



Unity: conformity at any cost?

ONE CHURCH

Are denominations
bad for unity?



THEOLOGY



60 SECONDS

BETTER TOGETHER

We speak to unity
group leaders



GOOD QUESTION



IN YOUR WORDS

REFORMATION REFLECTION

What it means for
unity today



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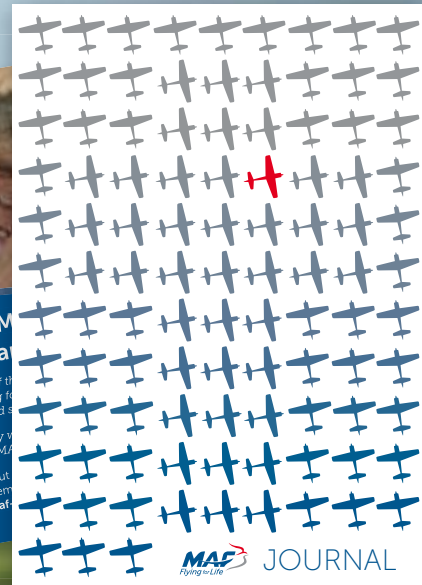


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Amaris Cole: ...find out more about Steve Clifford's very personal take on unity, from situations at the Alliance that he's handled to personal conflicts that have been a cause of pain...

CONTENTS

idea-torial

Unity: what does it mean to you?



When we started to plan this magazine, I asked the team to first write down what sprung to mind when they thought of the word 'unity', and then what they thought of when related to us as an Alliance. For such a small word, it means a great deal.

At the Alliance, we're all about unity – uniting the Church so that together we can make Jesus known. But does this mean unity at the sake of conformity? Our chair of Board, Tani Omideyi, answers on pages 20 and 21.

The more we thought about unity at our planning meeting, the more we wondered about the role of denominations in a united Church. Wouldn't it be better to all go to one Church? Well, the team were very passionate in their responses, so they have written their beliefs for the Good Question feature on pages 16 and 17. This question is timely as we continue to mark the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. On pages 26 and 27 David Hilborn continues our series by asking whether the Reformation was a good thing for Protestants.

By the time you're reading this I will be just a few short months away from my own big day, so the feature on unity in marriage, on pages 24 and 25, is of particular interest to me. I hope it will be to you, too. We've asked couples who face differences how they overcome these to live happily side-by-side.

Then, along with his usual Last Word, we've got the news in this edition that our general director's book will be available mid-March. On page 32– *idealist*– find out more about Steve Clifford's very personal take on unity, from situations at the Alliance that he's handled to personal conflicts that have been a cause of pain.

There's so much more we could have said about unity, but this is the start of a conversation we hope you'll continue to have in your churches and small groups, working out exactly what unity means to you.

Do let us know your thoughts by sending a letter to the editor, or tweeting us and using the hashtag #EAunity.

Amaris Cole

Editor

We're on Twitter!
Follow us @idea_mag



FIVE THINGS I DIDN'T KNOW UNTIL THIS ISSUE

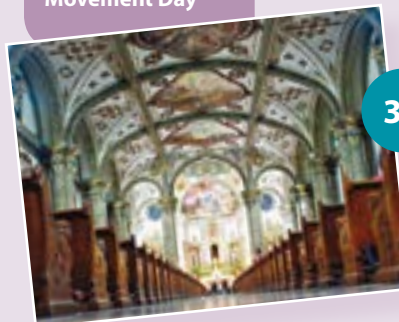
Our lovely director of communications & membership, Chine McDonald, is leaving!

... family, fun, and faith-filled are how she'd describe the Alliance

Alliance member Bethany church was the first in Europe to serve both Tamil and Sinhalese people

100,000 people are alive in Northern Ireland because they didn't adopt Great British abortion laws

25 organisations, 30 denominations and more than 130 city-wide unity movements will attend Movement Day



The face of unity.

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FEATURES

10 News

Movement Day comes to the UK in 2017. Find out more about the unity event, and how you can get involved.

22 – 23 When unity seemed impossible

Stories of unity despite division

24 – 25 Till death do us part

Four couples tell us how they remain united in the face of differences

REGULARS

4 – 5 Connect

News from across the Alliance.

6 eauk.org

Stay in the loop with everything the Alliance is up to online.

12 The 9 – 5

A day in the life of Julie Pascoe, UK director of Jews for Jesus.

14 60 Seconds with...

Graham Hutchinson. We ask the local unity movement leader why he does what he does, and how we can be praying for his work.

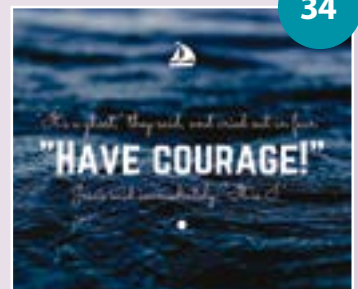
34 Last Word

Our general director writes...



The limits of unity.

28



Being brave in the storm.

34

30

evangelical alliance **170**
better together

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Engaging with neighbours of other faiths – beyond the doorstep

The *Beyond the Doorstep: Engaging with the South Asian Family* event will be taking place 21 March between 10.30am – 3.00pm at the Evangelical Alliance offices in Kings Cross. The day will consist of six presentations on successful engagement by church leaders: Tracey John, Jagdish Singh, Matt Irvine, Tom Ward, Dipak Upadhyay and Kuldip Rajo. This will be followed by a panel discussion and an opportunity to view relevant resources. The event will be of huge benefit to church leaders and Christians passionate about engaging more effectively with South Asian families of Hindu, Muslim and Sikh backgrounds.

Book your place for a minimum donation of £10.00 by visiting eauk.org/saf



17:21 - A moment of unity in the life of the Church



Many of the major Christian festivals and Bible conferences that are also members of the Evangelical Alliance will be taking part in an amazing display of unity this year.

The initiative – called 17:21 – takes place between March and October this year. It is expected to involve more than 100,000 people and will kick off at Spring Harvest in March and culminate at the Festival of Life celebration at the ExCel in London in October.

17:21 is based on the famous unity prayer of Jesus for his disciples in John 17:21: “May they all be one that the world might believe.” The purpose is a fresh commitment by

evangelicals in the UK to fulfil this prayer of Christ.

The core group who have facilitated 17:21 are Nola Leach and Lyndon Bowring from CARE, David Coffey – former president of the Baptist World Alliance – and our very own Steve Clifford.

He said: “2017 is a significant year in the life of the Church, with Christians all over the country re-committing themselves to unity for the sake of mission. I’m excited by this tangible expression of unity that so many key festivals will be taking part in throughout this year.”

During 2017 many Christians will be celebrating the 500th anniversary of the

Five prayer points

Please join us in prayer as we look ahead to a summer of unity across the Church. As festivals unite to focus on this theme, cover these gatherings in your prayers for protection as this important message is shared.

As we read this issue of *idea*, let’s echo Jesus’ prayer for us, his children, in John 17, “that they may be one as we are one – I in them and you in me – so that they may be brought to complete unity”.

Praise God for the work of unity movements all around the UK who are working to promote collaboration and connection between churches in local communities, in order to spread the good news of Jesus.

Please pray for all those organising Movement Day, a meeting of unity movements from all over the globe, which will be meeting in London in October this year. Pray for wisdom and help with the huge task of organising such an event.

Please pray for our church leaders, particularly in the 500th anniversary year of the Reformation. Please pray that this anniversary will be marked by the promotion of unity and peace throughout the Church, despite our differences.

Please pray for the Alliance’s board and council, who help to steer us in our mission of unifying the Church in voice and action. Please pray for wisdom and guidance for them personally, and in their roles within the Alliance.

birth of the Reformation, and 17:21 provides one of many opportunities to celebrate the central truths of the gospel, the unity of believers in Jesus Christ and their calling to share the transforming power of the gospel. At some point during each of the festivals and conferences, a moment will be marked in which Christians attending will read the same Bible passage, prayer of commitment, declaration of shared life and sing the same worship song. There will also be an artistic symbol of unity that will be transported between each event.

For more information, visit 1721.org.uk

Let's together make Jesus known



Our heartfelt desire at the Evangelical Alliance is to see the Church buzzing with many thousands of stories of men and women finding new life in Jesus because someone – a friend, sister, colleague – dared to share their faith with them.

That's why, with your support last year, we've recently launched the Great Commission website to help Christians talk about Jesus. It's a huge – and growing – collection of videos, stories, reflections and resources, designed to inspire, equip and empower every Christian and every church to be able to reach out to their friends and communities with the good news of Jesus Christ. Thank you for all your help.

But that's not all the Alliance is doing to make Jesus known this year. If we want to see thousands come to faith, we need to think big. So we'd like your support to enable us to:

- Equip Christians to speak into every situation, age, stage and style of life about Jesus, by catalysing and

creating new resources and tools for evangelism where there are gaps and needs that aren't being met.

- Inspire churches and communities that God is at work to save lives, by producing a new video story and article every week, and disseminating these across a range of media types to change the narrative and show that God is giving new life.
- Empower Christians across the UK with all the tools they need to share the good news of Jesus, by going on a Great Commission roadshow of events and speaking engagements, showcasing and releasing this resource for all to use.

So will you join us today in making Jesus known? Please consider making a gift that will inspire and equip Christians to talk about Jesus and so see many come to faith.

Go to eauk.org/supportmission to read the full appeal letter and make a gift. Thank you.

EVANGELISING WALES

Christians from around Wales are gathering in St Michael's Church, Aberystwyth, in March to discuss a new vision of reaching Wales with the gospel. Among the speakers are Rt Rev Andy John, bishop of Bangor, Rev Dr David Ceri Jones, author and historian, John Hibberd, mission and development officer for the Sheffield diocese, Neville Willerton, national operations manager for Church Army and Elfed Godding, national director Evangelical Alliance Wales. Speaking of the event, Elfed says: "The vision of Evangelising Wales is to consult with others involved in evangelism in Wales. There are many signs of encouragement across the country and we're gathering to inspire renewed involvement and initiate new and creative missionary endeavours in Wales."

Evangelising Wales takes place on Saturday, 11 March 2017 at St Michael's Church, Laura Place, Aberystwyth.

A NEW MISSION, WALES WIDE

Following the publication of A New Mission to Wales last year, a church planting network held a series of consultations in towns and cities across the nation in January. Leaders from both Welsh and English speaking churches gathered to pray and discuss fresh approaches to mission. With the gradual disappearance of traditional patterns of church and chapel in Wales, many now believe that a turning point in Christianity has been reached.

Elfed Godding said: "We must respond together. Evangelicals from a variety of backgrounds need to dream dreams and action new strategies in the power of the spirit. Like many others, I believe that God is doing a new work in Wales, evidenced by new expressions of church and regular stories of conversions.

"Now is the time to work together and seize the new opportunities facing us."

GENE SLAVES?

"Teen survey reveals gene for happiness," screamed a recent headline and CICC (Cymru Institute for Contemporary Christianity) is asking a loaded question: are we slaves to our genes?

This is the title of a seminar taking place across Wales in February, featuring guest speaker Dr Denis Alexander, emeritus

director of The Faraday Institute for Science and Religion, where he is a fellow.

Dr Alexander was previously chairman of the Molecular Immunology Programme and head of the laboratory of lymphocyte signalling and development at The Babraham Institute, Cambridge.

Drawing on the latest scientific evidence, Dr Alexander will argue that genetics undergirds free will and that modern science portrays a view of human identity that is remarkably consonant with the Christian understanding of what it means to be human.

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READ THIS

Open Doors presented its annual report on the persecution of Christians at an event in parliament in January. The Alliance member monitors the persecution suffered by Christians in different countries and publishes the results in the World Watch List. Pastor Aminu, from Yobe state in northern Nigeria, spoke at the event of the number of Christians who have been killed by Boko Haram. The pastor himself has received death threats from the group and described the discrimination that Christians suffer in his state where Christians are regularly prevented from attending university, getting jobs or holding public office. He asked for prayer that Christians in Nigeria would be able to forgive their persecutors.

[Read the full story on our website.](#)



LEARN ABOUT THIS:

The Evangelical Alliance has issued a briefing on the government's extremism plans. Over the last couple of years there have been repeated pledges to introduce new laws to tackle terrorism and extremism, although at the moment no new law has been formally proposed. We recognise that a key role for any government is to protect its citizens, however, the Alliance has raised concerns around the language of extremism and the proposals that spring from it. We have argued that these proposals have concerning implications for the religious liberty and free speech of evangelical Christians and churches.

The advocacy team continues to work with MPs and peers as legislation moves forward, to ensure that concerns and perspectives are clearly heard in the debates that will come. Many parliamentarians have indicated that they share our concerns, and want them to be reflected in any laws that are made.

eauk.org/extremism



SUPPORT THIS

Have you thought about supporting the Alliance? Maybe you're reading a friend's magazine or receive *idea* in your church, but you've never signed up personally. Well, we would love you to support us as we bring the Church together to share the good news of Jesus with those who don't know him.

For 170 years we've been representing Christians to policymakers and the media and bringing the Church together to make Jesus known. **For just £3 a month you can support us to do more than we could ever do apart.** We'll send you your own copy of *idea* magazine every other month and regular updates about how we're using your donations. You can also sign up to receive email resources on leadership, mission, advocacy or connecting with culture.

So join us today: eauk.org/supporter



PRAY THIS

General director Steve Clifford wrote on the day of Donald Trump's inauguration on the importance of praying for our leaders – whether we voted for them or not.

[Read the full piece, called *Trump: the power of politics*, on our website.](#)



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The EFC and the CIJA have launched a partnership based on common values.

INTER-FAITH PARTNERSHIP LAUNCHES IN CANADA

The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC) and the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs (CIJA) have signed a declaration of dialogue and partnership to discuss issues of common interest.

In a joint statement, the organisations said: "Evangelicals and Jews have distinct theological perspectives [but] our communities share many foundational values, interests and concerns that afford an opportunity for joint advocacy initiatives."

The collaboration will specifically discuss palliative care, affordable housing, religious freedom in Canada, peace and security in the Middle East, and support for persecuted minorities in the region.

Through biennial dialogue sessions between representatives of the EFC and CIJA, the partnership aims to strengthen mutual understanding and identify joint advocacy opportunities in the above policy areas.

Bruce Clemenger, president of the EFC, said: "We look forward to increasing our engagement with CIJA as together we seek to contribute to the public good and well-being of Canada, and to peace in the Middle East.

"Collaboration between faith groups in Canada is vital. It both deepens the mutual respect we share and fosters a better understanding of the diverse communities we each represent. Our shared convictions provide a strong basis for working together for the betterment of all."

Rabbi Shimon Koffler Fogel, CEO of CIJA, said: "We are excited to take our positive relationship with our friends at the EFC to the next level.

"On a wide range of issues, from alleviating poverty to supporting the people of Israel to advancing religious freedom, Jewish and evangelical Canadians are longstanding natural allies.

"Built on a foundation of shared values and mutual respect, the goal of this partnership is to ensure we have an even greater impact in advocating for public policies that benefit all Canadians.

"Our voices are stronger when we speak as one."

WEA CONDEMNS CHURCH BOMBING IN EGYPT

The World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) has condemned the bombing of the Church of St Peter and St Paul on 11 December 2016. The bombing killed 24 and injured 49 others.

Godfrey Yogarajah, associate secretary general of the WEA, said: "We deplore Sunday's attack and call upon the government led by President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi to ensure the protection of Christians in Egypt."

The violence was the worst attack against Christians in Egyptian history. Coptic Christians, who make up 10 per cent of Egypt's population of 91 million, have faced a surge in persecution and discrimination in the last six years since 23 people were killed when the Saints Church in Alexandria was bombed during a New Year's Eve service in 2011.

There have reportedly been no arrests for the attack.



Egypt's nine million Coptic Christians face violent persecution

WEA secretary general Bishop Efraim Tendero said: "While we condemn the bombing in the strongest possible manner, we also call upon all Christians in Egypt to remain calm and united in the aftermath of the attack.

"In this moment of distress, we urge the global Church to intercede for Christians in Egypt, especially those who have lost loved ones in this inhuman act of violence."

AEA CELEBRATES 50TH ANNIVERSARY

The Association of Evangelicals in Africa celebrated its 50th anniversary in November.

Held at the Kenya School of Law in Nairobi, the thanksgiving service featured the launch of the Africa Study Bible Sampler with a timeline of AEA's work in Africa.

Despite the challenges faced by the para-Church and organisations across the continent, the AEA continues to serve more than 35 countries in mobilising and empowering the Church for the transformation of communities and societies.

Figures from the past and present of the AEA were honoured, including some posthumous awards given to family members.

Other individuals who have served on projects, commissions and in the secretariat over the years were also recognised.

Dottie Hildebrandt spoke on behalf of the family of Kenneth Downing, the first AEA general secretary, said: "I want to say a huge thank you to each of you who worked so hard to make the AEA celebrations such a success, and especially for your very warm welcome to me personally. I know my dad would have been so blessed and humbled to see what the Lord has done and is doing through the AEA."

In a statement, the AEA said: "The AEA projects, together with the work of the commissions and the constituent national alliances, have contributed significantly in the phenomenal growth of the Church in Africa in the last 50 years.

"There was truly a reason to be thankful to God and celebrate God's faithfulness. We are encouraged and hopeful that the next 50 years will continue to see the hand of God in the renewal and transformation of Africa."



The Association of Evangelicals in Africa celebrated their 50th anniversary in November.

Alliance bids farewell to comms director

Earlier this year, we announced that Chine McDonald, director of communications & membership, will be leaving the Evangelical Alliance in March. Chine was the first black female director to be appointed to the Alliance's leadership team and among the youngest in its 170-year history. *idea* caught up with her just before she left...



Chine McDonald.

Where did you come from?

I joined the Alliance in 2010 as editor from my previous role as editor at the Crown Prosecution Service, a government department. Prior to that I was a reporter at the then daily newspaper the *Reading Evening Post*, covering crime, education and faith. I had wanted to be a journalist since I was about 12 years old, but as God would have it, I ended up with a keen interest in religious studies and a theology degree from Cambridge University. The editor role at the Alliance was a perfect place in which to mix my journalistic skills with my love of theology and making faith accessible and relatable. Although I started as editor, I've had various iterations of my role, later becoming head of media & communications before joining the leadership team and overseeing communications, fundraising and membership in 2014.

How would you describe the job you've done here?

It's been the best job I could have hoped for at this stage in my life. I joined the Alliance at the age of 26 and am so fortunate to have been given responsibilities and gained experiences that I could never have dreamed of – from managing reputational risk, team leadership, recruitment, fundraising regulations, branding, graphic design, public speaking, conflict resolution and a spectacularly rare knowledge of the breadth of the evangelical Church in the UK.

Where are you going?

I'm taking up a new role as head of Christian influence & engagement at World Vision UK, where I'll be heading up the development and implementation of a new strategy to engage and equip the Church in helping the world's most vulnerable children. I'm so excited about the opportunity to engage the UK Church in a renewed commitment to shine God's unconditional love into the world. I'll still in some way feel connected to the Alliance as World Vision is a member organisation – I'm sure I'll be back pestering my former colleagues often!

How would you describe the Alliance in three words?

Aside from 'unity, advocacy, mission', I'd say... family, fun, and faith-filled.

What's been your proudest moment?

The thing I'm most proud of about having worked at the Alliance is working with a brilliant team to start our 20s and 30s online collective – *threads*. It's a fantastic gift to millennial Christians and those who do not see the Christian faith as relevant to every area of their lives. I'm not only proud of the awards we've won, the people on the fringes we have engaged or the articles and events that we have put on, but I've also been so encouraged by the comments from people who say what a difference it has made in their lives. I'm thankful for the way we have pointed towards Jesus rather than away from him to a generation that no longer speaks the language of faith.

What has been your biggest challenge?

Some of the reputational risk issues in which we have had to deal with difficult situations among our member churches or organisations have been tough – but that is part of why the Alliance is here.

What will you most miss about working at the Alliance?

I have had the privilege of working with some amazing people. There's a unique family atmosphere within the Alliance; our colleagues care about every aspect of our lives. I've faced some of life's big moments at the Alliance and have always felt absolutely supported by Steve Clifford (the best boss one could hope for) and the rest of the staff team. I will also miss the twice-daily group exercises in the office that can only be seen to be believed. I'm talking planks, squats, sit-ups, the lot. I'm not sure I'll be able to replicate such a fun working environment in my future jobs.

What's your hope for the evangelical Church?

That we'd increasingly point to Jesus, the servant king, rather than ourselves. That we would break down barriers between ourselves and be absolutely committed to the unity to which God calls us.

How can we pray for you?

Please pray that I'll settle into my new role and team well and that my husband and I will adapt to the changes that come with the territory – particularly increased overseas travel as I'm a bit of a nervous flyer...

Movement Day comes to the UK

Movement Day is about the love God has for the places we live in. It's a growing vision to see more kingdom transformation across cities and towns, socially, culturally and spiritually.

A significant movement of unity has been growing in cities and towns across the world with church leaders and Christians in the cultural spheres forming friendships, praying together and working together to seek the welfare of their places.

Movement Day is a major two-day event, where all the main leaders from national denominations, city-wide unity movements across the nation and Christians working in business, arts, health, politics, local government, media, education and more from across cities and towns engage in a unique conversation as we imagine a better future for our places.

What could your place look like in the next 20 years if you really worked in unity, as one body, alongside people of peace across your city or town? What are the main challenges your city is facing, and how can you be

more strategic and coordinated to meet those challenges? How can Christians in the cultural spheres of life really work together to see great transformation in business, politics or the arts?

Last year, we took 90 people to *Movement Day* in New York, but this year it's coming to the UK.

Large delegations from all our main cities and towns are coming, made up of business people, artists, doctors, civil servants, teachers, local politicians, journalists and church leaders. From Sunderland to Southampton and Aberdeen to the Isle of White, the Church is meeting to learn from each other, share best practice and be inspired to go back and redouble our efforts to see long-term transformation.

Movement Day is a unified approach by more than 25 different organisations, 30

denominations and new church networks and more than 130 city-wide unity movements. It's a united partnership shared by those who are passionate about effecting kingdom change on the ground in towns and cities.

Movement Day UK is not one long lecture, it's firstly a meeting place for us all to come together and learn from each other. We believe the learning is already in the room and we're aiming in the seminar and tracks to give space for you to tell your story and learn from others. We are also asking a number of people to address the event in the plenary and other sessions who we feel have a specific story or experience to inspire us all.

We are welcoming leaders from across the nation to inspire our conversations.



Mark Greene from London Institute of Christianity, who carries a passion to see Christians live out the faith in every aspect of life.



Pastor Alan Platt will be joining us from South Africa, who leads a 30,000 strong church whose mission is see the transformation of the city of Pretoria.



Billy Kennedy leader of Pioneer, president of Churches Together and leader of the Southampton Churches Network will be talking about the importance of unity.



Marvin Rees, the recently elected mayor of Bristol and the UK's first elected black mayor, will be speaking.



Dr Modupe Omidoyi will be inspiring us about Harmonise Academy, a school set up to teach children excluded from all other schools in the North West.



Debra Green OBE is the national director and found of Redeeming Our Communities (ROC).



Letitia Shelton, former woman of the year in Australia, who leads a superb ministry towards women across the city of Toowoomba.



David Dorricott, managing director of a major software company, will share his passion to grow businesses that transform lives and the surrounding area.



Bishop Angaelos of the Coptic Orthodox Church.

To find out more information and to book your ticket go to www.movementday.uk or search for us on Twitter and Facebook: @movementdayuk

THE WALL

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Spring Harvest 2017

"The goal is for all of them to become one heart and mind—Just as you, Father, are in me and I in you, So they might be one heart and mind with us."
John 17

Join us this Easter to celebrate our oneness in Christ, stand together in unity and show that God hasn't finished with his Church yet.

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MINEHEAD TWO
SOLD OUT

SKEGNESS
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Harvest



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The 9 – 5 of Julia Pascoe



Julia Pascoe.

While celebrating the good news of Easter, it's a time many think back to the Jewish roots of our faith. Jews for Jesus, a member of the Evangelical Alliance, works to spread the gospel to the Jewish people. We caught up with Julia Pascoe, director of the UK branch, to learn about an average day working for the charity.

I usually wake up between 6 and 8am depending on my schedule. As a missionary with Jews for Jesus, no two days are the same, but I try to begin each day with quiet time in God's word, seeking His wisdom, grace and mercy for the day. I also play guitar, spending time singing songs of worship.

I usually drive to our Jews for Jesus shop, to Bible study visits and most other areas of ministry. Occasionally I'll take the train. There's no set time that I leave my flat every day, it really depends on what I have on any given day.

Some days I start at 10am and get home at 10pm, other days I might start at 8am and finish at 6pm.

Once a week I meet with our team for prayer and to reflect on the week ahead. We pray for each other, give thanks for the folks we're reaching with the gospel and pray for the opportunities and challenges God has for us.

I came to faith in Jesus almost 19 years ago and I've been on staff with Jews for Jesus for 13 years. I'm currently a missionary and director of our UK branch. Before I knew Jesus and before working in full-time ministry, my work life was very much a 9 to 5. In my early days of following the Lord, I often prayed for God to take me out of that. You've heard the saying 'be careful what you pray for'!

In 2003 I was invited to participate in an evangelistic outreach with Jews for Jesus

and two weeks later I was invited to consider becoming a full-time missionary with the UK branch. This wasn't the kind of answer to my prayers that I was expecting – at the same time I was doing a course in Christian counselling and was convinced God was preparing me for that. I knew I couldn't ignore the invitation of full-time gospel proclamation to my Jewish people.

For me, mornings are the best time of the day for working on writing reports, preparing messages and anything that requires concentration and quiet. As the branch leader, I have a lot more administration to take care of than I'd choose, but I'm very thankful for the Jewish people I visit for Bible study. I'm extremely excited about Rachel, a new Jewish believer of just a few months. She is already sharing her faith with her Jewish and non-Jewish friends. Part of my ministry to her is to help her deal with some of the challenges we as Jewish believers in Jesus experience. Another important role that I have is helping Rachel find an evangelical church or messianic congregation so that she can connect to and become part of the body of Messiah. We are in the process of that and will soon be preparing for her baptism.

I usually have lunch between 12 and 2pm. I eat green vegetables with everything!

In the afternoon I look at the other areas of my ministry, which includes street outreach – handing out gospel literature and asking people who they think Jesus is, looking for Jewish people who are open to reading the Bible to introduce them to Jesus. I also speak in churches across the UK sharing the Jewish roots of our Christian faith and helping Christians share their faith with their Jewish friends.

Being a missionary with Jews for Jesus isn't always easy, but it's a great way to serve. I don't consider full-time ministry as a job or going to work, I see it as a way of life.

In the evening I enjoy making time to catch up with family and friends at every chance I get.

I usually go to bed somewhere between 10 and 12pm.

As a member of the Evangelical Alliance, Jews for Jesus is one of 600 organisations supported by the Alliance. If you would like your organisation to become a member of the Alliance, visit eauk.org/join-us/

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This April, Jewish people all over the world will observe and celebrate Passover. During the same week, Christians all over the world will observe Maundy Thursday, remembering Jesus' last supper, His fulfilment of Passover and the Lord's institution of Holy Communion.

Have you ever wondered how the Lord's Supper emerged from the Passover? Or thought about what was on the table that evening? Jews for Jesus provides a fascinating insight into that pivotal evening with our 'Christ in the Passover' presentation. You can invite one of our missionaries to bring this presentation to your church or fellowship. (We still have some dates available during April 2017!)

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Please contact Paul on: **020 7267 5597** or email: enquiries@jewsforjesus.org.uk

If you would like to see one of these presentations this year then you are invited to visit one of the following churches, but please contact them beforehand to check there is still space:

Day	Date	Time	Speaker	Hosts	Location	Contact number
Sunday	2-Apr	10:30am	Julia Pascoe	Melrose Christian Fellowship	Basingstoke	078 7961 6930
Sunday	2-Apr	6:30pm	Richard S. Harvey	Woodside Baptist Church	CROYDON	020 8656 4193
Sunday	2-Apr	6:30pm	Zigmund M. Rogoff	Bethel Baptist Church	CAERPHILLY	029 2083 1138
Saturday	8-Apr	4pm	Julia Pascoe	Rickstones Evangelical Church	WITHAM	013 7650 2729
Sunday	9-Apr	10am	Zigmund M. Rogoff	Pendennis Good News Church	BRISTOL	011 7957 1685
Sunday	9-Apr	10:30am	Katalin Tar	Central Church	TORQUAY	018 0361 5480
Sunday	9-Apr	6pm	Julia Pascoe	Lower Earley Baptist Church	READING	011 8935 3598
Sunday	9-Apr	10:30am	Madeleine W. Pires	Mountsorrel Baptist Church	LOUGHBOROUGH	078 7043 4371
Sunday	9-Apr	9:30am	Richard S. Harvey	St Thomas & St Nicholas Bedhampton	HAVANT	023 9248 3013
Tuesday	11-Apr	7pm	Zigmund M. Rogoff	Westfield United Reformed Church	BRIDGEWATER	012 7844 7153
Tuesday	11-Apr	6pm	Richard S. Harvey	Thrapston Baptist Church	KETTERING	018 3273 4880
Wednesday	12-Apr	8pm	Julia Pascoe	Ferndale Baptist Church	SOUTHEND-ON-SEA	017 0246 9126
Thursday	13-Apr	7pm	Katalin Tar	Portswood Church	SOUTHAMPTON	023 8039 9658
Thursday	13-Apr	6:30pm	Richard S. Harvey	Westborough Church	GUILDFORD	014 8357 8842
Thursday	13-Apr	7pm	Julia Pascoe	Waterfront Churches	IPSWICH	014 7372 7774
Thursday	13-Apr	6pm	Madeleine W. Pires	St Marys Church	MANCHESTER	016 1336 4529
Thursday	13-Apr	7pm	Zigmund M. Rogoff	St Peters	ROMFORD	017 0834 2080
Friday	14-Apr	6:30pm	Zigmund M. Rogoff	Ballykelly Presbyterian Church	LIMAVADY, NI	028 7772 2937
Friday	14-Apr	6:30pm	Katalin Tar	Immanuel Baptist Church	PORTSMOUTH	023 9278 8710
Sunday	16-Apr	10:30am	Katalin Tar	Mansfield Baptist Church	MANSFIELD	016 2362 7710
Sunday	16-Apr	11pm	Richard S. Harvey	RCCOG City of Zion	Cambridge	012 2377 8710

*Please note spaces fill up fast which is why we take bookings over a year in advance.

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Graham Hutchinson

Graham has been the pastor at York Elim since 1999. He is also the co-chair of One Voice York, a York-wide organisation that unifies church leaders and ministries, and a member of the Evangelical Alliance's Council. Alexandra Davis spent 60 seconds with the leader to find out more about his unity projects, and why he thinks they're so important.

Why is Church unity important?

Church unity is important because in challenging times we are stronger together. But perhaps we should see it from a different and a better perspective: instead of starting with our need we should start with what God wants, and what He has revealed He wants through the scriptures. In John's gospel we can read the words of Jesus as he prayed for the unity of his followers and later, the Apostle Paul communicated the revelation he had received about the unity of believers as the Church, the "body of Christ". I don't think we need to work at unity so much as we need to avoid violating the unity that is already granted to us by the prayers of Jesus and that wonder that we call the Church.

What made you want to work on unity issues?

When I thought about working on unity I realised it was not really a conscious decision I had made, but looking back over the many years I have been a church leader, I see a pattern in my behaviour that was not particularly thought-through at the time. Each time I was stationed at a new location as a church leader I started praying for the work of God in that whole town or city. It never occurred to me to just think about my own congregation or fellowship, my "small corner".

From when I first became a pastor I sought out others in similar positions to mine who would be willing to pray alongside me. In the early years of my ministry in the 1980s I was aware that this sort of behaviour was not something I saw modelled by those older than me, but I somehow believed it was a biblical and a grown-up way to behave. By the time I arrived at York it was something that I believed in and had practised.

What does your local church community do to encourage unity?

Our local church community in York encourages unity by praying together. A small group of us committed together in the summer of 1999 that we would meet weekly for one hour to pray for our city. It began with just a few, but more quickly joined in. It wasn't long before we were putting out 40 chairs ready for the others to arrive. We made it known that it was for leaders of churches and leaders of Christian ministries and charities. The feedback from many is that from those small beginnings the gathering not only grew in number, but became a place of supportive and encouraging friendships.

What are some of your highlights from your work on Church unity?

We have worked together on various short-term missions and long-term projects and our annual open-air Easter baptisms with Archbishop of York, the Most Rev John Sentamu, have been popular. But to me the highlight is still the weekly prayer meeting. God is



Graham Hutchinson.

still getting us out of bed early in the morning each week to meet together and to meet with Him.

What would you say to Christians and church leaders looking to grow unity in their communities?

To Christians and church leaders looking to grow unity in their communities I would say grow up and stop competing! I have long ceased to be surprised at just how petty and insecure some church leaders can be. I have declared to startled groups of leaders that I don't believe that the church in a town, village or city is an apple pie: some church leaders feel envy or fear when another church seems to do well, but I have seen the recognition in their faces as I have then declared to them that the faithless thought that rises in the human heart is that if someone else seems to be doing better, then they are getting a bigger slice of the apple pie, which means everyone else is left with less. There is no apple pie! There is a world to win, and so many are lost. We should be honest about the challenges and disappointments we all face. Our common desperation to see the kingdom should pull us together.

What do you hope for Church unity in 2017 and beyond?

I have great hope for Church unity. To be exact it's more of an expectation than a vague hope. Put inelegantly, I think God is up to something! Though individuals have stepped up to the plate and committed to work in unity with their brothers and sisters, I still see it as something God is doing in our day. This is a phenomenon of our time that has never before been seen in the history of the Church. It's only a few hundred years ago that Christians were killing each other over conflicts about doctrine, yet now we see a global movement of gatherings of God's people of various traditions and doctrinal positions setting aside differences in order to pray for their lost communities. We should note that many of these unity groups seemed to emerge apparently spontaneously at about the same time, give or take a few years. I don't know what to expect for 2017 and beyond, but I think it's going to be a great adventure. God is up to something!

If you're passionate about unity in the place in which you live, do join us at Movement Day UK, 6-7 October 2017 at Methodist Central Hall, London. To book, visit movementday.uk



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Should we all go to one Church? W

Anglican. Baptist. Brethren. Assemblies of God. Vineyard. Elim. Newfrontiers. Foursquare. The list goes on. There are so many churches in the United Kingdom, all with their own worship styles, preaching practices and theological frameworks. But if we're aiming for unity as evangelicals, is it a problem that we are split down denominational lines? Shouldn't we all go to one Church? Amaris Cole asked some of her colleagues from across the Alliance.



No. God created us in diversity, with differences in style on so many levels – learning, worshipping, fellowshiping, communing. I suspect if we all went to one Church we'd just end up in a very mono-cultural way of doing things. Meeting with God and other Christians in a diversity of ways is one way of bringing glory to the creator God whose imagination is beyond anything we could... imagine. We could, of course, get a bit better at being more accepting of difference, keeping a check on how valuable our particular preferences really are, and making more of effort to cross those diversity lines. We will be one Church in heaven so we might as well start practising for that perfection now.

Alexandra Davis

Baptist

“... I have a varied church history myself, and understand how deep-rooted our theological differences and church practices can be.”



While I love the idea of mixing and mingling with people of various theological persuasions, I have to admit that my head hurts at the idea of getting through 10 minutes of a 'united church' service without having multiple theological disagreements/walk-outs/exorcisms. This might be because I have a varied church history myself, and understand how deep-rooted our theological differences and church practices can be. I grew up in the Plymouth Brethren – a preacher's kid, no less – and on the conservative side. Growing up, we didn't have musical instruments in our services – especially drums, as they're the devil's instrument (I know you all thought it was pipe organs), women didn't speak, and anything charismatic was regarded as misled at best, or possibly demonic. We thought a lot of things were demonic. I'm being a bit tongue in cheek of course, but I do see things differently now; I'm part of the Church of England, and definitely on the charismatic side. The worship at our church is LOUD. And our vicar aims for 50/50 representation for female speakers. They couldn't be more different, and I like that. And unfortunately, I know that both sides would find the others' services deeply uncomfortable, if not offensive. I'm not sure what to do with that, to be honest – maybe we could do with learning more, being offended more, by each other's theologies? But the pragmatic side of me feels like this is an issue that won't be resolved this side of heaven. And maybe even then, the angels might have to hide the drums?

Christine Gilland Robinson

Brethren/Church of England



What denominations mean for unity



Unity is beautiful. It's a central characteristic of the kingdom of God. Uniformity is not. In a lot of cases it's pretty ugly and painfully represses the creativity of God and those made in His image. This is where the Creeds are pretty significant. Their role in creating a theological framework that liberates and facilitates space for creativity and diversity is stunning. They help enable the Church to live within both truth and grace.

The Church, in its priestly role of mediating between God and the world, is meant to reflect the divine beauty and glory. No single style, emphasis, or even theological interpretation, will ever do this justice.

So if 'one Church' means a limiting of creativity and reflecting of the divine glory, then no we shouldn't all go to one Church. However, if we could humbly stand together as 'one Church' and accept a breadth of theology, style and emphasis, and if we could choose to recognise Christ in each other and celebrate each other's ability and calling to reflect different aspects of the vast expanse of God's glory, then perhaps formal denominations wouldn't need to exist. There would still be a role for networks of churches with a similar emphasis to relate to and support each other, but the (often arrogant) lines of separation that denominations sometimes create wouldn't be needed.

Andy Wooldridge

Previously Assemblies of God/Church of England



Denominations are funny. I've been to a few different churches in my life, all associated with a different body of churches. At the moment I go to an Anglican church that looks like a Vineyard church and meets in a warehouse on an industrial estate, but I used to go to a Vineyard church that met in 17th century church building – and grew up in an independent church that meets in a school hall.

The types of denominations I experienced are all fairly similar. They might have slightly different theology, or ways of doing things – but at the core they are all spirit-filled, Christ-centered communities striving to change the way they live. Shouldn't we be trying to live together – regardless of denomination or affiliation? Healthy discussion and differing views could then happen within one Church – rather than scattered outside with hundreds of different denominations.

Regardless, the most important thing is working together – whether that is within denominations or across denominations.

Tim Coysh

Anglican



The Church is not something we go to, rather it's a community of people we belong in. More a family than an event. So then the question becomes should we all belong to one family? And what defines being identified as a member of this family? I think we should all belong to one family, but that there will be some members of the family who we see as immediate relations and others who are more like that distant second cousin you rarely see. And while we might have different surnames and family traditions, there's still that bond of sharing in the same family spirit.

Rich Powney

Anglican



... Healthy discussion and differing views could then happen within one church – rather than scattered outside with hundreds of different denominations."

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The Evangelical Alliance's basis of faith

by Kim Walker

Every member of the Evangelical Alliance – whether an individual supporter or a church, organisational or corporate member – has signed our basis of faith. While the words are now used by many beyond our organisation as a declaration of their evangelicalism, where did the words come from, and who decided on them in the first place? We delve into the archives to find out.

During the very first preparatory meetings of the Evangelical Alliance that were held in 1845, it was suggested that there was a need for a basis of faith. It was during these preparatory meetings that it was made clear that the Alliance should concentrate on unity at an individual rather than denominational level. This impacted the shaping of the doctrinal basis – it meant the early leaders could avoid dealing with the ecclesiological issues.

When the Rev Edward Bickersteth stood to speak when tabling the resolution to accept the basis on 21 August 1846 during the founding conference of the Alliance, he said: "My beloved brethren, it is in weakness and fear and much trembling that I rise to propose to you this important resolution. Not on account of the resolution itself, but on account of my own unworthiness and insufficiency to bring before you efficiently such an all-important topic as the basis of this Alliance.

"I felt first the need of it as a means of union... There would be no strength in it; for from such an attempted union a large part of the spiritually minded would at once recoil. I felt also that an attempted union, without these principles, would be merely a confederation sinking or neglecting the most precious truths with nothing to give the devout Christian grounds of confidence or motive for co-operation.

"What then has been the general plan which has guided our minds in compiling this summary of principles? It was this – that it should be general enough to include the general proportion of real Christians, but that it might be seen that we do not think none to be real Christians, who hesitate to subscribe to some of these truths we have added that it's adoption is not to be considered as an assumption of the right to authoritatively to define the limits of Christian Brotherhood.

"We thought that it was important to have it general enough to include the great proportion of real Christians. We can only be thoroughly and completely united and combined, by a large acknowledgement of the great truths in which we agree.

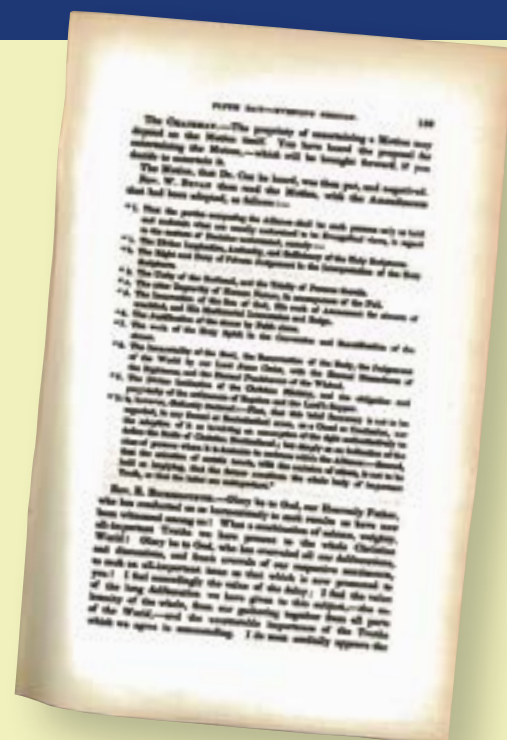
"We deeply feel that it is truth – divine truth – revealed in the word of God which unites us. Here we see the importance of that truth, in which alone we can truly love each another; and the soul of all divine truth is love."

After three days of discussion, a nine-point basis of faith was adopted. This basis of faith was reaffirmed at each of the annual conferences of the Alliance throughout the 19th century.

In the early years of 20th century there was a movement of 'New Theology' among some Christians, which alarmed many evangelicals. They saw this as disregarding the theology of the cross and of representing the simplistic views of modern thinkers. The Alliance campaigned against the movement by publishing articles and hosting meetings.

Although at first a revision of the 1846 basis of faith was not considered necessary, in 1912 a simpler, shorter statement was approved to aid the recruitment of members. The Alliance executive council described the new statement as "comprehensiveness without compromise". The existing 1846 full basis of faith was not officially rescinded, but it was not referred to in membership recruitment publications.

The 1960s were stormy times for evangelicals and following the heated exchanges at the 1966 Assembly of Evangelicals, the Alliance's executive council decided it was time to revisit and revise the 1846 basis of faith. The work on revising it caused challenging discussions at the Alliance and the executive council eventually decided to defer making a decision for two years, although the council did decide to accept the new basis of faith



THE BASIS OF FAITH IN NUMBERS

There has been **four** versions of the basis of faith

The basis of faith is **171** years old

Two separate versions of the basis of faith were used at the same time for two years

they had worked on for use with associate membership. This means that during those two years two different versions of the basis of faith were in use.

However, this came to an end in July 1970, when a new single basis was finally approved.

In the early 2000s the Alliance was rebranding itself as a modern movement for change and at this time it was thought that a contemporary re-wording of the basis of faith would be a good idea. The Alliance had been receiving an increasing number of enquiries about the meaning of the 1970 version and many contacts had also suggested new forms of wording. At the same time the World Evangelical Alliance was also thinking of drawing up a new basis of faith and the Alliance's head of theology, the Rev Dr David Hilborn, was invited to work on a joint project. The work on the project was eventually completed in 2005 when both the WEA and the Alliance boards approved the suggested wording.

You can read the basis of faith on the website: www.eauk.org/basisoffaith



Does unity mean

“

With unity both the cost and the successes are shared by all who commit to it, while with conformity one side pays the most while the other takes all the credit.”

Jesus described marriage as “a man leaving his father and mother, being joined to his wife and the two becoming one”, perhaps the best expression of unity most will ever experience.

But I suspect no one will equate this to conformity. Unsurprisingly most biblical references to ‘conformity’ are negative, often warning against surrendering to worldly norms. In perhaps the only positive reference, Apostle Paul in Romans 8 talked about us being “predestined to be conformed to the image of His son Jesus”. Later, Romans 12:4, talks about the Church being “one body but many parts with different functions. So in Christ we who are many form one body, and each belongs to all the others”. We can safely conclude that unity is about different parts coming together to carry out different functions towards the same goal, in the same way a body functions. It’s in unity that the full picture of the body of Christ is revealed through us the Church. It’s obligatory. God designed it that way through Jesus. At its best unity is motivated by love, nurtured in genuine

n conformity?

relationships and gives the freedom to participate. Conformity on the other hand is the act of matching attitudes, beliefs and behaviors to group norms. At its worst it's a powerful force that can take the form of overt social pressure or subtler unconscious influence.

Unity, like charity, begins at home in the local church, before it can go inter-church. The struggle starts within the local church where there may be people of different races, cultures, classes or professions. Often the preferred solution is to accommodate them as separate entities rather than take on the challenge of integration and unity. Could that mean that our church frameworks are somewhat built around conformity? Are we requiring those who wish to join us to conform to specific norms? From experience I would conclude yes, for both questions.

In the mid-90s, soon after our small congregation moved to Anfield in Liverpool, we encountered a group of young people that roamed the streets causing havoc and concern to residents.

Invariably they ended up on our church steps. We began praying for their salvation. One evening, half-way through our coveted praise and prayer meeting, they walked in to join us. They quickly got into the groove, clapping and dancing. Soon they were jumping excitedly on our lovely seats in praise. We had dared to give them space that night. It was a step too far for some who had earlier been praying for their salvation, but now promptly walked out. But God did something in the hearts of those young people that night. They became regular members of our congregation, not toning down to be like us, but challenging us to accept them as they were. It changed us as a church family and I think we became the better for it.

An Anglican church in the north of the city opened its doors to Tamil Christians over a period, and found that they took off their shoes before entering the place of worship as an act of reverence to God. Months on, people from other nationalities, including British people, had joined them in this symbolic act of worship. The whole church

became stronger because people were given the space to be different. "Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all." Whether at local or interchurch levels, unity will lead to change, which is why many are afraid to fully embrace it. Where change is resisted conformity rules. Both unity and conformity have a cost. With unity both the cost and the successes are shared by all who commit to it, while with conformity one side pays the most while the other takes all the credit.

So where does conformity fit into the equation? According to Paul, the conforming is not something we strive to achieve; it's God's spiritual act of yoking us to His son Jesus. Conforming at any other level contributes very little to real unity, but rather only temporarily enslaves.

Dr Tani Omideyi

Senior pastor of Liverpool-based Love and Joy Ministries (Int.), ecumenical canon at Liverpool Cathedral and chair of board of the Evangelical Alliance.



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Unity – when unity seems



At the Alliance, we're continually encouraged by the stories we hear from our teams and members of biblical unity when unity seems difficult – or even impossible. Our Gather network of unity groups has hundreds of examples, and we love celebrating those. Here are four other incredible examples of unity.

CAMPAIGN

The subject of abortion is fraught with tension and is an issue that is so potentially divisive, that subsequently it's difficult to talk about. Particularly in Northern Ireland, hardly a week goes by without a media headline of some sort or another. The campaign to change the law in NI has reached a crucial point with direct and targeted legal, medical and social challenges. But whatever the outcome of these challenges in years to come, legally or medically, we wanted to start right now to improve the care and support for women, children and their families.

I think it's safe to say that at the heart of people's feelings surrounding this very difficult issue is a desire to show compassion to a woman in need. However, there are different opinions as to what constitutes a compassionate response and many people feel disengaged or repelled by what they see as the entrenched and possibly aggressive tactics used by some individuals and/or groups.

Some don't feel that they can align themselves definitively with one 'side' or the other. There was space for a different voice and a new narrative. We wanted a new way to frame the abortion debate in NI; to find common ground, and break down barriers. So we brought together individuals who may or may not have aligned with any of the labels used; pro-life, pro-choice and feminist. We had no expectations of where that would lead or of any further commitment, but we were hopeful that it would be the start of something. And it was. A year later, we are launching a new movement.

Both Lives Matter is a collaboration of organisations and individuals seeking to re-frame the abortion debate in Northern Ireland. Advocating for better care in pregnancy crisis and creating a culture that values every woman and her unborn child. We imagine a people and place that values the life & health of women and unborn children, and pursues the wellbeing of both, because Both Lives Matter.



Dawn McAvoy,
Northern Ireland Evangelical Alliance

CULTURE

Cultural diversity is a part of the richness of following Christ. It comes with its own challenges.

For many years the variety of South Asian churches in the UK spent their time 'minding their own business'.

South Asian churches in the UK are often made up of different languages as well as religious and cultural backgrounds. Loyalty to traditions, culture and politics of the homeland may be hard to understand from the Western perspective. But for us Asians our past and our future are not so compartmentalised.

One of the most satisfying roles of South Asian Forum (SAF) is to bring all the South Asian Church leaders together. South Asian family holds the highest cultural precedence. Gathering at the Evangelical Alliance means differences of language, culture and politics are not just put aside, but overcome for the sake of the kingdom of God.

Practising being one body, unified by Jesus goes beyond leaders' meetings, but is rippling through the community as leaders model unity amongst themselves as well as teach it and live it in their churches.

This year the SAF is dedicated to promoting, encouraging and leading the way for unity amongst the South Asian churches by organising gatherings to celebrate Jesus together so that we can make him known.



Usha Reifsnider,
South Asian Forum

ms impossible

COMMUNITY

It was never going to be an easy to reconcile the frustration felt by members of Mark Duggan's family, his friends and the wider community following his death, with the official position of the police and statutory sector. Initial conversations with the police didn't quite get the response I had hoped for, which was a meeting with the family and community to avert a crisis. Then came the riots, which went way beyond anyone's wildest expectations – like a wild bush fire that refused to be tamed.

At the end there was carnage, distress and a total breakdown of law and order and trust, which I must admit also affected me.

Tottenham needed to regroup and demonstrate what a resilient community we were. Prayer gatherings were held on the high street and in churches as church and community members came out in their numbers to give clothes, books, toys and donations to those who lost everything when their homes and businesses were burnt down. We needed to ensure, while relating with the victims of the riots, we engaged with the frustrations of Mark Duggan's family and supported the investigations of the Independence Police Complainants Commission for which I was a member of its advisory group. Providing my church in the Tottenham Town Hall through the years for open and sometimes confrontational conversations became an absolute necessity then. The church became a hub for police and community press conferences, family meetings and mediation between aggrieved parties. The importance of remaining objective was crucial, albeit the perception was not that this was always the case. I had to remain undaunted by pressures from different quarters to express feelings that aligned with their position, but stay true to what I believed was right and would help build the broken bridges. Today, as I look back at the many interventions I was privileged to participate in or observe, including those carried out by the clergy, family, community activists, council, IPCC, politicians and police, I realise that amidst the tensions there was always the tenacity to create a better narrative for the future. My prayer remains that as we see the power of unity, we will not only work in our preferential silos but recognise how good and pleasant it is when we come together to work for peace and unity despite the diversity that confronts our ever-changing society.



Pastor Nims Obunge,
Freedom Ark Church

CHURCH

Twenty-one years ago Rev T.M.I Sathiyaraj came as a missionary from Sri Lanka to work with the growing Tamil community fleeing civil war between Tamil and Sinhalese people in Sri Lanka, and making their home in Southall, west London.

In the ministry, the first person who came to Christ was a Sinhalese. Other believers converted from Buddhism and Hinduism and eventually Bethany Church was planted to serve people from both the Tamil and Sinhalese communities. The church was the first in Europe to serve both Tamil and Sinhalese people, demonstrating how the love of God and the unity of the Church can help overcome division and how God's people can worship together in harmony.

We are now serving three generations of the Sri Lankan community, from the first generation who migrated here and who are steeped in Sri Lankan culture, through to second generation who experience life as half Sri Lankan and half British, to the third generation who were born here and are fully immersed in British culture. The older generation fear losing their cultural context, but the younger generations want church to be more British. One thing all generations have in common is rice and curry!



Pastor Chrisanthy Sathiyaraj,
Bethany Faith Ministries

Are you part of a unity group that has overcome hurdles and broken down boundaries to work together? We would love to hear more about it. Tweet us @idea_mag using the hashtag #EAunity.

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Till death do us part – just don't

Marriage. The Bible tells us that when a man leaves his mother and father and joins himself to his wife, the two become one. But, does it always seem so simple? Most couples argue, and some face huge differences that can sometimes seem too big to overcome. We got up close and personal with a few *idea* readers, asking them about the biggest bone of contention in their marriage, and how, despite this, they ensure they find unity in their marriage.



PHIL GREEN

In the beginning, we were attracted to one another because we shared so many similar passions and interest. We saw the world through a similar lens and had similar hopes and dreams for the future. We've been married almost seven years now and there is one massive difference – one that's common to many couples – it's a difference in body temperature, and results in thermostat wars! The problem is that we don't have a thermostat, we have storage heaters, so it means that the war tends to be waged in slow motion.

The main issue for me is the Arctic like temperature in the bedroom. So currently, I go to bed wearing a hoodie – it got so bad last week, I wore it with the hood up, while she often doesn't even sleep under the covers! From her point of view, as much as I complain, I still seem to sleep pretty

well, whereas if I sneak the temperature up she wakes up hot and sticky – we should mention she is currently pregnant so having to wear a hoody in bed is really not such a hardship!

In hindsight, we should have seen this difference coming! Right from the beginning, on car journeys I would turn the thermostat up, she'd turn it down. At the beginning of the relationship these differences were just a little quirky, later they actually become points of contention that required a conversation and compromise. We guess a differences in opinion over the temperature of a car or room is hardly the biggest of relationship challenges, but how we deal with these little, even humorous, differences are good indicators and provide a practice ground for dealing with more significant ones.



BAGGY

Generally, my wife Natalie and I are very similar in our political views. We're Labour supporters and lean towards the left. However, we are very opposite when it comes to Brexit. I voted to leave and Natalie didn't. I'll leave Natalie to give her reasons why she voted in, but briefly I voted to leave as I thought the EU was progressing too far in a direction I didn't want the UK to go. Being a bit older than Natalie (I'm 45), I remember being taught at school about how the UK had "recently" joined the EEC, as it was called then. It was solely about trade. In my 20s and 30s, I travelled through Europe many times on holidays. I loved the Schengen Zone and the single currency but never thought it would be necessary for Britain as being an island, you have to make an effort to get out of the country anyway. Mr Cameron asked for concessions, the EU said "no", so our only option was to leave. I do appreciate some of the laws we've gained since being part of the EU and there's no reason we can't keep the best of these after we leave.

So how do we live together with these differing opinions? Basically we don't talk about it a lot! We had quite animated debates just before and after the vote. Natalie would get upset as I'm quite relaxed about the future and Natalie thinks it's the end of the world. However, it's certainly not the elephant in the room. As no one really knows what's going to happen next, I would never say "I told you so" to anyone if this goes in Britain's favour. One advantage of having parents on each side is that our three kids got a very balanced view of Brexit!

put the heating on!



NATALIE

In the decade that Baggy and I have been married, I've become politically radicalised and militantly feminist and Baggy has mainly taken the same journey! However, Baggy has always had a negative view of the EU. He views it as undemocratic and unethical. I don't have a view on the EU as such, but am hugely concerned about the Tory government and see the EU as a necessary safeguard against Tory politics.

After the referendum, I was distraught at the era Brexit could usher in. Baggy was delighted. It was difficult for him to understand how deeply concerned I am about the potential destruction Brexit could contribute to. Whereas he is usually great at comforting me, I suddenly felt utterly alienated from the person I trust most deeply.

The following principles have helped us:

1. A healthy relationship is rooted in understanding not in agreement. Once Baggy began to grasp just how desolate I was about Brexit, Trump and the rise of fascism, he became more appreciative of my pain. We still aren't in agreement about Brexit, but he has focussed on comforting me, even if he thinks my views are overly dramatic. He trusts that how I feel is more important than his assessment of the political climate.
2. Honour positive intentions. Baggy didn't vote for Brexit because he is a racist bigot. I'm not distraught about the vote because I don't honour democracy. We try to honour each other's positive intentions, while also recognising intention isn't the same as impact.
3. Don't mention Brexit. Now we've come to a place of understanding with each other, we try to avoid talking about it. There's no point in going around in circles, and really the proof of the pudding is in the eating. Once we see the long-term reality of Brexit, we can then see whose perspective was most accurate.

“...but how we deal with these little, even humorous, differences are good indicators and provide a practice ground for dealing with more significant ones.”



USHA REIFSNIDER

My husband Matt and I have been married for almost 30 years and for all but 10 months of that time we have been missionaries. Our work has taken us all over the world. Either one of us may be left with the care of the home and family. People always ask us questions like: “Don't you miss each other?” Maybe they wonder if we thought it through.

We find spiritual and emotional intimacy gains an added dimension during these times apart. This is not to say that it is easy. I think the best analogy I can offer is fasting. I find that the busyness of the week doesn't allow me the intimacy with God that I really want. Being physically hungry on Sundays draws me to times of prayer. Being away from family, I don't have to think about food purchase, prep or meal times that break my routine. I enjoy food and everything to do with meals including cooking, serving,

eating and family time. But as soon as the habitual pangs for hunger start, I begin to pray. I'm more focused on prayer than any other time. The focus of my union with God goes beyond my needs and more about the beauty of the partnership; something I often take for granted.

While away from each other we try to beat each other on ways to creatively care. I have often left more than 100 precooked meals in the freezer. We use Skype to schedule prayer together. Most nights I will go to bed while Matt prays or reads out loud until I fall asleep.

We listen to the tiny details of day-to-day life in a way we often neglect when we are together.

When we miss birthdays and anniversaries, we create our own celebrations. 2015 we celebrated 10,000 days of being married.

The Protestant Reformation

Through this year in *idea*, we are marking the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's protest against the sale of indulgences – an event widely linked with the start of the Protestant Reformation, and thereby with the origins of evangelicalism. Certainly, Luther's emphases on biblical authority, justification by grace through faith and the priesthood of all believers would become hallmarks of evangelical belief. Yet while Luther gained numerous supporters, it would not be long before some of them diverged from him on significant issues. As they did so, tensions arose that raised profound questions about the limits of Christian unity.

Zwingli was significantly more radical on liturgy, Church government and politics than Luther. Yet at Marburg in 1529 they joined others to declare common convictions on 14 articles of doctrine. Only on the 15th and last article did they disagree. Luther believed that the true body and blood of Christ were "corporeally present" in the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper, whereas Zwingli regarded the elements as symbols enabling believers to recall the past sacrifice made by Christ. This had led to serious disagreement. Because of it Luther had at times refused even to recognise Zwingli and his followers as Christians. The 15th article, however, commended a more charitable approach: "Although we have not been able to agree [on this point] at this time," it said: "Each party should display towards the other Christian love, as far as each respective conscience allows, and both should persistently ask God the Almighty for guidance so that through His Spirit He might bring us to a proper understanding." In fact, tensions continued, but importantly divine truth was not relativised in this article: both parties pledged to keep striving for a "proper understanding" through prayer and study - recognising that they each had a partial grasp of it, but that the definitive truth was there to be found under God.

Similar dynamics were evident between John Wesley and George Whitefield two centuries later. Whitefield called Wesley his "spiritual father in Christ", and later relied

on his brilliant organisation to ensure that his own powerful preaching reached a mass audience. For his part, Wesley recognised Whitefield as his guide into the field preaching that would come so vitally to distinguish the revival. As J.D. Walsh has noted in the 1730s: "Whitefield and the Wesleys worked in the closest harmony." Yet by late 1740 they had fallen out. Wesley had long promoted Arminianism, with its emphasis on free grace, against the Calvinist focus on predestination. Whitefield, however, became increasingly drawn to Calvinism, and when Wesley intensified his defence of Arminian theology, Whitefield issued a firm critique of Wesley's view, which promoted Calvin's stress on election. Reconciliation on this specific issue was never achieved, and Wesley maintained to the end of his life that Whitefield had caused the "first breach" in the revival. Yet from 1742 relations improved. Whitefield received more invitations to preach from John Wesley's societies, and brokered an agreement with Wesley that Calvinistic Methodist chapels would not be built where Wesleyan societies already existed, and vice versa. When Whitefield died in 1770, Wesley preached at his funeral, as Whitefield himself had requested.

The formation of our own Evangelical Alliance in 1846 owed much to the aim of "unity in diversity" that had informed the Marburg Colloquy and the Wesley-Whitefield compact. Scots Calvinists like Thomas Chalmers and John Henderson joined the Wesleyan Jabez Bunting, the Anglican Edward Bickersteth, the Congregationalist John Angell James and the Baptist Edward

Steane in striking a fresh 'keynote of love' across the diversity of evangelicalism. Crucially, they grounded that vision in a basis of faith that defined the shared biblical convictions that enabled them to undertake more effective mission together than they

“
That process of discernment is not always easy; sometimes, indeed, it's painful. But it's vital...”

and the effect on unity

could have achieved apart. Even so, the strong global structure they had envisaged for the new body was diluted following a dispute on slave-holding between the British and American delegations to the inaugural conference. On that issue, the British party's belief that biblical teaching ruled out slave-ownership transcended the desire for institutional unity. A theological line was drawn.

More recently, the Alliance has faced various other issues that have tested its commitment to unity in the truth. Twice in the past 20 years we have published reports that have encouraged greater pastoral generosity towards gay men and lesbians, but which have reaffirmed the classical evangelical view that sexually active same-sex partnerships are incompatible

with God's will as revealed in scripture. In 2000 we carefully considered whether the view that the unredeemed might eventually be annihilated could be recognised as an acceptable evangelical position alongside the more common evangelical affirmation of eternal conscious punishment in hell. We concluded that the holding of either view over against the other was 'neither essential in respect of Christian doctrine, not finally definitive of what it means to be an Evangelical'. At the same time, however, we rejected the universalist view that all will be saved as lacking biblical foundation.

In these, as in other issues, we have sought to follow Luther in making scripture our key authority. As God's word written, the Bible points us to God's word incarnate: Jesus. As that divine word, Jesus embodies truth

and calls us to uphold that truth (John 8:32; 14:6). Just as he himself used scripture to defend that truth (Matthew 4:1-11), so we are obliged to ensure that our theology and practice have biblical warrant. If we find that the approach taken by another individual or group lacks such warrant, it's legitimate for us to say so. But even as we "speak the truth" in such circumstances, we are called to do so in "love" (Ephesians 4:15). No doubt, scripture urges us to "contend" for the true faith (Jude 1:3), and even allows that we might separate from others when that faith is sundered by false teaching, ungodly conduct, or both (1 John 3:19-24; 1 Corinthians 5:11-13). But even with such separation, there is typically the hope of reconciliation and restoration in the truth (Matthew 18:15-20; Galatians 6:1). After all, unity belongs with truth and love as a fundamental mark of discipleship – from Jesus' prayer that we should be one as he and the Father are one (John 17:11) to Paul's instruction to "maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3).

These, then, are the basic principles we must follow when we differ with other Christians on doctrine and/or practice. The particular challenge for us as evangelicals, however, is that in making scripture the primary reference-point for settling disputes rather than church leaders, councils or traditions, we face the prospect that interpretations of scripture may vary, even among those who regard themselves as committed evangelicals, and who would affirm all of these core principles. Indeed, our proper prioritisation of scripture needs to be linked with a recognition that as sinners who "see through a glass darkly" (1 Corinthians 13:12) we may sometimes diverge in our understanding of scripture. It's then a matter of humbly discerning whether that divergence merits breaking fellowship, or merely "agreeing to disagree agreeably" within the context of continuing fellowship. That process of discernment is not always easy; sometimes, indeed, it's painful. But it's vital if we are to maintain our integrity as evangelicals who are passionate about the truth of the gospel and about the unity for which Jesus himself so earnestly prayed.





The limits of unity

I was asked to preach recently at a wedding of two good friends of mine, and the theme that I was given was the bride of Christ. In terms of the wedding sermon, this involved some hurdles. For instance, the imagery in the Bible is looking to a future wedding. We remain in a state of betrothal – more committed than being engaged, but still not quite married. Writing this sermon forced me to look afresh at this image of the Church, alongside others.

We will look at some limits of the unity of the Church, but do need to start with a recognition of our fundamental identity: we are united whether we like it or – more likely it often seems – not. Two metaphors are particularly challenging in this regard as I look at the Church today and back through its history. We are the body of Christ, yet it seems that for much of the time that body is abusing itself, the various parts seeking to beat up other parts. This can't be healthy for the body. This has necessary effects on the bride that is being prepared for the marriage ceremony to come. One can't help but wonder how Christ would react were he to return and be faced with this damaged, bleeding and divided bride – something that is all too close to our minds as we celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, a time of great spiritual renewal, but

also of fracturing both between Catholic and Protestant and between the various Protestant groups.

However, I have the chance in my teaching at LST to take groups of students to many different church contexts – Anglican cathedrals, Pentecostal gatherings, a Catholic monastery, a Greek Orthodox service – in addition to attending my home Baptist church, and in each I see and experience great strengths drawn from their traditions and practices – and always some things that don't resonate with me – and I'm amazed by the beautiful diversity of experience that I encounter.

On reflection, I see how an emphasis on different aspects of the nature of God, and therefore the posture of the believer, lead to this variety in the outworking of the faith. Depending on the weight given to the glory, holiness, relationality, love, life, light of God, the believer is called more to humility, devotion, worship, mission or prayer; none would deny the importance of other elements and each incorporates all aspects to some degree. In each case, a brief consideration is sufficient to see how important context is in the developing focus of belief and the nature of Christian practice. There is nothing fundamentally wrong with any of these cases of diversity – a church in

rural China probably should look different from one serving the City of London.

The fact of unity doesn't imply that there should be homogeneity: that all churches should look the same, worship the same, pray the same. There is a great richness about the diversity that exists in the different forms of church, if the roots of this seem to have been more about division. At the centre is a shared belief in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, revealed in the person of the Son, in the work of the Holy Spirit, in the writings of scripture and in the nature of creation. The salvation won at the cross and made effective in us by the Spirit is held in common by the whole Church, but what this means for denominations, congregations and individuals is not the same everywhere and at all times.

One key characteristic of church life should be holiness, an aspect of which is being set apart from the surrounding culture. Depending on the virtues and vices of that culture, this will manifest in different ways, often working more closely with certain parts of scripture. This is one of the most glorious and difficult aspects of our common faith – the nature of our core revelation not in a systematic theology, but a collection of narratives, songs, stories, laws and letters. As new cultural challenges arise,

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The salvation won at the cross and made effective in us by the Spirit is held in common by the whole Church, but what this means for denominations, congregations and individuals is not the same everywhere and at all times.

new prophetic voices call the Church to different incarnations of the richness of the gospel and a greater diversity of Christian expression results. Too often this leads to condemnation by one Christian of another, without a desire to understand why the other worships or thinks or acts as they do. We react so quickly to surface features without any evidenced desire to understand and even learn from one another.

There was a conference held in Lausanne in 1927 for different groups to discuss the Lord's Supper, with the intention of holding a joint communion service at the end. The vastly different views clashed and there was a danger that the conference could end in chaos and lead to greater divisions until Bishop Charles Brent suggested that the delegates spend time together in prayer, closing by reciting the Lord's Prayer


together. There was a recognition that being united in faith was more foundational than unity of practice. The unity that the church is called to is not one of Christian clones, but of brothers and sisters living and working in different cultures and conditions with one Lord and one Spirit.

Matt Knell will be leading a seminar stream at Spring Harvest Minehead weeks 1 & 2 this year.




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The face of unity

There is, it seems, only so much truth in the world and only so many people can be right concerning it.

I received the email that a good friend was to be received into the Roman Catholic church around 8pm on Sunday evening. I had just finished a dinner in which Vatican II and the evolving understanding of 20th century Catholic tradition had been in as much common parlance as the vodka cocktails and Tia Maria coffees. I had been playing defender and critic, depending on the subject; I, the never-going-to-be-Catholic, but the willing sympathiser.

It had me thinking as I washed the last of the dishes and poured a glass of wine to sip while I took up the anonymous scribe of *The Cloud of Unknowing*. I thought long about this Church my friend was entering into. It's no secret that Roman Catholic tradition holds that the Holy See is the true and full expression of the Church. They comprise the Church universal, they hold the highest of all truths concerning God.

For all my sympathies, I remain a good Protestant. I don't believe Rome is any closer to God than the Anglican parish I attend now or the Episcopal, Baptist, or Southern Baptist I attended before. Yet I may be a poor Protestant in that I don't presume that someone aligned with Rome is outright going to hell. There's a scripture, somewhere, about confessing Christ, believing He is Lord, and this being the essential of salvation. It may be that I know only good Catholics, because they surely do.

Unity shows up in this conversation a lot. The Catholic Church speaks of Jesus' prayer in John 17, that the disciples may be one, as the touchstone argument for the unity of the Church. We are told that what Jesus meant, was that the Church should look exactly like what Rome has conceived. This is unity. In turn, the eastern Orthodox say the same, point to themselves and say: this is unity. Then the smattering of variant Protestants, every tribe and tongue, point to their patch of earth and say, this is unity.



And we all pray, to some extent, that we would all be one. But when we say 'one', when we say 'unity', we say that we should all be like each other and all believe the same. There is, it seems, only so much truth in the world and only so many people can be right concerning it: "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in me through their word; that they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you sent me."

This is the line that trips us up, that has us scattered in this fragmented conversation of unity. This idea of oneness. But have we cheated it by making oneness too easy to understand? The oneness Christ speaks of, implicitly, draws us to contemplation of one of the most profound mysteries of our faith: the trinity.

The trinity, which is impossible to explain well, is the oneness Christ speaks of. Unity is like the unity shared between father, son, and holy ghost. A oneness that the desert fathers described as an eternal dance. For the oneness of the trinity is also diversity: the son is the only incarnate, the father, eternal spirit, the holy ghost said to be both within and outside of us. Yet He is one God, who wert, art, and evermore shalt be. Hereafter the language slips and the words fail, too much is already said even in this. It's a mystery unexplainable, yet mere Christians everywhere affirm this one thing.

So what does Trinitarian unity look like?

Is it possible that we have misused these words of Jesus by coming to them from the wrong angle? Instead of saying: "We believe this, therefore it is what is right, therefore

all should believe the same," are we to start from a place that says: "We believe this, therefore it is the closest we have gotten, others reveal to us parts of Christ we have not yet seen."

What if unity looks not like a oneness that is sameness, but a oneness that is diversity? What if unity is a dinner table rounded by mere Christians, confessing the essentials of our faith: Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again? What if unity looks like a cosmic dance, turning to our neighbours with joy, disagreeing in love, listening longer than we speak?

Perhaps Christ's prayer is more realised than we have understood. Perhaps we are already more one than not. Perhaps this, then, is the true Church: God's various, variant people, huddled together around their tables, joining hands to sing the oldest of hymns, that Christ is Lord. Now and forever. Amen.

We need your help to ensure the "missing generation" is no longer missing. *threads* is reaching out to the missing generation, young adults in their 20s and 30s who are leaving the Church in droves as they see faith as irrelevant, out of touch and side-lined from the very real issues they are facing.

For as little as £3 a month, you could become a supporter of *threads* and play your part in ensuring this generation is no longer missing – visit eauk.org/supportthreads or call 0207 520 3848



The *idea*-playlist *our list of the best things to read, do and listen to.*

The *idea* iPod

The albums we're downloading this month. From rock to pop, this is the music we've discovered recently.

Unleashed –
Skillet

Campfire II – Simplicity –
Rend Collective

How can it be –
Lauren Daigle

Still –
Rivers and Robots

Let Love Loose –
I Am Future



BOOKS

Krish Kandiah



Is God a stranger?

Former Alliance director and founder of Home For Good, a national organisation encouraging Christians to foster and adopt, Krish Kandiah, has a new book out this spring. The author dropped into our London base to tell us a little more about the book.

What is the book about?

God is Stranger was written to encourage and inspire Christians to pursue knowing God with new energy. It encourages us to recognise that our current knowledge of God is so small compared to how much we will know Him and so we should pursue Him.

Why did you write it?

There are so many times in my life that despite my best efforts God felt very distant to me. As I travelled around churches across the UK and around the world, I discovered that I was not alone, in fact so many of our Bible heroes found God to be a stranger

to them and this book explores that discovering God is a stranger to us could be one of the most important discoveries we can make this side of eternity.

Who should read it?

This book is for anyone who is feeling like God is more distant from them than they would like.

Many people contacted me to tell me how much my previous book *Paradoxology* had helped them to see God in a new light. This book takes things one step further still. This book is not for the faint hearted as there is a sting in the tail of the book that uncovers something revolutionary about the way

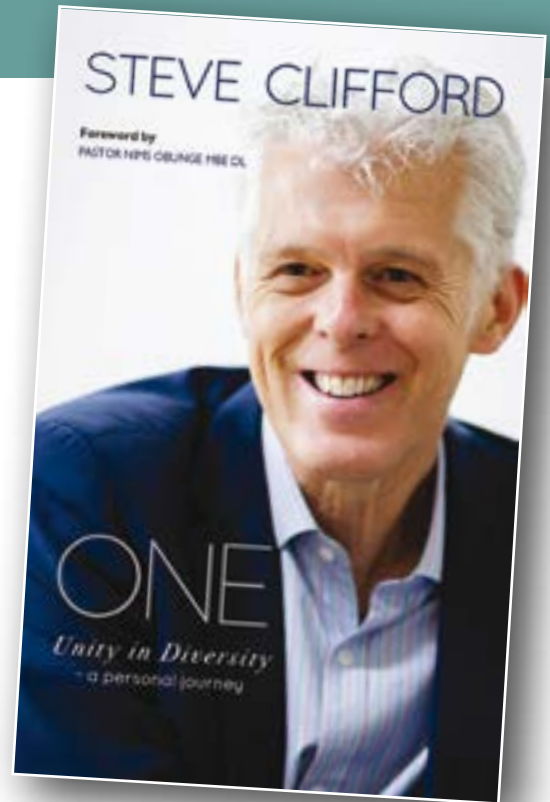


we come closer to God that has something important to say regarding the global refugee crisis.

God is Stranger is published by SPCK and is due to be published 16 March 2017.

ONE: 5 lessons about unity

Steve Clifford, general director of the Alliance, explores five lessons he has learnt about unity in his leadership journey and included in his new book 'One: Unity in diversity – a personal journey' (Monarch 2017)...



1. Unity doesn't mean uniformity

I'm privileged to have played a part in starting the Alliance's One People Commission, which celebrates diversity while promoting unity across ethnic differences. Such a desire for unity is, of course, very countercultural in our 21st century world. We live in an age of increasing fragmentation as we separate ourselves into self-defined groups built around age, ethnicity, culture, class, wealth, educational achievement, and profession. Jesus is committed to building his Church, a church of in-depth relationships, of preferring and sharing. A Church of such diversity that finds a unity which crosses all divides.

2. Unity won't fully be achieved by us

At the heart of my book is a conviction that the unity God has both given us and called us to maintain will not be achieved through organisational structures, events, assemblies, councils, great declarations, or large institutions. The great Christian unity movements across the UK and the rest of the world, including the Evangelical Alliance UK and the World Evangelical Alliance, will never achieve what Jesus had in mind in His prayer in John 17. We can simply work to create a context, an environment, a culture in which relationships can be built and oneness developed.

3. Sometimes unity fails

Conflict is never pleasant. Like most, I prefer to avoid it. In fact, scripture exhorts us: "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with one another" (Romans 12:18). I'm definitely a live-at-peace-with-one-another kind of person. Conflict is hard enough even when we face it in the context of family, friends, neighbours, or workmates. It's stressful and emotionally draining. Conflict escalates when it affects the wider group. Sadly, as part of my role at the Alliance, I have seen more times than I would like to count, instances in which unity has failed in the local and national Church. We need to be aware of this, but also be prepared with practical steps to handle it well.

4. Unity is all about relationships

We are all part of the family. We are clothed in Christ. We are one in Christ. What an amazing truth, but what an incredible challenge. But do we look like family? Do we behave like family? Do we treat each other like family? Of course, the sad truth is that in so many areas, we do not treat each other as brothers and sisters with a family bond. And thus it stands as an offence to the gospel we proclaim. Our relationships carry a missionary imperative, a purpose found in the very heartbeat of God.

5. Unity is something Jesus prayed for

In the early days after I had been appointed general director of the Alliance, there was one overriding passage of scripture I just felt I couldn't get away from. It was almost as if I'd been ambushed by the great John 17 prayer of Jesus. Encouragingly, as I spent time delving into the Alliance's history, I discovered that right from the very beginning – in both planning and executing the great 1846 assembly out of which the Alliance was formed – there the prayer was to be found. It seemed that John 17 was in the very DNA of the Alliance and particularly the call Jesus made within the prayer for unity among his followers: "I in them and you in me – so that they might be brought to complete unity." Throughout my time at the Alliance, I feel I have lived in that prayer. Almost every time I read it, I discover fresh insights into the heartbeat of God. John 17 is like a treasure hunt with wonderfully precious gems to be discovered and enjoyed. The treasure is to challenge, shape, and refine us. John 17 tells us that the unity Jesus prayed for is not just for unity's sake – it's a missional imperative: so that the world might believe.

One: Unity in Diversity by Steve Clifford will be published mid-March 2017 by Monarch.



In your words

We love hearing from you, so have your say on any of the issues raised in *idea* or make any comments about the Evangelical Alliance by emailing idea@eauk.org

SCARY STATISTICS

The survey of committed evangelical Christians which you present in Jan/Feb 2017 *idea* makes scary reading.

One in seven committed evangelicals (16 per cent) think that Christians should not challenge Muslims about the right of all people to believe, or don't know. Thirteen per cent of evangelicals (as many as one in eight) felt that there should be a place in the British legal system for Sharia law, or did not know. Eight per cent (one in 13) believe that preachers should not have the right to express their beliefs about sin, judgment and hell, even if people find these offensive, or do not know. Almost one in five (19 per cent) believe that an employee or student should not have the right to speak or write openly and without fear of being disciplined about religious beliefs or values they hold, even when these may cause offence, or they do not know.

Clearly, evangelicalism is not as consistent as we might like to believe, for in our churches there is a substantial minority who hold views completely contrary to the evangelical position that the Alliance puts forward - a position that I myself identify with - or who are simply confused.

Michael Gowen

Solihull, West Midlands

CORNUCOPIA OF DELIGHT

In your editorial you highlighted the direction the magazine was taking and the content in broad outline. It was so relevant and immediate I could hardly wait to open the copy! What I found inside was a cornucopia of delight. Not that all the content was 'delightful', but it was relevant, urgent, inspiring, informative, eye-opening if not eye-boggling. Very well done to you and all your contributors.

It might be a while before you can better this one, but I encourage you to try!

John Pilling

Via email

TWITTER TALK: How important is unity to your church?

We asked Twitter whether unity was something their church talks about regularly and puts into action. The results might surprise you:

46%	UNITY IS RARELY MENTIONED
36%	VERY - IT'S A MAJOR FOCUS
18%	FAIRLY - IT'S AN AIM
0%	I DON'T KNOW

HEARD IN TWEETS

Sailors' Churches @SailorsChurches

We're thankful to @EAUknews for their on-going #support! Great to see our @SailorsSociety ads appearing in @idea_mag #Connected #Partners

Missional Generation @MissionalGen

We really enjoyed writing a bit about what we do for local churches @idea_mag see page 16 thanks @EAUknews

Esther Collective @EstherCollectiv

Could you put any of these into practice this weekend? '5 ways to start a conversation about your faith' bit.ly/2gBKmla @idea_mag

Tim Sutton @timsutton_abc

A great reminder... The theology of conversion: how the Church has lost the language euk. co/2fmBSb9 via @idea_mag

RCCG Central Office @rccguk

Gavin Calver speaks on how to help young persons maximise their potential in #churches. @GavCalver @EAUknews #rccgukpastorsretreat #Brighton



Chine McDonald @ChineMcDonald

Today was my last @EAUknews board meeting. I held it together just about.

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

divergence of opinion or understanding among evangelicals.

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

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In the storm

“*Thank God, it's not all dependent on us being brave.*”

I don't know if you're like me, but often as I come to the end of one year and look forward to the next, I take a few moments to see if God might have something to say for the coming year.

So it was a few months ago, as 2016 came to an end and I looked ahead in anticipation to 2017, two words came to mind. It felt as if it was a challenge – certainly for me personally, but perhaps for us as a Church across the UK. Over the last few weeks, I've lived with these two words – I've found it impossible to get away from them. I've reflected on the challenge they bring to me in my own Christian journey, but also to us as an Alliance, and the churches and organisations that we endeavour to serve. The two words are simple and yet, as I have reflected on them, enormously provocative: be brave.

As I have responded to this call to bravery, I was reminded – as I read a book written by two friends of mine – of the incident that follows the feeding of the 5000 in Matthew chapter 14. The crowd is being dismissed, the clear up has happened and Jesus is determined to have a time of prayer alone on the mountainside. So, Jesus sends his disciples off in the boat to the other side. The Greek words used create the sense of Jesus, with great urgency, pushing them out into the lake. We, of course, know what happens next. The disciples are in trouble, there's a strong wind and big waves. Presumably Jesus knows there is a storm coming. It seems Jesus is sending them into danger.

It's at this point that Jesus meets them. As he walks on the water towards them, his first words are simple, yet profound. “Take courage!” Perhaps we can translate this: “Be brave.” To which he adds: “It is I”. In other words, they are not alone in the storm because he is there with them.

As we look back on 2016, and forward into the rest of 2017 and beyond, it seems to many of us as if we are living in a storm, both personally, nationally and internationally. Wherever we look, there seems to be uncertainty as to what the future will hold. The vote to leave the EU; the election of President Trump; the mass movement of displaced people; the rise of radical, militant Islam; the repositioning of China



and Russia; government policy which, in the name of challenging radicalisation and defending human rights, is in danger of eroding religious liberty and fundamentally reshaping how we view our humanity and conduct our relationships. So much uncertainty can lead us into deep insecurity, even fear. So it is, that “take courage” and “be brave” are words that seem so appropriate. Perhaps with such uncertainty around, this is an opportunity for us as followers of Jesus to offer another outlook on life to those who surround us.

Could it be that the ‘storm’ will open up opportunities to share our faith in Jesus, perhaps to offer a prayer, or to step up and make ourselves available to take on fresh responsibilities, and so initiate change for good? Could it be that God is sending us out into the storm, not fearful of what the future

holds, but confident that God is committed to working His purposes out right across His creation – and that we have the privilege of joining in on His mission for His world?

The great news of course is He doesn't leave us on our own, He promises to be with us and to give us whatever we need to fulfil the task. As Jesus was about to leave his disciples, he gave them some final instructions. In Acts 1:8, he puts it like this: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Thank God, it's not all dependent on us being brave. He promises the Holy Spirit. Let's face it, it's impossible unless the Holy Spirit enables us, but with the power of the Holy Spirit within us and working through us, who knows what He might achieve.



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