

Talking of puzzles, my friend Gerard Kelly posed another one to me today: why is it that if you drop a cat it always lands on its feet and if you drop a piece of toast it always lands butter-side down? And what happens when Miaow's Law meets Murphy's Law and you drop a cat with a piece of toast on its back?

In my head I am picturing perpetual motion and a dizzy cat. But maybe this helps us understand our Bible-reading conundrum. If you are a mission-minded Christian, you will want to feed on the Bible, and if you read the Bible you will become a mission-minded Christian. It doesn't matter where you start; the result is a perpetual cycle of appetite and action, feeding yourself and feeding others.

The Church in the UK is currently blessed with unprecedented availability of Bibles and Bible resources, but we desperately need something to initiate this cycle of Bible appetite and mission-minded activism. In partnership with more than 100 agencies, the Alliance has been hard at work on the Biblefresh initiative to fill just that need.

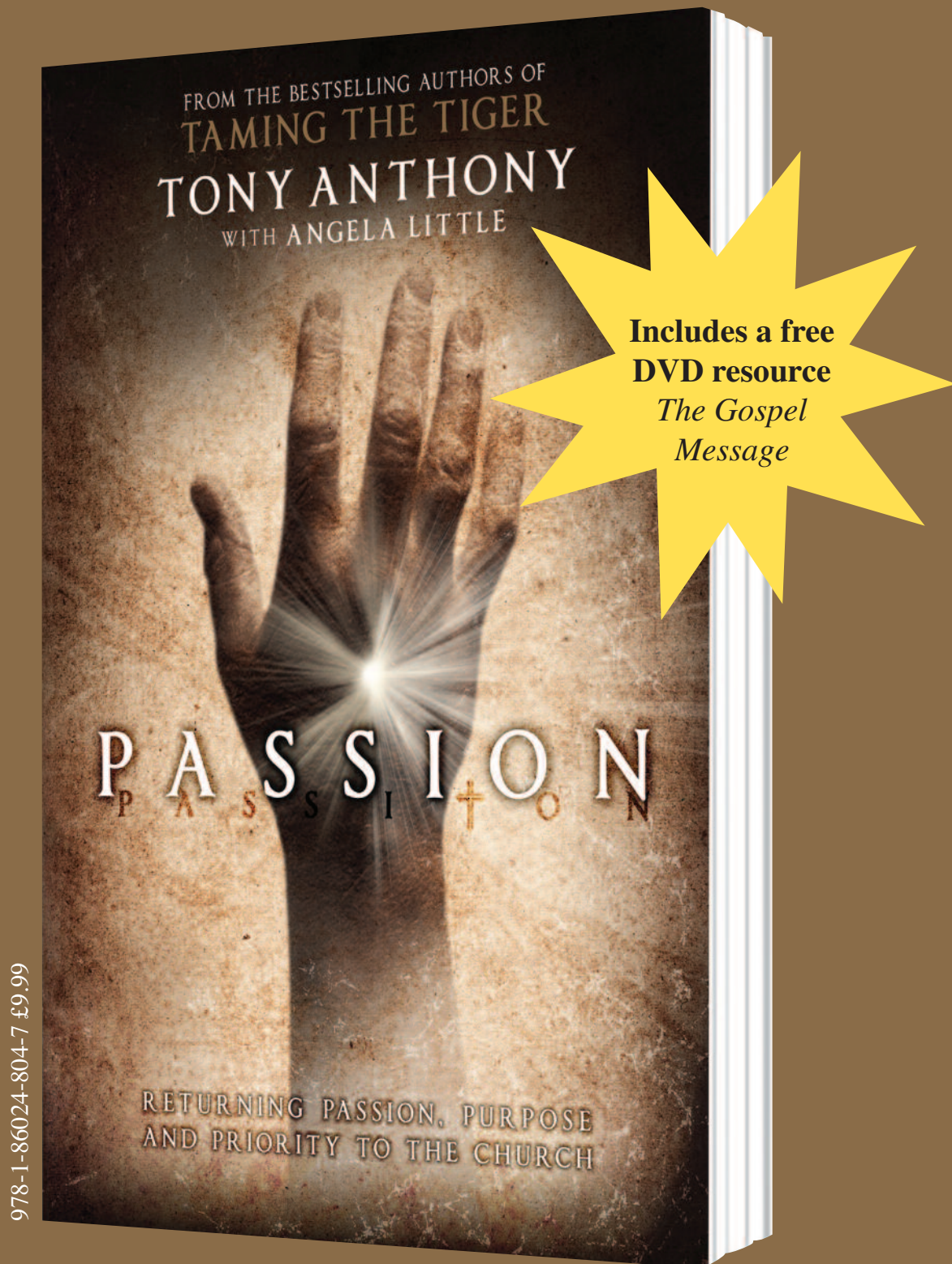
And expectations for success are high, as new churches from around the UK join Biblefresh every day, pledging not only to read the Bible afresh but also make translation, training and experiencing the Bible a priority for 2011.

Our prayer is that through a recovery of passion for God's Word, God's people will be more passionate about God's mission, triggering a virtuous cycle of increased appetite for Scripture.

And so to my final quandary of the day: cappuccino or instant before bedtime? To bean or not to bean – that is the question.

► Make sure your church is on the Biblefresh map at: biblefresh.com

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Evangelicals in the UK: a snapshot

Eric Audres

'David' tithes his monthly income, but 'Julie' does not. He believes evolution and Christianity are compatible, but Julie's not sure. They may have voted for different parties in the General Election 2010, but they share the belief that Jesus is the only way to God. Both David and Julie are evangelical Christians.

Last year the Alliance, together with Christian Research, took a snapshot of the beliefs and practices of evangelical Christians in the UK. *Phil Green* explores what this says about us...

With a sample size of more than 17,000 evangelicals, this was the most extensive piece of research of its kind. The results provide a valuable insight to 21st century evangelicalism. They'll encourage, challenge, stimulate conversation and provide a foundation for future research.



JESUS

91% strongly agree that Jesus is the only way to God



CHURCH

97% attend a church service at least once a week



BIBLE

93% strongly agree that the Bible is the inspired word of God



PRAYER

76% pray daily, 95% do so at least a few times a week

'Evangelicals are like any other Christians, but different. They are Christians with attitude.'

'Julie' and 'David' are fictitious, but based entirely on the data collected. They are both in their 50s and are typically evangelical. This means they share many common beliefs and practices, but they are also different from one another.

United

Julie and David both attend a church service once, sometimes twice a week. They are both part of a small group; Julie goes weekly, David fortnightly (although his attendance is a little sporadic). Most days Julie reads her Bible and prays. David also prays every day, although days often go by when he doesn't read his Bible. They both volunteer in activities that benefit their local communities, although Julie, who is a little older than David, puts in more volunteer hours. They both give money to their church and a range of charitable causes. David's family tithes their household income, Julie's doesn't.

They listen to, read or watch the news every day, and both voted in the 2010 General Election (although they voted for different parties). They both believe Jesus is the only way to God, that the Bible is the inspired word of God and that it's a Christian's duty to care for the environment. They believe evangelicals should be united in truth and mission and that Christians should engage with government and have a voice in the media.

Distinct

Julie and David have many friends who are also Christians, but several of them do not consider themselves evangelicals. Although they find that in many ways their beliefs and habits are similar, there are key differences. This group of friends admits that although their faith and the Bible are important to them, they do not give them such a significant role in their lives. These friends do pray and read the Bible, but not every day.

Julie and David have interesting discussions with their friends. Some, but certainly not all, are less convinced that Jesus is the only way to God and are less sure that all Christians should be actively involved in evangelism. David and Julie believe sex before marriage is wrong, but many of their friends disagree.

That said, although Julie and David have noticed there are significant differences between Christians who consider themselves evangelical and those who don't, some of their friends appear to be evangelical in all but name.

As Derek Tidball says, "Evangelicals are like any other Christians, but different. They are Christians with attitude. They hold convictions about the Bible, the work of Christ and actively working out their faith which, combined, make them a distinctive stream in the Church. But are they holding to them as firmly as they should? And do they really practise what they believe?"

"The wider Church, as well as the wider world, needs evangelicals to be true to their distinctive calling, but to be true without arrogance. Truth must be expressed with the grace and humility of Christ."

Diverse

While they hold similar views, Julie and David have different opinions on a range of issues. They are evidence that evangelicals are not the homogenous group the media frequently portrays.

Julie holds strong views on most issues. Theologically, she believes the Bible, in its original manuscript, is without error; and that hell is a place where the condemned will suffer pain forever. When it comes to ethics, she believes assisted suicide and sexual activity between two people of the same sex are both wrong; and that abortion can never be justified. She thinks that women should be eligible for most roles within the Church, although there are some roles only men should perform. But she's unsure what to make of evolution.

In contrast, David strongly believes women should be eligible for all roles within the Church and that evolution and Christianity are entirely compatible. He also thinks there are occasions when abortion can be justified. When it comes to other issues he's less confident. He's not sure whether the Bible, in its original manuscript, is without error, and he does not know what he believes about hell. When it comes to the issues of practicing homosexuality and assisted suicide, he really struggles. He leans towards them both being wrong, but really isn't sure.

Theologian and sociologist Elaine Storkey says this diversity presents



Eric Audres

Kevin Peterson



GIVING

96% have given money to their church in the past year



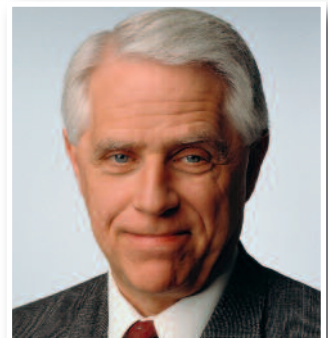
MIRACLES

83% strongly agree that the miraculous gifts of the Spirit did not end in the 1st century



FAITH

88% strongly agree that their faith is the most important thing in their life



ENVIRONMENT

94% believe that it's a Christian's duty to care for the environment



'Post-modern Britain has created a new generation characterised by contradiction'

Paul and Sarah highlight a noticeable trend: 16 to 24-year-olds are less likely to consider themselves evangelical Christians. Those who do consider themselves evangelical are different from other age groups.

Paul displays many typically evangelical traits. He attends church weekly, volunteers in activities that serve the local community, believes Jesus is the only way to God and considers sex before marriage wrong. He also talks about his faith far more often than his parents. On the other hand, he's not quite so convinced that the Bible is the inspired word of God and that it should have the supreme authority in guiding his beliefs. He doesn't read his Bible so often, but he prays most days. He doesn't give so much money to charity.

Andy Frost, director of Share Jesus International, isn't surprised by this. "Post-modern Britain, with its melting pot of faiths and ideologies, has created a new generation characterised by contradiction," he says. "On the one hand, they reflect passion to share their faith; but on the other hand, they less vehemently defend Scripture and lack personal time to read the Bible and pray."

Meanwhile, Sarah doesn't consider herself an evangelical. Andy Frost suggests this might be because "the word 'evangelical' has been tarnished by American political agendas" and because the word "is confusing to a generation which doesn't understand party lines and church squabbles". He doesn't think that evangelicalism is in decline, but he thinks it needs to be redefined for them as "grace and truth".

This snapshot is the first in a series of reports that will paint a detailed picture of 21st century evangelicalism in the UK. This picture will be an invaluable asset to church leaders and Christian organisations as it provides encouragement, presents challenges, guides reflection and stimulates discussion.

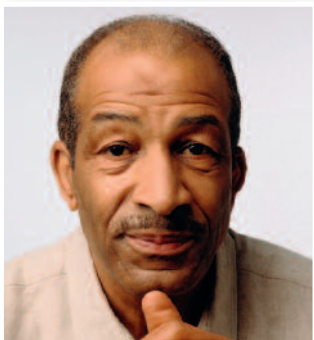
While Julie and David are both typically evangelical, they certainly don't agree on everything. Is one of them right and one of them wrong? Or do they need to learn to live with the tension? And if Paul and Sarah, while typical for their generation, are quite different from their parents, the key question is: what does this mean for the future of evangelicalism?

both a challenge and an opportunity. "This research has highlighted just a few of a wide range of issues where evangelicals hold a variety of opinions," she says. "Is this diversity good, or is it a problem? Although it is of utmost importance that we are united by truth, it is essential that this includes a space where we can discuss areas of disagreement. We should be helping people wrestle with the issues of the 21st century, enabling them not only to reach a godly conclusion, but also wrestle in a godly manner."

Changing

David and Julie have children who are in their early 20s. Sarah and Paul are both Christians, and are very similar in their beliefs and practices. Paul considers himself an evangelical Christian, while Sarah, like many others in her generation, doesn't.

► The first report will be available to view online or as a free download from 12 January. To get a copy, as well as to find out more about how the research was conducted, plans for the future and how you can get involved, visit: eauk.org/snapshot



ENGAGEMENT

76% watch, listen or read the news every day, and 85% voted in the last General Election



VOLUNTEERING

81% do some kind of voluntary work at least once a month



UNITY

94% believe that evangelical Christians should be united in truth



VOICE

93% believe that evangelicals should have a voice in the media and engage with government



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Hope for prisoners

Daylight

For most of us, prisons are fearful places we don't like to talk about. But several Alliance member organisations are actively involved with prisoners both when they're behind bars and after their release. Sarah Scott of Daylight Christian Prison Trust and Richard Brooker of Langley House Trust write about the challenge facing the Church...

From darkness to light

Stephen found himself serving a prison sentence for four years when he was caught dealing drugs. After a 10-year downward spiral, during which he became addicted to heroin, he had lost all hope. Behind bars, he saw no way out of the life he had become so familiar with and knew that without help he was likely to end up back in a cell not long after release from prison.

It was at this point of desperation that Stephen met a prison visitor who introduced him to Jesus Christ. Stephen became a Christian and after his release he was supported by a Christian-run project that helped him tackle his addiction, obtain a degree in sociology and secure employment. Stephen is now working with Daylight to share the Good News with other prisoners so that they too can see their lives transformed.

Stephen is just one of the 96,000 prisoners in the UK who Daylight seeks to reach with the Gospel and to support after release as they settle back into a community. With the largest prison population in Western Europe, the Church in the UK has a huge opportunity to reach an often forgotten group of people. We often spare little thought for those behind bars, but lives are being transformed from darkness to light. Speaking of the work going on in

prisons, one prison chaplain said, "It is a reminder that the church 'inside' is part of and not separate from the Church outside."

As some 52 per cent of the prison population in the UK claim to be Christians, many offenders are grateful for the time that prison visitors take to talk with them, explain the Bible and write to them when they are often written off by their families and friends on the outside.

And the effects of incarceration go beyond the prison gates. Among prisoners, 65 per cent have a numeracy level expected of an 11-year-old and half of them lack the basic skills required for employment. This makes it extremely difficult for ex-offenders to rebuild their lives after release, so many give up without hope of a future.

Meanwhile, prisoners over the age of 60 are the fastest-growing age group inside, and many have given up hope of ever being released. For those who do get out, many deliberately offend because

it is safer in prison than trying to rebuild their whole life.

Even if churches can't get involved inside prisons or with ex-offenders, they can still pray for and support the work going on behind bars in the "invisible church" inside. Christians know that there is one Gospel that can transform lives, and there are stories to prove this in prisons from Scotland to the South coast. daylightcpt.org

The Church in the UK has a huge opportunity to reach an often forgotten group of people

Breaking the cycle

It was almost a year ago that Darren came to live at Langley House Trust in Bradford. His aims were to remain crime-free and drug-free and he wanted to build on his counselling experience. Successful rehabilitation now also had an added edge for Darren, as being granted supervised access with his 14-year-old daughter, who had been taken into care, was dependent on positive reports from both the staff and his probation officer. Langley has formed a housing association to help churches provide resettlement support for ex-offenders and the homeless. The main aim is to help those in prison break the cycle of re-offending, working with churches across the country to provide buildings and professional management services to help those at the margins of society.

Leaving prison after a significant time inside can be almost as daunting an experience as entering prison in the first place. Many ex-offenders have no family to turn to, and their only friends were often involved in the very crimes they are looking to leave behind.

Now 39, Darren's story is not unusual. He started using alcohol at 13 to cope with his troubled family life, then moved onto hard drugs. His first conviction occurred in 1989, aged 18, and his last was in 2007. He described himself as suicidal when he arrived in prison for a seven-year sentence. It was a long haul, with many hard lessons to learn, but gradually things began to look up.

The great news is that Darren recently moved into his own flat. He has remained crime free since his release, and last June he was removed from the prolific offender register. Things haven't always gone to plan, but Darren is now able to use the skills he has learned to make better decisions.



Prisoners gather for a Daylight session on how to avoid re-offending.

‘When working alongside ex-offenders we need all the prayer, volunteers and support we can get’



Ex-offenders learn gardening skills at Langley House.

"The care and support I received at Langley House was just what I needed," Darren says. "I have worked hard in the project, especially on creating the pond in the front garden. I also know I am hard work at times, but the staff are well able to handle me. They are always there to listen and though sometimes I don't like their answers, I know they are right."

Last year Langley helped almost a thousand people to make a fresh start in life. "When working alongside ex-offenders we need all the prayer, volunteers and support we can get," says Langley's Chief Executive Rev Steve Robinson. "We have a saying, 'My history does not define my destiny.' It is loosely based on the Lord's words to the woman caught in adultery in John 8, 'Neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more.' Our aim has always been to see people set free from a life of crime. It's God's work we're about and we need churches to get involved too." langleyhoustrust.org



Prepare for an outward looking Easter

As the new year begins, our minds may be more focused on our resolutions than the next chocolate feast in the calendar. After celebrating the birth of Christ in December, *Lucy Cooper* explores why it is helpful to start preparing now to celebrate His death and resurrection in April...

We may have only just finished the Advent calendar, but chocolate eggs and bunnies will lace the supermarket aisles before too long. And these festive distractions obscure the true meaning of Easter, which still seems a bit lost on much of the British public. A well-known supermarket chain had to correct themselves twice when it reported that few young people realised that Easter was to celebrate the birth of Christ. The second comment corrected this to rebirth, only to finally concede that Easter is actually about the resurrection.

This kind of misunderstanding presents a challenge to us to rediscover the life-changing impact of the Gospel message and share it. Andy Hawthorne, director of Message Trust, says, "Easter should knock us sideways. The first person in heaven after Jesus died was a common thief who had done absolutely nothing to deserve salvation."

Bishop Wayne Malcolm describes Easter as a moment for "ultimate triumph of good over evil, a barbaric moment that was also a triumph of love over hate".

Fresh opportunities

This year there is a fresh and wider recognition of the mission opportunities that Easter presents. There are so many ways that we can share the Good News of Jesus with the people around us.

Hope Together, which launched last summer as a continuation of Hope 08, is highlighting Easter this year as a golden opportunity to be outward looking and share the Gospel through words and action. Hope is providing resources and support to churches over the next four years with an aim to see churches become more mission-focused

Roy Crowne, executive director of Hope Together, says, "Christmas is a wonderful celebration, but the Easter message demands an even greater response. It's a vital opportunity for local churches to connect with the non-churchgoer in a real way. This is our festival and a great moment to present our faith to our communities."

A new Hope for Easter resource shares an array of exciting and creative mission ideas to make an impact in local communities at Easter. It profiles new ideas alongside ones that have been tried and tested. It also includes advice on how to go about doing similar things locally. Here are a few ideas:

THROW A PARTY. Since Hope 2008, Churches Together in Leamington Spa have held The Easter Wave celebrating the Good News of the season and making it a joyful and colourful occasion. Jonathan Lee, Chair of Churches Together in Leamington Spa, said: "For the last three years, hundreds of Christians from several churches in Leamington have joined together for the Easter Wave - a march of witness through the town led



‘Christmas is a wonderful celebration, but the Easter message demands an even greater response’

discussion course with contributions on CD from key Christian thinkers, looking at the legacy of love from Jesus. yorkcourses.co.uk

SHARE A STORY. Living Hope Church in Dudley has filmed many members telling their two-minute testimony. While this is designed for year-round evangelism, opportunities are especially ripe at Easter. Rev Jeremy Parkes says, "Often there is only a small two-minute window of opportunity to share in a conversation, so we wanted to prepare people to be able to tell their story concisely and effectively within that time frame. It is about connecting our personal story with Jesus. His death and resurrection has turned our lives into new ones." Taking the time to remind yourself what Easter means to you and practicing telling the story can be a powerful means of outreach. livinghopechurch.org.uk

BUY REAL EASTER EGGS. We can also share the Good News – and a little love – with our family and friends by giving away the Real Easter Egg, a Fair Trade chocolate egg produced by the Meaningful Chocolate Company. This is the first egg to directly reference the Christian background to the holiday, with a panel explaining "the real meaning of Easter" and giving a portion of profits to charity. realeasteregg.co.uk

Working together

Easter activities could include a new twist on a traditional event, getting churches to work together to have a deeper, wider reach in the community. Steve Clifford, the Alliance's general director and Hope's chairman, asks us to "imagine all over the country, in communities large and small, churches working together bringing Jesus' story alive through word and action". Easter may be a few months away, but the ideas, collaboration and preparations will need to start now.

Roy Crowne adds, "Jesus was put on the cross for His revolutionary message of love and rose again for us. So let's not just celebrate the joy of Easter inside our churches – let's spread the Good News, and together we could see our communities transformed."

Whether it's through sending cards, egg hunts, art displays, concerts, creative prayer, staging a play or giving gifts, engaging with our communities could see people responding to Jesus for the first time. Because that, after all, is what Easter is all about. hopetogether.org.uk

by the Salvation Army's Brass Band. Along the way we have given out chocolates, brightly-coloured helium balloons, and cards from the churches. The wave has had a positive effect, and people in the town have been intrigued."

Easter is a great time to stage a celebratory event, and some churches have found that neighbours warm to them when they hold an all-age street festival. This would be similar to a traditional fun day, although it doesn't need to be as elaborate. Face-painting, balloons and little acts of kindness such as shoe-shining or manicures would go down well. hopeleamington.org.uk

HOLD A SPECIAL COURSE. Small-group studies and courses have always been a popular way to reflect together on the period of Lent and the meaning of the events of Easter Week.

Hope for Easter contains two group studies, one for adults and one for youth, which use pivotal moments in Jesus' story to spark a response of social action and evangelism. Well-known denominational leaders and members of the Hope leadership team share a bit about what Easter means to them personally, which can provoke deeper thought about what it means to us and how we would communicate this to another in a one-to-one conversation.

In addition, York Courses have produced a five-session ecumenical



Soul-searching

Looking for conversation starters, *Sophie Lister* finds relevant themes in popular culture...

Perhaps a society truly becomes lost when it doesn't know how lost it is. This is the eerie suggestion put forward by the high-profile new film *Never Let Me Go*, adapted from the acclaimed novel by Kazuo Ishiguro. The alternative Britain that the story portrays isn't a typical rainy dystopia. Instead it's an apparently tranquil, progressive world where tedious paperwork and restrained euphemisms conceal the dark truth: that one group of people is being systematically sacrificed to meet the needs of the rest. It's a world where the right questions are no longer asked.

Kathy (Carey Mulligan), Tommy (Andrew Garfield) and Ruth (Keira Knightley) have an idyllic childhood. Growing up at Hailsham boarding school, their lives are barely marred even when they are told of a dark fate awaiting them in early adulthood. Far more real are the everyday concerns of friendship and the unspoken love triangle already forming between them. But as the years pass, their grim destiny looms ever closer. Will they try to escape it? Or will they learn to seize upon the short time that they have?

Keira Knightley tells of how a friend urged her to read the book,

Film



127 HOURS (opens 7 Jan)

This is the incredible true story of Aron Ralston (James Franco), a fit outdoorsman who was trapped for five days in a narrow crevasse in an isolated Utah mountain and lived to tell the tale. Making it into a film must have been tricky, but director Danny Boyle is more than up to the task, taking us on a swirling rollercoaster ride right into this young man's mind as he confronts his own mortality and finds the will to live, even if it costs him his right arm. This powerful story of survival is an exhilarating movie experience. **RC**

THE KING'S SPEECH (7 Jan)

Colin Firth gives one of his best performances ever as Bertie, the man who became George VI after his brother Edward VIII (Guy Pearce) abdicated the throne for love. Afflicted with a terrible stammer, his wife (Helena Bonham Carter) hires an unorthodox therapist (Geoffrey Rush) to help him speak in public. And as WWII breaks out, the nation needs to hear his voice. This is an inspiring story of an unusual friendship that helped a man rise beyond all expectations. It's also a thoroughly crowd-pleasing film with first-rate performances and production values that transcend the usual costume drama. **MC**

CONVICTION (14 Jan)

Hilary Swank gets another barnstorming role in this true story of Betty Anne Waters, a working class woman who became a lawyer to help clear her brother (Sam Rockwell) of a murder charge. The film may be a bit melodramatic and sentimental, but watching the events unfold is thoroughly gripping. It's also stirring to watch Betty Anne tenaciously take on the system against a huge mountain of personal odds. Performances from Swank and Rockwell, as well as Minnie Driver, Juliette Lewis and Melissa Leo, all add to the film's emotional kick and political relevance. **RC**



Lost souls: Keira Knightley, Carey Mulligan and Andrew Garfield seek answers in *Never Let Me Go*.

saying that it "defines our generation". The actress laughs this off as "a bleak thought". But is it so far from the truth? The children of the last few decades have grown up in a society that is losing its grip on absolutes. Audiences may be shocked by the moral norms accepted by the world of *Never Let Me Go*, but the film is a stark warning to check the moral blind spots of our own age. History demonstrates how easily evil can come to be called necessary, normal and even good.

Fighting back

Accustomed as we are to seeing heroes battle against cruel systems, it is almost incomprehensible to us that these characters don't fight back. Even Tommy, the most hopeful of the trio, doesn't get beyond the prospect of being granted a few more years. His question is never one of reprieve, only deferral. It simply never enters his mind that his fate is brutally unjust, because his highest authority is the society that has bred him. There is no voice assuring him that, despite what he might have been told, he is a precious individual with a soul.

To the viewer, nothing could be more obvious. The compelling performances of the three lead actors only serve to underscore what we feel by instinct anyway: that every human is unique and every life has value. For this reason, it is utterly devastating when Kathy and Tommy are confronted by what their society really thinks of them. "We didn't have to look into your souls," they are told. "We had to see if you had souls at all."

These words may well ring in the ears of audiences long after they leave the cinema. Many in our generation are so lost to rationalism and relativism that they may be unsure that they have souls at all. Like

History demonstrates how easily evil can come to be called necessary, normal and even good

Kathy, Tommy and Ruth, we are in one sense nothing more than pieces of meat, allotted a short span of time on the earth before we die.

And yet so much in us speaks of more. We can't shake the hunch that there is right and wrong, that human beings do have intrinsic worth, that love is worth fighting for. Without hearing about the God of love in whose image they are made, our generation can make no sense of these facts.

The film takes its title from a song that Kathy listens to in her loneliest moments. As a child, we see her cradling her pillow as the lyrics speak of her deepest yearning: "Darling, hold me and never let me go." Despite her life's brevity, despite her isolation, despite everything she has been led to believe about the horrible purpose of her existence, her longing for transience is not quite snuffed out.

Like the generation she represents, she is aching for lasting love and for the affirmation of her humanity amidst all that would seek to deny it. This is the impression of the film's world that lingers – not how strange it is, but how hauntingly familiar.

► *Never Let Me Go* opens in UK cinemas on 11 February.

Sophie Lister writes for Culturewatch.org



HEREAFTER (28 Jan)

Both writer Peter Morgan (*The Queen*) and director Clint Eastwood make a dramatic shift in their usual styles for this emotionally resonant drama about three people who have a connection to the afterlife. In San Francisco, George (Matt Damon) has the ability to speak to the dead; in Paris, Marie (Cecile De France) is recovering from an after-death experience; and in London, Marcus

(played by Frankie and George McLaren, pictured) is struggling with the death of his twin. These three people converge at the end, as the film provocatively explores the basic human understanding that death is not the end. **RC**



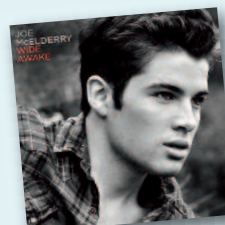
BLACK SWAN (11 Feb)

Darren Aronofsky (*The Wrestler*) takes his usual bravura approach to this drama about a New York ballerina (Natalie Portman) who loses her grip on reality as she lands the lead role in a new production of *Swan Lake*. Paralysed by nerves and paranoia about other dancers, she takes us on a surreal mental journey that's often terrifyingly intense. The film touches on parental expectations, self-harm and peer pressure in a haunting, intimate way that leaves us utterly shaken. And the ultimate question is whether she needs to lose herself in order to reach the pinnacle of stardom. **RC**

CDs

WIDE AWAKE by Joe McElderry (Sony)

Last year's *X-Factor* winner Joe McElderry released his debut album, right in the middle of the recent series of the ratings-powerhouse TV series. This album includes his first single *The Climb* and his recent chart hit *Ambitions*. It is a prime example of the classic pop genre, containing a mixture of fast-paced tunes and slower ballads. As you listen to the album, the mostly upbeat style can become quite repetitive, but it has mostly received positive reviews. It will be interesting to see if Joe can succeed in the industry where other *X-Factor* winners have failed. **BJ**





Tom Hollander and Olivia Coleman star in *Rev*.

volunteers for help. If we've shined a light on any of that it's a good thing. It's quite interesting, and frequently funny.

How is Adam different from someone who doesn't have a faith?

He has the priestly desire always to do good and turn the other cheek. And the simple fact that he prays – in every episode he talks to God about whatever the dilemma is – displays a process that is unique to those with a faith.

How did you balance comedy with authenticity?

I think some producers were worried it wasn't funny enough. Compared to *Father Ted*, which is a brilliantly written gag show, or *The Vicar of Dibley*, which is a much-loved and very successful mainstream comedy, we are so different. What we really wanted to do was to paint an authentic picture and make sure that the prayers felt real, but also to not avoid moments of vulnerability, loneliness or pain. You have to fight for that stuff, because the BBC thinks we're making a comedy show.

What was the inspiration for the evangelical episode?

It was just a broad "let's go there", not based on one particular place. We went to several evangelical churches doing research, asking questions, watching stuff and creating a sort of composite. The producer was a little concerned about that episode. There is a watchlist at the BBC for shows that may cause problems; the simple fact that this was a new contemporary religious comedy meant we were straight on it. But once people realised that we'd made an effort to be authentic the fear started to go. The writing comes very much from my views on that strand of the Church. I have some evangelical friends who loved it and said they knew people with a similar messiah complex. Only one person said they thought I'd pushed it a bit too far.

Part of our cultural fabric

Film and television writer James Wood wrote the critically acclaimed sitcom *Rev*, which aired on BBC Two last summer and is now slated for a second series. Co-created by James and Tom Hollander, who plays the lead role, *Rev* centres on the daily trials of Rev Adam Smallbone, a Church of England vicar newly promoted from a sleepy rural parish to the busy St Saviour's in East London. It's a world Adam has little experience of, and it shows...

idea: Do you think this show has shattered preconceptions about Anglican vicars?

That certainly wasn't our intention; we simply wanted to do an authentic bang up-to-date contemporary 21st century picture of what that job is like and the joys and frustrations of it. So I suppose in the process of doing that we did dispel some myths. My parents are very much part of the Church, my grandfather was a vicar and I had a "churchy" upbringing. But even I had my eyes regularly opened. As one vicar said to me, he is often the only professional in the building, depending on



'The Church is a key part of our cultural fabric, whether you're a believer or not'

What's the feedback been like?

Extraordinary in many ways. We've all been surprised and delighted by the wide and varied group of people who seem to like it. Tom is regularly harassed now because people seem to love the show who aren't necessarily people who go to church or are practising Christians or who have any faith at all. It's made us realise the Church is a key part of our cultural fabric, whether you're a believer or not. The show seems to have tapped into the breadth of people the Church affects. CO

► Series 1 of *Rev* will be available on DVD this spring. Filming on the second series is scheduled to begin this summer.

What do you think of *idea* magazine? What stories have you enjoyed reading, and what else would you like us to cover? Would you like to be able to discuss the issues we address in the magazine online?

We're revisiting the way we communicate and we want to hear your views so that we can make sure we are giving you the magazine, resources, emails and website you want. So please log onto our website at www.eauk.org and fill in our questionnaire to tell us how we can best serve you.



Exploring the power of stories and Christ's return

Do Christians underestimate the power of stories?

At a recent Alpha group, frustrated by the complexity of the Bible, someone sighed, "I wish God had written an executive summary." But God chose not to hand us a list of truths about Himself, or an instruction manual, but an epic story in which He reveals Himself. The declarations about the God who "heals you", "sees you" and "brought you out of Egypt" both reveal character and are backed up with action.

When things seem wrong, people recount the stories of God's intervention

in the lives of our forefathers (Psalm 44). This reminds us of our identity and gives hope. The prophet encourages us to remember our origins in order to build confidence for the present: "Look to the rock from which you were cut" (Isaiah 51.1-3). Retelling the history of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob reminds us what kind of God we are praying to: the one who has shown Himself faithful throughout time and will act again on our behalf. Later, the sermons of Peter and Stephen recite the significant events and purposes in the history of the people of God, placing our

lives in a larger context.

We are a community shaped by stories. Anthropologists, philosophers, historians and theologians agree that we experience our lives and the world around us narratively. We seek beginnings and endings, climax and conclusion. We also weave our own personal stories into larger ones like human progress through science, social systems or religion. We all want to be part of a bigger story than ourselves.

Despite the post-modern announcement of the death of meta-narratives, they still seem deeply rooted. However, the Church has at times been scared of story, treating the narratives just as a source from which to distil doctrines, which somehow are seen as a purer, safer truth. Yet storytelling is an important part of formation of the Christian community and integral to the dynamic of teaching.

Moreover, with our storytelling we subvert dominant narratives around us. In *Disciples and Citizens*, Bishop Cray wrote, "Jesus was a storyteller. He taught in parables. Many of the parables retold Israel's story in ways that seemed familiar when they began, but brought the listener to a conclusion they did not expect. In this way, He gave His listeners the opportunity to see their assumptions and worldviews differently and to respond accordingly... This was subversive engagement with Israel's understanding of its story. We need to find similar, imaginative ways to retell, subvert and challenge our nation's stories."

Jesus' parables were provocative stories, inviting the hearers to leave conventional understanding and encounter new and potentially transformative views. And we are called to shape our work, family life and community activity in such a way that it points to the story of Christ.

The oral tradition didn't merely characterise the 1st century; it can be



Melville Floyd

We need to find imaginative ways to retell, subvert and challenge our nation's stories

Is your church covered?

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Future hope significantly affects the present

as powerful in our time, enhanced by a diversity of creative media forums. We live in a culture that values authentic voices and stories.

"The social-ethical task of the Church... is to be the kind of community that tells and tells rightly the story of Jesus," wrote Stanley Hauerwas. "We continue this truth when we see the struggle of each to be faithful to the Gospel as essential to each of our lives." Good stories, whether explicitly or implicitly biblical, have the potential to awaken consciousness in society.

Were early Christians wrong to expect Jesus' imminent return?

The hope of Christ's return prominently marks the identity of the 1st century Church. As NT Wright said in *Surprised by Hope*, it gave a proper shape and balance to the Christian worldview, telling a story of beginning, middle and end. In their vulnerability in a harsh context, the "day of the Lord" shed a significant light on their situation, generating hope and endurance. Their view of time interlocks the present and future closely together: future hope significantly affects the present.

Throughout history, Christians have faced the ambiguities of hope and delay. The delay is addressed explicitly in 2 Peter 3. But the opportune dimension of time, rather than chronology, is critical for enduring hope. Paul sets the community's

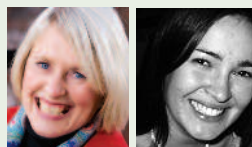
transformation and vocation in the timeframe of the day of the Lord (Romans 13.11). The day that is breaking forth is already reflected in a measure of His glory, character and reign in the world.

For Christians, all of life – including suffering, enemies, social status, grief, happiness and possessions – is placed in the context of Christ's return (1 Corinthians 7.29-31). We are already experiencing the power and gifts of the new day and adopt a lifestyle that reflects this. Our devotion to Him takes primacy, fuelling our motivation and sharpening our message. It leaves no room for complacency.

This larger picture may need to be re-introduced in our message, particularly when our sense of purpose and passion is tempered. Paul's expectation of the Lord's coming and his vision for a glorious Church still powerfully appeals to our zeal and endurance (2 Corinthians 11.2). Without such fervent hope we are poorly equipped for mission, as well as for life itself.

► If you have a question about practical theology, send it to: idea@eauk.org

Marijke Hoek is the Alliance's Forum for Change co-ordinator, writing in conjunction with MediaNet's Liz Hunter



Don't Mention the War

19 Jan, London

Designed for pastors and students, this symposium will examine Christian traditions of pacifism and just-war theory, and ask what faithful Christian ministry to local communities in a nation at war can look like today. eauk.org/events or email pub-aff@eauk.org

Leadership Conference

10-11 Feb, London

Holy Trinity Brompton's all-new event will feature a mixture of Christian and business speakers. In addition to worship and ministry, teaching seminars will focus on the three key themes of leadership, vision to action and church planting. htb.org.uk/leadershipconference

National Marriage Week

7-14 Feb, Northern Ireland

This week-long event seeks to encourage those who are preparing for marriage, as well as those already married, to invest in their relationship. It is an ideal time to think about supporting those in local communities at every stage in their married lives. nationalmarriageweekni.co.uk

The Big Read

8 Mar-24 Apr

As part of Biblefresh, churches are being encouraged to join in The Big Read through the Lent period. Study guides and other materials will be available online, along with the chance to engage with other churches and house groups participating in the project. bigbible.org.uk

New Word Alive

10-15 Apr, North Wales

New Word Alive is a Bible holiday week based in North Wales for all Christians. Uniting around the central truths of the Gospel, Christians join together for a week of great Bible teaching, fellowship and worship. newwordalive.org

Spring Harvest

9-24 Apr, Minehead; 9-14 Apr, Skegness

Spring Harvest exists to equip the Church for action. Through a range of events, conferences, books and resources, Spring Harvest seeks to enable Christians to impact their local communities and the wider world. springharvest.org



DOWNTON ABBEY (Universal)

ITV's Sunday-evening period drama was so positively received by audiences and critics that a second series is already underway. Penned by Oscar-winning screenwriter Julian Fellowes (*Gosford Park*), the series delves into the secrets of every individual in the Crawley household. The class divides are unhinged when a lowly solicitor becomes heir to the estate, a maid applies to be a secretary and Lord Crawley employs a secretive friend as a valet. All of Downton's residents – upstairs and downstairs – are ultimately tested by the gentility of their reactions, the vulgarity of their judgements and the propriety of their decisions. **HP**

FRINGE: Season 3 (Warner)

The third series of this popular TV show finds Olivia Dunham (Anna Torv) trapped in an alternate universe. Her doppelgänger then travels to our universe with Walter and Peter (John Noble and Joshua Jackson), assigned to carry out some devious task. In each episode one of the team investigates a bizarre occurrence, while the story of the two Olivias runs throughout the season, as well as Peter attempting to solve his own dilemma as a child of another universe abducted into ours. *Fringe* gives us a quest for truth and identity in a riveting story with engaging characters. **RB**

SINGLE FATHER (2Entertain)

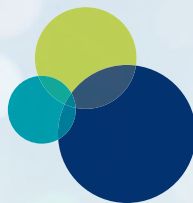
With this moving four-part drama, David Tennant proved that he has more to offer than his hyperactive turn in *Doctor Who*. As Dave, a widowed man struggling to raise his four children, Tennant



exudes quiet anguish, holding our attention even when the plot veers into melodrama. The drama questions what holds a family together or drives them apart, showing the devastating impact of loss. The adults in the story wrestle with their weaknesses, discovering that grief is a messy business. Arguably, though, it all resolves a little too neatly: does "healing" necessarily require a conventional happy ending? **SL**

make christmas count!

evangelical alliance
uniting to change society



Help us to let the world know what Christians are for this Christmas – glad tidings.

At Christmas we celebrate something we're all for – God coming into the world as a man, Jesus Christ. **A man who had more impact on our world than anyone before or since.** He literally changed the world as he drew all people together to him (John 12:32). That's our vision at the Evangelical Alliance, so this Christmas we especially want to celebrate coming together as evangelicals, uniting to change society. **To have a real impact for Jesus Christ in our world – but we need your help to do it.**

Ever since our foundation in 1846, **the Evangelical Alliance has made a real difference in our society by using genuinely positive influence.** People listen more readily to our voice. It's all too easy for Christians to say what they're against, so we tell it like it is – that Christians are good news... and here are just three examples:

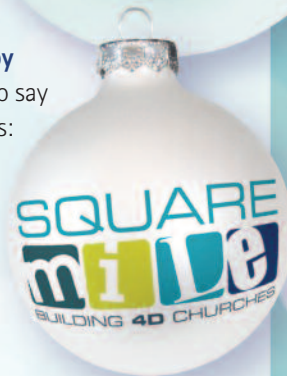
Biblefresh encourages churches to get people into the Word of God.

Life beyond Debt enables churches to be outspoken on issues of poverty and injustice.

Square Mile equips evangelicals to get really joined up in mission.

Our core work is to promote and uphold evangelical Christianity in our society and includes bringing a positive influence to bear in government and the media. **Getting listened to, not simply heard.**

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The Church has many faces

General Director Steve Clifford is heartened by the sense of "shared mission" at a diverse global gathering of Christians...

As I sat looking across the vast Cape Town International Convention Centre, packed full with more than 4,000 delegates, I was overwhelmed by the sense of this being a snapshot of the Church. Gathered for just the third time since 1974, the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelisation had come together from 190 of the world's 220 countries. The conference was made up of men and women of all shapes, sizes, skin colours, hair textures and, of course, preferences of ministry and theological understanding. Yet we are the Church – brothers and sisters in Christ.

We worshipped, prayed and opened Scripture together as we sat not in rows but around tables. At my table sat an Anglican bishop from Khartoum in Sudan, an Ethiopian Mennonite who is head of missions in his own country, a Korean missionary recently returned from having lived in China for 15 years and a businessman from Hong Kong. At times we struggled to understand each other, and yet we shared a common cause and a passion to see our nations, and indeed all the nations of the world, reached with the Gospel.

I was moved to tears one day, as this vast congregation engaged in musical worship and, one after the other, leaders representing many different nations led in their own language. I was reminded of how the Apostle John, in the book of Revelation, describes a great assembly in the age to come. While we might not be singing a Graham Kendrick tune, a wonderful song of worship and adoration will be sung.

Alive and kicking

Don't let anyone tell you the Church is finished. The Church is alive and kicking. I saw it at the Cape Town congress. I heard the stories, met the people and rejoiced as I learned of large numbers of people coming to Christ in some of the world's most difficult places. Certain nations that have been described as "closed" are in reality wonderfully open to the Gospel, as local believers engage in evangelism despite immense personal danger.

At times this means some are martyred for their faith. This is a tremendous personal challenge when I consider some of the issues that occupy my life or upset me. Here are people losing families, jobs and education. They're being imprisoned, attacked and even killed for their faith.

It became wonderfully clear as the Congress developed that the worldwide Church is passionately committed to a Gospel that involves both words and actions, which means being good news as well as speaking the Good News. The Church around the world, week in and week out, is getting its hands dirty. You name it, we're involved.

Christians are involved in digging wells, feeding the hungry, caring for the sick, and challenging injustice wherever it may be found – human trafficking, the Indian caste system and the Rwandan genocide, to name just three. The challenges remain enormous.

A large delegation from China was refused permission to travel to Cape Town at the last minute. There are still unreached people groups that have never heard the Good News. There remain big cities that need fresh approaches to communicating the Gospel because they are populated by people who have been displaced from their homelands (more than 200 million worldwide).

And the Church also can't ignore huge global issues regarding the environment and our responsibilities as guardians of God's creation.

Shifting gravity

As the Congress progressed it became obvious that the centre of gravity of Christianity was no longer in the northern hemisphere or the West. The passion, vision and challenges were coming primarily from the southern hemisphere and the East, spoken out by mainly younger male and female church and mission leaders. For the small team from the Alliance that attended and participated in the Congress, perhaps the most exciting element was the realisation that God seems to be speaking the same challenge to leaders right across the nations of the world.

Time and time again people spoke of the need for unity – not unity for unity's sake, but unity for purpose and for a shared mission. The prayer of Jesus in John 17 was quoted repeatedly: "that they might be one ... so that the world might believe".

This is the message that we at the Alliance have sensed God has been giving to us as a team. There is something in our unity (not our uniformity) that not only brings pleasure to our Father in heaven but releases a dynamic in mission. Are we willing to put aside some of our preferences, our ways of doing things?

Are we willing to recognise that we are part of one family, the family of God, with one mission, the mission of God? Are we willing to ask ourselves the hard questions? How else can we together reach our villages, towns, cities, schools, universities, neighbourhoods; work and leisure places; our family, friends and neighbours; our nation with the truth of the love of God for each and every one, the Good News of the Gospel? We can't do it on our own, and no single Church, ministry, network or denomination has what it takes. But maybe together we can be part of the answer to the great prayer of Jesus in John 17 and play our part in fulfilling His Great Commission.



Ann Clifford

Are we willing to recognise that we are part of one family with one mission?

See
insert for
details

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