

Welcome to Issue 28 of LEAF's newsletter and diary. Firstly let me wish you a very happy New Year. I trust that 2007 will be a prosperous year (in the truly Biblical sense of that word) for you, your family and your church. Let's continue to pray earnestly that this year will see the Kingdom of God advanced in our area... "Thy Kingdom Come."

Our **Annual LEAF Celebration** took place in October and John Smith brought a very inspiring and challenging word on Empire or Kingdom – if you were unable to be at this meeting you can download this message from the LEAF website – www.leafforest.org - it is well worth listening to.

You will find details overleaf of our **LEAF Annual Vision Meeting** on **Fri 2nd Feb** – please be there if you possibly can – it should be a great evening.

In our lead article, Derek Copley challenges us to be open and unashamed about sharing our faith. Let's take this message to heart.

Jonathan Wallis, Chairman



WHAT CAN CHRISTIANS LEARN FROM MUSLIMS?

I have a friend who bears the unusual name of Brash Bonsall, formerly Principal of what was then called 'Birmingham Bible Institute'. He was also unusual in another aspect – his practice of expressing his faith in God publicly. I remember being in Woolworths with him, and in full view of everyone he put his arm round my shoulder and said 'Word of prayer brother'. With that he proceeded to pray for me. I also discovered that he would do this with students at bus-stops, and at times, when the bus arrived, they would board it leaving Brash, delightfully unaware, praying on the kerbside!

Last month I was in the Arab quarter of Jerusalem, where Jews and Arabs live happily side by side. I walked outside my host's flat on the second floor, and as I looked across to the balconies of other apartments, there was a Muslim man with his mat, facing Mecca, and saying his prayers. Next door was Jewish man sitting on a chair with his Bible in his lap, also praying, at the top of his voice, unashamed. On the balcony above him, walking about, another Jewish man was praying aloud. And on a recent flight from Malaysia, the TV monitor continuously showed in which direction Mecca lay, so that Muslims on board could be facing the right direction when they prayed their 'salat' prayers, which they do 5 times a day.

Muslims and Jews are unselfconscious about praying in public, and it puzzles them as to why Christian prayer is so private and invisible to the general public. And they ask questions like 'how do Christians know at what times to pray, for how long, and what words to use?' I ask myself 'is there a challenge somewhere here?' For all their legalism and formalism, I suspect that the Muslim who faithfully sticks to the 'salat' actually prays longer than we do, who have no planned routine and feel superior. Also, the way they teach their young people emphasises reverence in prayer, in contrast with our focus on freedom, spontaneity, and familiarity with God. We downplay the transcendence of God and emphasise the God who is with us. As the writer David Wells has noted, our God has become lightweight.

I am also challenged by the concept among Muslims that Islam is a complete way of life. It addresses itself not just to the soul, but to the whole of life. Many would support the idea that true religion should provide the framework for public life, like Shari'a law, and they are disappointed when they see Christians (or Westerners whom they regard as 'Christian') having such low moral standards with our social and political order governed not by Divine law but by systems devised by fallible human beings. They are amazed that we do not seem to care when unbelievers mock our Prophets or even the Lord Jesus. Our apparent timidity baffles them. Lesslie Newbigin believes we are too ready to privatise our faith, and that we should learn from the witness of Muslims to their faith as public truth.

At the heart of the Christian Gospel is the cross, something Muslims find strange and offensive. 'God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom' (1 Cor 1:25), and the idea of Jesus 'a holy prophet' being murdered by unbelievers, and bearing our sins is particularly offensive to Islam. How deeply do we value that which shocks the Muslim, the idea of the death of an innocent man being needed to reveal God's love? Or has familiarity bred contempt?

Whether personally, or corporately, it is a healthy thing to 'to see ourselves as others see us' (as Robert Burns put it). We should seek to answer three questions:

- 'How do Muslims see Christianity?'
- 'What can Christians learn from Muslims?', and
- 'How will this knowledge assist us in witnessing to Muslims?'

The latter question assumes that we are comfortable in theory about evangelism among Muslims, and challenges the uncomfortable fact that many UK Christians have become politically correct in this issue and others. We prefer not to witness to them in case we cause offence.

Contd overleaf

LEAF is committed to the transformation of society and culture in the New Forest through evangelical Christians uniting together in prayer, worship, evangelistic activity, social action and speaking with a common voice to local government and media.

Local Evangelical Alliance in The Forest, Rose Cottage, Back Lane, Sway, Lymington, SO41 6BU. Charity No 1111910
Tel: 01590 682605. Email: leaf.info@virgin.net Website: www.leafforest.org Editor: Jonathan Wallis

What can Christians learn from Muslims? (contd)

Had the Early Church taken this stance, there would be no church today. Presenting Christ and the Cross has always, and will always cause offence and unpopularity. And we can't stand unpopularity. It takes us out of our comfort zone, and we must, at all costs, not 'feel bad'. We insist on a concept of 'wholeness' which aims at our being free from pain. Thank goodness the believers in Central Asia, where I work, are not afraid to witness within their Muslim nations.

Derek Conlev

WHAT LEGACY ARE YOU LIVING?

On Easter Monday, 1991, James Ryle sat in his office reflecting on a very successful Easter Sunday. His church had been packed, and after 8 years of blood, sweat and tears, building up a church from scratch, he felt encouraged and satisfied by what had been achieved.

Then the Holy Spirit spoke softly and tenderly to his heart. "You have succeeded," He said, "and you have failed... you have succeeded in attracting a crowd; you have failed in building a church."

Deeply impacted by those words, James began to realize that if he were to be removed from the picture (and James is a gifted preacher), most of what he had built would rapidly evaporate. The church is not dependent on one gifted pastor, but on every member finding his place in the body of Christ. A church will not **leave** a legacy for the next generation unless we, its members, are **living** that legacy now.

James determined to build into his congregation the essential components that would enable them to live the kind of great lives that would leave a legacy for the next generation. The five principles he focused on were:

- The Power of God's Word
- The Lordship of Jesus Christ
- The Beauty of Community
- The Splendour of Grace
- The Gateway to Greatness (a serving heart)

You can download five messages from James Ryle developing these principles along with accompanying notes, free of charge, from his website www.truthworks.org (click on "Free downloads"). These are a great resource and I recommend them to you.

Jonathan Wallis

COMMITTEE NEWS

We are delighted that **Tim Lockwood** and **Helen Burch** have agreed to join the LEAF committee. Tim is the pastor of New Hope Community Church in Hardley, and Helen, along with her husband Peter, lead the Hepzibah Prayer House at Ashley Heath near Ringwood. Helen is joining with a particular brief to develop and encourage initiatives that will increase and ignite prayer across the New Forest area.

We are still looking to strengthen our committee further. Please pray that God will add the right people. #

LEAF ANNUAL VISION MEETING

This is our one opportunity each year for all members of LEAF from different churches across the Forest to come together for worship and prayer and to share what is happening in our area. We aim to keep the business side of the evening (our AGM) as brief as possible so that we focus on our vision for the future. This year we will be giving leaders from each LEAF member church the opportunity to share for 2 minutes on what is happening in their church and their vision for the future. (It may seem incredulous to you that any leader could be that brief, but we will be timing them!!) Let's come together on that evening and have our vision lifted to see...

WHERE WE'VE COME FROM AND WHERE WE'RE GOING

Friday 2nd February 2007 at 7.30 pm

**Lyndhurst Baptist Church Hall,
Chapel Lane, Lyndhurst, SO43 7FG**

FOREST FIRE

Fri 11th & Sat 12th May 2007

At Brockenhurst College

Equipping Christians for Life

You will already be aware that the **NEW FOREST BIBLE WEEKEND** has been brought under the auspices of LEAF and is being relaunched in 2007 under a new name: **FOREST FIRE**. A separate sub-committee, led by Dave Gooderidge, has been working hard to get everything together for this and extensive publicity is being planned which you and your churches should receive shortly. We are delighted that **Mark Greene** from the London Institute of Contemporary Christianity will be the main speaker at this year's event.

The event will just run over Friday night and all day Saturday (not Sunday evening), and the Saturday will be an exciting and fun-filled day for the whole family with events for children led by **Miracle Street** from Southampton. **Book the date in your diary!**

LEAF YOUTH PROJECT.

Following Carol's departure we have been looking to appoint a new **Youth Liaison Officer** to take this project forward and build on all that Carol achieved during her time working for LEAF. **We believe we may have found the right person and hope to be able to give you further details in the near future, so please continue to pray that we will fill this very important role.**