

Sharing *News*

Dear friends

I propose three simple tests, in the following order, for a local church which is alive with the Spirit of God.

1. When members of a congregation get together for any reason, is there a natural enthusiasm to share with one another what it is like to be *Christian in everyday life*?

I would expect stories to bubble up informally about experiences like these: serving or caring for someone in the community; speaking without embarrassment or difficulty about our faith, what it means to us and how others are welcome to join us; or sharing with others in a concern for justice for people who get a raw deal in life.

There will be challenges in this as well as excitement. Being Christian in everyday life isn't easy. We naturally turn to one another for mutual support and encouragement. The aim? To increase confidence in 'being ourselves' as Christians in our families, workplaces and neighbourhoods.

2. Are members of your church focussed on the two big issues at the heart of *our common life as a congregation – worship and mission*?

Worship: Are we working together, in an open way, to improve its quality and its relevance to the world we live in? Are we helping one

another to see links between worship in church and hints of similar experience in other parts of our lives?

Mission: Is there a mission project of some kind focussed on your neighbourhood, run by your church or ecumenically, about which there is news to share and in which involvement is called for?

3. Is there a calm and wise recognition that the two or three things I've mentioned above are *worth sticking at, through difficult times as well as good times*?

Being Christian – both in our individual lives and with the church in shared activities – is rather like a close relationship. It has its high moments (which are worth remembering and celebrating). But a lot of it is rather mundane, even a bit of a slog. It cannot be romantic, earth-shattering or exciting every moment of every day. But it can be relied on to be fundamentally affirming, kindly, gentle, loving, tender, respectful and supportive. And therefore profoundly nourishing, giving us a deep-seated contentment. Let's have lots of initiatives and change; but also a conviction that we are to be God's faithful people over the long term.

David G Deeks

MAKEPOVERTYHISTORY – The Next Steps

On Tuesday 31 January Make Poverty History member organizations including The Methodist Church and MRDF met to determine the next steps after 2005's world-changing campaign.

The mood was one of celebration and determination. Make Poverty History was designed to raise awareness and make the most of political opportunities that arose in 2005. Though Make Poverty History as a 'one off' campaign is now ended, campaigning will continue in 2006 and beyond to push for more of the changes that will bring world poverty to an end.

Anthea Cox, Co-ordinating Secretary for Public Life and Social Justice, commented: "There is plenty to celebrate: 2005 was an amazing year, with Methodists expressing an overwhelming commitment to changing the lives of those affected by global poverty."

"As a result of this year of campaigning, nineteen countries have received further debt cancellation, freeing up vital resources for health and education spending; G8 leaders have agreed an extra £50 billion of aid for Africa and the UK government has begun to take on board the arguments for trade justice. Churches up and down the country contributed to these victories, adding their voices to those of millions of people worldwide who want to see an end to poverty."

Kirsty Smith, Director of the Methodist Relief and Development Fund, said; "The energy and enthusiasm mobilised by Make Poverty History in 2005 was fantastic. This momentum must not be lost and it's down to us to hold our politicians to the promises they made last year."

"We can all play a role in supporting the work of the Global Call to Action against

Poverty (GCAP), which unites anti-poverty campaigns in both North and South. MRDF partners Jubilee Debt Campaign and Trade Justice Movement, two of the core networks that made up Make Poverty History, will be instrumental in carrying on campaigning in 2006 and beyond."

To read the latest on follow-up actions on trade, debt and aid, see the MRDF website

www.mrdf.org.uk

Pray Without Ceasing ahead of expectations

The Methodist year of prayer - Pray Without Ceasing, is far exceeding expectations, with over 8,000 hours of prayer carried out up to the end of 2005.

Pray Without Ceasing was launched at the Methodist Conference on 1 July 2005, and by 30 December Methodists had spent an estimated 8,000 hours praying in churches, homes, schools and prisons. With multiple prayer sessions in different locations at the same time.

So far 19 of the 33 Methodist Districts have taken part, each drawing up a rota so that between them at every time of day or night on every day of the week, a Methodist building was open for prayer. In the London South East district Methodist prison chaplains joined the rota and reported 30 hours of prayer from prisons, young offender institutes and the Dover Immigration Removal Centre.

The idea for the year of prayer came from the Methodist Youth Conference. Youth Conference representatives introduced a motion at the 2004 Methodist Conference in Loughborough calling on the Church to celebrate prayer, affirm prayer that is already taking place and provide ideas and inspiration for new ways of prayer.

The Revd Michaela Youngson coordinates the campaign. She says, "we aimed for continuous prayer, but we have exceeded that. More importantly, people report that this has reinvigorated their personal and church prayer lives. Obviously prayer has always been a crucial part of Christian life, and always will be. But this year of Pray Without Ceasing shows we can regain the excitement and power of prayer by focussing on it."

Local Pray Without Ceasing co-ordinators have written in to say how powerful the experience has been. "We report the good news of an amazing time of blessing beyond anyone's expectations," wrote Lesley and Mike Sergeant from the Newcastle circuit in Staffordshire. From the Bristol District, Derrick Norton said, "the seven streams of prayer and worship caused a real buzz of excitement, and people want to repeat the experience."

The Pray Without Ceasing website contains the latest news, event reports, lots of exciting ideas, and a forum where you can discuss issues relating to prayer.

www.praywithoutceasing.org.uk

Breakout: Passion

Booking is now open for Breakout, the MAYC National Youth Festival. This year's theme is 'Passion', and it will take place at the Blackpool Winter Gardens on 7-9 July 2006.

Plans are well underway for a great weekend. Bands, performers and speakers will be booked up soon. As full details become available they will be posted on the MAYC website, where you will find a booking form and more information on the theme of 'Passion'.

www.mayc.info

Rethinking Mission

The mission studies journal Rethinking Mission is now available free on the web.

Rethinking Mission is published jointly by USPG, The Methodist Church and the United College of the Ascension.

It aims to stimulate new thinking about the theology of mission, enlightened by perspectives of Christians around the world.

The Rethinking Mission website includes the latest (as well as archived) articles, book reviews, news items and useful web links.

www.rethinkingmission.org

Fresh Expressions – a new DVD to inspire emerging church

Fresh Expressions, a joint initiative by the Methodist Church and the Church of England that aims to resource mission by encouraging new and different expressions of church, has just brought out a new DVD.

Presented by well-known Songs of Praise host Diane-Louise Jordan, this DVD contains 15 engaging and informative stories from around the country. It is an excellent training tool for those interested in setting up or understanding more about Fresh Expressions. Be inspired!

expressions: the dvd: 1: stories of church for a changing culture £12.99. Order from Church House Bookshop: 020 7898 1300.

The Fresh Expressions website has details of many new and exciting church initiatives across the country, and provides an opportunity to share the story of your own 'fresh expression'.

www.freshexpressions.org.uk

METHODIST DIARY 2006

MARCH

26 Mothering Sunday

APRIL

4-9 Easter People, Torquay

9 Palm Sunday

14 Good Friday

16 Easter Day

18-23 Easter People, Scarborough

MAY

7 Vocations Sunday

14-20 Christian Aid Week
www.christianaid.org.uk

21 Aldersgate Sunday

JUNE

22-29 Methodist Conference, Edinburgh

25 Conference Sunday

JULY

7-9 MAYC Breakout 'Passion' Blackpool
www.mayc.info

9 NCH Sunday

SEPTEMBER

10 Racial Justice Sunday

OCTOBER

15-21 Week of Prayer for World Peace

22-28 One World Week

www.methodist.org.uk (Site Ref: DY111203)

Covenant Workshops

The Methodist Church and the Church of England are currently running a series of workshops across the country aimed at those who want to find out how to work together with other churches, especially in the light of the 2003 Anglican-Methodist Covenant.

The workshops are aimed primarily at church leaders and resource personnel, but others are very welcome if they feel they would benefit or have something to share.

Programme themes:

- Catching a vision for a covenant lifestyle
- Sharing in God's Mission
- Exploiting possibilities and addressing obstacles
- Working at our own shared participation in a covenant lifestyle

Programme ingredients:

- The experience of participants
- An exploration in the context of prayer and worship
- Small group work, discussion and an opportunity for questions

Resources will also be supplied so that similar workshops can be conducted more locally.

For details of the workshops, as well as resources, news and stories about covenant living, see the Anglican-Methodist Covenant website.

www.anglican-methodist.org.uk

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The Methodist Church

