



Inside this issue:

How do people come to faith? 1

Touching a child's heart—Zambia 2

The Chinese are coming—Southern Africa 2

Church Army International: West Indies & Vanuatu 3

The Ministry of healing—Egypt 3

Christian witness in a multi-religious world 3

Simple steps 3

The Hard Gospel—Ireland 4

Get Involved 4

# WITNESS6.7

Acts 6.7a - The word of God continued to spread

## The Evangelism & Church Growth Initiative Newsletter

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### HOW DO PEOPLE COME TO FAITH?

In the last edition of Witness6.7 we considered how Anglicans share their faith; but how do people come to faith? Obviously in a variety of ways, but the story of Peter and Cornelius in Acts 10, provides some pointers of conversion from one faith community to another.

Cornelius was actively seeking God; he was looking for something outside of himself and his previous experiences and understanding and so would have been open to that which was new and different. Sometimes God takes the initiative and finds those who are not seeking him. When this happens it is often as the result of the prayers of others; often such prayers will be sustained prayer over a period of time.

To become a Christian, Cornelius will need to change his worldview; something needs to happen that allows the acceptance of a different worldview. Usually this will be a process, over a period of time; perhaps the person or community has found themselves challenged by the worldview of a different community. Such challenges are unlikely to come from logical argument; logical argument usually only works if you have similar worldviews and assumptions to start off with. The challenge comes from realising that another community has values, or a lifestyle that flows out of their values, which are not found within your own worldview.

Conversion usually begins in response to what people are **doing** rather than what they are **saying**. It is the values, and lifestyles reflecting these values, which help people to begin to realise that another worldview is more appropriate for them.

Usually we would assume that repentance is a necessary step in conversion. Repentance literally means a change of direction; a clear indication that the previous direction was the wrong one, an admission of the previous faults and the decision to proceed in a different direction. It must be pointed out that although the text makes no such mention of repentance – in fact no word is spoken by Cornelius and his household between the invitation to Peter to speak and the extolling of God in tongues - the baptism in the Spirit follows immediately after Peter speaks of the forgiveness of sins through Jesus' name. We might assume that the Holy Spirit is aware of an inner repentance that the narrator misses from the narrative.

Peter doesn't state different Christian doctrines; he doesn't use Christian jargon. Instead Peter speaks

of his experience of Jesus at work in his life and in the world. It is the other person's experience of God at work in their life that can challenge and change our worldview; doctrine will only make sense after the worldview has begun to change.

In societies where there is a strong sense of community it is very difficult to hold a worldview that is different from the rest of the community. Often either the whole community converts and is baptised, or no one converts and is baptised. If an individual from a particular community does convert to Christianity, from a different worldview, they will be cutting themselves off from that community. They may be cutting themselves off from their family and, if single, are likely to be making the likelihood of marriage within their original community impossible. They will need incredible support from the Christian community in order to survive and grow as a Christian; seeing the decision to convert as being a purely individual decision, rather than a communal one, might be imposing western cultural values onto the situation.

Peter doesn't try to make Cornelius and his household identical to him and his companions; witnessing the baptism in the Spirit, convinces him that there is no need to make them adopt aspects of Jewish culture that are essential parts of his Christianity. The Holy Spirit seems content for Cornelius and his household to be Christians within their own culture. What we see here is *evangelism*, where they are exposed to, and respond to, the good news of Christ in an appropriate way within their own culture and context, and not *protestantisation* where there is an attempt to make the convert replicate yourself and take on board all of the manifestations of Christianity found within your own culture and context.

Bishop Kenneth Cragg, who has written extensively about the engagement between Christianity and Islam, is quoted as saying 'Mission is not about the claims that we make, but about the discoveries we enable'. Throughout the narrative it is the Holy Spirit that is in control; we are called to witness, but it is the Holy Spirit that converts.

*Do share your stories and reflections of how people come to faith through these pages.*

## TOUCHING A CHILD'S HEART IN LUSAKA

The Rev'd. Fr. Robert (Bob) Sihubwa, Diocesan Youth Pastor & Music Chaplain writes *"The last quarter has been one of the most exciting in the sense that we have witnessed the fruits of the Youth camps and the children conference held in March. Sunday school teachers, after attending the "Touching a child's heart" conference at Miracle Life Church, have shown a lot of innovation. One congregation in Chaisa which had 1 teacher now has 6 teachers. There are plans in Matero of opening community Bible Clubs for all children regardless of their church affiliation. Livingstone has reported increased numbers of children and parents are getting impressed with what is happening. When people put into practice what they learn, it makes us feel that it is worth the effort.*

*On 29th May we hosted a Joint Girls and Boys Brigade enrolment at the Cathedral. Eight congregations responded and the cathedral was full. We enrolled 415 boys and girls and through our research we have discovered that out of 77 congregations in the Diocese, only 19 have BB, GB or Girls Friendly Society (GFS). Imagine if one day we have a joint enrolment of 77 congregations, we would need a stadium; may God take us there!! We have developed a strategy to fill up close to 60 congregations between July - December. Come 2012, all congregations must have these groups. The teams are ready to move and we need not less than K6 million to manage this project. I can hear what Jesus said, "the harvest is plenty, but the laborers are few..."*

## THE CHINESE ARE COMING

Archbishop Thabo, together with leaders from other denominations, recently hosted a ten person delegation, from China's Ministry of State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) in Johannesburg and Cape Town. "Growing the Church" was asked to facilitate most of the practicalities. The delegation's purpose was to learn about different models of being the church in an African context and to reflect on how the church engages with local communities when confronted with the challenges of life. Showing interest in Church State relationships, Cabinet Minister Wang Zuo'an who led the team said, "China is going through massive change and we are keen to learn from our friends in South Africa where you have experienced amazing changes yourselves. We are looking for good role-models". He was profuse in his praise for what they had experienced of the church in South Africa. He expressed the hope that the models and principles of ministry and community engagement that they had encountered could also become a reality in China. To this end he issued an invitation to the 15 Primates of the Global South to visit China in September and for the hosting party to visit the church in China as well. They said that they hoped this would lead to the establishment of a relationship between the South African and Chinese churches.

Church leaders were humbled and realised afresh our enormous responsibility to reflect Christ and his church in practical, responsible and holistic ways – ways that would bring a new dimension to the relationship between the church and state in China and potentially impact 1.3 billion people! What an awesome opportunity! South Africa was their final leg after visits to Kenya and Uganda.

Archbishop John Chew of Singapore and South East Asia and Mr Kua Wee Seng of the United Bible Society, who accompanied the delegation said, "Enormous changes have already taken place in China. We have been building a relationship with the Chinese state for about twenty years and are seeing the fruit thereof. A few years ago they permitted the establishment of a printing press in Nanjing. The press has already printed about 53 million bibles in Chinese languages. Archbishop Chew coordinated the visit which was organized by the primates of the Anglican Communion's Global South.

Rev'd Trevor Pearce—Growing The Church



## Church Army International

### West Indies

Philip Johanson, in the last edition of the Church Army international newsletter wrote about his visit to the Province of the West Indies. Here he was able to meet with groups of clergy and lay people in the various dioceses to talk about evangelism, church planting and begin to explore the possibility of Church Army working in those dioceses where they are not currently involved. Wherever he went the welcome was warm both in terms of climate and from the people. He had some very good discussions and a real interest in exploring the possibilities of new work. The various dioceses, the House of Bishops and the Provincial Standing Committee will now discuss possible ways forward.

### Vanuatu

He also speaks of the exciting proposed development to see Church Army Vanuatu launched. Ben Tosiro spent three months in New Zealand where he translated and contextualised training material before returning to Vanuatu with this material, a laptop and a data projector. The former Diocesan Office in Santo, Vanuatu will be renovated and used as a training centre.

After four and a half years with Church Army International, Philip who is standing down from this work, said that it has been a privilege working with Church Army around the world in supporting current work and exploring new opportunities of working in partnership with others in sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ.

## The Ministry of Healing: An Effective Way of Communicating God's Love to All People

*The Most Revd Dr Mouneer Hanna Anis, Bishop of the Episcopal/Anglican Diocese of Egypt with North Africa and the Horn of Africa; President Bishop of the Episcopal/Anglican Province of Jerusalem and the Middle East gave the keynote address at the recent USPG—Anglicans in World Mission conference.. The full text of this stimulating talk, illustrating the connection between a healing ministry and Christian witness can be found at <http://www.uspg.org.uk/images/cms/Bishop%20Mouneer%2021.6.11.pdf>*



## "Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct"

A five-page document on the conduct of mission "according to gospel principles", was released during a public presentation on Tuesday 28 June at the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva, Switzerland.

The recommendations regarding respectful behaviour on the part of missionaries, evangelists and other witnesses when sharing the Christian faith were issued following a five-year series of consultations among the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue (PCID) of the Roman Catholic Church and the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA). The three bodies include Orthodox, Catholic, Anglican, Protestant, Evangelical, Pentecostal and independent churches with a combined membership of some two billion people representing nearly 90 percent of the world's Christians.

The full text of Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World is available in:

**English** [http://www.oikoumene.org/fileadmin/files/wcc-main/2011pdfs/ChristianWitness\\_recommendations.pdf](http://www.oikoumene.org/fileadmin/files/wcc-main/2011pdfs/ChristianWitness_recommendations.pdf)

**Spanish** <http://www.oikoumene.org/es/documentacion/documentos/programas-del-cmi/interreligious-dialogue-and-cooperation/christian-identity-in-pluralistic-societies/testimonio-cristiano-en-un-mundo-de-pluralismo-religioso.html>

## Simple Steps

Julian Linnell of Anglican Frontier Mission suggests a simple framework, from the Book of Acts, to outline simple steps your church or bible study group can take to evaluate your current mission work and to intensify it. See under **Other Resources** on <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/mission/ecgi/resources/index.cfm>

**The Hard Gospel** *Bishop Trevor Williams, formerly leader of the Corrymeela Community in Northern Ireland, writes about the Hard Gospel project in the Church of Ireland. The project was intended to address sectarian attitudes within the Church. Drumcree parish church was the focus of many of the communal tensions in recent years as members of the (Protestant) Orange Order annually insisted on their historic right to march to Drumcree Church against the wishes of the local nationalist (Roman Catholic) community; leading to stand-offs, road blocks and violence against the police.*

The fear, community tension and violence which surrounded the Drumcree standoff for many years, may have had at least one good outcome. The service in Drumcree Parish Church prior to the parade and what followed, raised difficult questions for the Church of Ireland. It has led the Church of Ireland to examine its need to change.

In 1997 the General Synod of the Church of Ireland, the Church's highest governing body, declared unequivocally that the Church was opposed to sectarianism. Nothing remarkable in that - what would you expect a Church to say! What was significant was that the Church decided to follow up on its statement. They decided to find out if the Church itself, in any way contributed to sectarianism. They undertook a study of the attitudes and opinions of Church of Ireland members, in both Northern Ireland and the Republic. The result of that study showed a deep desire within the clergy and lay membership of the church to find ways of dealing positively with difference in our relationships both within the Church, and in wider society.

Northern Ireland is well trained in the blame game - finding the fault with the other side. Our instinct is to demand 'the others' change. But the only change we can bring about, is to change ourselves. This is what the Church discovered through its study of sectarianism and is what led to the Hard Gospel Project. The aim of the project was to address issues of sectarianism within the church, and to avoid being hypocritical. It was Jesus who summed up God's law in two commandments 'love God, ..... and to love your neighbour as yourself'. To call yourself a Christian Church and not follow this most basic Christian teaching is indeed hypocritical. But the challenge is quite radical when you live in a context of sectarianism. One of the aims of the project sought to express this: "to model in its own structures and ways of being, the relationships and values with regard to overcoming sectarianism, community conflict and dealing with difference, that it will promote in wider society"

The project received funding from the International Fund for Ireland, and the Department of Foreign Affairs in Dublin, and was welcomed as an ambitious attempt at institutional change to overcome sectarianism.

The three year project came to an end in January this year. Three members of staff delivered, among other things: a fantastic range of programmes; resource materials and meetings throughout the 32 counties; materials for parish study groups were produced; an audit of the committees and structures of the church was undertaken to see who was being excluded; a project on meeting the needs of Loyalist communities in the North; a counterpart programme with immigrant communities in the South; a study of the experience of border Protestants.

These can be accessed on the Hard Gospel Website <http://ireland.anglican.org/archive/hardgospel/> (continued)

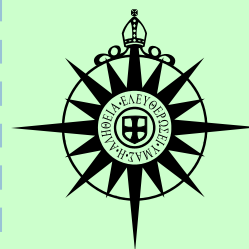
It was Seamus Heaney, the poet, who coined the phrase "whatever you say, say nothing", which reflects the difficulties we have in speaking together about contentious issues. So a series of seminars were held under the banner 'Beyond the Box' dealing with issues such as "Where there is no vision... Leadership in the Protestant/Unionist community": "Remembrance... whose story is it anyway?" "Racism.. the new sectarianism".

In the three years of the Hard Gospel Project new ground has been broken for the Church of Ireland. Now that the Project is complete, the Church faces its greatest challenge. Will it make a lasting difference to the Church? Will the structures of the Church be more representative? And perhaps the greatest challenge of all, will the Church continue to find ways of stimulating discussion with the wider community on the pressing issues of the day?

A Hard Gospel Implementation group has been formed to assist the process. Will it achieve the priority and commitment it takes to effect such radical change throughout the institution? At the end of the day, the Church of Ireland will be judged by the words of Jesus command '.....to love your neighbour as yourself'.

### Get Involved with ECGI

- ◆ **Register**, if you have not already done so, <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/mission/ecgi> - we will let the core group person responsible for your region know about you;
- ◆ **Tell others** involved in evangelism and church growth about the Initiative and the newsletter;
- ◆ **Send us** your stories, of how God is working through your church or organisation to grow his church, to include in future issues, (300—800 words) by 1 September for the October 2011 edition. We are exploring how we can include more sensitive material on secure web pages;
- ◆ **Tell us** about resources: books; websites; courses, good practice; prayers etc that we can include in future newsletters or on the website;
- ◆ **Read the website** to explore the various helpful resources that are already included;
- ◆ **Translate** this newsletter, and other material, into the languages of those who cannot read in English; at this stage we do not have the resources to do this ourselves;
- ◆ We call on you to **pray** for the ECGI and the work mentioned in this issue.



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