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Agenda for
Change

p18

january/february 2009



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The FIC course has given us a framework that has allowed people to examine their history and lifestyle without fear and humiliation and provide a way for them to walk from the shadows into the certainty of their new life in Christ.

Graham Marsh, Kings Church Eastbourne (New Frontiers)

It has been a great blessing to find a course that combines spiritual development with a powerful healing dynamic...

Canon Steve S Morgan, Christ Church, Merthyr Tydfil

The simple yet profound message of the FIC course has proved to be a turning point in many people's lives.

Melanie Smith, Course Leader Christian Life Centre, Selly Oak, Birmingham

Our people have been encouraged and motivated to move up a gear.

Elizabeth Byrne, Hacketstown Christian Centre, Co Carlow, Ireland

The FIC course makes a real difference.

David Priddy Pastor, Ashford Common Baptist church



Editor's note

Over the past few months, it feels like our world has been changing into a very different place. Financial uncertainty is now hitting every aspect of our lives, from Christmas gift-giving to holiday-planning to making sure the bills get paid at the end of the month. And things are shifting politically as well, with a new president about to take office in America amid promises of a new era of diplomacy and action on such key issues as climate change, terrorism, poverty and justice.

In times like these, it's extremely important to have your friends and family around you. And this is why the Alliance is focussing on community over the next few months. Continuing from Joel Edwards' parting challenge in *An Agenda for Change* (p18), this theme was formally launched at the Temple Address in November (p4), which featured photographs and stories of community interaction throughout the UK (p21).

The challenge for us as Christians is to embrace our wide range of neighbours; people from every country on earth live around us and hold values and beliefs that can't help but be different from ours. They will see Christ when we approach them, accept them and offer them friendship.

This year in *idea*, we'll be looking at how churches can better reach out to local communities by combining mercy, influence, life discipleship and evangelism. Yes, these are pretty big topics, but the Alliance is committed to working *altogether* to challenge and equip the Church to be salt and light in the community. Our neighbours need us now more than ever.

“ We need to remember that we are representing Jesus on our streets ”

evangelical alliance
uniting to change society

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idea magazine is published bimonthly and sent free of charge to members of the Evangelical Alliance. Formed in 1846, the Alliance is the largest body serving evangelical Christians in the UK, and has a membership including denominations, churches, organisations and individuals. The Alliance's mission is to unite evangelicals to present Christ credibly as good news for spiritual and social transformation.

There are around 2 million evangelical Christians in the UK, according to a 2007 Tearfund survey. *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. Story ideas from members are welcome, and will be considered by the editorial board. Unsolicited material will not be returned unless a stamped, self-addressed envelope has been provided. Articles may be reproduced only with permission from the editor.

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Alliance focuses on community

Britain can climb out of recession by abandoning greed and instead investing in neighbourliness and a sense of community, according to the Archbishop of York, Dr John Sentamu.

Speaking at the Alliance's eighth annual Temple Address on 27 November at the Royal Society in London, the Archbishop said that the country had been "poisoned" by "material excess" and "through a lack of a shared big picture". He told the invited audience of 250 that greed has destroyed society.

"While we have all benefited from the economic progress of past decades, the consequences of rampant consumerism and individualism – both economic and social – have been to eradicate the glue that coheres community together," the Archbishop said. "The woes of our current economic climate will bring many challenges over the coming years. Increasing redundancy, home repossessions and a recession will create an economic climate in which the economic givens of recent years can no longer be taken for granted. However, alongside these challenges will be opportunities for re-considering the purposes of our economic wealth."

By the end of 2008, the credit crunch had seen a cut in VAT to 15 per cent, government borrowing hit record levels and the Bank of England slash interest rates to their lowest level since 1955. Unemployment had also hit an 11-year high, rising to 1.82 million.

A post-credit crunch Britain would have to be rebuilt with the old-fashioned

values of "neighbourliness, mercy, community and a sense of service", the Archbishop said. "The opportunity which is before us as a nation is to use this time of crisis to create a renewed shared vision of community based on service rather than caring for number one, on duty rather than entitlement."

He concluded that Britons must put "humankind, nation and our global village" before family, home and career.

Responding to the Archbishop's address,

The opportunity before us is to use this time of crisis to create a renewed shared vision

Mike Talbot, chair of the Alliance Board, said that the British public also had a responsibility to welcome migrants. "Inviting someone you don't know to your home for a meal is a great way to build community," he said. "And I would like, on behalf of the Alliance, to call on everyone here – no matter your background – to give this a try."

"If we realise that we need to re-evaluate who our neighbour is, then we will push ourselves beyond what is comfortable to make space around our table or make enough food for one more plate. After all, we cannot say we love our neighbour unless we positively show that love in action."

The event also marked the launch of the Alliance's *Don't Be a Stranger* campaign, which aims to encourage the British public to build strong communities that are particularly welcoming to migrants. A photographic exhibition looking at migration and the church (see p21) will tour the country throughout the year and is available for bookings. nostrangers.co.uk



ECONOMIC BATTLEGROUND. After Gordon Brown won several rounds of contests with David Cameron over the economy, the Conservatives finally landed a blow by announcing that, to tighten budgets, they would not maintain the projected growth in public spending in 2010–11. It seems Cameron may be tapping into a growing public willingness to accept spending restraint.

When money is easy to find we mind less what the Government is doing with it; when paying the mortgage and feeding your family is a struggle, resentment grows at the seeming profligacy of public spending and the threat of a future rise in taxes to pay for it.

Christians could take this opportunity to show the world around them that money is not the most important part of life. Perhaps at this time of economic difficulty Christians could also model living within their means while maintaining their giving and encourage those around them to do likewise. Our seeming intoxication to indebtedness and reliance upon credit is a dangerous way of life and is surely one of the main causes of the current economic mess.

EUTHANASIA. In November, Liberal Democrat MP Dr Evan Harris secured a 90-minute Westminster Hall debate on assisted dying. While the debate did not relate to any proposed legislation and was not followed by voting, it was nonetheless part of a clear strategy by the euthanasia lobby – led by Dignity in Dying (formerly the Voluntary Euthanasia Society), of which Harris is a leading supporter along with Lord Joffe – to promote assisted dying.

In the debate, Harris repeated the call for individuals to be allowed legal autonomy in deciding when to end their lives. He was principally opposed by Labour MP Dr Brian Iddon, who chairs the Care Not Killing alliance, which seeks to oppose introduction of assisted suicide and voluntary or involuntary euthanasia into UK law, promotes palliative care and works to educate the general public about the issue.

Dr Iddon said, "I do not want physician-assisted suicide to become a treatment option.... How a society treats its dying patients is a litmus test for that society."

This debate will continue. And with Lord Joffe insisting he is preparing to reintroduce a bill in the House of Lords, there is no doubt that those concerned to ensure that euthanasia never gains a foothold in UK law will need to remain alert.

SEX AND RELATIONSHIP EDUCATION. The Alliance, along with Care, Family Education Trust, Christian Concern for Our Nation and others, has been in communication with Schools Minister Jim Knight MP since he announced last February that the Government was going to undertake a review of Sex and Relationships Education Delivery in England.



The primary concern was that the review group might recommend that sex and relationships education (SRE) be made part of the National Curriculum, as opposed to the way it works now, with the required course being decided on a local basis by parents in consultation with governors.

Research demonstrates that SRE benefits from high levels of parental involvement. So rather than define this at the school level, it makes sense to provide for greater parental involvement in SRE than other subjects, rather than letting politicians set the curriculum.

In late October, however, Knight announced that in England SRE will be compulsory for those 5 years and over and placed on the National Curriculum, completely reneging on his earlier commitment to consult. In other words, on this important issue, the Government has eroded parental influence by centralising the curriculum away from parents and governors, and it has done this without consulting parents. It is now very important that parents make it plain to the Government that making such controversial policy changes without a general consultation is completely unacceptable. eauk.org/pq

complicated reality. Despite conventional mythology that abortion and same-sex marriage are the predominant factors in determining the evangelical vote, only one in five felt that these issues best reflected their beliefs. A comparable proportion (18%) felt that an agenda

Splitting the vote

On 20 January, Barack Obama will be inaugurated as the 44th president of the United States, and it is interesting to note that he did more throughout his epic 21-month election campaign to reach out to Christian voters than any Democratic candidate since Jimmy Carter. He is comfortable speaking from the pulpit, and his speeches are often laced with biblical rhetoric.

Exit polls suggested that the evangelical vote went to Obama's Republican opponent due to the key morality issues. But the Faith in Public Life survey revealed a more

focused on poverty and the environment was the most representative outworking of their values. The remaining majority felt that a broad range of policy areas best reflected their position.

Voting in the UK is not polarised by religious belief in the same way that it is in the US. However, as we look towards a general election in the next 18 months, it is important to consider what issues we should be challenging our candidates with. Where do our beliefs impact the world around us and how should we call on our political leaders to make a difference?



Churches take climate action

Micah

Ahead of the UN's climate talks in December, hundreds of UK churches this autumn marked Micah Sunday by calling on the Government to help poor communities that need to adapt to the effects of climate change. The global Christian movement Micah Challenge urged churches to consider the effects of severe storms, heatwaves and rising sea levels, which have the potential to create millions of environmental refugees.

Christians were able to engage through action, worship, sermons and prayers about poverty and social justice, in response to Millennium Development Goal number seven, a commitment to ensuring environmental sustainability. As a result, more than 1,200 postcards were sent to Prime Minister Gordon Brown, calling on him to secure a global deal in December that helps poor communities adapt to the effects of climate change. Without a strong deal, global warming may destroy millions of lives and undo decades of development work.

Globally, Micah Sunday activities included a prayer rally in Kenya, food distribution in Burundi, and the provision of medicine and clothes in the Ivory Coast. "If the Church worldwide can just raise its voice on the issue of extreme poverty, then huge changes can be made," said Andy Clasper, Micah Challenge UK's executive director. "This generation could yet be remembered as the one that wiped extreme poverty from the face of the earth."

Tackling change

Meanwhile, the former chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel of Climate Change, Sir John Houghton (pictured), says that churches must lobby Gordon Brown to



Climate change is a very big problem; the moral imperative is enormous

prioritise tackling climate change, despite the recession. Addressing an Alliance and Tearfund-sponsored event in Cardiff recently, he said, "Climate change is a very big problem and anything we can do about it by lobbying on this issue is vital. The moral imperative is enormous."

Sir John was the keynote speaker at the event at Calvary Baptist Church in Cardiff. He warned that if left unchecked climate change could see a rise of as much as 6 degrees in average world temperatures, causing floods and droughts that would create millions of environmental refugees and jeopardise millions of species.

Sir John said that world leaders have just seven years to halt

carbon emissions. "There's been so much dragging of feet," he said. "We've not been giving tackling climate change the priority it needs. Gordon Brown must not allow the economic downturn to get in the way of really getting on with it." He called on the Prime Minister to live up to his commitment to promote both the economy and the environment together.

"The credit crunch is bad news for climate change if we say that we can't do anything until we have sorted it," he said. "But we can say it gives us an opportunity to look at these things in a new way that makes an impact on the environment and climate change, and also helps with the credit crunch at the same time."

Co-host of the event, Rev Elfed Godding, director of the Alliance in Wales, said, "Being a Gospel people includes dealing with climate change. Consigning people in Bangladesh to death because of our carbon emissions: that's a case of injustice." micahchallenge.org.uk

Supporting environmental Christians

A web-based organisation for Christians working in environmental action was launched in October by Sir John Houghton FRS CBE. Professionals International in Christian Environmental Action (Picea) aims to support environmental professionals around the world in their personal and professional development and through networking to connect individuals and groups.

Picea was created by Simon Penny, founder of Promise Consulting, who said, "There are probably hundreds, if not thousands, of Christians across the globe who are in, or are seeking to become involved in, one type of environmental profession or another. They are motivated by their faith to care for their fellow human, their environment and the world God has given us to live in. Picea is for those people, to help strengthen them in their calling to this vital and important ministry area." joinpicea.org

Science can't bury God

As the skeletal remains of a Tyrannosaurus rex gazed down, Oxford professors Richard Dawkins and John Lennox wrestled with the question "Has science buried God?" During the debate last October, for almost an hour with virtually no moderation, the conversation shifted from the theory of evolution to the location and role of ultimate truth in our universe.

The Oxford University Natural History Museum was packed with fervent supporters from both sides, as well as a few undecided minds who were there for the sport. Most were shocked by Dawkins' early announcement that he could possibly accept an argument for a God who set the world in motion. This wasn't nearly enough to satisfy Lennox or the many Christians in the crowd, but it was a remarkable concession from such an outspoken atheist.

Any hope for common ground was swiftly dashed with Dawkins' insistence that any God who sent His Son to die for insignificant human beings was petty and small-minded. His stock answer to any theological point was that its significance is irrelevant, since it is not true.

Lennox's core argument for the rationality of belief in God is that the universe and its laws, including human life, stem from God as the sophisticated agent behind it all. Something so complex cannot come from something simpler; and there is a coherent design behind our minds that enables us to ask these questions and develop reasoned arguments. This is not just the product of chance.



In his book *Has Science Buried God?*, Lennox debunks the argument that a room of monkeys could have written the works of Shakespeare, emphasising that it is the argument that life came about by chance that lacks intellectual credibility.

Where Dawkins really failed to provide a coherent argument was when the debate shifted to morality. Without a basis for the meaning of life, the structures that form our environment will only ever be relative. We all acknowledge certainties in our life, yet if we remove God perhaps we are left with only death and taxes.

The debate was organised by the Fixed-Point Foundation; a transcript is available at: fixed-point.org *Daniel Webster*

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AN EAST TIMORESE WELCOME. The newest nation in Asia welcomed the world's oldest ship in November, when OM International's Doulos docked in the port of Dili in East Timor. The high-profile visit was officially launched when East Timorese Prime Minister Xanana Gusmão opened the ship's onboard book fair. And later, President Jose Ramos-Horta and his wife made a visit to Doulos and interacted with the vessel's all-volunteer Christian crew. United Nations workers based in the country were also invited to a special programme on the ship, where they learned about the ship's mission to bring knowledge help and hope to the world. During the week-long visit, the Doulos team donated medical supplies and wheelchairs, as well as boxes of educational books and even brightly coloured footballs. More than 33,000 people, including some 3,500 schoolchildren, came on board to see the book fair and witness the multi-national crew's unity and faith. omships.org

Band of brothers gathers in Belfast

One of Europe's biggest men's conferences filled Belfast's Odyssey Arena in November, as 3,000 delegates addressed the theme *The Call: Rediscovering the Life Less Ordinary*. A joint initiative of CARE and EM, The Mandate brought together men from Britain, Ireland and beyond for prayer, worship, support and teaching.

Speaker Colin Dye, of London's Kensington Temple, urged them to become "a life-giving community of people in committed relationships that could really change the world". He added that "this is not about any form of policing one another's lives", noting that "even Jesus had His band of brothers".

Sharing the speaking duties was Adrian Plass, who urged all "failed

Christians" to let God work through them. "Don't let the disciple in you stop the child in you from coming to see Jesus," he said. Workshops also looked at how to reach out to other men and how to handle money.

During the conference, the men also reached out to the street children of Cambodia by giving nearly £18,000 for Phnom Penh-based Hosea Ministries. themandate.net

A liberating resource

The devastating effects of internet pornography are the target of a new resource from CARE. Launched at The Mandate men's conference, *Living Free* follows on from the earlier *Searching for Intimacy* initiative to help those caught up in pornography, including friends and family members. Along with Bible study material, topics covered include identifying and acknowledging the problem, how to find or be a mentor, setting up a support group and protecting your children and family.

In his introduction, CARE Chairman Lyndon Bowring says, "It is my heartfelt prayer that this handbook will encourage and equip church leaders, counsellors and mentors to deal compassionately with those who struggle, and result in many thousands of people living free from the snare of pornography." care.org.uk/livingfree



Investing in change

Christians are being urged to think about using their investments to help eradicate poverty through business enterprise. Prior to the launch of its Transformational Investment Fund this spring, CRU Investment Management is campaigning to create sustainable large businesses in areas of extreme poverty in an effort to generate employment and to stimulate smaller service businesses.

As Kofi Annan said at the African Green Revolution Conference in Oslo last August, "Africa doesn't want charity; Africa wants to produce and to trade."

A pilot project in Malawi, working in commercial agriculture, has generated much more than profit by focusing on the rural areas that are noted internationally as the heart of African poverty. CRU calculates that the pilot scheme impacts positively on an estimated 83,000 people.

According to CRU research, UK denominations and faith charities have well over £12bn in investments, excluding property, while UK Christians are reported to have £15bn in savings. If a small proportion of that can be switched to transformational investments, Christians can address deep underlying reasons for poverty while enjoying good returns. cruim.com

Evangelicals unite in global mission

As part of the global World Evangelical Alliance, the UK Evangelical Alliance is working together to serve and represent the 400 million evangelicals worldwide, seeking to unite the Church in God's global mission. In October, the WEA General Assembly met in Pattaya, Thailand, under the theme *One Lord, One Body, One Voice*, with more than 400 delegates from 85 countries, who gathered to discuss issues facing the Church in the 21st century.

WEA's international director, Dr Geoff Tunnicliffe introduced the conference by stating its vision to see the church in every community effectively living out and proclaiming the good news of Jesus. He said, "Foundational to that vision is an understanding of integral mission: holistic transformation, a proclamation and demonstration of the Gospel."

This was shown powerfully in stories of believers suffering persecution in places like Turkey and Sri Lanka or from leaders in Africa faced with the rampant onslaught of poverty and Aids. Testimonies of Christians sharing God's compassion in those contexts offered practical help. "These reports were a humbling experience," said the Alliance's Churches in Mission Executive Director Krish Kandiah, "but also a challenge and inspiration to find ways for our alliances to work together more effectively."



The UK team also included David Muir, Elfed Godding and Mike Talbot, and the UK Alliance gave gifts to help delegates attend from Croatia, Estonia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Serbia, Tajikistan, Trinidad, Turkey, Uruguay and Zimbabwe.

Christians get streetwise

Through a six-month course, Londoners will be able to learn how to get the Gospel into the marketplace. OAC Ministries (Open Air Campaigners) will run

its *Streetwise* training course one Saturday a month for six months, starting in January. Geared to help busy people effectively share their faith, the course emphasises practical

approaches using creative, visual means. OAC professional evangelists will offer workshops and lectures, as well as providing actual experience. All aspects of evangelistic preaching will be covered, including dealing with objections to the Gospel.

Simon, a previous *Streetwise* graduate, says, "Before this course, I honestly had not realised

that I would be preaching the Gospel. Now I realise that the power of God and His Word are sufficient, and that we just need to make ourselves available and listen to God's guidance."

London Director Peter Kennelly says, "If anyone is keen to share their faith or to work with their local church in outreach, this is the course for them. *Streetwise* aims to sharpen evangelistic skills and develop relevant outreach techniques. Our experience means that we can offer training to effectively communicate the Gospel with children, teenagers and adults." oacgb.org.uk



The Alliance Notice Board (online)

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www.eauk.org/anb



Drama team gets to 'the crux'



A new evangelistic media team, recently established by Youth for Christ, will reach out to young people aged 11 to 16 through drama. The Crux Theatre team (pictured) is based in Nuneaton and Hinckley, and aims to help students achieve more,

increase their self-confidence and take responsibility for their actions, all while meeting curriculum requirements for two Key Stages in four subjects.

The first production is the play *End of My World: Remixed*, written by Paul Birch, which follows a few days in the life of a Frankie, a 14-year-old who feels that his life is in need of a remix. "This fast-paced, physical piece of theatre is ideal for school groups and youth groups, and addresses a number of relevant issues for teenagers," says Coordinator Laura Gill, Crux. "It encourages young people to think about their role within the community, and is a perfect way to generate discussion about a wide variety of issues, including bullying, stereotypes and prejudice, community cohesion and identity."

Crux Theatre offers schools, youth groups and churches packages that suit a variety of budgets. Workshops can be tailored to suit specific needs, including requirements for Drama, PSHE, English and RE courses. yfc.co.uk

Expecting a miracle

Members of several communities met in Old Trafford last November to seek a solution to Manchester's gun and gang problems. St Bride's Church hosted the first in a monthly series of *Urban Miracle* events to reflect on local issues.

Joe Malaika, a community volunteer who is helping to organise the event and is chair of Old Trafford Independent Advisory Group, says, "People from a variety of backgrounds and prayer experiences came to visit and speak to God about issues in different ways according to their comfort level – for example, by lighting candles, writing, verbal prayers, meditation, written quotations and simple quiet moments."

The event aimed to give visitors a calm, neutral space with several stations set up to help facilitate prayer for young people, their families, the agencies that work with them, and the community as a whole. "The title of this event came from the belief that if across the city people are praying, a miracle will occur and there will be less gun and gang violence, more positive expressions of community, and young people using their energy positively," says Malaika. "Organisers hope that other communities, cities and groups will have similar meetings and spread the movement across the UK." Contact: boldsista@hotmail.com

Thacker to chair theological commission



The World Evangelical Alliance Theological Commission has appointed the Alliance's Head of Theology, Dr Justin Thacker, as its new chairman. Thacker

replaces Dr Rolf Hille, who stepped down in October after 12 years in the position.

Thacker joined the Alliance and the WEA Theological Commission in 2007. Trained originally as a medical doctor, specialising in paediatrics, Thacker previously worked as leader of a team assessing healthcare provision for young offenders in England and Wales. Sensing a call to the ministry, took his BA in theology at London School of Theology, and completed a PhD from King's College London. He is the author of *Postmodernism and the Ethics of Theological Knowledge*, a response to the postmodern critique of Christianity, is an ordained elder of the United Reformed Church, and is on the council of Scripture Union.



mediamatters

by Lucy Cooper, Press Officer

Gloomy financial forecasts have reflected the winter weather and cast a large cloud over the news agenda. With the credit crunch and unemployment reaching newsworthy levels it appears the only person without fear of redundancy may be the BBC's business editor, Robert Peston.

In this grim economic situation, it has become commonplace to hear negative spin about immigration, with fear-mongering that migrants will take our jobs and sponge off the state. This left me wondering what impression this gives to migrants when they first arrive in our often unfriendly country.

With a bit of fine-tuned listening over the tabloid din, the Alliance press office has been discovering inspiring and uplifting stories from the people behind the stereotypes. As part of the *Don't Be a Stranger* campaign, I have met individuals who tell a very different story to the one the media presents. It is clear they contribute to Britain's rich tapestry of cultures and that churches are central to the welcome they have received.

There are still existing challenges to confront stereotypes and delve beneath the surface. Rev Arlington Trotman said, "The question still remains as to the extent to which churches are inclusive and the extent to which they appreciate the gifts and skills migrants bring."

For more on this topic, see the story on p21. And you can read the stories by visiting: nostrangers.co.uk



HEAL Africa provides emergency food supplies at a displaced person camp in Masisi, west of Goma.

Agencies unite to help Congo

Leading aid agencies united in November to raise urgently needed funds for people affected by the ongoing violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Launching the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) Congo Crisis Appeal, Chief Executive Brendan Gormley said that while aid was getting through to some people, far more was needed.

By early December, more than 250,000 people had been forced to flee their homes to escape the fighting, adding to more than 1 million people who have been displaced over recent years as tensions have grown. Agencies that make up the DEC – including Alliance members Tearfund and World Vision – were already delivering life-saving food, water, shelter and emergency medical supplies to the victims of the violence.

"The start of the rainy season has meant people living in already desperate conditions are becoming ever more vulnerable," said Gormley. "Our member agencies are already reaching several hundred thousand people, but the need is overwhelming and increasing. We have got to do more."

Development agencies also joined in calls for more United Nations peace-keeping forces to be deployed to the war-torn country. Thousands of orphaned children are at risk in the camps, as are women and girls who are in danger of being raped.

Tearfund spokesman David Bainbridge said, "The UN peace-keeping force needs a strengthened mandate which would allow it

to enforce peace rather than just protect themselves. Local people have been known to stone UN vehicles out of frustration for a lack of intervention to keep any peace. We are working with our partner agencies to help civilians caught up in this, but we need the fighting to stop as soon as possible. Both sides are accused of disregarding the rights and safety of civilians, and humanitarian access must be a priority."

As rebel forces continued to take control of key towns, many thousands of

Congolese have been forced to flee their homes. The UN, which has a 17,000-strong force in the region, said that the fighting was taking a "catastrophic" humanitarian toll on the civilian population.

The east of the Congo has been affected by conflict since the end of a five-year conflict in 2003. It is estimated that 5 million people have died in the country during the fighting, mainly through malnutrition and water-borne diseases. The rebels' leader, Laurent Nkunda, claims to be protecting the minority Tutsi population in the east from militia linked to the genocide in neighbouring Rwanda in the early 1990s. However, some see the control of natural resources in the area, such as gold and coltan (which is used to make mobile phones) as the root of the violence.

Despite the fighting, aid agencies are trying to take provisions into the country. In November, World Vision delivered kits including blankets, shelters, soap and children's clothing to more than 10,000 families.

Mission Aviation Fellowship was flying food and medical supplies to refugee camps in the north of the country. Pilot Dave Jacobsson said, "It was very sad to see the camps from the air and to see destroyed, looted villages."

Meanwhile, diplomatic negotiations continued to try to bring a halt to the violence. dec.org.uk

HS

Five charities raise cash in six minutes

More than £90,000 was pledged to five innovative Christian charities at the second Cross Pollinate networking and fundraising event in central London in late November. Around 50 Christian philanthropists gathered at Barclays Wealth in Mayfair, where five charities' representatives had six minutes to explain what they could achieve with £5,000. The philanthropists then had six minutes to question the charities before pledges of both practical and financial support were offered.

The five charities, selected by an independent panel, were Open Door (North East), which assists asylum seekers and refugees on Tyneside; Clear International, which offers pro bono legal aid to promote

justice for prisoners in East Africa; Bridging the Gap, which aims to get sex workers off the streets of Southampton; Kidz Klub in Liverpool, which teaches youngsters about God; and the Funzibodo Trust, which supports development work on the island of Funzi and port of Bodo on the eastern coast of Kenya.

The Cross Pollinate funding network was set up by Christian entrepreneurs Matt Bird (Make It Happen) and Ian Wilkins (Alvor Charitable Trust), who have a vision to help fund and resource small Christian charities and to encourage intuitive and communal giving. The next Cross Pollinate meeting will take place on 26 March at Pricewaterhouse Cooper in London. crosspollinate.co.uk

Using technology for outreach

A growing collection of resources is being offered in advance of this year's Internet Evangelism Day, 26 April, during which churches are encouraged to examine the potential of the web in sharing the good news. Even as web-based outreach continues to expand, many churches are unaware of the possibilities. There's a range of freely downloadable ideas and resources for an internet evangelism awareness slot in a church service, anywhere from one minute to one hour long. These include video clips, a PowerPoint presentation, drama sketches, MP3 music and handouts. There's also a self-assessment tool to help churches make sure that their websites are effectively reaching out into the community.

In addition, a Guide Network is linking with Internet Evangelism Day, Global Christian Internet Alliance, the Lausanne Movement and visionSynergy to share information and encourage collaboration among churches. And there's even a page that lists the many opportunities for reaching out to people using mobile phones. internetevangelismday.com



LONDONERS GET A HELPING HAND.

Christians brightened up a dull late-October morning by gathering on the Millennium Bridge to launch World Vision School Aid, a year-long partnership between World Vision and the National Association of Head Teachers. Now in its second year, School Aid is an educational and fundraising campaign aimed at raising awareness among school children about global poverty, social responsibility and giving – showing how they, as global citizens, can help to make a

difference. After visiting World Vision projects in Pathanamthitta, India, NAHT President Clarissa Williams said, "Poverty is ugly, but the people are beautiful and somehow many seem to rise above their lot in life. I shall be eternally grateful to World Vision for inviting me to go with members of their staff to see for myself the work they do in a country that is trying hard to bring about transformation despite many obstacles and challenges." schoolaid.tv

Hope unleashed in Stockport

More than 700 young people crammed into The Plaza in Stockport Town Centre at the end of October for a hope-filled concert featuring pop, rock, hip-hop and R&B music from LZ7 (pictured), thebandwithaname and Blush-UK.

Organised by Christian youth charity the Message Trust in partnership with Stockport Christians in Schools Trust and

local churches, the concert came on the back of visits by the bands to local schools, where they supported religious education lessons looking at the theme of hope in relation to the Christian faith and the difference this can make to lives and communities.

This was just one in a series of similar projects designed to mobilise young people to help local communities in and around Greater Manchester as part of Hope08.

Andy Hawthorne, chief executive of the Message Trust, said, "Hope 08 has the potential to be a catalyst for lasting social action and good news. As Christians in Greater Manchester, we want to celebrate the great stories of hope through activities, like this schools week in Stockport, and we want to inspire young people to build a movement of hope for this city."

message.org.uk



Creation survey reveals diversity

A recent Alliance survey examining views on creation has revealed little change in the proportion who believe that the world was created in six literal 24-hour days. Of the 630 member churches that responded to the email survey, 36.3 per cent accept this view, compared to 36.9 per cent 10 years ago. The survey also examined beliefs on the age of the universe and the origin of human life, noting that the number of churches that believe that the Biblical account of creation is intended to be symbolic has risen from 27.5% in 1998 to 34.5% today.

Concerning the origin of human life, 67% believe the best explanation is special creation by God on the sixth day. However, comments on this question revealed that many considered that this may not have been a literal sixth day. A further 15.7% believe the best explanation is intelligent design, while 16.9% opted for Darwin's theory of evolution made possible by a creator God. Only 2.1% of churches opted for "don't know". This contrasts with 35% who chose this option with regard to the age of the universe. While 26.4% of churches considered the universe to be less than 10,000 years old, 38.5% believe it to be billions of years old.

"We acknowledge the diverse range of evangelical views on this issue," said the Alliance's Head of Theology Justin Thacker. "What matters in all of this is that evangelicals remain absolutely committed to the full authority and primacy of Scripture. While evangelicals will, no doubt, continue to hold different interpretations of the particular passages that speak to this issue, all of us can continue to confess

our belief and trust in the one God who created the universe and everything in it, even if we are not in full agreement on how precisely He did it."

eauk.org/theology



Can Non-violence Be Cool?

19 Jan, London

Taking place on Martin Luther King Day, this conference, sponsored by the Peace Alliance and St Ethelburgas, aims to challenge the culture of violent street crime in vulnerable communities in London. Bringing together key leaders in the city, the conference will take a deeper look at how the insights and wisdom of great spiritual and historical peacemakers can inspire and equip young people today to refuse violence. The day forms part of an ongoing dialogue with young people and community workers surrounding these issues. stethelburgas.org

Homelessness Sunday

25 Jan

For 15 years organisations such as Housing Justice and Scottish Churches Housing Action have partnered to run this campaign, bringing together thousands of churches through prayer and reflection and drawing attention to the devastating effects of homelessness. homelessness-sunday.org.uk

Launch of National Family Week

28 Jan, Westminster

National Family Week is a national initiative to celebrate family life in Britain. Involving not-for-profit organisations, companies and families across the country, the campaign will culminate in a week of activities encouraging families to spend time together. Ed Balls MP, Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, and Dr Tanya Byron, psychologist, author and presenter, will be among those speaking at the launch event, which will also encourage dialogue between senior representatives from a whole host of organisations that see family as a priority within their agenda. nationalfamilyweek.co.uk

Association of Christian Counsellors National Conference

29 Jan-1 Feb, Swanick

In addition to topics of bereavement and loss, workshops will explore such areas as street culture, domestic violence and family therapy. Training will also focus on community within the pastoral context as well as how to deal with issues of self-esteem, anxiety and depression. acc-uk.org

Women's Conference

31 Jan, Kennington

With a passion for changing the world one child at a time, Sheiba Mbabzi of Compassion UK will share her personal testimony of how growing up in Uganda and being sponsored as a child changed her life. She will also share more about Compassion's work in improving the lives of impoverished children around the world. The breakfast will include food, worship, prayer and a question and answer time. Contact: caroline@levitt7.orangehome.co.uk

European Leaders Conference

13-16 Feb, Oxford

Sponsored by Salt and Light, this leaders conference will centre on the theme "encountering God to impact His world". With a focus on God's dynamic, God's heart, God's Word and God's vision, the conference will encourage leaders to breakthrough from passivity into faith and to transform their churches to impact society. Speakers will include, among others, Caroline Cox, Dave Perry and Krish Kandiah, the Alliance's Churches in Mission executive director, who will present a seminar on proclaiming the Gospel to a new generation. saltlight.org/europe

New Word Alive

30 Mar-4 Apr, North Wales

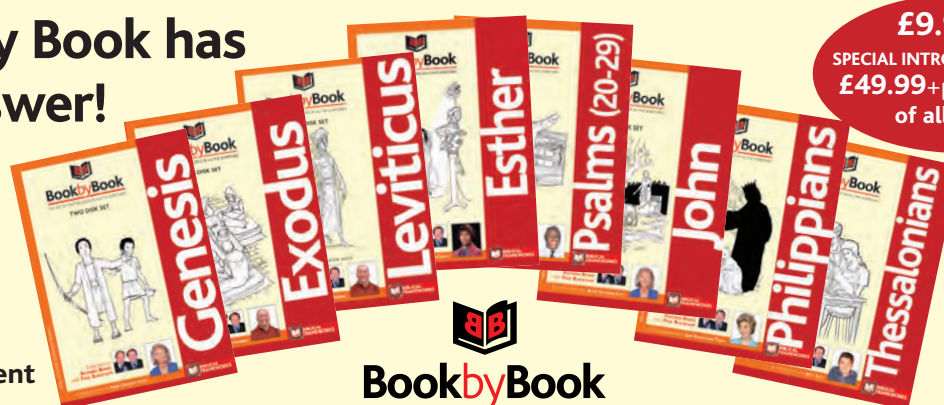
New Word Alive's conference has the goal of "serving the Church, reaching the world". The aim is to resource individuals and churches, empowering them in their mission to local communities. Their first conference this year will feature worship from Stuart Townend and Sam Parker, plus training tracks on how to read the Bible for understanding and how to hear God speak. Don Carson from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Illinois will deliver the keynote address. newwordalive.org

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Treasure in a field

Local Christians work alongside bicycle *fundis* (repairmen) as they practice their trade in Muhanda, Kenya.

Dr Jim Harries, chairman of Alliance for Vulnerable Mission, and Dr Richard Briggs, director of biblical studies at St John's College Durham, tell a missionary parable...

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field (Matthew 13.44).

Did you ever wonder what this man did next? Well, he soon heard that there was another field just around the corner: a mission field. This was exciting news, so he leased out some of the first field to generate assets and funded a trip to the mission field.

He had some misgivings – the field with the treasure wasn't really supposed to be an income-generating investment, it was meant to be the place of joy and rest for his weary heart – but surely it would be worth it if he could persuade some people in the other field to come and join him?

Newly empowered, he went to the mission field and built a visitor centre with large displays of the treasure he had found back home, guidebooks to pearls we have loved, classes and seminars on foreign pearls, and a fine air-conditioned restaurant. It was the biggest thing going in the mission field: a shiny new project that attracted the locals for miles around.

Soon he had to ship in staff to run the visitor centre – experts, consultants, accountants, cooks and teachers who understood the project, unlike the locals. The opportunities were immense. They didn't all have time to learn the language,

but no problem, they could employ local translators who would be glad of the money. People rolled up in huge numbers.

But the costs were never-ending. The locals found themselves competing for the most prestigious jobs. Those who came to work brought stressful work patterns. And the original field was now a business centre rather than a haven for the weary.

The shiny new project attracted the locals for miles around

Then one day the man packed up, set off to another field and started again. With no money or resources to share, no grand-plan, no infrastructure and no imported agenda except to share Christ with those he came to. He let them teach him how they spoke, how they thought, how they longed and loved and learned and laughed. And he told them about this treasure that warmed the heart and satisfied the soul.

When one day they asked for this treasure, he suddenly realised that the treasure was buried in their field too. So they got to digging together and began to uncover it. But they couldn't quite dig it out until they sold everything they had and bought the field.

Helping people dig

Fortunately, there are mission practitioners who would rather help people dig up pearls than import pearl-processing machines. It is so easy in mission work to get drawn into thinking for people rather than with them, and to buy into people's lives (even unwittingly, with the best intentions) because the offer of some new project or benefit just looks too much like Western success to be refused. Even simple knowledge of the English language is often perceived as a golden key to undreamed of riches, a key greatly to be coveted for reasons unrelated to the treasure in anyone's field.

In response, the Alliance for Vulnerable Mission advocates that some missionaries (or development workers) run their ministry or project using neither a foreign language nor outside resources. Doing their work face-to-face using local languages and resources may be slow and sometimes frustrating, but projects governed without external finance and directed by locals bring a refreshing freedom.

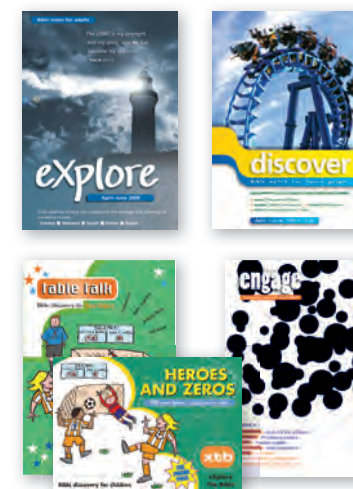
Discussion turns from finance to deeper issues: commitment, how to navigate anger or find forgiveness, what it really means to live with a passion for the God of heaven and earth.

► Conferences exploring the idea of vulnerable mission will be held 13 February in Andover and 10 March at Cliff College, Derbyshire. For details, visit: vulnerablemission.com

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There is no reason why the word 'evangelical' cannot be rehabilitated to mean good news once again

Laying foundations for the future

Before leaving the Alliance, Rev Joel Edwards issued a strong challenge to British evangelicals. Ian Wedd looks at where we are going from here

If November's election of Barack Obama as president of the United States tells us anything, it is this: that despite the technology and media age we live in, there is nothing quite as effective as a great orator with a powerful vision speaking to a gathering of attentive people with a hunger for change.

It was in this spirit that Joel Edwards,

rather than putting his feet up as he approached his final days as general director last summer, pulled on his walking shoes and set off on an often exhausting speaking tour of the United Kingdom, outlining the Alliance's vision for the future of evangelicalism, a vision he called *An Agenda for Change*.

This vision was realistic in its

expectations. It admitted that we want to see the spiritual and social transformation of our society, but that like the great cathedrals of old we must have a long-term time perspective and accept that we may only lay the foundations for the generations to follow.

At each venue people were asked to write on small plastic bricks their commitments to being good news in their local community. These went on to form the building blocks for our very own cathedral. By the end of the tour, it would be over four feet high and feature a

thousand bricks with personal messages, including one in Chinese from Brother Yun.

Many churches were inspired to action by what they heard. Geoff Felton, minister at St Andrew's Canterbury, said, "As a church we found the conversation aspect of *An Agenda for Change* to be very important, especially in engaging with evangelicals in the wider society. It's one thing to sit back and watch others talk about making a difference but it's another thing to actually be involved."

As a result of Joel's visit the church has committed to continuing the conversation, with a regular breakfast group and plans for an annual event.

Looking forward

While Joel may have moved on from the Alliance, this vision is also at the heart of the Alliance's new strategic plan, which looks forward to the next few years. This is fleshed out in new initiatives such as the Square Mile resource and an expanded media network and web-based resources.

Square Mile will be a way for churches to look to their local community and ask how they can be more effective to those that live and work in a one-mile radius of the church. It offers four simple categories – which helpfully spell M-I-L-E – that allow a church to explore how it can serve local people more effectively: mercy (demonstrating God's compassion to the poor), influence (being salt and light in the public life of the community), life discipleship (equipping Christians for missional living as workers and neighbours), and evangelism (faithful and relevant communication of the Gospel). As *An Agenda for Change* called for unity between the left, right and centre of evangelical thought, Square Mile will



express this balance through its focus on integral mission.

The extended media network and web-based resources will aim to create a one-stop internet access point for journalists, politicians, evangelicals and even those who would seek to discredit us, outlining what we really believe and telling of the community-building initiatives we are involved with up and down the country. The network will be an interactive hub, offering information but also looking for feedback and discussion.

Let's talk

The *Agenda for Change* tour was a kick-start for this ongoing vision. And far from being a top-down lecture, it was in fact always intended to be the beginning of a conversation between evangelicals – across both the nation and the theological spectrum. This is a conversation about how we work through the challenge to present Christ credibly as good news for the long-term social and spiritual transformation of our nations.

Joel spoke at 25 venues to 3,000 people. He signed more than 500 books. Many new members were inspired to join the Alliance and become part of the transformation we want to see. The tour began in the fine spring sunshine of Canterbury and ended in the muddy fields

of Greenbelt, where more than 2,000 people offered him their warm applause.

It went as far west as Swansea, north to Edinburgh, east to Norwich and south to Southampton. The hotel rooms may all have looked strangely similar, but every audience was different. And yet there was a sense of unity as people in each venue responded to Joel's message and discussed how they could take action in their area.

Joel's vision is a rich legacy that he has left to us. It is a vision with a truly bold aim: nothing less than the spiritual and social transformation of our nations. We may be daunted as we ask ourselves "Can we do it?" But to borrow a line from a certain new president, "Yes we can!"

► Joel Edwards' book *An Agenda for Change* (Zondervan) is available from bookshops and online. You can join the conversation at: anagendaforchange.com



Defining An Agenda for Change

While the word "evangelical" may have a PR problem in some circles, there is no reason

why it cannot be rehabilitated to mean good news once again. In his book, Joel explored the different theological strands of evangelical thought – left, right, centre – and explained that each has something of value to teach the other and we are better together than we are apart. He stated that we must not be ashamed to present the Christ of Scripture, whose claims of absolute truth will often be an offence to our culture. But while we present Him boldly we must also present Him credibly and not force Him into our own narrow moral agendas. We must realise that He might well have identified Himself more closely with Make Poverty History than with a demonstration about sexual orientation. And we must also remember that Christ was a conversationalist. Rather than hectoring dogma, Jesus' way of discourse and loving engagement will always be the path we must follow.



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in all circumstances
in the office
when I'm feeling down
in adversity
doing the washing
when I'm sick
in the car
in my retirement
in the face of persecution
while raising my kids
explaining the gospel
at the school gates
while watching TV
on a Friday night
when I'm feeling down
while I write my dissertation
on a Monday morning
walking the dog
authentically
in all circumstances
when I'm feeling down
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Other speakers confirmed:

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Who is your neighbour?



In November, the Alliance held a series of events to examine the concept of community in the light of immigration issues. *Charis Gibson reports...*

Don't be a stranger." Many of us will have said this affectionately to our families and friends as we parted company from them after the Christmas holidays. But Jesus doesn't ask us just to love those we would naturally share Christmas dinner with. Instead, He challenges us to re-evaluate who our neighbours are and to welcome those we consider strangers.

The Alliance's annual Temple Address in November, along with the accompanying photographic exhibition, website and other events, was a chance to remind ourselves of the Judeo-Christian injunction to help the stranger. Migration is one of the biggest media and political issues

facing Britain today, and many Christians told us stories about how they are helping, supporting and loving these new neighbours.

Church and integration

Filling out forms, negotiating with landlords, even understanding basic English – churches who work with migrants are discovering how huge these obstacles can be for them.

Major David Blowers, from the Salvation Army in Margate, works with Czech and Slovak migrants, particularly Roma, teaching English or helping them fill in forms to being on the streets with them. "Sometimes the problem is simply

Names (left to right):
Anthony Maka, Naua Fa'uhiwa,
Arthur Crane MBE (former
secretary of Pontypool RFC),
Kuli Faletau, Sonatane Ha'unga,
Fe'ao Vunipola
Country of origin: Tonga
Place of residence: Thornbury
Occupation: rugby players
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that they don't speak English well enough to get everything sorted out," he says. "Sometimes it is a cultural thing or sometimes not understanding the system. We give a lot of advice."

In Northern Ireland, a cross-denominational group of Christians came together in 2001 to found the organisation Embrace, which promotes a positive response to migrants.

Rev Richard Kerr, a Presbyterian minister and Embrace committee member, says, "People's views on refugees and asylum seekers are often more informed by *The Daily Mail* than the Bible."

Mavis Henry, a nurse from South Africa, was imprisoned by immigration authorities when she first arrived in Northern Ireland, because of problems with her visa. On her release, she stayed with Christians, including Richard's family, for a few months while she got on her feet.

"Christians fight for our human rights as a person and embrace you as a person," she says. "How many

People's views on refugees and asylum seekers are often more informed by *The Daily Mail* than the Bible

people have strangers in their homes when they don't know anything about them? They took that risk when they took me in – they didn't know me – that is being a Christian."

Church and community

"The church was influential in us settling in," says Phuoc Tan Diep. "They were a God-send. They came and gave us clothes and whatever we needed. We didn't have anything; it was an empty house. It was amazing. We went

to church and there was a lot of support and help from them. Our only family holiday was the Lake District, and they provided it for us."

Phuoc was just 3 years old when his family fled war-torn Vietnam, arriving in Wolverhampton in 1978, but the church's kindness to his family made a lasting impression.

Nelu Balaj arrived in the UK from Romania as a student in 1992 and is now the racial justice officer for Action of Churches Together in Scotland. "We have been working with migrant Christians and ethnic minority churches to help people feel at home in their churches," he says, "because a lot of people want to work and be a part of the scene in the church in the UK, but they don't know how to. We believe it is essential to help them feel empowered as equal partners with so-called traditional churches."

The Alliance, along with European Christian Mission, Fellowship of Churches of Christ in the UK and Global Connections, is currently consulting with the Polish Evangelical Alliance and English churches and agencies involved with Polish migrants.

Dr Krish Kandiah, the Alliance's Churches in Mission executive director, says, "We want to resource UK churches so that they can support Polish workers here, and to start a conversation between British and Polish churches to examine how we can forge better links with each other."

Church and worship

We may all be worshipping the same God, but when migrants arrive in the UK they can soon find the different expressions of worship an extra culture shock, especially if they can't understand what's being said.

Christians across Britain are working out their own ways of accommodating new cultures of worship. Rev Irfan John, who works with ethnic minority congregations in Wales for the Methodist Church, recently started Cardiff's first Urdu worship service.

"I prefer to worship in an Urdu worship service rather than an English one, because I understand my own language 100 per cent, and English is my fourth language," he says.



Wesleyan Christian Centre pastor, Rev Elson Parris, may be a Barbadian living in North London, but that doesn't stop him also overseeing a Portuguese congregation. The church has an English service in the morning and a Portuguese one in the evening, with a monthly joint celebration.

"We help them to integrate by having the different services, which helps them get used to the surroundings and the different culture and cultural mix," he says. "We try to create an atmosphere where each culture can engage and enjoy each other."

Church and advocacy

Working with asylum seekers proved to be a watershed for Dave Smith in terms of his attitude to campaigning. "I was fairly non-political until this issue came up for me," he says. "I then realised that Christians need to be political beings as well as spiritual ones. Jesus never made a distinction; nor should we. He was very political and challenged the rulers of His time."

Dave is director of the Boaz Trust, which supports asylum seekers in the North West of England. As well as giving practical care, Boaz promotes justice for asylum seekers and refugees and campaigns for changes in asylum legislation to make it easier for asylum seekers to get legal aid.

The Boaz Trust is one of the organisations the Alliance met with in 2007 before compiling a report on asylum using evidence from translators, pastors, asylum seekers and transcripts of asylum

interviews and legal appeals.

That report, *Alltogether for Asylum Justice*, highlights the difficulties faced by people claiming asylum on religious grounds. The report includes advice for church leaders and provides guidance for MPs and their case workers, to give them a better understanding of asylum claims on religious grounds.

Rev David de Verny, a former Church of England chaplain to migrant workers in Boston, Lincolnshire, believes passionately that Christians must take action on injustice. "We don't have any national, well-known figures that speak out on behalf of migrant workers," he says. "And that is where I think the churches must lead. Otherwise, we betray Jesus."

Church and evangelism

"Christians need to recognise that we are a family, born and created in the image of God," says Rev Arlington Trotman. "That is our common identity. Regardless of culture, colour, political or religious background, we are one people under God."

As a Methodist minister, Arlington has been working on migration, asylum and racial justice issues for more than 10 years, and runs the Churches Commission for Migrants in Europe. His words reflect the motivation that drives Christians across the country to serve, welcome, fight for and honour the migrant in their communities.

Major David Blowers says that in Margate, social action came first, followed by evangelism. "There were people who trusted us and more people who would come and ask us questions, and we were able to help

Name: Dave Smith
Country of origin: UK
Place of residence: Manchester
Occupation: director of the Boaz Trust
Photo by: Dawie Verwey



Name: Rev Irfan John
Country of origin: Pakistan
Place of residence: Cardiff
Occupation: synod enabler for the Methodist Church
Photo by: Dawie Verwey

ON THE COVER
Name: Maron Ehata
Country of origin: Democratic Republic of Congo
Place of residence: Manchester
Occupation: Cross Refugee Service; volunteer, Boaz Trust
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In *Gran Torino*, Clint Eastwood (right) plays a war veteran who tries to reform the Hmong neighbour (Doua Moua) who tried to steal his car.

Talking about... neighbours

Whether we are talking from a pulpit or over a garden fence, *Tony Watkins* helps us to give relevant answers to the big issues raised by contemporary popular culture...

Love your neighbour is probably the most famous biblical commandment. But what if my neighbour plays hip-hop at midnight? What if my neighbour doesn't like me?

There was a time when we thought neighbours were a good thing. We would chat over garden fences, pop round for a

coffee, keep a protective eye on each other. Now we're more ambivalent. Neighbours can be noisy, messy, even hostile. The phrase "neighbours from hell" is firmly embedded in our culture. One reason why many people long for a rural retreat is the desire to escape from uncomfortable urban neighbours. But bad neighbours can be anywhere.

Three key changes have created this problem with neighbours. And the issue is bound up with the nature of the modern world, affecting rural areas as well as cities.

The first and most obvious is the change in lifestyles. People generally work much further from their homes than they used to, so they spend less time there. They leave

early and return late. And women are far more likely to be out at work, so they're not around to bump into others and nurture friendships.

Meanwhile, leisure time is spent watching television rather than chatting at the pub. When we go out, it's often with friends from work rather than from next door. We just don't interact much with others at a local level. Neighbourhoods used to be communities; now they're mere areas.

A second factor is having more technology in our lives. A radio's tiny speaker might be heard through the wall, but a music system can disturb a whole street. Televisions glow from every room in the house. Power tools, strimmers and more all intrude into our lives and disturb our increasingly fragile tranquillity.

But the third change is the most significant. We have become a society in which we put ourselves first and others a poor second. And this shift has been gathering pace for a long time as Christian values are pushed to one side.

Sigmund Freud, one of the key influences on the last century, believed that it was right to put ourselves first. In *Civilisation and Its Discontents*, he argued that it is not only hard to love your neighbour, it would "be wrong to do so". The neighbour, he said, is "unworthy of my love" and "has more claim to my hostility and even my hatred".

Stranger danger

By focusing on our own needs and desires, we begin to see the neighbour as someone who might impinge on our rights, rather

than as someone to whom we have responsibilities. When a neighbour builds a huge catamaran in his garden, parks across our drive or keeps the volume on full, we feel that there has been some incursion into our sovereignty. Our view, our space, our peace has been invaded. Our rights have been violated.

**Neighbourhoods
used to be
communities; now
they're mere areas**

This is the situation facing Clint Eastwood's character, Walt Kowalski, in *Gran Torino*. He plays a grouchy, racist Korean War veteran who resents the influx of East Asians into his neighbourhood. Things come to a head when his Hmong neighbour tries to steal his prized car, and Walt sets about trying to reform the young man. It turns out to be a process that changes him too.

This raises a very important question: what ethical responsibilities does a neighbour have? We can quickly reel off a list of things our neighbours should do: Turn it down! Clean it up! Leave me alone! But we're neighbours too, and we're always more reluctant to consider what responsibilities we have.

Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan in response to a follower who wanted to put limits on the command to "love your neighbour as yourself". The stranger who showed mercy was the

neighbour to the one in need, despite the hostility between their peoples. Jesus' point is that we have an obligation to love other people as ourselves, whether or not they live next door.

But what does it mean to love others as ourselves? It means doing for them what we would like someone to do for us in the same situation. We call this the Golden Rule, but only Jesus expresses it positively (Matthew 7.12). Other ethical traditions express it negatively: don't do to others what you don't want them to do to you. The negative version stops us upsetting people; Christ's positive version is transforming.

Will Smith's character understands this in *Seven Pounds*. He has wrecked his life in seven seconds, so he decides to make a difference in seven strangers' lives. And Robert Downey Jr's character in *The Soloist* understands this when he goes out of his way to help a down-and-out musician (Jamie Foxx) with mental health problems, although there's a sense that the musician's wasted talent makes him somehow more deserving of help.

It's not enough to restrain ourselves from behaving in anti-social ways or from responding angrily to our neighbours' transgressions. Restraint doesn't deal with underlying attitudes. But actively showing love to others can begin to help.

In other words, Freud was wrong. Love is not just for those who earn it or who we think have a natural right to it. No, love must be for our neighbours too. It's the only way our neighbourhoods will be transformed into genuine communities once more.

► Find out more about the issues raised in this article at: damaris.org/ideamagazine
► Toolsfortalks.com contains quotes and illustrations taken from the latest films, music, magazines and TV – updated weekly.

Tony Watkins is resources and training co-ordinator for the Damaris Trust



A homeless, Julliard-trained musician (Jamie Foxx) is befriended by a journalist (Robert Downey Jr) in *The Soloist*.



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Film clips

The appeal of cinema crosses most of society's boundaries. And since films often examine important themes, they can spark lively conversation with neighbours about something more important than the weather. The following aren't for family viewing, but they can ignite discussion about significant issues...



CHE (15) is an ambitious two-part biopic about the iconic revolutionary Ernesto "Che" Guevara (Benicio Del Toro). Part 1 intercuts his involvement in Castro's Cuban revolution with his time meeting the press and the UN in New York, while Part 2 is a more straightforward account of his final year as he tried to raise the same rebel forces in Bolivia. The riveting filmmaking quietly shows how even the noblest ideologies wither in the face of human ambition (2 Jan/20 Feb).



SLUMDOG MILLIONAIRE (15) is a pure crowd-pleaser, but it also has a serious undercurrent as its story is set amid heavy class bigotry in Mumbai, where a young slum-dweller (Dev Patel) discovers that the events of his childhood have prepared him for the Indian version of *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*. But what makes the film truly special is that after all of the grim violence and horror of his life, it's not actually about winning the cash. A true must-see movie (9 Jan).



ROLE MODELS (15) targets its vulgar comedy at adults while subtly making a strong point about how children need us to find creative ways to reach them where they are. On the surface, it's an hilariously gross-out romp about two slackers (likeable duo Paul Rudd and Seann William Scott) court-ordered to work in a mentoring programme with two troubled kids. But it's also a remarkably sensitive story of two young men who finally sort out their priorities (9 Jan).



RACHEL GETTING MARRIED (15) stars Anne Hathaway as Kym, who gets out of rehab so she can attend her sister's wedding. Of course, her behaviour sets everyone on edge, mainly because of their expectations, but also because she's shockingly honest. The excellent cast, which includes Debra Winger, astutely explores the rich mixture of love and resentment that exists in any group of family and friends. It's tough, truthful and sometimes uncomfortably realistic (23 Jan).



FROST/NIXON (15) is a Hollywood adaptation of Peter Morgan's award-winning play about the clash of egos when David Frost (Michael Sheen) landed the first post-resignation interview with Richard Nixon (Frank Langella). Fortunately, Morgan's engagingly intelligent dialogue and insight survive the big-budget approach. And the acting is first-rate, really digging beneath the skin to examine the point where each man realises his whole future is at stake (23 Jan).



WENDY AND LUCY (12) evocatively explores the concept of community, as Wendy (Michelle Williams) and her dog Lucy are stranded in an Oregon town on their way to a new life in Alaska. Wendy finds most people are more interested in policies and rules than helping a woman in need. But she's also surprised by those who come to her rescue. This gives the film a resilient sense of hope to underscore its frank depiction of alienation in modern society (6 Feb). **RC**

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In our 11-part series looking at how the Alliance's Basis of Faith is Good News for our neighbours, *Susannah Clark* discusses...

8. The ministry of **God the Holy Spirit** who leads us to repentance, unites us with Christ through new birth, empowers our discipleship and enables our witness..

Susannah Clark is the Alliance's public theology research assistant



This series is not a commentary on the Basis of Faith, neither is it an explanation of how the Basis is interpreted by the Alliance. Rather, it focuses on the relevance of the Basis to spreading the Good News.

It is a staple of evangelical conviction that mission is impossible without the power of the Holy Spirit. This is immediately clear in Jesus' own life. In Luke 3.22, at the start of His public ministry, the Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus at His baptism. Jesus then returns from the temptations in the desert in Luke 4 full of the Holy Spirit and goes on to declare in His paradigmatic statement in the synagogue in Nazareth: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor" (Luke 4.18).

Such is the importance of this empowerment that Jesus tells His disciples not to embark on their mission until they have received this power: "I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24.49). This is precisely the example that Jesus Himself followed.

New Testament scholar Max Turner describes it like this: "In Luke 3-4 the Spirit then comes as Jesus' messianic empowering for the redemptive mission, while Pentecost brings a parallel endowment for the Church's mission, over which the Spirit remains the initiator, the driving power, the guide in significant decisions and the legitimator of the whole endeavour, especially at its most delicate points."

In Acts 1.8, the power of the Holy Spirit is promised again to the disciples as giving them power to "be witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth". Jesus indicates that we should expect to receive this power, and of course the disciples did receive it at Pentecost in Acts 2.

The problem, though, is that too often we either think of the Spirit as a mediator of a good spiritual feeling or ecstatic experience or we avoid reflection on the Spirit's role at all.

An unusual experience

When the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, those present certainly did have an unusual experience. Yet the purpose of that experience was to empower them to be witnesses for Christ. When the disciples spoke in many tongues by the power of the Spirit, it caused those present to be "amazed and perplexed" and to ask what it meant. This then gave Peter the opportunity to address the crowd, to explain and preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Similarly, when Acts 5.12 reports the many signs and wonders being carried out by the apostles, it is followed by the statement, "Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number."

So the New Testament pattern, especially in Luke and Acts, is that those who are filled with the Spirit are empowered for mission (see Acts 4.31, for example). Indeed, it is precisely for this reason that Jesus was so clear that we are to wait for the Spirit before embarking on our mission (Luke 24.49).

We must not forget, however, that long before we even begin to speak we require the Spirit to be at work in others. No matter how impressive our preaching, how creative our PowerPoint presentation, how powerful our testimony, how good our worship band, if the Spirit of God is not at work in people's hearts, we cannot expect them to accept the message.

Acts 11.15 records that as Peter was speaking, the Holy Spirit came on the gentiles present, allowing them to hear the message that God had granted them repentance and given them life. It even says that they "had no further objections".

The Spirit thus both enables our witness and causes people to hear the message, the importance of which Max Turner stresses: "Only through the Spirit can the ongoing messianic/transformational

reign of Jesus continue to be experienced by His people."

Further evidence of this is given in 1 Corinthians 12.3, which says, "Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, 'Jesus be cursed', and no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord', except by the Holy Spirit."

We can expect no one to accept Jesus Christ as Lord without the Holy Spirit working in them.

It would seem that the ministry of the Holy Spirit is in a sense circular, a continual spiral through history: The Spirit has to work first in us to hear and accept the message of



Too often we think of the Spirit as a mediator of a good spiritual feeling or ecstatic experience

good news, to repent, to unite us with Christ through new birth. Having been united with Christ, we are empowered in our discipleship by the Spirit and can witness to others. The Spirit works, then, in both us and them to lead them to repentance and unity with Christ, and in turn to witness. In this way, the work of the Spirit continues through history, calling each generation afresh to repentance, new birth, discipleship and witness.

► See also Max Turner's article, *The Work of the Holy Spirit in Luke-Acts*: luke-acts.notlong.com

► The Alliance's full Basis of Faith can be found at: eauk.org/faith

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Firing on both cylinders

The Nov/Dec *idea* was another great edition of a rare magazine that I try to read from cover to cover each time. The article on Morningside Baptist Church (*Obsessed with the Word*, p15) was very informative and of interest to anyone hungry for revival.

Although I have one slight criticism with the title: I think it should have read *Spirit, Word, Witness Obsession*. Many churches are obsessed with either the Word (an intellectual bent) or the Spirit (an emotional bent) but what we need is balanced firing on both those cylinders, and then of course witness (outward-looking).

As the pastor put it so ably in your article, "We have an obsessional missional focus." David P French, by email

Fighting ignorance

In reference to recent articles about the outreach and challenge to Britain's Muslim community, my impression is that the Church is not very active towards Muslims and is generally quite ignorant as to how to approach this seemingly difficult group of people. Unfortunately the media and politicians are both quite ignorant of their history and doctrine as well. They often back down rather than confront them, and at the same time are becoming more secular and anti-Christian.

This is certainly not encouraging to the Church, but it really requires addressing by them. So may I be so bold as to request that churches need to educate their congregations about Islam and how to reach out to Muslims. We could also look into placing biblical text on transport across the country – not just John 3.16, but verses 16–18.

Richard Broadhurst, Cumbria

Take old folks seriously

Once again I am saddened to read of the emphasis put on young people in the Nov/Dec edition of *idea* (*Council Emphasises Young Leaders*, p4).

I look back on my Christian life more than 30 years ago, when I first became a Christian, and realise how little I knew then of the Bible, of Christian living or life experience. My husband came into leadership as a minister of a church and, looking back now, we acknowledge all the

mistakes we made in relating to people and in the things of God because we were young and inexperienced.

Has the world changed so much that old, wise heads are now found on young shoulders? Yes there is potential in young people, but surely they will reach their potential as they listen to mature Christians and take the old folks more seriously.

The older Christian has so much to offer the young, but instead we are told to listen to the young, who to be quite honest are making the same mistakes that we made as young people.

Irene Thornley, by email



Opposing without threatening

I read Stephen Carter's letter (*Your Voice*, Nov/Dec) taking issue with Dennis Alexander while I was travelling to Cambridge for the Science and Religion course given by the Faraday Institute, at which Mr Alexander chaired some of the sessions. Mr Carter asks Mr Alexander to "concentrate on challenging the New Atheism" rather than "attack Christians who held views different from his own" and challenges us to "concentrate on confronting Dawkins and his ilk". I can assure readers that that is exactly what Mr Alexander and his colleagues are doing.

All the speakers at the course accepted an evolutionary understanding of creation, but none of them ever cast doubt on the sincerity and intelligence of people who

held a young-earth view. By contrast, I have heard many creationists claim that one cannot be a Bible-believing Christian and believe in evolution, a view with which Richard Dawkins totally agrees.

I have since visited the Edinburgh Creation Group website and was pleasantly surprised to find a much more accepting and open approach.

Both Mr Carter and Mr Alexander are correct in saying that our first priority is preaching the Gospel, but for those who wish to examine the creation in the light of science, the Faraday Institute and the Edinburgh Creation Group seem to represent the opposing viewpoints without threatening Christian unity.

Peter Grayson, Millom, Cumbria

Apostles still needed

Regarding recent correspondence in *idea* about the risk of "redesigning God", I think homosexuality is a defining 21st century debate for the Church. Daniel Mills' letter (*Your Voice*, Sep/Oct) brilliantly showed how not to interpret Leviticus glibly on sexual morality, but hinted that Leviticus is uninspired nonsense. Yes, chapters 18 to 22 were written in the context of the Old Testament covenant, which was made up of God's moral law and the ceremonial law given to a non-pluralist Jewish theocracy. Yes, all Old Testament ceremony and sacrifice were fulfilled and ended by Christ in the New Testament, but Christ writes His eternal moral law in believers' hearts, says Hebrews 10.9–16, by His Spirit.

A tolerant, pluralist democracy like ours rightly gives equal access to the goods and services of for-profit organisations to believer and unbeliever, heterosexual and homosexual alike. But since our democracy is pluralist, it should likewise reject the absolute doctrine of secular fundamentalism, which says that no organisation, including churches and charities, should be values-based, having the right to require members to consistently believe and practise their chosen moral values. The result is that secular fundamentalists regard all organisations as effectively for-profit.

But 1 Corinthians 6.9–11 warns professing believers who persist in practising sexual sin of God's judgement and church expulsion, exercised in the hope of producing repentance and restoration. Also, Ephesians 4.11–13 says that apostles are still given and needed today, to boldly lead God's Church until we reach "unity and maturity", speaking the truth in love.

Paul Taylor, Cardiff



Weathering the economic storm

As the world is gripped by financial turmoil, Steve Pierce, head of the education ministry Stewardship Money, writes...

In October 1987, BBC weatherman Michael Fish famously assured viewers there was no hurricane on the way. In fact, Britain experienced its biggest storm since 1703. Two decades later, the first run on a British bank in 100 years warned of a growing financial storm. Given a new mood of critical reappraisal, the Church can speak a contemporary, even prophetic, word within society – a word of hope in challenging times.

But to do so with conviction and integrity requires change for the Church. We need our thinking about, talking about and use of money to be biblically shaped and directed, so that we act as followers of Christ and not just consumers.

We should start by recognising that we have spoken far too little on topics about which the Bible has plenty to say. It is often said there are over 2,350 verses on wealth and possessions. Among them, Deuteronomy 8 suggests three essential perspectives on wealth that can help us: money as gift, temptation and as a covenant obligation.

The abundant gift

Along with our physical bodies, God gave to us the material things we need. Firstly, Deuteronomy tells of the abundant gift of land. "Gift" means practicing gratitude: if we are privileged to work, we should hold our pay slips thankfully when millions receive benefits or minimum wage. "Gift" means joyful generosity, knowing that in giving we reflect the heart of the Giver for the poor.

The writer of Deuteronomy also understands that our sense of "gift" is undermined by our casual language of owning, earning and deserving. Herein lies temptation. We focus on today, often sharing a commonplace dissatisfaction with what we have. Wealth can capture our hearts and we end up wanting more. The credit crunch and recession may provide the discipline we need to think again about our attitude to credit.

Thirdly, Deuteronomy teaches that the gift brings covenant obligations: lend generously to the poor, protect the weak, lend without interest, release economic slaves and cancel debts. Of course these things need thoughtful modern application, but the principle that a gift creates social obligations remains true. If we can rescue banks to the tune of £5,000 billion globally and nationalise a building society in a weekend, why is it so difficult to find the £150 billion to meet the Millennium Development Goals for the poorest people on earth?

A sustainable lifestyle

Authentic, biblical stewardship knows God as both owner and giver of all and demands that we become responsible and

accountable. Our lifestyle must be sustainable, characterised by celebration, contentment and gratitude.

At the heart of biblical stewardship is the practice of generosity. Such generosity, in both individuals and society, is an effective antidote to the desire for more.

It honours God and not our chosen lifestyle. Generosity acknowledges that Jesus is Lord of our money and puts into practice our obligation to be open-hearted and open-handed to the poor.

Christians will feel the effects of this global turmoil, so how can churches take action? Do we simply batten down the hatches, pray for shelter and hope to ride out the storm? Or does our faith have something to say – something to offer not just to our congregations but also to the communities of which we are a part? There is a window of opportunity to prepare now before the effects of recession bite hard.

We would encourage each church to be "recession ready", to think about, adapt and develop a strategy to enable it to serve the vulnerable in both the congregation and community:

- ▶ Start talking money in different ways within the church
- ▶ Train a crisis-response team that can offer support
- ▶ Know how to support and where to point people in debt
- ▶ Offer training in financial literacy and managing a budget
- ▶ Identify under-utilised resources in your congregation and community
- ▶ Establish a hardship fund for emergency situations
- ▶ Covenant to maintain or increase giving to the world's poorest people
- ▶ Co-operate locally with churches, community groups and networks
- ▶ Establish practical and emotional support for the newly unemployed
- ▶ Make it a point of corporate church prayer

Economic hardship is not the time to stop giving. "If you close your ears to the cry of the poor, you will cry out and not be heard" (Proverbs 21.13). This is the time to stand out as different.

Yet generosity is not simply a response to growing financial needs. The point is to glorify God, and this concerns how we are more than what we do. The current climate is an opportunity to teach and model stewardship. The primary purpose is to change how we are around money as an integral part of Christian discipleship and to glorify God in our lives and lifestyles.

▶ Watch this space: the Alliance is developing resources to help churches engage with their communities regarding debt. A longer essay on this topic is available at: stewardship.org.uk



The credit crunch may provide the discipline we need to think again

Letters should be sent to idea@eauk.org or *idea*, 186 Kennington Park Road, London SE11 4BT. Be sure to include your name, address and phone number. The Editor reserves the right to edit letters for length and clarity. We regret that we are not able to engage in personal correspondence. Everyone who has a letter printed on this page will receive a thank you gift.

Haunting last words

Churches in Mission Executive Director *Krish Kandiah* looks at the challenge of reaching out to a missing generation and beyond...

I had been biting my tongue for 12 weeks. Biting so hard, in fact, that it hurt. My wife was expecting a baby, and I had been sworn to secrecy. As other extreme extroverts like me out there will know, this was like asking a toddler to save his Christmas chocolates until Easter. So finally when I was given the go-ahead to spread the word, it was like releasing the Hoover Dam.

I worked my way through the phone book with my good news; but there is only one of those calls I remember: the one to my grandmother. She was a remarkable lady who was born in the Himalayan foothills and, being a war-hero widow, single-handedly brought up three daughters before emigrating to the centre of Stoke Newington, where she grew to know everybody and everybody knew her.

Her popularity may have had something to do with her extrovert nature, but during this particular phone call her tendency to speak before thinking meant that her response was not a predictably warm “congratulations” or an excited “wow”, but a never-to-be-forgotten, heart-rending cry of despair: “Oh no!”

Now that shut me up. And I don’t to this day remember how the phone call ended, let alone understand why she reacted in that way. Perhaps it had slipped her mind that I was actually married to the future mother of my child. Or more likely, perhaps the prospect of passing on her genes and becoming a great-grandparent wasn’t quite as exhilarating as becoming a first-time dad.

A few years later I was to have another memorable phone call with my grandmother. This time she called to give me a piece of her mind. I had let her down and, try as I might, she was accepting no excuses. In fact, my excuses just made the phone call harder. Had I known it was to be the last time I would speak to my grandmother before she died, I would have bitten my tongue in respect of her love for me over the years.

My grandmother’s last words of challenge to me to rethink my priorities were unwelcome at the time and they still haunt me. Yet over the years I have come to realise that this is how many of us feel about the last words of Jesus as recorded in Matthew’s Gospel. They force us to rethink our priorities, apply our faith and step out of our comfort zones.

These words were not spoken by our Lord and Saviour in criticism, but in love. He was not writing a press release, issuing an order, uttering a homely adage or scolding naughty disciples. No, Jesus was passing on His last will and testament to His best friends, and on His heart was the need of the world and the

vision of His Church investing into the next generation “to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28.20).

Invest in the future

I don’t think it’s a coincidence that the last words that the apostle Paul pens from his prison cell are written to Timothy, a next-generation leader with the same mandate to invest in the following generation and the one after that: “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others” (2 Timothy 2.2).

There is a definite biblical imperative to make sure that we foresee and actively engage in becoming spiritual parents, grandparents and even great-grandparents.

This imperative is what drives the Alliance’s dedication to invest in younger leaders, both helping current-generation leaders and recognising that there is a need to raise up the next generation, as well as the one after that.

In a recent survey of UK Evangelical Alliance churches conducted with Innovista, an Oxford-based evangelical leadership development agency, 96 per cent of pastors surveyed said that increasing the number of the emerging generation (ages 16-30) in their churches is either “more important than” or “as important as” other issues. Yet only 11 per cent of respondents stated that they considered themselves well-resourced in the form of people, training and tools to do this.

Innovista is committed to investing its energies into meeting these needs, particularly in churches in deprived urban areas that felt under-resourced to reach out to 16- to 30-year-olds.

This missing generation in the local church is a key area for evangelicals to address, not simply because we are worried that some of our churches will die out, but because we need to take seriously the last

words of Jesus calling us to pass on this precious deposit of the Gospel to every generation.

Inter-generational learning is no doubt critical in a variety of ways. My grandmother taught me many things including the medicinal benefits of raw ginger and how to value people from different walks of life. But her lasting legacy to me is to take seriously Jesus’ last words. Thankfully, we are not sworn to secrecy, but empowered to be proud parents, grandparents and great-grandparents in the faith.

► For more information, visit: innovista.org



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