

**Welcome** to Issue 32 of LEAF's newsletter and diary. A lot seems to have happened since our last newsletter – our Annual Vision Meeting was held back in February and we had a good evening with leaders from different LEAF churches sharing how discipleship looks in their churches. In May we held our second Forest Fire event with Steve Brady from Moorlands as our guest speaker. A report on this event is included overleaf. This was followed by the Global Day of Prayer where people from a good cross section of churches throughout the Forest joined with millions from many nations to pray for our world.

**Our annual LEAF celebration is coming up in October** – you will find full details overleaf and in the LEAF diary. *I look forward to seeing you there!* And do remember to take a look at the LEAF website – [www.leafforest.org](http://www.leafforest.org)

*Jonathan Wallis, Editor*



## A LETTER FROM THE CHAIRMAN

### A shrinking church?

Just recently I was reading another article on how the church is shrinking in the UK, and in many people's eyes becoming more irrelevant to daily life. Whilst that is probably true in church buildings where the gospel of Jesus Christ is not proclaimed, or is proclaimed in word only, I don't believe it is remotely true in churches that are led by the Holy Spirit and that embody the character and nature of Jesus.

Many people are searching for a deeper meaning to life but unfortunately, because of their perceptions of the church through bad experiences, and its negative portrayal through the media, Christianity is often not the first place they rush to find any answers. This means that we can't expect people to come to us, but instead we need to build unconditional friendships with them and demonstrate what a Spirit-filled life looks like up close and personal.

In a society where universal truths are viewed with suspicion, all of us have the responsibility to live out the truth of the gospel in such an attractive way that people will want what we have. Where this is done consistently, God builds his church.

### Essential ingredients of a growing church

In studying several models of church it has become apparent that there are a few universal basic elements that are consistent with all of them, even though they may be worked out in different ways.

The first is *'worship and prayer'* – this is the relationship we build with God. We give him the praise and honour that is due to him and in return he

empowers and equips us to live for him.

Secondly, *'evangelism and outreach'* – this is our outward relationship to the world where we preach the gospel in word and action.

Thirdly, *'fellowship within the church'*, as we fulfil the command to love one another.

Fourthly, *'discipleship'* where we learn as Jesus' apprentices, and finally, *'serving'*, where we take on the nature of Jesus.

When we get all these right and in balance the church will grow.

***"We don't have a problem with church growth: our problem is with church health." (Rick Warren)***

When things are healthy they naturally grow. Christian A. Schwarz (Natural Church Development) suggests that a church will only grow to the level of its weakest area, in the same way that you can only fill a barrel with water up to the level of its shortest stave. So perhaps we need to review each area in our churches to see which one(s) need strengthening.

As I look around the New Forest at the diversity of our churches I am encouraged that God is growing his church both numerically and in depth. Sometimes it seems as if he 'prunes' our growth for reasons only known to him, but I believe that this will lead to more fruitfulness if we follow him obediently.

Jesus said, "I will build my church!". Praise his wonderful name.

*Phil Cole (Chairman)*

**LEAF is committed to the spiritual transformation of the New Forest**

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**Leaf Annual Celebration**  
**Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> October 6.30pm**  
**at St Saviour's, Brockenhurst**  
**Speaker: Dr Derek Copley**

**Is the Gospel Still Powerful?**  
**So why do we witness as if it isn't?**

This is the one opportunity in the year for people from right across the Forest to come together to worship, pray and to listen to God's word together. Our speaker this year is Derek Copley who will be challenging us to live and to witness as if we really believe in the power of the gospel. Worship will be led by Laurence Bennett and the Salvation Army Worship Group.

**Report on Forest Fire 2008**

**Spirit-Empowered Living –  
Practical Faith for every day life**

Around 300 people booked in for Forest Fire this year. Our guest speaker was Rev Steven Brady, Principal of Moorlands Bible College who spoke to us about Spirit-Empowered Living, based on Ephesians 5 and 6.

The purpose and aim of Forest Fire is summed up in the phrase "Equipping Christians for life" and Steve's talks built on the theme of "whole-life discipleship" that Mark Greene had focused on in Forest Fire 2007.

His essential argument was that the only way that we can practically live effective lives as disciples of Jesus is to discover what it means to be empowered by the Holy Spirit – and this is not a one-off event but a daily experience. Steve mixed plenty of humour with a powerful exposition of God's word and challenged us to allow the Holy Spirit into various different areas of our lives:

1. Spirituality in your heart
2. Vitality in your church
3. Fidelity in your marriage
4. Harmony in your home
5. Dignity in your workplace
6. Stability in the fight.



*Pause for thought*

**Don't focus on the GROWTH  
of the church – focus on the  
HEALTH of the church,  
because healthy things grow.**

**Redefining LEAF's vision  
and aims**

The committee has taken time to revisit our aims and objectives and this has resulted in a simplified mission statement and a redefining of LEAF's aims:

**Mission Statement:**

**LEAF is committed to the spiritual  
transformation of the New Forest.**

**LEAF's aims:**

**1. To support churches in the making  
of disciples**

LEAF is involved in facilitating joint ventures and sharing resources and ideas. Our annual "Forest Fire" event aims to help equip Christians of all ages to be effective "whole of life" disciples. We are also actively working to support youth and children's leaders within the churches of the New Forest.

**2. To encourage greater unity among  
the New Forest Churches**

We liaise with church leaders in order to keep open lines of communication, and to provide encouragement and support. Our newsletter and diary and website are designed to improve communication and interaction between churches. Events such as the annual Vision evening and the annual Celebration bring people together from churches across the area and we aim to involve a wide cross-section of people in the running of LEAF.

**3. To communicate the relevance of  
the Christian Faith to contemporary  
society**

We are aiming to produce high quality promotional material and relevant information to the media and to liaise with local community leaders. We would like to be a united voice on issues that affect the New Forest and we are encouraging churches to get involved in projects which benefit the community.

**4. To pray for the transformation of the  
New Forest**

We arrange a regular monthly prayer time for church leaders and have encouraged the formation of a prayer team drawn from the churches in the area. This team not only commits to praying for churches and their leaders, but is working to encourage the prayer life of each church.