

Welcome to Issue 33 of the LEAF newsletter and a diary packed with information on what is going on over the next few months. Do look on the web - www.leaforest.org – for further information. On behalf of the LEAF committee, may I wish you a happy and spiritually prosperous New Year. It seems hard to believe that we are already in the final year of the first decade of the new millennium, but I have a growing sense of excitement that God is still at work in our world – seeking to establish *his* kingdom on this earth through *his* people, the church. God has not given up on his church or his world, and we live in exciting and significant days as we eagerly await the return of our Lord.

Our annual LEAF Vision Night is coming up in February – you will find full details overleaf and in the LEAF diary. *I look forward to seeing you there!*

Jonathan Wallis, Editor



A LETTER FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Exploring new ways to do Church

In my last letter I was very positive about the state of the church in the UK and in God's promise to build his church – which is still the case. But I've recently begun to see the size of the challenge we face in our post-Christian nation in the 21st century.

The recent Mike Frost conference in Southampton challenged my thinking and started me and our leadership team at Bransgore Community Church on a journey to explore how we lead a 'missional' church that will reach the whole community. The fact that numbers may be increasing in some of our churches doesn't in itself mean that all is well. Growth is generally good, but we might simply have just become better fishers in a rapidly shrinking pond!

The way we generally organise church appeals to a decreasing number of people - Mike Frost would say that we rely on being 'attractional' rather than 'incarnational'. Most of our events, including courses like Alpha, are dependant on people coming to us on our terms – we run the agenda and control what happens. Even if we run outreach ministries in the community our subconscious prayer is that one day those people will 'see the light' and will be 'attracted' to our Sunday morning worship services and join in 'our' programmes.

Is there another way? Frost would say yes, and defines the 'incarnational' life as follows, *"(It) creates a church that is a dynamic set of relationships, friendships and acquaintances. It enhances and 'flavours' the host community's living social fabric rather than disaffirming it. It thus creates a medium of living relationships through which the gospel can travel. It emphasises the importance of a group of Christians infiltrating a community, like salt and light, to make creative connections*

with people where God-talk and shared experience allow for real cross-cultural Christian mission to take place."

Just before Christmas I was talking to the leader of a large church in Bournemouth who had come to the same understanding but by a completely different route. They have recently launched three 'life communities' (A 'venture' one for those who like outdoor pursuits, one for migrants to Bournemouth, and one for the 20s and 30s age group). The vision is for each small group of Christians to spend time with friends or acquaintances in order to live life together. Their only 'church' requirement is to attend an organised service once a month – the rest of the time is spent hanging out with their friends - praying that over time they would become a Christian community. Indeed, I've heard of examples of where this has happened. In one instance a group of water-skiers over time formed a Christian community that studied the bible together, prayed together and became the rescue service for all other boats on the river where they met.

God has begun to open my eyes to different ways of being church. I don't want to copy what has been done elsewhere but I'm seeking the expression of church that God is asking me to be a part of. The big change for me is that now I'm not so restricted in my thinking as to what the possibilities could be and my head has come out of the sand – which is just as well as it left a big target exposed! I'm a long way from any answers but at least I've begun a journey of discovery. Please join me...

Phil Cole (Chairman)

LEAF is committed to the spiritual transformation of the New Forest

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Leaf Annual Vision Night
Thursday 5th February 7.30pm
at St Saviour's, Brockenhurst
Speaker: Neil Hudson

Making Missionary Disciples

This year's LEAF Annual Vision Night is going to be different and we really want you to be there with as many of your church's main leaders as possible. We can guarantee that you will be pleased that you came (now that is a bold claim!).

It's a huge concern for us to ensure that church leaders see Forest Fire as a tool to significantly help their churches in the area of whole-life discipleship. We don't want it to be just "another" event but rather to be seen as serving leaders and their churches in the vital and urgent task of equipping people to be missionary disciples.

Neil Hudson is the main speaker at Forest Fire 09 and we've asked him to introduce the incredibly helpful material he will be bringing to that event at the Annual Vision Night. Neil works with the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity (LICC) as a Church-Life Consultant and co-leads a church in Salford.

By coming to the Annual Vision Night you'll be able to see why the really simple ideas that LICC are sharing with churches around the country are so powerful. Neil will tell us that there are no silver bullets or magic answers just some uncomplicated and subtle changes (what LICC calls "one degree shifts") that we can all make that can have an enormous impact on a church's culture.

We fully anticipate that you will leave not only better equipped and resourced yourself but inspired to encourage those in your church to come to Forest Fire in May.

Please come if at all possible and do bring others with you. We look forward to seeing you there.

Dave Gooderidge

Phil Cole

Pause for thought

Any time the people of God become preoccupied with concepts and ideologies instead of Christ-like expression of life and power, they are set up to fail, no matter how good those ideas are. Christianity is not a philosophy; it is a relationship.

Bill Johnson

Excited... but dissatisfied

As I see what God is doing around the world in and through his church I am excited, but also deeply dissatisfied. I am excited because I see increasing numbers of God's people stepping out of the shadows and beginning to exercise the power and authority that is theirs in Christ... dissatisfied because I know there is so much of God's power and anointing available to me that I have yet to experience... excited when I see God doing amazing things elsewhere... dissatisfied when I don't see these things happening here in the New Forest.

Don't get me wrong, God is at work in our region and I'm deeply thankful for everything that he has done, but I have within me a deep (and I believe godly) dissatisfaction because I long to see so much more.

"I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father. You can ask for anything in my name, and I will do it, so that the Son can bring glory to the Father. Yes, ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it! (John 14:12-14 NLT)

I find this statement of Jesus profoundly challenging. When Jesus talks about his works, he is clearly referring to the miracles, signs and wonders that he performed during his three years of ministry, so, to a simple student of God's word like me, this scripture can only mean one thing... I, and every other true believer in Jesus, can do the same miraculous works that he did. If we take this seriously – and I for one take the words of Jesus very seriously – we cannot be satisfied until we too are experiencing the reality of this in our everyday Christian walk.

Do not make excuses for powerlessness. For decades the Church has been guilty of creating doctrines to justify their lack of power, instead of crying out to God until He changed them. (Bill Johnson)

I thank God for men like Bill Johnson (*who will be in Southampton in April – see the diary*), the late John Wimber, and many others who have pursued the truth of Jesus' words with all their hearts and demonstrated to us all that powerlessness is simply not acceptable.

Jesus commanded us to heal the sick and raise the dead, which is impossible unless we learn how to connect with the supernatural power of God. The problem for many of us is that we believe that the rest of the Christian life is somehow possible **without** God's supernatural power!

We pray "thy kingdom come" most Sundays. Isn't it time we began to really mean it – and to cry out to God until we too begin to experience the reality of what Jesus promised us? It's what the world around us is waiting and longing for.

Jonathan Wallis

