

# libraryoflives

The Pioneer Journal – Issue 4

## TIME TO PLANT



A fresh breeze is blowing across the age-old landscape of 'church planting'



6

### BEYOND THE MOMENT

Why Pioneers' Symposium was an uplifting experience

8

### NAKED CHURCH

Just what have Christians in Wales been stripping off?

12

### MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

How do you move a church from hurt to healing? Facing that challenge – and winning





# Breathtaking

Like a deflating balloon Sangita's lungs are shrinking.  
The cure costs the price of a tank of petrol.  
But Sangita's too poor to afford it.

**Breathtaking. Isn't it?**

## » killer TB

Tearfund's new pack for 2006. With resources for your church including DVD, posters, CD-Rom and OHPs.

**Order it now. Inspire your church.  
Challenge your soul. Feed your mind. Stop TB.**

Available now for £9.95

[www.tearfund.org/KillerTB](http://www.tearfund.org/KillerTB)

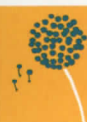
[enquiry@tearfund.org](mailto:enquiry@tearfund.org)

0845 355 8355

113252  
Registered Charity No: 265464



**TEARFUND**



CHRISTIAN ACTION WITH THE WORLD'S POOR

## Fresh expressions

I have just returned from Lambeth Palace. Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams and his intelligent and charming wife Jane were 'at home'. In the grand setting of the 'guard room', the Archbishop and Lord Brian Griffiths (formerly Mrs Thatcher's senior advisor) spoke about 'Fresh Expressions Of Church'. They had tracked 450 of these, involving 25,000 people of whom 8,000 are children.

It's an Anglican initiative coming from the Archbishop and Bishop Graham Cray of Maidstone. They have 'given permission' to think and act differently, creating new shapes of church. *The Daily Telegraph* noted, 'Non-traditional church, looks highly hopeful!' And all this has been achieved in two years.

### Skate parks

That's pretty remarkable when one thinks of what was the House Church Movement – now called the New Churches – who've taken 35 years to plant 2,500 churches. These latest additions have been planted in less than a third of that time.

So where are they? Well, they're in coffee shops, skate parks, pubs, gyms, schools (that takes me back 30 years!), cinemas – the list is endless. But the approach appears not to be reactionary, spitting on traditional church, hiding off into obscurity nor separateness.

This looks like a mature – and dare I say it, modern – way, to be God's people in a given setting. They are making church so attractive that mums, children, sportsmen, socialisers and teenagers having fun, want to be there.

In the last issue I endeavoured to extol the virtues of Hillsong London. Since then, Senior Pastor Gary Clarke has spoken at the Pioneer Leadership Symposium, which in itself was probably regarded as one of the best things we've ever done (see full report on page 6-7).

Now here am I extolling the virtues of charismatic and sometimes conservative evangelicals in the Church of England. But I am not Hillsong and I am not Church of England.

### Grace pioneers

We have pioneered in terms of grace, relationships, flexibility, partnerships, inclusiveness – and many other areas that you can now find in many other sections of the church. But we need to continue with these and let them deepen locally, nationally and internationally.

However, we'd be foolish not to acknowledge that pioneers do not pioneer on behalf of themselves – but on behalf of the many who will follow in ten, 20 or 30 years' time. We should rejoice at what we are seeing, learn what we can, and realise that most of us need fresh expressions of church. That's not because we've hit a middle age crisis, or because we are bored.

Jesus is worthy of our worship with songs old and new, and the world needs our prayers. And in this highly technological media age, we need to be regularly hearing scripture read, taught and expounded. But we do need to find new ways of being a servant community.

Gerald Coates



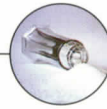
## Contents



**lifeworks** .....page 4 – 5  
Latest news from across the network and beyond



**lifechangers** .....page 6 – 7  
James Hughesdon reports from Pioneer's new leaders' symposium



**lifestyle** .....page 8 – 9  
Christians in Wales are stripping off layers of religion – and are wrapping themselves in reality.



**lifetimes** .....page 10 – 11  
A fresh breeze is blowing across the age-old landscape of 'church planting'



**lifesavers** .....page 12  
How do you move a church from hurt to healing?

PIONEER

**libraryoflives** is the official journal of the Pioneer network of churches and ministries. Material is protected by copyright. No content may be reproduced without permission from Pioneer.

**Executive Editor:** Gerald Coates

**Editor:** Clive Price

**Design and Print:**  
Verité CM Ltd,  
Worthing,  
West Sussex BN11 5JG

**Publisher:**  
Pioneer Trust, Rayleigh House  
32 High Street, Great Bookham  
Surrey KT23 4AG

**tel:** 01372 459413

**e-mail:** admin@pioneer.org.uk

**web:** www.pioneer.org.uk

Pioneer is a registered charity (no 327160) and a member of the Evangelical Alliance.

## MUSIC REVIEW

Okey Dokey  
by Doug Horley

Here is a clever mix of catchy tunes, funky beats and message-filled lyrics that will get your kids humming Doug's songs for days.

There is an impressive variety of tunes – from pop-mixed dance tracks, to more simple praise melodies.

The more fun-filled tunes will please the younger children, and with Lindz West's input (from The Tribe), the older ones will be satisfied with funky beats and truth-filled raps.

A personal favourite is *The Incredible Song*: 'I'm not a superhero, not much good in fights, really bad in tights, but God says I'm amazing, cos in me, did he, put all that he needs for me to serve him faithfully'.

You'll find something on this album to get everyone in your family – and indeed your church – bopping, jiggling, waving, jumping, and worshipping with child-like praise! (Available from Pioneer Direct).

Hazel Ireland

## OKEY DOKEY!

Fun and Funky Praise and Worship for Kids



World class rockers Delirious

## TEUTONIC TIMES

WITH more than 10,000 tickets sold already, *Calling All Nations* is capturing the hearts and minds of thousands of youth – and the young at heart – all across Europe.

Saturday July 15th will see them gathering at the Olympic Stadium in Berlin for this day of worship, praise, prayer – and a focus on mission.

Delirious?, Ruben Morgan (Hillsong), Matt Redman, Gerald Coates and Noel Richards are among the many worship leaders and contributors to this unique occasion.

Coaches are already planned to leave 150 cities across Europe, a train load are coming from Hungary and thousands will be flying to Berlin to enjoy a weekend in the city.

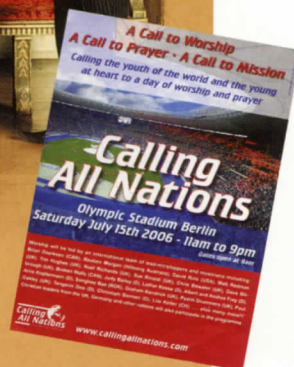
Among the partners is World Vision, a leading relief and development agency. This Christian charity is helping people in nearly 100 countries in the struggle against poverty.

They are working to promote the well being of all – especially children. World Vision have offered material, social and spiritual support to 100 million people in nearly 100 nations.

'We're very pleased to be part of the *Calling All Nations* global gathering,' said World Vision's Head of Education, Publications and Prayer, Peter Scott.

'We're convinced that everyone who attends will have a unique opportunity both to worship God – and learn more about how they can make a difference.'

For further information, visit the official website – [www.callingallnations.com](http://www.callingallnations.com).



## STOP PRESS

Just as we were going to press, the Pioneer office received news of the tragic death of Pioneer church leader David Stanley. A former member of Cobham Christian Fellowship, then Pioneer People, David died after a long battle against cancer. He leaves a wife, Meryl, and four children.

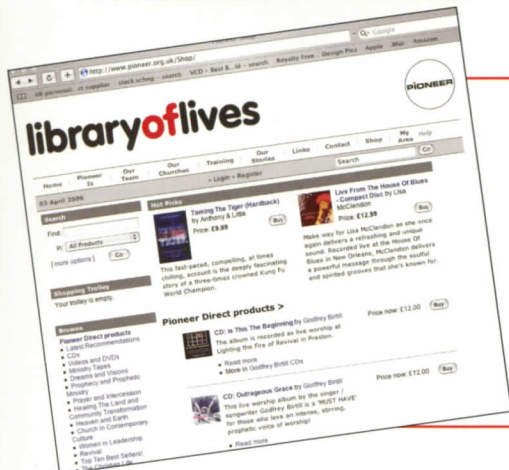
## NEW LOOK FOR AN OLD FRIEND

A NEW design has been created for the Pioneer Direct shop – which for years has provided a range of resources to individuals and churches across the UK and overseas.

These resources provide a popular and much-needed service to those who want to increase their effectiveness in promoting revival and community transformation.

Books, CDs, videos, DVDs and ministry tapes are available – from Noel Richards' boxed set to Godfrey Birtill's CDs – and books ranging from prayer to prophecy.

The website is updated regularly, and Friends of Pioneer get a special discount. Visit the website at [www.pioneer.org.uk/direct](http://www.pioneer.org.uk/direct), or phone 0845 222 0032.



## Ishmael 'revival'

FORMER Pioneer Associate Ishmael recently formed a new group called The Glorie Band to present revised standard versions of a selection of popular tunes from his ministry.

Despite being on the same bill as much younger bands – who had travelled from across the country to take part – they made their own impact at the Nth-Fest music festival.

They won over their mainly teen audience with punk and power-pop songs like 'Crowd Trouble', 'Song Of The Last Generation', 'Bartimaeus' and 'Father God I Wonder'.

Ishmael and The Glorie Band will return – for a concert at The Venue, Chichester, on 17th June. Special guest will be the legendary Steve Flashman ([www.ishmaeldirect.com](http://www.ishmaeldirect.com)).



Photograph: Ali Orchard

## TV TARGETS PIONEER CHURCH

**PIONEER activist Adrian Hawkes recently found himself on prime time TV – as one of several targets for leading evolutionist Richard Dawkins.**

Adrian – whose London-based Rainbow Churches run a Christian school – was questioned by the Oxford scientist as part of a controversial documentary on Channel 4.

He was featured on the two-part 'The Root of All Evil?', which attacked evangelicals in particular. Richard Dawkins quizzed him about his views on creation.

*'I thought I might look a fool,' Adrian told us, 'but I thought, "well, someone needs to do it – even if you're made to look stupid".'*

He said the TV crew took three or four hours of film, although the resulting clip was just a small part of the whole programme. *'So you can guess how much was edited,'* he added.

*'He pushed the Noah thing, and actually said, "every civilisation has a Noah story – it must be untrue". I was a bit bemused by that and answered, "well, if it is in every civilisation, surely that would suggest that it is true".'*

He claimed that Professor Dawkins did not appear interested in his church's foster care agency, care for asylum seekers and promotion of fair trade.

*'I did say that I thought he was very fundamentalist for his ideology. At that point he got cross – he said lots of people have said that and he did not like it.'*

However, the exposure might not harm Adrian and his Phoenix Academy. *'I did a programme years ago for ITV,'* he recalled, *'and they did make me look a little silly.'*

*'But we had loads of applications for our school. People are not so naive as to not to be able to see through some of the programme.'*

The Evangelical Alliance have not been as accommodating. They condemned Professor Dawkins' programme for being 'viciously biased' against faith communities.

In a public statement, the EA said that the series was a *'woefully ill-informed atheist polemic which belies its own claims to rational argument.'*

*'We are not suggesting that "The Root of All Evil?" should be banned or censored,'* said Head of Public Policy Dr R David Muir. *'We are simply surprised that Channel 4 commissioned a programme of such poor quality.'*

## DOUG'S ATLANTIC WAVE

PUPPETS, pyrotechnics and professionalism were hallmarks of a recent US tour for children's ministry supremo and Pioneer Associate Doug Horley.

*'Our tour kicked off with the Franklin Graham event in Halifax, Nova Scotia,'* he said. *'The Canadian team had been preparing for the whole year – and a team from the Billy Graham organisation had been working with 260 churches to put it all together.'*

Doug's team ran the children's event on the Saturday in the huge Metro Centre hockey stadium. More than 4,000 people packed into the venue. They were linked by satellite to a second venue at Cape Breton – where there were another 559 people.

*'The morning began in spectacular style with BMX stunt bike team "Chaos on wheels",'* said Doug. *'They'd arrived earlier in the week to specially construct their ramps for their exciting demonstration of stunt bike skills.'*

Doug travelled with a team of six to run the event. They hosted an hour-and-a-half programme of songs, sketches and a gospel message. *'The team did a brilliant job,'* he said.

*'We also had a fantastic local puppet team, a flag team – and even a pyrotechnics team. Combine that with a top class PA system – and boy did we rock! It was a fantastic morning. At the end, when I gave the gospel message, hundreds and hundreds of children responded.'*

The Billy Graham organisation is committed to excellence. About an hour after the event, they gave Doug a breakdown of the responses.

*'This not only showed the number of responses,'* he said, *'but analysed them by age, sex, and type of response.'* Nearly 600 had made some kind of response – and nearly 500 were first-time commitments.

The Billy Graham organisation have included a children's event in their crusades and festivals for only the last six years. But according to Doug, this was the first time they had used a non-US children's team.



*'One of the best leaders' conferences that we have been to'*

Robert Armstrong, Hertford Community Church



*'I have returned home enriched, provoked and deeply challenged about leadership, church and the kingdom'*

Gerald Coates



*'We are brilliant at being catalysts – we are not a corporation'*

Jeff Lucas



*'This was, by far, the best leaders' conference that I have been to'*

Sara Ward, Bridge Church, Brentford

*'The Symposium has dropped a grenade in our leadership team which will soon detonate'*

Philip Evans, Submerge Guildford

*'A great Symposium. Gary Clarke was excellent. I have come back home raring to go'*

Catherine Delve, Pioneer People Farnham

*'Well done for delivering the Pioneer Symposium. The much needed clarification of Pioneer came across well'*

Rich Wilson, Fusion

About 160 leaders from the Pioneer network of churches descended on a wonderfully restored parachute factory recently. You could say it was an uplifting experience.

They had gathered at the home of Letchworth Garden City Church for 25-and-a-half hours of fellowship, teaching, worship and fun. The facility provided ample space for seminars, meetings – and of course, food and drink.

# Beyond th

## James Hughesdon reports from P

### Transforming people

Most of the speakers over the weekend were drawn from among the Pioneer network. The notable exception was Gary Clarke, Senior Pastor of Hillsong, London.

The symposium began with a welcome and opening address by Gerald Coates. He focused on the future of Pioneer. What really struck home was the need to be committed to the movement of God's Spirit – not just the moment.

The danger in charismatic churches is that people seek after that momentary experience. But they are not prepared to commit to the long haul – which is to see God's kingdom come in this world, and to see people transformed for Jesus.

Gary was the main speaker for Friday evening and Saturday morning. He based his messages around 1 Samuel 13-14, where Jonathan and his armour bearer attack the Philistines by themselves. That starts the rout of the Philistine army and the deliverance of Israel.

Gary spoke of how leaders need to be careful that we don't simply sit back under the pomegranate tree, as Saul was doing. Often we need to act on certain presumptions that we can make about what God wants us to do and hope, as Jonathan did, that *'...perhaps God will be with us'*.



## Higher level

Yet there is also the flip side to this, where we need to learn from the armour bearer, who was committed to Jonathan 'heart and soul'. This is the attitude that we need to seek to build on the churches and in the people around us. Coupled with that, we need to seek to connect ourselves with people who are at a higher level than us – so that we will be drawn up to that level.

# e moment

## Pioneer's new leaders' symposium

Dotted between the main sessions were a variety of seminars led by people from within Pioneer. These talks were well received and were very challenging.

**Phil Collins** gave a brief overview of the changes happening within Pioneer, with the establishment of a National Churches Forum and Exchange. Even the mealtimes were utilised, with discussion on each table based around topics ranging from 'global change' to 'employing staff'.

**Rex Allchurch** and the Harding brothers led the worship extremely well. Their efforts connected the symposium together.

## New season

Yet the symposium felt like it was more than simply a time of good teaching, worship and fellowship. It seemed that it was a moment of transition for the network. John Noble brought a word that summed this up. He said that *'The blossom is on the tree'*.

There was, and is, a movement taking place from winter to summer within the network. Now is the time to show ourselves to be committed to this movement into a new season – rather than just being there for the moment.

For further information and feedback from the symposium, visit the Pioneer website at [www.pioneer.org.uk](http://www.pioneer.org.uk) or [www.libraryoflives.org](http://www.libraryoflives.org).



*'What I found refreshing about Pioneer is their earthiness and honesty'*

Neville Hollands, LifeSpring Church, Reading



*'We felt it would be brilliant to do this more often, as it packed a lot into a smaller amount of time'*

Mary and Paul Dennison



*'An awesome conference'*

Paul Safar, Redhill



**James Hughesdon** recently graduated from Exeter University with a degree in theology, and is now living in Bookham, Surrey. He works part time as a manager in Guildford and part time with Gerald Coates, founder of the Pioneer movement.

# Naked churches

Christians in Wales have been stripping off layers of religion – and have wrapped themselves in reality. Rob James explains how this has happened to two Pioneer churches

When the apostle Paul told the church at Corinth that their lives were to be letters read by all men, he little dreamed that would happen in a sorting office. But that's just what's taken place in Swansea.

Cornerstone Church was pioneered 11 years ago when nine people met in the front room of Julian and Sarah Richards' house. Eleven years later, that group has evolved into a thriving congregation of about 160, with 12 paid members of staff.

Unusually, the church's growth has come primarily through people coming to faith. That's a remarkable achievement given the well-documented background of decline and decay in contemporary Wales. And it's not difficult to understand why.

## Pipe dream

The church was founded on the principle of building a community of people that would attract the lost. At the heart of that was a desire to serve those who lived around it.

This vision has been infinitely more than a pipe dream. Staff members – with the help of many other volunteers – deliver multiple projects and services to the local community, attracting some 1,400 visits a month.

In 1997 the church purchased and refurbished a former GPO sorting office, renamed The Cornerstone Church Centre. It operates as a base for the worshipping and serving community.

In 2000, thanks to an EU grant, the church was able to respond to the growing demand for community services by completing a £100,000 annex.

The church has embraced a holistic concept of mission that stresses the needs of the whole person, and has been both adventurous and industrious in seeking to put those principles into practice.

*The church  
has embraced  
a holistic concept  
of mission*

Pastor Julian Richards models this missionary ideal. He is a board member of a local community development trust. He has represented faith groups on the Key Partners' Alliance Committee and on the Welsh Council for Voluntary Action Board. This umbrella organisation has close relations with the Welsh Assembly, to inform and represent the concerns of Welsh civil society.

Some of Cornerstone's activities fit well within traditional models of mission in Wales. Once a week, more than 200 children are bussed in from the local estates and taken to the Elim Church in Swansea.

This inter-church programme consists of an hour's mix of interactive fun, games, songs, quizzes and Bible stories. Every child is visited by a volunteer each week with a puzzle to complete. That means more than 170 homes in the Swansea area are visited every week.

## Outdoor pursuits

Here are just some of the other ways in which Cornerstone reaches out to their community:

- lunch clubs in secondary and junior schools;
- an evening drop-in café for young people;
- parent and toddler group called Little Rascals;
- education courses in conjunction with Swansea College;
- homework clubs for children struggling with assignments;
- sessions on parent-craft, relationship skills and HIV/AIDS awareness;
- counselling service;
- outdoor and indoor pursuits programme for teenagers.

Cornerstone Church is sending out a powerful message from its refurbished post office. It's a message that locals clearly understand and accept as good news. As a result,

Cornerstone is a growing church that is winning an ever-increasing sense of trust and acceptance, both within the local community, and the city of Swansea.

### Socially excluded

Few churches can claim to touch almost every family in the town. But that's what's happening in Llanelli. And most of the contacts are through Crazy Maisie's.

Crazy Maisie's Fun Station and Nearly New Shop is only one of many expressions of faith sponsored by Antioch Christian Centre in Llanelli. But over the past three years it's had a significant impact on local people.

Antioch Church was started in 1987 by Karen and Mark Lowe and Stuart Watkins. The church grew rapidly, with a willingness to accept people from a variety of backgrounds – particularly those who were socially excluded.

*'Llanelli is a typical post-industrial town that was devastated in the early 80s by the closure of a major steelworks,' said Karen Lowe. 'Over the past few years there has been some major regeneration – but there's still a lot further to go.'*

Antioch clearly thinks it has a crucial role to play in regenerating this devastated society. Indeed it seems to have been doing it from the moment of its birth.

*'We'd been working with groups of wild youngsters,' Karen added, 'some of whom had been coming to faith, but they really weren't fitting into the chapel culture. We decided to plant a church, which began in our front room.'*

*'We moved into a number of different community halls. But at that point we felt that we needed to plant the church again – with the values of a passion for the presence of God and a real desire that none should perish.'*

They started seeing people coming to faith from all sorts of difficult backgrounds – including prison and addiction. It radically changed them as a church.

*'We decided we needed a building to facilitate some of the work we were doing,' said Karen. 'We had been very anti-building, but we started looking at pubs, old chapels, and even an undertaker's. In the end we bought 17,000 square feet of semi-dereliction.'*

Antioch then arose from the ruins of a derelict factory within the old docks area of Llanelli. It provides a base from which the members seek to serve the local community.

The present Antioch Centre houses a number of different projects. Antioch is committed to a multi-faceted approach to improving the social and economic life in Llanelli. That is reflected in the wide range of activities which aim to meet four major areas of need:

- family support,
- disadvantaged youth and children,
- drug and substance abuse,
- unemployment.

The church did its homework well before seeking outside funding. The refurbishment of the building is still in progress, but has already achieved in making a base to serve the whole community.

There are other ingredients to Antioch's fresh brew of community involvement:

- drop-in centre for drugs and alcohol intervention activities;
- 13 business start-up units;
- numerous community service units;
- a recording studio for local bands;
- various children's and young people's clubs;
- parent and toddler group;
- seven-week course on parenting skills;
- full-time family support worker.

Funding is available for those willing to pursue it diligently. Currently Antioch has around 14 projects based at the centre, and the church has developed a proper management structure to deal with this.

### Anonymous refugees

Engagement is an essential part of the gospel for the church at Antioch. Members believe it is important for faith groups to actively engage with existing organisations and service providers. That way they can ensure they are working with the community – not isolated from it.

It's worth remembering that the first church at Antioch was not the result of a major crusade. It was not established by a few outstanding leaders. It was built by a handful of anonymous refugees who had lost everything, whose worlds had been turned upside down, but loved Jesus – and showed it.

In many ways they were powerless and very ordinary. But they had good news to share and people took note. Thankfully, there are disciples in Llanelli today who can also be called 'Christians'.



**Rob James** is a journalist and church leader based in South Wales. His article has been adapted, with permission, from the new book 'The Naked Church', published by Shedhead Productions and distributed by GWEINI, the Council of Christian Community Work in Wales ([www.gweini.org.uk](http://www.gweini.org.uk)).

# Time to plant

A fresh breeze is blowing across the age-old landscape of 'church planting'.  
Andy Read reports on latest developments in this realm

If the 1980s was a party of church planting in the UK – embraced by historic denominations as well as New Church groups – then perhaps the 1990s was 'the morning after the night before'.

For some at least, the optimistic target setting of the previous decade produced disappointment when the numbers were not realised.

Of course, this is not true in all cases, and there would be many reasons behind the headlines. However, the reality is that in some quarters the term 'church planting' became something more whispered in corners than proclaimed in public.

## New forms

More recently, though, another signal started to appear on the radar. This is what it said:

*'All over the UK a fresh wind of God's Spirit is producing many and varied new forms of Church. Even where church planting has not featured highly on the agenda of many streams and denominations, there is a growing grass-roots level emergence of church planting activity.'*

*'Even plants which appear to be traditional are finding new ways of being Church in terms of how they build community and reach out to the communities around them. This activity is happening right across the diverse cultures that make up the UK Church today – including Afro-Caribbean, British Asian and other minority groupings.'*

So read the publicity for Mission 21. This conference was planned to look at the issue from the widest perspective, and if possible, serve as a springboard for further activity. It was a joint venture of three organisations:

- Together in Mission – the successor to Challenge 2000;
- The Group for Evangelisation – an ecumenical group that brings together those with a responsibility for evangelism and mission from all major denominations and some newer-church streams;
- Wycliffe Bible Translators – whose core work is based on a heart for mission in all communities.

The conference took place at the new Philadelphia Campus of St Thomas' Church, Sheffield, from 8th-10th March, and attracted up to 500 delegates and day visitors.

## Past failures

The stated aims were to 'assess the new landscape, honestly face past failures, look at our faith and expectations for the future, learn from what is already happening, add momentum to it and to see what new connections can be made'.

So how successful was the gathering in meeting those objectives?

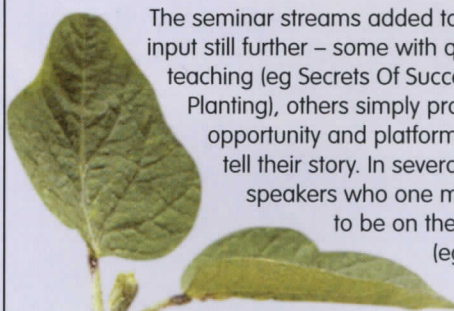
First, you will not find many (any?) gatherings bringing together such a broad band of delegates. They featured New Frontiers; Afro-Caribbean groups such as the Redeemed Christian Church of Christ; small inner-city church plants meeting in a flat in a high-rise block; representatives from the Archbishop of Canterbury's Fresh Expressions group; Pioneer; Methodists; and Baptists.

Platform speakers included Martin Robinson, Stuart Murray-Williams, Pastor Agu Irukwu, Paul Weaver, Pal Singh, Sandy Millar, Graham Cray, Andy Hawthorne and Gerald Coates. Bringing such a wide group together, in a cohesive way, was no small achievement.

The seminar streams added to the breadth of input still further – some with quite focused teaching (eg *Secrets Of Successful Church Planting*), others simply providing an opportunity and platform for practitioners to tell their story. In several you could find speakers who one might often expect to be on the 'main platform' (eg Fran Beckett, Stuart Bell and Roy Crowne).

Networking opportunities were facilitated and encouraged, with the aim of helping people to make connections with others doing similar things in the same area – either geographically or demographically. Again, the breadth of backgrounds of those attending made such possibilities unusually varied.

*'Another signal started to appear on the radar'*



## Other faiths

Anyone coming to Mission 21 seeking a quiet life will have been disappointed! Those with ears to hear will have heard such challenges as:

- Pastor Agu from RCCC explaining that his church's usual church planting method is to send a small team into an area, where they rent a house and start by praying – perhaps for eight hours a day!
- Pal Singh talking about those of other faiths in the Asian communities who sometimes have received a revelation of Jesus – such as a neighbour who knew that Jesus answered prayer, so had a cross among his other idols.
- Bishop Graham Cray encouraging us to prioritise resources and energy to reach out to the non-churched, as we are at a significant point in history.
- Gerald Coates declaring that things have so changed over the last 20 years that the local 'new-church' can be irrelevant in their community, while the Anglican church can be the best thing in town.

- Juliet Gilpin of Urban Expressions, talking about the church that meets in their inner-city flat on a budget of £4K per year. One new convert there asked to be baptised. They also asked if a friend could help baptise them; the friend was not yet a believer – but guess what? After attending the pre-baptism chats they decided they wanted to follow Jesus as well!

- David Stroud of New Frontiers speaking of their very intentional programme of church planting and leadership development.

Of course, that same breadth and variety also meant that to draw a single message from the gathering is very hard. The voices were many and so were the experiences.

*'The voices  
were many and  
so were the  
experiences'*

However, if we are to take seriously the fact that God loves his people to dwell in unity, then a conference such as this must at the very least have brought a smile to his face.

Add in the fact that over the three days the Body that is called the Bride of Christ was talked about with respect, with love, with humility and with a desire for growth and inclusion of more of those for whom Jesus died, and surely the smile must have broadened.

And when God smiles – who knows what can happen next.



**Andy Read** is part of the leadership team at The Pioneer River Church, Maidenhead, Associate Director of Equipped to Lead, a Spring Harvest speaker, and a member of Churches Together in England's Group for Evangelisation. He is married to Lina and they have two adult daughters.



# Mission accomplished

How do you move a church from hurt to healing? Missionary Vickie Blair faced that challenge – and won. Patrick Woodward reports

Vickie Blair faced a major challenge. She had accepted a request to lead a church with a 20-year heritage – and a need for healing.

Broadwater Christian Fellowship in Worthing was formerly led by Mark Langham. But two years before, he had stepped down due to differences of personality and style with the elders.

## Closed countries

Mark and wife Denise, who had led the worship team, had remained as members. The elders continued to lead without a full-time pastor. Relationship difficulties emerged. A significant ministry was starting to unravel.

However, Vickie rises to a challenge. Originally from Alabama, USA, she pioneered mission activity in a number of 'closed countries'. She was the first missionary to the former Soviet republic Kyrgyzstan in 1991.

There were two immediate consequences. She asked all the existing leaders to step down, which they did gracefully. Then a number of church members decided to leave. Some felt unable to accept a woman's lead.

With a new eldership in place, it was time for more changes. 'I felt God clearly say to me, "Restore the severed root",' she said. The church had been part of Pioneer, but had later left to join New Frontiers.

That relationship had broken down. Vickie re-established the link with Pioneer. She set up structures for church membership and government – which had lapsed in previous years – started teaching on 'discovering your gifts' and rebuilt relationships.

A new name – 'River of Life Church' – was adopted. Mark and Denise were appointed as elders, ending two years of disappointment. Denise was reappointed to lead the worship team.

Vickie set out to build people up. She prayed for everyone daily, and told them so. However, she is the first to admit she did not always get things right. She had no experience of pastoring a western church.

'Christians in Kyrgyzstan are so different,' she recalled. 'After so many years of Communist rule, the commitment of the Kyrgyz church is unparalleled. It's not the same in the UK. And with the struggles the church had been through, people were not always ready to accept some of my radical ideas.'

Different nationalities started to attend the church – Peruvian, Brazilian, Bulgarian, African, Seychellois – along with American and British. It's a cosmopolitan congregation!

Many people took their first step into overseas missions, visiting India, Africa, Romania and Kyrgyzstan. Existing contacts were built on and encouraged. Now about one-third of the church budget is committed to overseas mission.

## Nomadic spirit

Vickie knew she would not be at River of Life forever. Pioneer leaders John and Sue Riddell – whose guidance has been much appreciated – commented on her 'nomadic spirit'.

Now the time has come for her to move on. In September 2005 Vickie declared that her last Sunday would be January 8th. *'This step came to me in a word from John and Sue, and in many other ways which I knew to be God's voice,'* she said. *'He is opening new doors for my ministry, but I knew he would not abandon my sheep at River of Life.'*

The church committed itself to 40 days of prayer. Then Vickie announced that Mark and Denise Langham would be appointed as her successors, with Denise in the lead role. *'This came as a surprise to some – not least Mark and Denise themselves,'* she said, *'but I had always felt that this was what God had intended all along, a restoration.'*

River of Life Church is now a vibrant fellowship with a clear sense of purpose and a strong united spirit. But for this American woman, 'mission' is never quite 'accomplished'. She remains a key part of the church, but is looking to new horizons as she senses God's call back to Kyrgyzstan – and beyond.

*'People were not always ready to accept some of my radical ideas'*

**Patrick Woodward** is a member of River of Life Church, Worthing. He writes and presents programmes on Christian and mainstream radio.

