

idea

Meet Steve
Clifford

p16

uniting to change society | march/april 2009



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Editor's note

Magazine production schedules always create a time-shift anomaly, as we work far ahead of the date when you're actually holding this issue in your hands. The week I'm writing this,

Barack Obama has just been inaugurated as the 44th US President, so of course my mind can't help but linger on feelings about regime change and hope for the future.

Is it a coincidence that Steve and Ann Clifford also made their first official appearance in the Alliance's London office this week? It was great to meet them, and you can read a conversation with Steve in this issue (p16). He starts work as the Alliance's new general director in April, and there's definitely a forward-looking feeling in the air.

This is perhaps the attitude we should be taking about the deepening recession as well. This issue features a few articles looking at the financial crisis, including a news story (p4) about Alliance events and resources and our *Talking About* feature (p22), in which Tony Watkins examines the topic through the prism of pop culture.

And of course the main theme for this issue connects to all of this, as we begin a four-part series on the Alliance's Square Mile initiative (p18), looking at how churches can offer mercy, influence, life discipleship and evangelism to their immediate community.

This is a challenge for all of us to stay connected with the world that's immediately around us. And as transport and technology make the planet smaller, we know that whatever we do right here will have ripples far away. It's a principle that echoes through the speeches of President Obama and of course the words of Micah 6.8: "And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

Rich

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a forward-looking
feeling in the air**

evangelical alliance
uniting to change society

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There are around 2 million evangelical Christians in the UK, according to a 2007 Tearfund survey.

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

Story ideas from members are welcome, and will be considered by the editorial board. Unsolicited material will not be returned unless a stamped, self-addressed envelope has been provided.

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Churches target debt issues

Churches must be at the heart of helping individuals recover from debt during the financial crisis. That was the message from Hazel Blears MP, the Communities Secretary, who was the keynote speaker at the Alliance's *Life Beyond Debt* event in London on 5 February. The conference brought together churches and charities working in debt relief.

Echoing President Barack Obama's inauguration speech, Blears said that it would take the whole country, not just government to pull the UK out of recession. "In the current economic climate everybody has got to pull together," she said, noting that churches have a key role to play in providing information on debt recovery and offering debt counselling.

"Local authorities should be commissioning faith organisations to do this kind of work," she added. "Often churches can reach people that other people can't reach."

At the central London event, the Alliance proposed that every church in the country should be able to offer support to people struggling with the burden of debt during the recession. This could be through debt counselling, running credit unions or providing food banks.

Hazel Blears gave this a cautious welcome. "It might be that we don't need a completely new service in every church," she said, "but we need to make sure that churches know what help is on offer so that when people come to them they can tell them what services are available, or help them themselves, whichever is appropriate."

Debt – both national and personal – is becoming an increasing problem as the recession takes hold. The UK has a public debt of £650 billion and a consumer debt of £1.4 trillion. According to Credit Action, every adult in Britain owes £30,420, and the average outstanding mortgage is more than £100,000. This is at a time when unemployment has risen to 1.92 million, the highest for 10 years.

In September, the Samaritans reported a rise of 25 per cent in the number of calls it received. These, it said, were due to people anxious about their finances.

Helping people recover

Life Beyond Debt brought together 30 Christian organisations that are currently helping people to recover from debt. Other speakers at the event, held at the Salvation Army's international headquarters, included Keith Tondeur, president of Credit Action, and Matt Barlow, chief executive of Christians Against Poverty.

Alliance Parliamentary Officer Daniel Webster, the event's organiser said, "The

aim of the event was to bring together churches and Christian charities that are working to help people recover from debt. There could be no more crucial time for churches to take on the task of providing help for people who are struggling during the credit crunch."

The Alliance is urging every church in the country to get involved in this in whatever way is appropriate for them. "That could be anything from providing practical help to those struggling to pay their bills, running credit unions or food banks or providing debt counselling," said Webster. "Churches are uniquely placed in their communities and have for centuries been the place that people turn to in times of trouble. We want that to be the case now and are concerned to help churches find the resources in order to help others."

Hazel Blears said that the country as a whole needs to "take a reality check" over spending. "This is something that is difficult at the moment," she said, "but is an opportunity [for us] to be more realistic."

She said that the government was committed to ensuring that people "kept a roof over their heads", but criticised banks for the "irresponsible lending" which led to the financial crisis. HS

► More *Life Beyond Debt* events will be held during the year. For more information, visit: lifebeyonddebt.org

Often churches can reach people that other people can't reach

GAMBLING. The gambling industry, like virtually all sections of the economy, is struggling in the current climate. In response to this difficulty it has asked the Government to double the limits for stakes and prizes for many fruit machines. Initially the Government had indicated that it would only back a small increase, acting cautiously to avoid increasing the risk of problem gambling. This was the approach agreed to in the 2005 Gambling Act.

However, it now seems willing to accept the demands of the gambling industry and ignore the inevitable impact that it will have. While all sections of the economy need support in difficult circumstances, this current move seems to prop up the bank balance of the industry by digging into the pockets of the poorest.

The Alliance, along with other Christian groups, has met with officials to express these concerns and call for a cautious approach, insisting that any changes are backed by research showing they will not increase gambling addiction. Next year the Government will review the prizes and stakes for casino fruit machines. If it agrees to all the industry's demands on this occasion, a dangerous precedent will be set for large increases based purely on the public not spending their money in this way during an economic downturn, and the desire of the gambling industry to boost its bottom line.

CHARITY COMMISSION. The Charity Commission has published its final guidance for the public benefit of religion. This follows a long and complex period of consultation after the passing of the Charities Act in 2006. There was concern that these regulations would require churches and Christian organisations to provide onerous evidence of the benefit that they provide, where previously religious public benefit was automatically presumed by the law.

The Alliance has worked with the Commission through the passage of the bill and subsequently in discussions about the

implementation process. As a result of this long-standing engagement, virtually all of the concerns expressed have been dealt with. Religious organisations will still have to state the public benefit they provide in their annual report, but they will not have to provide evidence of this. This is a huge relief for churches and enables them to continue to provide the benefit to the public they always have. New regulations will apply to all charities whose financial year began on or after 1 April 2008. eauk.org/pq

ASYLUM. A healthy dialogue has recently opened up between the Alliance and the UK

Border Agency. At the moment, discussions have centred on the plight of Christian asylum seekers in Wales who have fled religious persecution, and will hopefully enhance the Home Office's understanding of faith issues as it processes cases from countries such as Eritrea, Iran and Pakistan.

Following the 2007 report *Alltogether for Asylum Justice*, the Alliance has continued to work with the Home Office. This work has developed into the larger *Don't Be a Stranger* campaign, encouraging churches to reach out to migrants. In Wales, churches that work with asylum seekers have been networked together and have agreed to share information and work more collaboratively. The meetings so far have been very fruitful and bridges have been carefully built. Together with Christian Solidarity Worldwide, the Alliance has been asked to undertake research on behalf of the UK Borders Agency in Wales. nostrangers.org.uk

Daniel Webster

Life beyond debt

In February, the Alliance held its *Life Beyond Debt* conference drawing together many Christian organisations that are working to help people cope with the economic crisis and apparent uncertainty in the Government.

When Government Minister Baroness Vadera (pictured) suggests that green shoots of recovery are showing, people's confidence in the Government could be shaken. After all, there are very few signs of recovery; we have the highest unemployment for over a decade and are now officially in recession. With all parties desperate to be seen to be doing something, the impression of headless

chickens is unavoidable. It is also a disturbing reminder that even those in whom we place our trust do not really have a clear idea of how to get out of this mess.

In this climate of uncertainty, churches often provide a crucial antidote. They offer essential services such as debt advice or the provision of food and essentials for families who are struggling. They are good news in a time when the headlines stream constant bad news. To see how your church can make an impact, visit: lifebeyonddebt.org

Water strategy urgently needed

Plans for managing water are failing to consider the impact of climate change, resulting in devastating consequences for the world's poorest people. This is the key message from the report *Separate Streams? Adapting Water Resources Management to Climate Change*, published by Alliance member agency Tearfund. The report says that unless major changes are made to water management strategies, climate change will threaten the lives of millions as rising temperatures deplete water supplies.

Today, around 700 million people face water scarcity, and the number of people living in severely water-stressed regions is set to rise to 5 billion by 2050 unless significant changes are made to water management strategies.

The report, which includes research from the semi-arid areas of Niger and northeast Brazil (pictured), highlights that climate change adaptation must be integrated within water management policy to benefit the poorest and most vulnerable people.

Speaking at UN climate talks in Poznan, Poland, in December (see p11), Tearfund Director of Advocacy Paul Cook said, "In northeast Brazil, local farmers are sharing what little water they have with their cattle, leaving themselves vulnerable to sickness and disease. This is shameful, and future planning on water management strategies must factor in the impacts of global warming if such injustices are to be reversed." tearfund.org

Youth prepare for a Shockwave

Young Christians from more than 50 nations will take part in a prayer event for the estimated 60 million young Christians around the world who face persecution every day. Organised by Alliance member agency Open Doors, *Shockwave 2009* takes place over the weekend of 6-8 March.

Over these three days, young Christians will be encouraged to pray for the persecuted church worldwide, 60 per cent of which is under age 18. British young people who want to join with

others can visit prayer centres in Aberdeen, Oxford and Manchester. Hundreds of young people will also gather in Bradford.

"We believe that prayer changes things," said Eddie Lyle, CEO of Open Doors. "*Shockwave* will create an army of love to come alongside God's young family of persecuted believers. We urge every young Christian in the UK to join up with their global brothers and sisters and to march alongside their suffering brethren in prayer." odshockwave.org

Conference aims to redeem sex

In response to the progress of the gay and lesbian agenda in the UK, Alliance member CARE and Anglican Mainstream will hold *Sex and the City: Redeeming Sex Today*, a two-day conference 24-25 April in London. The event is being held to answer questions about why social, cultural, political and religious sectors are all bowing to pressure to redefine relationships according to models presented by gay advocates.

According to Dr Lisa Nolland of Anglican Mainstream, the gay and lesbian contingent is but the first manifestation of a profound sexual sea-change occurring today that will make the 1960s sexual revolution look tame. Many institutions do not want to draw attention to themselves or cause offence to their supporters by being politically incorrect. And religious groups do not know about what is really happening because it is not within their immediate vision.

Nolland also acknowledges that these areas are minefields, and that sincere people of good faith approach them differently. "We believe that information and practical help are critical," she said. "Men and women of all faiths must become informed about these present developments and be able to offer hope to those who feel trapped by their sexual orientations."

The conference will be led by Dr Joseph Nicolosi, Dr Jeff Satinover and Arthur Goldberg JD, all of whom have written respected books on the subject. anglican-mainstream.net

Campaign raises Easter awareness

The4points has launched a major campaign to support churches in Merseyside and around the UK in the run up to Easter Sunday. Since its launch in 2005, the simple logo has helped communicate the Gospel in countries all around the world using four icons that mean: God loves me, I have sinned, Jesus died for me, and I need to decide.

"People across the world have found The4points to be a very simple tool that helps them to share their Christian faith in a clear and memorable way," says the project's founder, Dave Sharples (pictured with his children). "The Easter campaign has two main objectives: it will raise people's awareness and understanding of the Gospel, and it will also help congregations of every size to invite people to their Easter service."

The campaign includes putting The4points logo down the side of 30 black cabs in Merseyside, with the slogan "What

Easter is all about" on the back. Local churches will join in the campaign using banners, posters and T-shirts.

At a national level, church packages include banners, posters and personalised invitations to help local people invite friends and neighbours to their Easter service. Personal packages are still available at: the4points.com

Examining the state of the nation

Christians from Wales will gather together in Newtown on 12 March for the Waleswide Church Planting and Strengthening Conference, looking at how things have progressed since the last consultation in 2005 and looking ahead to 2015. The event will feature church workers sharing their personal experiences in planting churches, supporting developing churches and helping leaders with transition issues. Speakers include Julian Richards and Rob Jones, while seminars will offer time for questions and answers. waleswide.org.uk

the4points

"Without your financial support Rodion could be homeless again."

SGA has been involved in the care and support of orphans in Ukraine for many years. However, on reaching 18, teenagers must leave the orphanages where they have received the love and care of Christian house parents and step out on their own.

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SGA is helping Grace Church in Odessa with financial support to build a Transition House for teenagers such as Rodion which will house 65 young people in separate apartments giving them both the independence and support they need.

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media matters

by Lucy Cooper, Press Officer

It is not often that we see broadcast media solely dedicate time to a discussion on the meaning of the cross of Jesus, but this was exactly what happened in January when BBC South East covered the removal of a graphic crucifix due to the fact that it was putting people off entering the church. Despite different Christian opinions on this particular news story, few could deny that it was a thought-provoking presentation of the Gospel from a variety of perspectives.

When St John's Church in Horsham removed this crucifix from its window and replaced it with an empty cross, the church found itself in an unexpected media frenzy over the rights and wrongs of this exchange. Although this controversy eventually generated a positive debate, it wasn't all plain sailing for the Rev Ewen Souter, who found himself in the media spotlight as the reasoning behind the removal of the cross became distorted. Here are some of his tips for churches that must suddenly deal with similar media issues:

- ▶ **Be prepared.** Think through whom you would need to inform and who your spokesperson would be if a controversy or allegation arises. Consider potential issues that could be picked up and try to understand how journalists work.
- ▶ **Be proactive.** As soon as an issue arises, decide what you want to say. "I realise now that we should have issued a press release ahead of time with the exact wording that we wanted to convey," says Souter. "If possible, try not to leave it to the press to create something on your behalf, as that may inadvertently allow them to create a storm in a teacup."
- ▶ **Be careful.** Usually, a denial or "no comment" will not prevent a paper from running a story, so if you need time before responding then try to arrange a suitable deadline. Souter notes, "If you receive further phone calls, be careful what you say. Make sure that you use the right words to describe your meaning, to clarify the initial article. We found, after we were slightly caught out, that it was important to check where the information was going. A local press report had soon made it to the notice of national daily papers."
- ▶ **Be available.** The nominated spokesperson needs to be well-briefed and available to take interviews. Souter says, "It may well be worth doing live radio or TV interviews, where they cannot edit content. I made sure that I had a few notes in front of me in case my mind went blank on air."
- ▶ **Be in contact.** It is important that you get the support, encouragement and prayer you need.

In conclusion, Souter says, "If you need advice, get in touch with the press officer of your denomination or the Alliance. Stay in close contact with them while the media coverage goes on. Put a statement on your website, and communicate what is going on to your members as well as giving them ideas of what they might or might not say in public conversation." eauk.org/media/resources

Sharing tips to help churches deal with a media crisis

Media hubs established

As part of an effort to equip Christian communities to engage with local media, the Alliance helped establish new media hubs in Belfast and Glasgow last autumn. Coordinators Judith Hill and Ian Black are working to help churches tell good news stories locally. Meanwhile, Christians in Bristol, Dundee, Manchester, Newham and Norwich continue to engage with their local media outlets.

The Alliance's Forum for Change coordinator, Marijke Hoek, says, "There is a huge opportunity for Christians to engage with the media – an open door to communicate the good news, vision and values of the Gospel in our communities." To explore how to develop contacts with the media in your community, contact m.hoek@eauk.org

Educate the whole person

In December, evangelicals from 12 education organisations met to discuss how they could work more closely to promote their vision that education is about the development of the whole person under God. Youth for Christ, CARE, Scripture Union and the Association of Christian Teachers were joined by Festive, which focuses on supporting Christians in further education and sixth form colleges.

Key points emerging from the discussion, which will continue at a follow-up event in March, included the shared concern that Christians should take a more vocal role in national debates about education and provide a distinctly Christian perspective, which will benefit all pupils.

The Alliance-facilitated Forum for Change has also launched Culture Footprint, an e-mail newsletter examining the presence of Jesus in culture. It features teachers, artists, entrepreneurs, journalists and politicians, all working toward improving society one footprint at a time. One issue focussed on Jerry Marshall (pictured), an entrepreneur who now heads up the Transformational Business Network's efforts to alleviate poverty through business. To subscribe: eauk.org/forumforchange

Boys need protection too

Alliance member World Vision is urging governments and churches to take action in the wake of studies showing that the world is still "largely silent and unresponsive" to the needs of boys as both victims and survivors of sexual abuse. Face-to-face interviews with more than 400 children around the world, plus a report on attitudes to sexual abuse of children in Cambodia, have revealed that while abuse of boys is widespread, it is not taken as seriously as abuse of girls.

"The attention to the needs of girls is well-deserved," said Laurence Gray, World Vision's director of advocacy in Asia. "But the world has been largely silent and unresponsive to the needs of boys both as victims and survivors of sexual abuse. The evidence has often been there if only we had chosen to pay attention to it."

Comments from children who took part in focus groups on the issues of trafficking and sexual exploitation showed that boys worldwide were also at significant risk of sexual abuse.

Ruthi Hoffman Hanchett, policy officer for World Vision, said, "The world has only really given its attention to the commercial sexual exploitation of children in the last 10 years, and it has been primarily focused on girls. Boys suffering at the hands of molesters now cannot afford to wait another 10 years before they get the same consideration as girls." worldvision.org.uk

Christian training centre launches

The Kingdom Business School opened its doors in January with a goal to provide training as well as original ways to launch new businesses and re-energise existing

ones. Developed by Watford-based WorkPlace Inspired, the school offers teaching, mentoring and specialist resources to equip Christian entrepreneurs.

Programmes include *Launchpad*, a one-day session for Christians who want to start their own businesses. Another day is set up like Dragon's Den, giving entrepreneurs a chance to pitch their business ideas to a panel of experts. Those who are successful will be offered advice free-of-charge, along with mentoring and an introduction to finance providers.

"In the current economic situation, we want to help create jobs and generate wealth," said faculty member Bridget Adams, "and there are market sectors where it is very good to start businesses right now. We believe that the Church should be actively involved in the business world, and KBS is dedicated to equipping and releasing Christians to transform business, and transforming business to transform the world." workplaceinspired.com

Mixing Christianity and coffee

Queues of young people in Cambridge turned up at their local Starbucks for an innovative presentation of the Christian message over 10 Sunday nights last autumn. Conceived by a group of local youth workers, the Exploration Station had an average attendance of 90 young people and was based on the Youth Alpha course, exploring the meaning of life and introducing Christianity.

Exploration Station combined specially produced video footage with audience interviews and team presentations. Each night the leaders raised questions ranging from "Can Christians play violent video games?" to "Why wasn't Jesus a woman?"

"Something about the venue and the approach captured people's imagination, and they really loved it," said Jim Overton, director of the local Youth for Christ Centre. His wife, Hannah, had approached the store manager after working at Starbucks for four months.

Matt, a 17-year-old student, was dragged along by his girlfriend, Sarah. "I wasn't really sure that I could take the Bible seriously," he said. "It had always seemed a bit far-fetched. But since Exploration Station, it's all kind of fallen into place." One month later, Matt became a regular at his local church. yfc.co.uk

Innovation crucial to evangelicalism

The Christian community is not adapting or innovating enough to face generational challenges, said American researcher David Kinnaman at gathering for younger leaders in England last December. Young people must think outside the box and lead the way in shaping the future of evangelical Christianity, he said.

Kinnaman, co-author of *unChristian*, which examines young people's views of Christianity, came to Britain to urge young leaders to be "spiritual entrepreneurs." "If young people can grab hold of their personal calling, even if it is small, then deeper, more lasting change can occur," he said. "Sometimes in trying to change everything, leaders end up changing nothing. Young leaders have the chance to focus their ambition on sustainable projects, not merely those that produce fanfare and little long-term influence."

Using research on young adults' perception of evangelical Christianity today, Kinnaman led a discussion held at Warwick University. Building on these conversations, the Alliance is facilitating younger leaders to network together and look at these issues in the UK context. "The day was stimulating and challenging," said Andy Croft, associate director of Soul Survivor. "Learning from other leaders is a necessity and not a luxury." eauk.org/slipstream

Churches, schools and other groups gathered in more than 100 countries to celebrate the 55th annual World Leprosy Day on 25 January. The goal of the event is to remind Westerners that leprosy still affects millions of people around the world, with more than 250,000 new cases each year. This year, the focus was on funding a new project in Kwara, Nigeria (pictured below), where the day's events were used to spread the news that leprosy is curable and to dispel the social exclusion that the disease often brings.

The Kwara project will increase case detection rates by integrating leprosy services into the general health system, working in five leprosy communities to build new houses and provide basic amenities like water and electricity. More than 300 children from these communities will be supported in education, and the project will also provide small business loans through cooperative societies.

Meanwhile in the UK, Peterborough United football goalkeepers Joe Lewis and James McKeown joined with children from five local Peterborough primary schools

(pictured above) to show their support for World Leprosy Week, during which pupils were sponsored to wear a glove for a week.

Rupert Haydock, National Director for The Leprosy Mission, said, "The symbol of the hand reminds us that many people affected by leprosy still do not receive treatment in time to stop irreversible deformities developing that prevent them doing the everyday things most of us take for granted. Our aim is to support people affected by leprosy to overcome the disease, and the social discrimination and poverty that often go with it."

leprosymission.org.uk



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Respect climate commitments

The path to a global climate deal in 2009 seems to have taken a detour, says Alliance member agency Tearfund following UN climate talks in Poznan, Poland, in December. Despite a fortnight of talking, progress was painstakingly slow, even as climate change has already begun hitting poor people. Current science indicates that things will get much worse unless developed countries act urgently to slash emissions and help poor communities adapt to climate change.

Director of Advocacy Paul Cook said, "Tearfund is concerned that developing countries do not have time for rich countries to prevaricate on decisions that could literally save the lives of millions of the poorest people around the world."

A delegation of Tearfund's partners from Malawi, Niger, Zambia, Nepal, Bangladesh, India and Honduras attended the conference to provide eyewitness accounts. These climate change experts are working at the grass roots with local church communities struggling to cope with the impacts of global warming.

Meanwhile, the EU Council agreed on a new package of climate and energy laws that show an extremely low level of ambition. Wealthier countries must raise their game at the July G8 summit in Italy and at December climate talks in Copenhagen. Tearfund is urging Christians to raise their voice as a global church to demand a just deal for poor communities around the world. tearfund.org

CHRISTIAN WORKERS ON FILM. An award-winning film is drawing attention to the work of Alliance members Terry and Joan Thraves and their charity In Ministry to Children, set up to help street kids in the third world. The film, *The Throwaway Children of Colombia*, examines the situation of the "disposables", the name given to Colombia's homeless children, many of whom have a life expectancy of just two years on the streets. Directed by Andrew Boyd, the documentary won the Best DVD prize from the Christian Broadcasting Council in November.

In Ministry to Children was set up 14 years ago, and over the years has rescued scores of children from the streets. Working with Colombians, it has established feeding programmes to help the poorest families keep their children at home and in school, rather than abandoning them to fend for themselves.

"The film follows boys who have been rescued, cared for, trained up and have gone on to make great things of their lives. Most of their friends who stayed on the streets disappeared or died," said Boyd. "But this is also Terry and Joan's story – of how an ordinary couple in their retirement felt prompted by God to make a difference. They got stuck in – and the rest is history." inministrytochildren.org

Supporting positive change

Volunteers in North Staffordshire are learning to support and encourage local young people as the result of a new project launched by Youth for Christ. Called Eavesdrop, the initiative holds Approved Provider status from the Mentoring & Befriending Foundation and trains volunteers to be one-to-one mentors, meeting for an hour a week listening to young people and helping them develop positive change in their lives.

Eavesdrop also runs *Special*, a six-week course for girls who have low self-esteem. The course runs in three local high schools and at the Lock, a drug and alcohol unit for young people in Stoke on Trent.

"During the sessions we listen to songs with words describing being beautiful, ugly, having hope and feeling pain," said Eavesdrop co-ordinator Connie Locker. "There is fingerprint painting, glitter, much laughter, singing and fun, during which the young people have a glimpse of just how beautiful they are and how fearfully and wonderfully they are made."

The work of Eavesdrop is supported financially by individuals, local churches, an Opportunities for Volunteering grant from the Department of Health and funding from Robbie Williams' Give it Sum fund, which is managed by Comic Relief. yfc.co.uk



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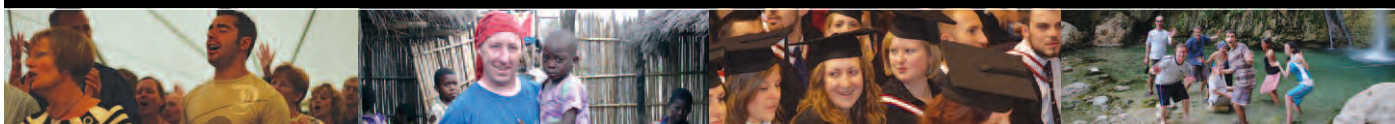
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Braille service to mark bicentenary

The first ever all-Braille church service will be held on 21 March at St Martin's-in-the-Fields in London to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the birth of the man who invented the alphabet for the blind, Louis Braille. The non-denominational service is being organised by Alliance member Torch Trust for the Blind, which works with blind and partially sighted people around the world.

Blind people will lead every aspect of

the service, including reading the Bible lesson, preaching and leading prayers, with blind musicians playing the organ and leading the singing – all using Braille. Louis Braille himself was an accomplished musician and organist at a Paris church.

The event is also part of Torch Trust's 50th anniversary celebrations. RNIB, the Association of Blind Catholics, the Guild of Church Braillists and Churches Together in England are also participating.

Torch Trust Chief Executive Gordon Temple said, "Around 2 million people live with sight loss in the UK, many of whom have lonely and unfulfilled lives. Even churches can be daunting, difficult places for blind and partially sighted people. Torch Trust's *Foursight for the Church* initiative seeks to help churches better include blind and partially sighted and to provide the accessible media resources they need."



Anointed for the Marketplace

6-7 Mar, Manchester

Discover how business can be a powerful tool to help bring God's kingdom to colleagues, companies, cities and whole nations. This intensive, practical course will help Christians explore their calling to the marketplace. Led by Charles McLachlan, former partner at Arthur Andersen, and hosted by Network Manchester. network-ea.org.uk

Christian Music Weekend

7-8 Mar, Leighton Buzzard

Christian musicians from the UK and abroad will gather for a weekend of fellowship and worship. A variety of solo and group artists will perform, including Yazz, George Hamilton IV and Dave Bilborough. Local churches throughout Bedfordshire are involved and all are welcome to join the celebration. Entrance is free. lcf.uk.net

Motherhood: A Roller Coaster Ride

10-26 Mar, various UK venues

In Sheffield, Preston, Stoke on Trent and Manchester, Dianne Parsons, Marion White and Cathy Madavan will explore the ups and downs of life as a mum. Hosted by Care for the Family, the event includes discussions about parenting with an emphasis on the importance of being a mum. careforthefamily.org.uk/mum

Waleswide Church Planting and Strengthening Conference

12 Mar, Newton, Wales

With a practical emphasis on principles, models and examples, this conference welcomes leaders from Wales to consider the next steps in strengthening and planting churches. The conference will explore the state of the nation, progress since the 2005 consultation, prospects for 2015, ways for people to get involved, training programmes, planting successes and churches in recovery. waleswide.org

New Word Alive

30 Mar- 4 Apr and 4-9 Apr, Pwllheli, North Wales

This conference has a goal of "serving the Church, reaching the world" by resourcing individuals and churches and empowering them in their mission to local communities. Don Carson from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Illinois will be the keynote speaker. newwordalive.org

Spring Harvest

4-19 Apr, Minehead, Somerset and Skegness

This is an event for people of all ages and church backgrounds, featuring Bible teaching, seminars and Spirit-filled worship. The event aims to deepen your walk with God to enable you to return home inspired to impact your community and friends for Jesus springharvest.org

A Heart for the Nations

14 Apr, Wales

Designed to inspire and empower individuals to transform their communities and to build God's kingdom, ECG's conference will focus on how to get involved in local mission projects and how to be radical disciples of Christ. The event will also feature youth and sports activities, comedy, theatre and prayer spaces. ecgevent.org.uk

Comparing Obama with King

At the 22nd annual Martin Luther King birthday celebrations in London in January, sponsored by the Martin Luther King Twelve, the Alliance's Public Policy Director, Dr R David Muir, gave an address in which he said that he believed President Barack Obama was a partial fulfilment of King's famous dream.

"The glass ceiling of racism is pierced, but it needs to be shattered," Muir said. "Obama is a powerful symbol. I hope that his determination and victory will inspire many to break the chains and the mind-forged manacles that hold them back from fulfilling their dreams, improving their lives and communities and transforming their social reality in ways that will, as Dr King argued, 'enlarge the concept of brotherhood to a vision of total inter-relatedness.'"

Muir referred to King (pictured) as an optimistic realist and said that while King would be happy with the progress made by African-Americans in certain aspects of society, he would agree with Obama that "questions of race and racism continue to define" America and that, while race played a factor in the presidential elections, Obama's victory was for all Americans. "King recognised the moral legitimacy and power of such coalitions and alliances in bringing about social and political change," Muir said.

Other speakers at the event included Dawn Butler MP and Esther Stanford, a lawyer and presenter for Voice of Africa radio. Muir's full speech can be downloaded at: muir-mlk.notlong.com

Hulton Archive

Charity database goes online

A new internet-based database has been established to provide details of all 169,000 registered charities in England and Wales. Developed by the charity GuideStar UK, the database includes a full annual report and detailed financial information about each charity.

"Website users can find a charity working on a specific cause or in their local area by a search engine that searches across the entire database," said Laura Ellis, programme officer at GuideStar. "For example, if you enter the keywords 'evangelical church' in the search engine, 687 charities are listed."

Search results are clustered by type to help people easily find organisations that are most appropriate to their interests, and an advanced search facility allows further narrowing of results.

Ellis also said that the site has been designed to help charities reach a national audience, and stressed that using and linking to GuideStar will also help them demonstrate openness and accountability to their constituents.

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Churches learn to reach Poles

More than 80 Christians from churches across the UK met in Coventry in December to learn how to evangelise Polish people living in their communities. The event was organised by Alliance member European Christian Mission in response to popular demand from British Christians who wanted to reach out to migrant Poles living in their communities, said Richard Tiplady, ECM's director.

"Polish people are often quite isolated in the UK," he added. "They don't connect easily to British churches because they don't understand the language. This can make them lonely and solitary. I would like to see more Polish-language services and congregations, plus Polish pastors coming over to support them."

Mauri Dwulat, the general secretary of the Alliance in Poland and a keynote speaker on the day, said that Polish evangelists felt "obligated" to witness to those who had left their home country. "It's our responsibility to go and share Christ with them," he said, noting that evangelising Polish migrants was a task that needed to be shared with the local church in the UK.

"We want to come alongside churches in England," he said, "to gather in support and together step out and say to the Polish people, 'How can we help you?'"

There are now 800,000 Poles in the UK. The number has declined slightly this year due to the credit crunch, which has seen many Polish migrants return home. Earlier this year, a survey from the Institute of Public Policy Research, a Government think-tank, showed that many of the 1 million Eastern European immigrants to the UK since 2004 had already returned home.

The IPPR looked at the impact of the expansion of the EU in 2004 and 2007, which led to greater immigration into the UK. It suggested that migration would slow as conditions improved in people's home countries. One report said, "Four in 10 of the returned Polish migrants we surveyed think that better employment prospects in Poland will encourage Poles living in the UK to return to Poland for good."

But the training day in Coventry was aimed at helping churches to witness to the thousands who still live and work in the UK. Many come from a Roman Catholic background, and Mauri Dwulat said that the aim of the scheme was to prevent them dropping away from church attendance while they were living in a foreign country.

Some churches already have Polish evangelists working with migrants full-time. At the Assembly of God church in Doncaster, 32-year-old Bogusia Polak works with the church running English classes for Polish residents.

Every few months she is joined by a team of evangelists from Gdansk to run Polish days for the 15,000-strong migrant population. These days feature socialising, traditional Polish meals, football matches and visits to such local sights as Chatsworth House.

Polak believes that building up authentic relationships is more important than

Face painting classes are part of the Polish days in Doncaster. Below: Migrants show national spirit in Northern England.

preaching. "I think the key is relationships," she said. "We talk about all sorts of different things like family and life, because they are lonely in England. But often they ask about God because they feel empty inside."

Harry Hartman, a Polish evangelist from Gdansk, also took part in the training day and has helped run the Polish days in Doncaster. He said that Polish Christians had a duty of care to others who had emigrated to find work. But he warned British churches against taking a unilateral approach to evangelising Polish people in their area. "We are a proud nation," he said, "and we don't like things being done for us. So evangelism needs to be a partnership between Polish Christians and British churches."

Following the training day, European Christian Mission's aim was to see other Polish days being run in Edinburgh and Lisburn in Northern Ireland early this year. And it is hoped that, as a result of these events, Polish days will soon be held at churches across the country. *HS*

► For more information about training days, visit: ecmi.org or tel 01604 621092
► For more stories about churches reaching out to migrants, visit: nostrangers.org.uk

‘ Evangelism needs to be a partnership between Polish Christians and British churches ’

A close-up portrait of a young girl with dark skin and short hair, looking directly at the camera with a gentle smile. She is wearing a light-colored, possibly white, garment. The background is a warm, brownish-gold color.

my name is Nuerkie

I live with my grandmother. Even though my father lives next door, I don't really see him. I don't know where my mother is. I go to the local market for my grandmother and run errands for her because she is quite old.

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Nuerkie Tettey, Compassion sponsored child

The logo features a stylized blue figure of a person with arms raised, positioned above the word "Compassion" in a large, bold, serif font. Below "Compassion" is the tagline "in Jesus' name" in a smaller, sans-serif font. Above the word "Compassion" is the phrase "Releasing children from poverty" in a small, sans-serif font.

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Steve Clifford

In January, the Evangelical Alliance's UK board named Steve Clifford as the next general director. Before he officially takes office in April, *Rich Cline* sat down with him for a chat...

Born and raised in Bradford, Steve Clifford is the son of an Anglican vicar who was tragically killed in a car crash by a drunk driver when Steve was only 5 years old. His mother went to work as a teacher while she raised Steve and his brother.

As a teen, Steve says he was “disconnecting from the church” when at 17 he took a summer job over the border in Lancashire at a farm connected with Capernwray Hall. This was to be the first in several key transitions in a spiritual journey that has included a year on a Youth With a Mission team in Copenhagen, a theology degree at London School of Theology and work as a teacher of both RE and PE.

In 1985, after moving to Cobham, Surrey,

he had what he calls “another of those pivotal moments” and felt a calling into the life of the church.

idea: Was it a big step to move from school to church life?

Steve: I'm a believer in Church. One of the privileges I've had over the last year working with Hope08 was travelling around the country seeing the Church doing the business of church. And it's fantastic, in all kinds of expressions - in rural settings, towns, villages, cities - just the Church being good news through actions and words, engaging in communities, caring for unemployed people, offering accommodation to those without homes. I love the Church on a Friday and Saturday night in the early hours out on the

streets of our cities escorting people to taxis, giving them water because they're coming out of clubs where they've had too much to drink. And handing out flip-flops because the girls have lost their shoes in the clubs and they're walking out into streets that are covered in urine and glass. So flip-flops are a kind of 21st century equivalent of washing people's feet.

idea: And you got a taste of the global Church in your work with March for Jesus.

Steve: From a prayer march in the City of London, March for Jesus grew into a global movement of 80 countries and 60 million people. And I ended up chairing the international board. Just the sense of being

caught up in something that was bigger than us – we couldn't have manufactured that. But somehow God had taken hold of this little idea and exploded it. And that took me to lots of places around the world, which gave me an amazing appreciation of the Church – this global phenomenon of people of so many backgrounds and cultures and theological persuasions, all lovers and followers of Jesus. The Church wasn't British and it wasn't necessarily Western; it was an incredible Church in all of its diversity. March for Jesus looked very different wherever you went. In Sao Paulo there were 2 million people there, then off to Lagos where the Redeemed Church of God held what was the largest prayer meeting of all time. There were something like 5 million people there. And to come back feeling I'm part of the Church in the UK, but I'm also part of a global Church.

idea: Sometimes, this diversity puts a strain on our unity.

Steve: In all families we have differences in terms of our preferences – what kind of food we eat, what kind of music we listen to. That's part of family life. I know the differences make it difficult at times, and sometimes the differences are a bit painful, but as we engage in mission together and in caring for our communities some of those differences become less and less relevant. The things that unite us are far greater than the things we might have questions about. So let's celebrate the things that we're united in and let's agree to disagree agreeably about the things that we have differences about.

idea: But some issues don't seem to allow for agreeable disagreement.

Steve: As an Evangelical Alliance we have a basis of faith, a reflection of theologians and church leaders who have grappled with this thing called evangelicalism. And I think we unite around the basis of faith and we also unite around principles as to how we're going to relate to one another. Now, there's clarity in the basis of faith, but there's also space within it for differences. And I think the challenge I'd love to put out there is that if we're going to disagree, let's disagree well. Let's sit in the room and work hard, grapple with these issues, and let's respectfully hear each other, believing the best of each other. These are the things scripture exhorts us to do. Paul writing to the Corinthian church, where there were things that needed to be sorted out, speaks strongly to them as a

father and as an apostle. But in the heart of that epistle the challenge that he brings to them is to love each other. And I think that the challenge for us is to relate to each other as God relates to us, even in the midst of our disagreements.

I would love us to be part of the discussion as to reshaping and redefining the kind of society that we want

idea: The world will know we are Christians by our love for each other. But how do we present ourselves to a sceptical society?

Steve: I think we need to be authentic. Look at the experience of Hope08: as the Church across the UK engaged in its communities, it found friends among local councils, the police, social services, you name it. These people might not share our faith, but they do have a concern for the communities in which they're living. We've been known for the wagging finger and the intense brow – there are things we feel strongly about, and we don't need to be ashamed of them. But how do we express those with the right body language, the right tone of voice and having gained the respect because we've been willing to get our hands dirty and be involved in people's lives? How

can you view the life of Jesus other than seeing the activity of Jesus: the hands touching people's lives alongside the words that He spoke? I think, if we can do that, there will be friends who will be willing to hear us better because of what we've demonstrated to them.

idea: Will this help us rise to the challenges of our society?

Steve: I think we are living at a moment in history that's unprecedented certainly in my lifetime – banks closing to bankruptcy, the whole loss of confidence, businesses just running out of money because banks aren't willing to lend to them, the knock-on impact of that in terms of employment. And we are facing potentially another million people being made unemployed over the course of the next year. That has an impact not just on the individual but on families and communities. I live in London, where young men are killing each other with guns and knives. We're living in a crisis of parenting with so many young people being brought up in families where there's only one parent. Alongside this is the environment and what we're going to do about global warming. These kinds of issues are tremendous challenges that society is facing, and I would love us to be part of the discussion as to reshaping and redefining the kind of society that we want. I believe that the decisions that are going to be made in the next few years will shape how society is over the next hundred years or more.

idea: As Christians, how can we meet our responsibility to the world in areas like poverty, relief and climate change?

Steve: We are part of an ever-smaller world. The decisions we make today – the purchasing decisions – have an impact on other nations. And sadly, the truth is that the recession we're facing will have a greater impact on Africa than it will do on us. So we can't ignore our responsibilities. I think we've got to get behind the kind of work Tearfund and Micah Challenge are doing and support them. This isn't the time to step back from our international responsibilities. We've got to step up to the plate and recognise that alongside our responsibilities to the society of the UK we also have responsibilities to the globe.

► You can watch a video interview with Steve and Ann Clifford at: eauk.org

Giving: Ewan Cochrane, a young volunteer, helps sort donations at Salisbury's Food Bank.

As the Alliance launches its Square Mile initiative, *idea* begins a four-part series looking at mercy, influence, life discipleship and evangelism. Hazel Southam takes a look at how churches are showing mercy in their communities...

Square Mile exists to catalyse and equip the Church in the UK to take an integrated approach to mission

Recession. Downturn. Credit crunch. Almost from nowhere it seems that these words have become the backdrop to our lives. They have tangible effects on our day-to-day existence. Britain's jobless figures have already hit a 10-year high. By the

end of 2011, it is anticipated that 3.4 million people could be out of work. One in five of us live in fuel poverty. And meanwhile the Government is spending billions to rescue the banks – £81 billion at this point, enough to fund the UK's schools for a year.

So what can we do about this and how can we make a difference? All around Britain Christians are working to

alleviate the pressure of the credit crunch on their local communities.

Ron Palmer nurses a cup of coffee and tries not to cry. He fails. Ron, 58, was a carpet fitter for 30 years working for the famous Wilton firm and running his own company. He was always working. Then in quick succession he was diagnosed with cancer, lost his house as he could no longer work and ended up living on benefits.

But when his benefits were stopped because of an administrative problem, Ron was left with no money and consequently no food. It was at this point that he walked through the door of Salisbury's Food Bank, run by the Trussell Trust and staffed by volunteers from neighbouring churches. The scheme – which is now being replicated around the UK – provides emergency food for families and individuals who have nothing to eat.

Think of Red Cross parcels, but then think of this happening in leafy Salisbury, with its ancient cathedral, surrounded by the New Forest. The appearance may be picture postcard perfect, but the reality is different. Last year, the Salisbury Food Bank provided emergency food parcels for 3,000 people. They're expecting that figure to jump by 20 per cent this year, entirely due to the recession.

Three food vouchers – given out by social services, doctors and carers – provide basic food (and a few treats) for a couple of weeks. At Christmas, special boxes included a turkey and all the trimmings, provided by two local firms. It can be enough to tide people over the gap between ending benefits and starting a job, or simply waiting for their benefits to arrive.

"Salisbury appears to be an affluent city," says organiser Mark Ward, "but there's a low-income



is for mercy

population working in agriculture and tourism. Couple that with the high cost of housing, and people are struggling to pay their way on a low income."

And he takes it further: "There's a poverty problem in the UK, and I get very angry with people who say that there isn't. On the other hand, when I see the people that we meet, it does make me excited that we are able to help."

For Ron, the Food Bank's voucher scheme and affordable coffee bar, meant the difference between eating and not. Asking for help was the hardest thing, he says. "I'd never done that in 40 odd years of work. But without it I wouldn't be here. It was too many things at the same time for me. I used to own properties in Salisbury. I worked 90 hours a week. I earned a lot of money. I never thought I'd be here. But the church and the Food Bank have given me a different way of life. I can come to the coffee bar and see people. It's good. It's given me a new life and a new outlook that I will beat this. I have hope now."

Karen Hurst volunteers at the Food Bank one day a week. Karen and her husband formerly ran a busy Post Office on the Isle of Wight and latterly a pub in Salisbury. But ill health and a 26 per cent hike in rent to the brewery left the couple out of work and in rented accommodation. She too found herself receiving food parcels from the Food Bank.

"Coming here made us feel human again," she says. "It was less about the food and more about how I felt. I came from a family where the cupboards were always bulging; we were always

baking. So to open the cupboard door and find nothing there was dreadful. The way I care for people is by feeding them, and all of a sudden I couldn't make things better by feeding them."

Now she puts her baking skills to use at the Food Bank's café, making scones and cakes. "It's brilliant," says Karen. "It's restored my belief in myself."

Have mercy

Schemes like the Food Bank in Salisbury, which is based in the Elim Church, lie at the heart of the Christian faith, according to the Alliance's executive director of churches in mission, Dr Krish Kandiah. "The only way that some churches are visible is in the fact that there are loads of cars parked outside the building," he says. "If the church ceased to exist would anyone in the locality notice? For people to take the Christian faith seriously they need to see a visible expression of that. We are looking for a way that the Church can demonstrate the good news practically in order for people to see the relevance of the good news. We want to be proactive in blessing the communities that we are part of."

From this desire springs Square Mile, a new Alliance initiative that

Receiving: Trevor Feltham collects his box from the Food Bank.

Relaxing at Yarmouth's Memory Club.

will be launched at Westminster Chapel on 5 March. Its aim is to help create "4D churches" enabling Christians to make a practical impact on the square mile around them through projects just like the Food Bank in Salisbury.

Its four major themes are mercy, influence, life discipleship and evangelism. Mercy sounds old fashioned, even hard to comprehend, but essentially it means compassion – the kind of compassion that sees churches run everything from food banks to after-school clubs. It will be the aim of Square Mile to help churches find the most efficient ways of doing this, learning through others' experience.

The difference that this does and could make is incalculable. Kandiah says it was the fact that his local church "got out onto the streets" in his home town of

Brighton that made him want to find out about Christianity.

Along with the Alliance, member organisation Faithworks has long lobbied the Government for a level playing field for Christian-based social care projects. The argument has been: why should funding be denied just because a project is run by a church?

Faithworks' spokesman Brendan Fox says that Christians have "a theological imperative" to make a practical difference in their community, plugging a gap that the state cannot fill. "The idea of being salt and light is core to our faith," he says. "If we disappear from the community, then how much have we been salt and light in that situation?"

And he warns that the next few years will be a pivotal time for church-based projects as the economic crisis bites. "There will be more need during the credit crunch. People are struggling to make ends meet. The church should be at the forefront of helping meet those needs," he says.

Giving hope

In Winchester, a team from Christ Church is doing just that through a debt counselling scheme set up by church member Peter Russell. Within a year, what began as a personal call from God has grown to a team of five people working part-time.

Like Salisbury, Winchester has a leafy, affluent



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image. It costs more than £18,000 a year to educate a child at the famous private school, Winchester College. But, says Russell, there are pockets of deprivation. One person in 30 lives on benefits.

The team members spend a day a week helping clients with their financial problems and organising repayment of debt. "We are in the business of giving people hope," says Russell. "Our first client was terrified that she was going to be put in prison because she wasn't paying her debt. We have seen a little transformation in her life. We want God's love to come through us and that's why we do this."

In Yarmouth, St Andrew's Church has established a Memory Club for those suffering from dementia and Alzheimer's. A second scheme has now been set up at the local Methodist Church.

Mel Thomas, 74, who founded the club five years ago, says she hopes that the scheme will be replicated across the country. "People with dementia feel that they are untouchable because they are not 'normal' anymore. They feel that they are not as they were," she says. "We welcome them and show them love and normalise how they are. Our service is based on love and faith. They come in very down and go out laughing and joking. We boost their confidence and self-esteem."

She continues: "People come to church for weddings, christenings and funerals. Why can't we

offer God's help and provide a service for people and get the community involved with the church, rather than waiting for people to come to us, which was always the way in the past?"

All around the UK, from a youth project on the Isle of Lewis to a pregnancy counselling service in Carlisle and a children's centre in Enfield, churches are answering this question. They aren't waiting for people to come to them. They are going out and showing mercy to their local communities. And that is what Square Mile plans to enable and encourage.

We want God's love to come through us and that's why we do this

To help Christians engage in 4D mission, the Alliance has produced:

- ▶ A DVD-based course for small groups, featuring projects around the UK and input from leaders such as Shane Claiborne, Mark Greene, J John and Elaine Storkey.
- ▶ A daily journal to help Christians explore mercy, influence, life discipleship and evangelism - and take action.
- ▶ A central hub for mission resources for you and your church. For details, visit: eauk.org/squaremile

For information on Food Bank, visit: trusselltrust.org or tel 01722 411244.

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Michelle Williams plays a woman at the end of her financial rope in *Wendy and Lucy*

Talking about... penny-pinching

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

I guess we didn't really need the runaway success of *Mamma Mia!* last year to remind us of Abba's classic 1976 song *Money, Money, Money*. How could we ever forget such a catchy tune and lyrics voicing such a familiar feeling: wouldn't life be that much easier if we had a little more money? If we could be part of the rich person's world, wouldn't we be free of concerns?

It sounds crass, but how many of us don't secretly feel that way? Even if we don't join the queues for lottery tickets,

don't we feel a twinge of envy when someone does well on *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* Which of course brings to mind another feel-good film, Danny Boyle's award-winning hit *Slumdog Millionaire*.

In the current economic nightmare, financial security has become a key issue for us all. Will I still have a job next week? Are our savings safe? Will we lose the house? Many of us instinctively cut back our expenditure to just the essentials.

Meanwhile, Gordon Brown is urging us to get out there and spend, spend, spend! In

line with the thinking of the most famous of all economists, John Maynard Keynes, the Government is increasing public spending – and public borrowing to fund it. And they want us to do likewise. The idea is to get money moving around the system: from pockets into tills to banks and back to pockets. Keep businesses going and there will be jobs. Keep them servicing their vast debts and the creaking financial edifice won't come crashing down around us.

I'm no economist, but isn't one of the major causes of this crisis the staggering

levels of bad debt? And yet banks are being told to make it easier for people to borrow money. So people are being encouraged to increase their level of debt at the very time that their jobs may be in danger. Is it just me, or is there something utterly wrongheaded about this?

A new mindset

Even more disturbing than the economics is the fact that there's no suggestion that our fundamental values need to change. We're encouraged to shift our priorities, but not our overall mindset. The engine of this whole system is consumerism, but it's time we recognised that consumerism is a euphemism for greed.

Back in 1920, the British social critic RH Tawney, in his immensely important book *The Acquisitive Society*, warned that the pursuit of material things has a profoundly corrupting influence. It may fuel the capitalist machine, but once we define the good life in terms of possessions and wealth, we're in deep trouble. It's bad for

our relationships, it's bad for our mental health (as psychologist Oliver James powerfully explores in his book *Affluenza*) and it's bad for our spirituality.

Financial security has become a key issue for us all

We become preoccupied with things we would like but don't need. They become badges of success, status and style, and so we slip into the invidious comparison of our things with someone else's. Pride, envy, covetousness all creep in. It's not just about keeping up with the Joneses, but about maintaining what we subconsciously feel is our place in the social order.

This acquisitiveness makes us self-centred, concerned to keep - or improve - our standard of living. We gradually

become insensitive to the needs of others, preferring to jealously guard, rather than generously give, what we have. We easily overlook the plight of people like Wendy (Michelle Williams) in *Wendy and Lucy*, whose financial difficulties propel her towards Alaska in hope of a well-paid job that will solve everything. She is vulnerable to changes in circumstances that make things worse for her, but no one seems to care about her neediness. And her increasing desperation drives her into choices that compound her problems.

Greed makes us now-centred, concerned with being comfortable in the immediate future. We know we need to tackle climate change, but prefer to satiate our desires rather than inconvenience ourselves for the global good. The innovative documentary *The Age of Stupid* features Pete Postlethwaite as an archivist in a post-apocalyptic 2055 who, as he views film from our own time, is astonished that we did so little to save

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Dev Patel and Anil Kapoor
face off in *Slumdog Millionaire*

**It's time we
recognised that
consumerism is a
euphemism for greed**

ourselves from impending doom. The reason why is not stupidity in an intellectual sense, but in a moral one. It's not that we don't understand what can be done, but that we don't care enough to limit our greed.

This is the most significant problem of the Western world. Lots of clever people have made an awful lot of money. But the whole system has been built on shifting moral sands. Even after all that has happened, there's been little or no

recognition that a society which depends on and fosters greed is fatally flawed. Even now there's no widespread sense that we need some moral bedrock.

In fact we need more than a fresh foundation. We need a transformation of human hearts within consumerist societies, so that we realise that we've been worshipping an idol. Jesus insisted that we couldn't serve both God and materialism. It's time we admitted He was right.

► Find out more about the issues raised in this article at: lifebeyonddebt.org

► Toolsfortalks.com contains quotes and illustrations taken from the latest films, music, magazines and TV – updated weekly.

Tony Watkins is managing editor of Culturewatch.org

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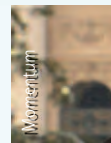
The appeal of cinema crosses most of society's boundaries. And since films often examine important themes, they can spark lively conversation with neighbours about something more important than the weather. The following aren't for family viewing, but they can ignite discussion about significant issues...

GRAN TORINO (15) is a startlingly thoughtful look at how immigration is changing communities. Clint Eastwood directs the film with his usual elegance and economy, and he stars as a bigoted man forced to interact with his Hmong neighbours. As his world-view slowly shifts, the film finds real resonance and challenges us to find ways to make a difference in the lives of people around us. And the ending offers a seriously emotional shock of redemption (20 Feb).

GENOVA (15) tells a powerful story of emotional redemption as a father (Colin Firth) takes his two daughters (Willa Holland and Perla Haney-Jardine) to live in Italy after the death of his wife. What happens there is an inversion of the classic *Don't Look Now*, as the children seek to make sense of tragedy in ways that are painfully honest. And under the surface, director Michael Winterbottom catches the balance of love, resentment and understanding (27 Mar).

American Express

THE CLASS (15) feels like a documentary as it follows a year with teen students in an ethnically mixed Paris classroom. Based on the nonfiction book by teacher François Bégaudeau (who plays himself in the movie), this Cannes-winning drama bristles with honesty, viewing life from the perspective of these sharp young people. It's a vital, insightful examination of respect that creates a beautiful collage of observations, opinions and reactions (27 Feb).



RELIGULOUS (15) is a bold, irreverent attack on religion from American humourist Bill Maher, shot in the style of *Borat* as he seeks to expose narrow-mindedness. And he actually gets to the bottom of something: how people blindly follow rules imposed by religious leaders whether or not they are actually biblical.

As he travels around America, Maher's seemingly innocuous queries constantly reveal ignorance and prejudice. There are also striking observations of how Christianity, Islam and other belief systems impact culture – from violence and terrorism to debates about sexuality and creation/ evolution. The film has a free-wheeling, cynical approach that's often hilariously entertaining, packed with pointed questions and cheap jokes, all framed as a quest to find out why people believe in "fairy tales". But this obscures the truth that his facts are often misleading or deliberately skewed.

Maher may have been raised Jewish-Catholic, but his agenda is purely agnostic-atheist, as revealed in his final rant to the camera. This kind of undermines his oft-repeated thesis: "I don't know; my product is doubt, not certainty."

And while we can't agree with much of what he says, we need to admit that Maher does have some valid points to make and that watching the film will help us understand how others see us. But it's not for the easily offended, or for anyone afraid to have their beliefs tested (3 Apr).

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

10. The Church, **the body of Christ** both local and universal, the priesthood of all believers – given life by the Spirit and endowed with the Spirit's gifts to worship God and proclaim the Gospel, promoting justice and love.

Dr Keith Warrington is vice-principal of Regents Theological College and author of *Discovering the Holy Spirit in the New Testament*

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

When Jesus chose a name for the community of believers who would be left after He returned to heaven, He chose the word *ekklesia* (Matthew 16.18, 18.17). It wasn't a religious term; it was actually a political term – but it was a very good choice to best describe central aspects of the community that would be left after He had gone.

Fundamentally, it referred to a group of people who were called out (*ek + klētos*) to be together. It did not refer to a building but to a community and, in particular, to people who were entrusted with the role of ensuring their own stability and development, responsible for their cohesion and maturity, planning for their future and fulfilling their corporately decided goals. Jesus anticipated that His community would function similarly: in relationship, enjoying each other's company, demonstrating sympathy and support, compassion and commiseration, motivated by the central element of love, the intended consequences being unity and diversity. Somewhere along the way, some of these fundamental elements have got lost.

Maintaining unity

Although Jesus prayed for unity among His followers (John 17.11), and Paul encouraged believers to maintain the unity that the Spirit established (Ephesians 4.4), Christians have often identified other priorities. One of the greatest challenges in my own Pentecostal tradition is that of disunity – phenomenal growth but a tendency to fragmentation.

A month ago, I was speaking at a Pentecostal Conference in Indonesia, a country of more than 130 million people of which there are some 10 million Pentecostals represented by 70

denominations. They recognise the challenge of being divided, and so the leaders of the various Pentecostal denominations regularly meet for fellowship and prayer, planning and listening to one another, to ensure that unity and mutuality is maintained – protected where it is in danger of being undermined and re-created where it has disintegrated.

It is a challenge for us all, especially where we relate to believers from different Christian traditions to our own. It is also a privilege, as there is much to be gained in learning from one another and, most importantly, we will be fulfilling the aspirations of the Spirit and Jesus.

By contrast, believers who are divided fail in their mission to reflect the plan of God through the Church. The underlying problem of the believers in Corinth, to whom Paul wrote, was not related to issues of sexuality or immorality, injustice or charismatic chaos, poor leadership or the Lord's Supper. The fundamental problem was that the believers were disunited; so it is the first topic that Paul addresses (1 Corinthians 1.10-13) and all the problems thereafter are consequences of it.

Many years ago, I joined Operation Mobilisation to engage in mission for one year in Europe, mainly Italy. As part of our preparation, each one of us was requested to listen to 10 sermons. I did not understand why I was sent one that dealt with the issue of unity. I was ready to evangelise the world – why did I need to be told about living together harmoniously? My leaders were wiser than I was; to offer an effective corporate witness, we needed to manifest love for each other in harmony and unity. By the time I arrived in Italy, I decided to listen to the message again.

Next issue:
Jesus' return

Celebrating diversity

Perhaps the other key message by Paul to the church at Corinth relates to the topic of diversity (1 Corinthians 12.4-31). Each one of us is different, made by God with unique gifts and sensitivities, tendencies and personalities. The mission set before us is to live harmoniously, but also to recognise each other's strengths. Having identified them, we should actively seek to provide opportunities for people to use and develop them. Our role is to affirm others – in particular, to celebrate their abilities and enable them to function effectively. Actively identifying each other's gifts and then facilitating opportunities for their expression will result in cohesion and inter-dependence.

When Roberta Hestenes was spiritual director of the University Presbyterian Church in Seattle, she was asked how

**We need to manifest
love for each other in
harmony and unity**

she would evaluate the maturity and spirituality of a church. She replied, "I would sum it up by saying you look at the quality of a church's corporate life." We may be tempted to conclude that a church is successful because of the size of the congregation, the rapidity of its growth, or its social or evangelistic programmes. However, it may be more important to consider its sense of corporate diversity and interdependency. Is it run by a few gifted individuals or does everyone have an active part to play? Is it a church where the majority come to watch or where all come to actively participate?

God-oriented, Jesus-centric, Spirit-controlled

Jesus describes His new community as "my church" (Matthew 16.18) while Paul refers to it as "God's church" (Galatians 1.13). It is owned by God but, sensationally, He has chosen to live in it (1 Corinthians 3.16). It is our responsibility to take seriously our place in His Church, ensuring that our relationship with Him is developing, so that when we are with other believers we will be able to positively influence them, maintaining unity, celebrating diversity, and thus reflecting His aspirations for His Church.

► The Alliance's full Basis of Faith can be found at:
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An official position?

I was puzzled by your report on a survey about views on creation (Jan/Feb, p13). It seems the results were gathered church by church, as though each of the 630 participating churches had "official" positions on the age of the earth and the extent to which God may or may not have used random processes.

What if such a church has a new individual turning up who doesn't agree with the official package? Can they stay? Can they become a member?

At my church we take a relaxed line on creation issues. I'm pretty sure if we demanded adherence to an official policy on these things, we'd eventually lose two-thirds of our membership.

Andrew Waugh, Reading

Where's the proof?

While I agree with much of what was written in *idea* about the difficult times we live in, I'm not so sure about comments made regarding the "economic battleground" (*Your Voice in Parliament*, Jan/Feb). The article claims (rightly) that the credit crunch is hitting families and their budgets, but it goes on to say that "resentment" is growing "at the seeming profligacy of public spending and the threat of a future rise in taxes to pay for it".

Yet where is the proof that people resent the Government's strategy or that money is being wasted? I would argue that the Government is pursuing the only realistic economic strategy it can. Their essentially Keynesian economic ideas are the best on offer. In the long run, John Maynard Keynes' theories are right: we need to stimulate demand, not curb it.

The alternative is to do nothing, or cut back. In wider economic terms this would deepen the recession and make life worse for families, not better. More jobs would be lost. And that's no option at all.

Graeme Kemp, Shropshire

A visit to *The Shack*

I've just finished reading William P Young's book *The Shack*, and saw that Eugene Petersen is quoted on the front cover saying, "This book has the potential to do for our generation what John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* did for his. It's that good!"

I'd really like to see a review by you of the book, as it has certainly deepened my faith in our great God and his loving purposes.

Ian Parker, by email

EDITOR'S REPLY: We continue to explore establishing a group of volunteers to write book reviews for *idea*. In the meantime, we'll run your comments on this page where possible. Note that there is a review of *The Shack* by Public Theology Researcher Susannah Clark, along with other reviews, on the Alliance website: eauk.org/publictheology



Show some balance

I notice that the climate change lobby is gathering momentum amongst Christians (*Churches Take Climate Action*, Jan/Feb). But does *idea* intend to present a balanced view of the arguments or to just flog Sir John Houghton's line: "Unless we announce disaster no one will listen"?

When Sir John made this comment, the three cautionary conclusions by climate scientists written for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report of that year were deliberately removed in favour of an alarmist statement. A number of IPCC scientists resigned in protest. Meanwhile, some reports claim that the average world temperature dropped between January 2007 and January 2008 – the largest fall since records began in 1880

and, according to Edward Blick, "about equal to the net gain in average temperature for the 20th century".

These facts and many others are deliberately ignored by the climate change lobby. Until recent years it was a political attempt by mainly Western left-wing governments to manipulate the facts in favour of political ends. More disturbingly, evangelicals are getting on the bandwagon and quoting half-truths as "gospel".

As a long-standing Alliance member, I would look to you for balance in the discussion and caution in joining the global warming lobby.

Derek C James, by email

Thanks, and please...

We are members of the Alliance and just want to say at the start of 2009 thank you for all you do. Thank you too for *idea*, which is great. The last edition is brilliant, packed full of stuff that I can use. But I wanted to ask about something that was in the Nov/Dec issue: an advert by Rickfords Hill Publishing (p2). Their books look great, but at the top of the advert is a book *Lord, Why Am I Ill?* by Tom Harrison. In the blurb it says, "The Bible makes clear that all illness is given for a specific reason. But more than that, it shows that once the reason for the illness has been dealt with, the illness can be removed."

I realise this is an advert and not the Alliance's opinion, but in six months as a church we have suffered the suicide of a lad aged 18, death of a 44-year-old from cancer and loss of a baby when mum was 6 months pregnant. I haven't read the book – it might be brilliant – but the blurb is appalling. Does God bring all illness for a specific reason? I'm not sure the Bible makes that clear at all.

Please don't misunderstand; we love the Alliance and we've been members for ages. This is not meant as a rant, but I guess I am aware that things like this can cause tremendous damage.

Andy Upton, Leicester

AD MANAGER'S REPLY: One of the biggest challenges facing the Alliance is to maintain unity amongst a wide range of evangelicals. Many Alliance members would disagree with Tom Harrison's views. However, there would also be a minority who support his position. Given this, we decided to let the advert stand.

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

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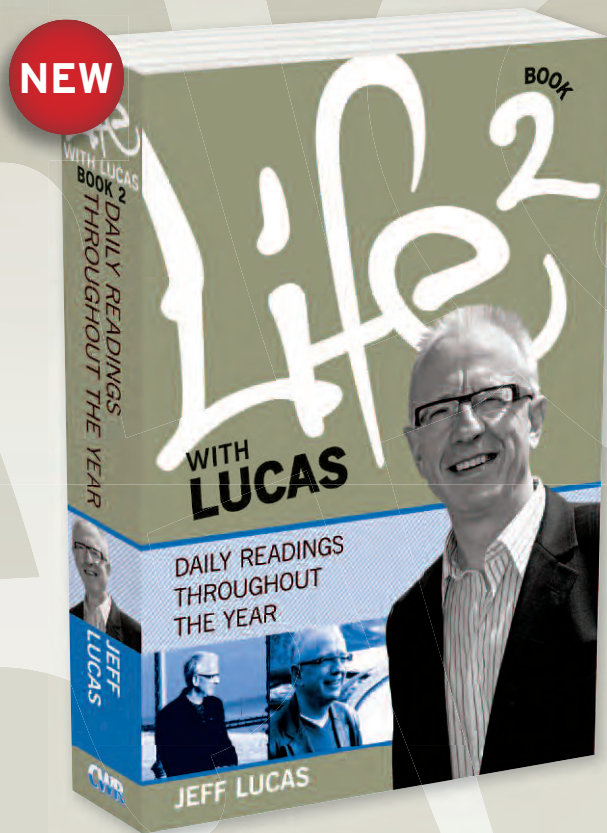
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Why is there so much fighting?

The Alliance's director for Northern Ireland, *Stephen Cave*, tries to get to grips with a world at war...

History teaches us nothing except that history teaches us nothing." There is some debate about who actually said it, with general opinion being that it was George Bernard Shaw paraphrasing sentiments expressed by the German philosopher Hegel. Whatever, it still may be true.

We have left the 20th century, christened by some as the "Century of War", behind, but arguably the world is more violent, insecure and wracked by war than ever. The so-called "war on terror" rumbles on with no sign of abating with the daily tragedy of more deaths in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Pakistan and India are still uneasy in the aftermath of the Mumbai explosions. Russia and the Ukraine have been at loggerheads over gas supplies. And 2009 started with the horrific events in Gaza played out on TV screens across the world.

Of course my own part of the world, Northern Ireland, can't hold its head too high when it comes to conflict. The fighting may not be over here, but at least it is now done primarily with words as opposed to bombs and bullets.

And community tensions still run high in other areas of the so-called United Kingdom. In January, a woman in Scotland was beaten savagely just because she happened to "sound English". And while it was encouraging to hear Trevor Phillips, head of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, acknowledge that the police in England could not now be accused of institutionalised racism, the sad fact remains that far too often we still see shameful divisions and attitudes held towards those who are different.

Then there's the tragic breakdown of family life all over the UK. It would be too easy to make sweeping generalisations, and we need graciously to acknowledge that wherever people are involved there will always be struggles, but is it not fair to say that even in families we do not work as hard at our relationships as we should? We are too quick to fight and separate, instead of doing the hard work of understanding, listening, forgiving, accommodating and moving forward. Perhaps one intriguing consequence of the economic crisis will be that couples will work harder at staying together because they can't afford the cost of separating.

And the media is in on this. It seems that those in charge of our radio and television programming think that good media equals a good fight. From radio phone-ins to reality TV, and even supposedly more serious broadcasting, we have succumbed to sound-bites and bitter arguments instead of constructive conversation. I have actually turned down a few media

opportunities because I felt the programmes merely wanted to get Christians on air fighting with each other.

Treating each other well

The Church cannot stand idly by and shake its head, for we are just as guilty. Think of how much division is regularly reported within and between churches and denominations - how we cannot manage to treat each other well, or disagree agreeably, even though we are all well aware of Christ's heart for the unity of His people.

As a broad family, the evangelical Church seems to go through its fair share of controversy; it appears that each year another "test of orthodoxy" emerges, as one group or another looks for an opportunity to break ranks and have a pot-shot at others while they do so. How often are doctrinal differences aired on websites, blogs and Christian magazines with little or no attempt at private discussion or friendly encounter?

Maybe I'm just getting old and tired; maybe I'm losing some of my ideals or deserting my principles, though I hope not. But I am becoming increasingly frustrated by humanity's willingness to fight about everything. What is it about us that makes us want to fight? Why are we not good at building relationships that can handle differences, and then learning from and appreciating those differences? Why do we run so quickly to conflict or choose to disengage rather than work at it, whether that's as nations, people groups, churches or even within our families?

These issues run right to the heart of our ministry as an Alliance. We are passionate about unity and relationships, and many of our members, individuals, churches and organisations are at the forefront of the building of relationships in a huge range of contexts. There are those committed to the building up of family life whilst others are working tirelessly in broken communities, bringing healing and hope to those on the fringes of society.

Meanwhile, the Alliance's *Don't Be a Stranger* campaign has highlighted a range of positive examples of relationship building and community cohesion.

Ours is a conflict-ridden world at every level and, as followers of Jesus, we must take up the challenge of changing that culture of conflict that seems to be all-pervasive. After all, isn't He the one who called us to unity together and to be peacemakers and agents of reconciliation in His world? I, for one, am tired of the fighting.



Why are we not good at building relationships that can handle differences?



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