

idea

Fighting
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p20

uniting to change society | may/june 2009



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Editor's note

It's right there in the Alliance logo: "uniting to change society". The central vision of this coalition of Christians, churches and organisations is to influence the people around us – to be God's voice and hands in a world that seems to be falling apart.

And the news is pretty overwhelming at the moment, with reports that global warming might have passed the tipping point, that oil reserves are drying up and, of course, that the world's banking system is teetering on the brink of collapse. All this talk of impending doom makes us look expectantly at events like July's G8 summit in Italy, hoping that the world's leaders can do something.

Meanwhile, churches throughout the UK – and the world – continue to bring good news to those who are scared or oppressed. This issue of *idea* tells several of these stories, centred around the main feature, which looks at the influence strand in the Alliance's Square MILE initiative (p16).

We also meet young soap stars using their fame to stir people to action (p9), Christians helping their persecuted brothers and sisters around the world (p10), charity workers positively influencing the lives of street children in Latin America (p14), and the extraordinary founder of Mothers Against Violence (p20).

At the back of the magazine, our *Talking About* feature (p23) looks at the issue of justice as reflected in popular culture, and then we have the 11th and final instalment of our series relating the Alliance's Basis of Faith to everyday mission (p26). We'll begin a new series on this theme in the next issue. And we'll also hear from the Alliance's new general director. But the vision will be the same.

evangelical alliance
uniting to change society

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Celebrating the Church

The Pentecost Festival returns to the streets of Central London 26-31 May, as thousands of people will gather for events in and around Leicester Square to celebrate the birth of the Church. Musicians, actors, politicians and scientists will take over streets, pubs, clubs, cafés and open

areas for events that demonstrate the diversity and relevance of the Church in society.

Coordinated by Share Jesus International, the festival aims to challenge Christians to leave the safety of church buildings and be a part of something big. And it also challenges

secular society to reassess their preconceived ideas of Church.

This year's celebration is expected to be even bigger than 2008's inaugural festival, which saw more than 150 events at 60 venues, including special open-door Sunday services and more than a hundred volunteers working in street teams, walking around the events to talk, help and pray with passers-by.

Special events this May include three nights of comedy sponsored by Christian Aid, a cinema stream hosted by Jericho Films and, in Darwin's anniversary year, scientific experts giving talks that will challenge common assumptions. There are also events featuring a range of music and performance styles, including hip-hop artists, magicians and strong men.

As part of the festival, the Alliance will be holding the special debt seminar *Money? Let's Talk* on Saturday, 30 May, to encourage and equip Christians to support others in the area of money management. In addition to offering a theological perspective on how to break the taboo of money in the church, there will also be a discussion on how churches can help those struggling financially.

Seminar speakers include Chris Tapp, director of Credit Action, and John Preston of the Church of England. The event is free, but spaces are limited. For information and to register, visit: eauk.org/lifebeyonddebt

► For details about the festival, visit: pentecostfestival.co.uk



ART MEETS RELIGION. Nine years in the making, artist Chris Gollon's 14 paintings, *Stations of the Cross*, were permanently installed at the Grade One listed Church of St John on Bethnal Green in late-March (pictured is Station II: *Jesus Takes up His Cross*). The commission was the vision of Father Alan Green and the church's modest congregation, which is located in one of London's poorest boroughs. The commission was funded by members of the congregation, the Jerusalem Trust, the Christian Arts Trust, novelist Sara Maitland and collectors of Gollon's work. The artist offered to work at cost. Drawing on the European traditions of El Greco, Rembrandt and Goya, Gollon used his own son as the model for Jesus and his daughter as Mary, complete with mascara running down her face. "The Church of St John on Bethnal Green has had a long-standing involvement with people on the fringes of our society, the sort of people who often feature in Chris' paintings," said Green, who was the model for Nicodemus. "His work contains many religious allusions and forms, which do not suggest conformity but challenge." stjohnonbethnalgreen.org





WEEK OF PRAYER. The annual Week of Prayer for Parliament and Government will take place 6-13 June. A number of events in and around Parliament will be held to help focus prayer on our leaders. Christians from across political parties and Whitehall departments, along with 24/7 prayer, all come together to intercede for our nation and for those in positions of responsibility. This is also a great occasion for churches to have a particular focus on praying for politics and parliament. For information and resources, visit: christiansinparliament.org.uk

CHRISTIANITY IN PUBLIC LIFE. MPs from four political parties came together to debate the contribution of Christianity in public life on 11 March. In response to recent media stories about Christians being challenged about expressing their faith in the workplace, the MPs highlighted the invaluable and growing social contributions that Christian individuals and organisations are making in the UK, and sought government assurances that this would continue to be valued practically.

Andrew Selous, MP for South West Bedfordshire and Chairman of the Christians in Parliament group, organised the debate, at which Christian MPs from the Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat and Scottish National Party expressed their support and acknowledgement of the vitally important role that the faith has in supporting public and voluntary services.

Lembit Opik, MP for Montgomeryshire, said, "Although there must be tolerance of all different faiths in this country, nevertheless we live in what must reasonably be called a faith-based society with Christianity at its core."

Labour MP Ian Wright, a minister from the Department for Communities and Local Government, responded for the Government by acknowledging the good works that Christians provide and

offered further support for Christian groups. In recognising the Christian heritage of the UK, he accepted the need for Christians to continue to play an important role in public affairs and to be able to express their faith as the central component of their identity.

GAMING MACHINES. The Alliance has joined the Methodist Church and other denominations in calling the Government not to implement planned changes to the levels of prizes and stakes for the most widely available category of gaming machine. The doubling of the prize limit to £70 brings it above the weekly benefit payment.

While there is no doubt that the gambling industry is struggling in the current economic climate, the proposed changes run the risk of exacerbating the financial problems faced by many vulnerable people. There are around 250,000 problem gamblers in the UK, and the Government has turned back on their pledge to take a precautionary approach

and not change the regulations in any way that could worsen this situation.

Christians are urged to find out more about this issue and contact their MPs to express their concerns. For information and resources, including a petition calling the Government not to raise the stakes, visit: fruitless.org.uk

STEM CELL RESEARCH. During the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill debates in Parliament, the Alliance and member agency CARE were involved in drawing attention to the dangers of human embryonic stem cell research, highlighting the ethical alternatives. This not only meant drawing attention to the fact that not a single therapy has been licensed as a result of unethical human embryonic stem cell research (which involves the creation and destruction of human embryos), whereas more than 70 have been licensed as a result of wholly ethical adult stem cell therapy.

It also involved highlighting the breakthrough in 2007 that resulted in adult stem cells being reprogrammed so that they have similar properties to human embryonic stem cells, significantly increasing the potential of adult stem cell technologies. A further breakthrough was announced in early March in the development of this reprogramming technology, making it plain once again that it is the ethical approach to science that constitutes the way forward.

eauk.org/pq

Christians mobilise for G20 summit

Micah Challenge's Rise Up campaign mobilised Christians around the world to seven days of prayer and activism leading up to and during April's G20 summit in London. The crucial meeting of world leaders focussed on the global banking crisis. Micah Challenge was urging leaders to approach the issues of financial reform and climate change based on partnership and care for the vulnerable.

Before the event, Ron Sider, author of *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, said, "The G20 meeting offers a truly historic opportunity to reshape global economic structures in such a way as to dramatically reduce global poverty and empower the poor. The Bible tells us that God and His faithful people are on the side of the poor; our faith compels us to actively work for justice."





Sharing marriage secrets

Christian organisations joined together in February to launch Marriage Week in Northern Ireland with a celebration of two couples who, between them, had been married for 134 years. The reception, held in the Long Gallery at Stormont, was accompanied by live piano music from Alliance member New Irish Arts and opened by the politicians who had sponsored the event, Jeffrey Donaldson MP MLA and Pat Ramsey MLA.

The highlight was celebrating the commitment of two long-married couples. Joe and Lila MacArthur (pictured) met in Tandragee during the Second World War. After a simple wedding ceremony, which Joe's Scottish family was unable to attend due to the war, they went for lunch in a local café and then headed off to the cinema. Their first resolution as a married couple was to not go

to sleep until they had made up after a disagreement or a quarrel. After 68 years, they say old-fashioned common sense is a key ingredient for marriage.

William and Mae Coalter enjoyed a double wedding with Mae's sister; both had saved up coupons to buy the material for their dresses, which were made by a neighbour. The reception was hosted by Mae's mother in her home. They attribute their 66 years of marriage to love, patience, honesty, helping others and being family-centred.

Organisations involved in Marriage Week Northern Ireland included the Evangelical Alliance Northern Ireland, Care for the Family, Family Spectrum, Christian Guidelines, Association of Christian Counsellors, Salvation Army and CARE. *Karen Jardine*
nationalmarriageweekni.co.uk

Youth addiction centre opens

Responding to the risk of addiction-fuelled HIV/Aids in Cambodia, Hosea Ministries and the Christian Response to Addictions in Cambodia (CRAC) project opened Hosea House in Phnom Penh this past February. The first inclusive drug assessment centre in country, it aims to reach out to both street kids and the growing numbers of rootless middle-class children caught in the drug trap.

The opening ceremony was attended by local community leaders, the government's drugs advisor and representatives of NGOs, missions and city churches. The centre was officially opened by Patrick Prosser, executive director of Life for the World Trust, which initiated the CRAC project in 2006.

"As young people in Cambodia try to come to terms with their nation's traumatic past, the poverty of many and divided broken families, they see drugs and glue as solutions to their problems," he said. "Sadly, drugs multiply their problems, but now there is a programme which offers real hope that change and a new start in life are possible."

Life for the World also runs training programmes in the UK for churches and Christian workers who want to help children, ex-offenders and the homeless. Their next university certificate course in addiction awareness begins in October. lftw.org

Study programme goes online

Alliance member Christian Endeavour has launched a new section on its website designed to equip and enable web visitors to reach out to their communities in a variety of situations. Three practical programmes are designed for students aged 8 to 80, offering a variety of training to help Christians grow in their faith and put it into action. An awards scheme provides a ladder of achievements, particularly for young Christians, in the areas of Bible and Christian reading, Christian work and Christian living. online.org

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Subsistence farmers to the rescue

Farmers from some of the world's poorest countries are coming to the rescue of recession-hit Britain, offering expert advice to people who are turning to growing their own fruit and vegetables to beat the budget blues. Tips from these "land-to-mouth" farmers have been collected by international development agency Progressio as part of a campaign to highlight the crucial role played by small-scale farmers across the globe.

Recent reports show that 100,000 credit-crunched Britons are currently queuing up for allotments, even as vegetable plots are created in many more of the country's 15 million gardens, and sales of fruit and veg seeds have jumped by 28 per cent.

Advice from these global farmers is based on organic farming methods that have been finely tuned by

centuries of reliance on the land for survival. And they say that no area is so small that it can't be put to good use.

Faustino Reyes Matute, a 52-year-old farmer from San Marcos, Honduras, says, "Don't despair if you haven't much room – you can still get produce from plants grown in old tins and tubs on window sills or balconies."

Preserving precious resources is second nature to small-scale farmers. "Collect and save rainwater to water your plants," advises Mary Gerald, a

40-year-old farmer from Chiola, Malawi, who grows enough organic produce on her small farm to feed her family of eight. She also sells a small surplus at the local market.

Organic solutions

The tips, which have been given the thumbs up by the Royal Horticultural Society, include advice on ways to tackle pests and control weeds organically and to maximise crop yields. Not all of the farmer's suggestions made it on to the RHS hit list

though; tips on where to dig your own well would probably cause problems with council-planning departments. And one farmer's suggestion that a bucket be placed under leaky pipes to collect water was countered with the advice that you're better off getting the leak fixed.

Guy Barter, head of advice at the RHS, said, "Growing your own food is seen as an enjoyable activity in Britain, but elsewhere it can be a matter of life and death. The ingenuity of people in this position can be inspiring and their advice helpful."

Progressio, which has worked in the developing world since the 1970s, believes that small-scale farmers are essential to solving the escalating food crisis across the globe. "These guys are real professionals," says Petra Kjell, Progressio's environmental



Michael Nyirenda and his children display onions and maize from their garden in Chiola, Malawi.

policy officer. "Not only do they produce food to feed 2 billion people – a third of humanity – they do so in a totally sustainable way, managing a large proportion of the world's water supply and preserving the soil's fertility."

Yet Progressio reports that many small-scale farmers are now under threat, particularly in low-income nations where swathes of land have been given over to large-scale commercial agriculture and backing for small-scale producers has dwindled in national and aid budgets. Progressio is urging Christians to call on their governments to take action so that, amidst all the talk of the negative impact the banking crisis is having on world hunger, small-scale farmers are not forgotten.

Jo Barrett

► For the full list of tips, and more information on subsistence farmers, visit: progressio.org.uk

Growing your own food can be a matter of life and death



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Director of Training

CWR is recruiting a Director of Training, effective from 1 October 2009, to lead and develop our Training & Events ministry. The successful candidate will ideally have previous work experience within the Christian counselling sphere. The post holder will also become a member of the CWR Ministry Strategy Team.

As the post holder will have an important role in leading and communicating CWR's ethos, this role carries a genuine occupational requirement for the position to be filled by a committed Christian.

This full-time role is one of 36.25 hours per week based at Waverley Abbey House, Farnham.

For more information please go to our website www.cwr.org.uk/jobs or contact Katie Rubery at jobs@cwr.org.uk.



Invite neighbours back to church

"Come As You Are" is the theme of this year's Back to Church Sunday, which will be held on 27 September as congregations in Britain and abroad invite people to return to church. Figures show that more than 37,000 people took up the invitation during last year's event. Some 5,000 returnees had become regular members within six months, according to research by the Diocese of Lichfield.

The whole congregation is encouraged to get involved in this special event in September, thinking through whom they will invite, praying for them in the run-up to the day and then welcoming them into the church. Many also invite people for meals after the service.

For information and resource packs (last date for ordering is 31 May), visit: backtochurch.co.uk

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Katharine Green, a curate in Worcester diocese 'It opened up my thinking in new and exciting ways'



Peter Hart, a youth worker in Hartlepool 'The crux of the course for me was putting theology into practice in the real world, which means it is ideal for youth ministers - or any minister - who longs to engage with the cultures you meet outside the church.'

New fellowships for 2009/10! We are pleased to announce four new Baillie fellowships for students starting the MA in 2009/10.

Discipleship school goes online

Ellel Ministries has launched a new website linked to its Luke Nine Eleven Training School (NETS), featuring videos of current students testifying to the work God has done in their lives as they prepare for ministry.

Made up of four 10-week terms, NETS is based on Luke 9.11, in which Jesus "welcomed, taught and healed the people". It's an in-depth international training school, providing a comprehensive life-discipleship course based on a hear-see-do model. Students are taught biblical truth and keys to healing and have the opportunity to see experienced prayer ministers applying the principles. They are then given the opportunity to minister themselves with the oversight of experienced ministry team members.

NETS takes place at Ellel Pierrepont, a 35-acre estate in the heart of the Surrey countryside that was set up by founder and International Director Peter Horrobin to be a "teaching hospital" for the Body of Christ.

The website's name takes the school's initials and adds a twist. "The inspiration for the site came after repeatedly hearing students testifying that their lives were 'never ever the same' after completing the school," said Marketing Manager Darren Gallagher. nevereverthesame.com

Soap stars take a stand



Channel 4

Female Soap actress of the year, Emma Rigby, has become ambassador for Interserve's *Step Into Justice* campaign, which will hold one of its major fund-raising events in June with the *Walk for Justice* from Liverpool to London.

"This campaign is the perfect vehicle for churches to become involved in issues of justice," Rigby said. "Justice can mean many things to many people. For those people served by Interserve workers in over 30 countries in Asia and the Arab world, it means providing homes, food and clean water – often against all odds."

Christian MPs Andy Reed, Gary Streeter and David Burrowes are also supporting the campaign, which is highlighting Interserve's work housing the homeless in Central Asia, offering shelter to orphans in Mumbai and providing clean water in Uttar Pradesh, northern India. interserve.org.uk



ITV

Meanwhile, Sacha Parkinson, who plays the Christian teen Sian in *Coronation Street*, is being featured in *Just Sex*, a new book that takes a revolutionary

look at sexual ethics. Speaking of the purity pledge taken by her character in the soap, 17-year-old Parkinson said, "I think it shows a different side of teenage peer pressure and it gives another option for teenagers."

In writing the book, author Guy Brandon discovered a new generation of young people who are challenging the old sexual-revolution view that sex is harmless to others. Instead, they insist that sex is a question of social justice.

"Young people are increasingly and often personally aware of the damage that results from what was once mistakenly thought to be free love," said Brandon, a researcher for Jubilee Centre, the Cambridge-based social reform organisation. "If we practice treating relationships as disposable and as though they have no impact on us or on those around us, then of course we are going to find it difficult to break that habit when we finally try to settle down in a long-term, stable relationship." jubilee-centre.org



Counties

JESUS IN A 7-TONNE LORRY. An interactive experience exploring the life and death of Jesus has celebrated the visit of its 30,000th school pupil. Children visiting LIFE, which has toured the UK since 2006, use a hand-held computer to watch videos, listen to music and answer questions as they move through the exhibition, before relaxing at the LIFE Café. A year 6 pupil from Cardiff called it "the best school trip I have ever been on".

In addition to the children, some 10,000 further visitors of all ages have used the exhibition as it has toured Britain and Northern Ireland. "LIFE gives young people the opportunity to learn about events that happened 2,000 years ago in a 21st century way," said recent visitor Ian Austin, MP for Dudley North. "It is a great opportunity for old and young alike to examine the life of Christ in a new and exciting way."

Project Co-ordinator Martin Buckley notes how much children love surfing the internet, chatting online and downloading music and videos, often all at the same time. "The LIFE exhibition harnesses this love of interaction with technology that is second nature to our children, to provide a memorable and positive experience," he says. The exhibition, developed by the Christian charity Counties, continues to tour the UK. For information and bookings, visit: lifeexpo.co.uk

Mission goes Oscaractive

A new online social network has been set up for Christians who are involved or interested in cross-cultural mission. Launched by Oscar, the Gloucester-based information service for world mission, the network features a range of interactive features to help people find peer support, advice and encouragement.

"So many mission workers and supporters are already using Facebook,

Twitter and other social networking tools," says Mike Frith, Oscar's founding director. "Oscaractive interfaces with many of these and creates a place online for people to interact with each other on mission related issues, from the practical to the spiritual. All of those who are interested or involved in world mission are welcome to join." oscaractive.net

A cuppa can help



Open Doors

On 7 June, Open Doors is inviting Christians to once again "pour out their support" for persecuted Christians by organising a *Great Big Tea Party*. The goal is that 1,000 tea parties will be held by

youth groups, families and individual Christians in Great Britain and Ireland to draw attention to the increasing levels of persecution faced by fellow believers.

Open Doors' 2009 *World Watch List*

report of the worst 50 nations for persecuting Christians included all but one of the major tea producing countries. This year's tea parties will focus on India, ranked 22nd.

In 2008, for the first time since the country's independence in 1947, the number of recorded attacks on Christians exceeded 1,000, while the southern state of Karnataka plans to introduce an anti-conversion law that is already effective in eight other states, preventing Hindus from becoming Christians.

In February alone, there were 13 detailed recorded reports of Christians attacked by Hindu extremists in Karnataka – many beaten or killed, one shot, others issued with death threats, property damaged and church services disrupted.

Meanwhile in the state of Orissa, forced conversions continue in the wake of anti-Christian violence in the Kandhamal district, leaving hundreds murdered, 54,000 people homeless, 5,000 houses burned and 250 churches destroyed. "Convert or die" threats are still preventing 10,000 Christians from returning to their home villages.

To meet this need, Open Doors increased support to suffering Christians in India last year, providing practical assistance to more than 23,500 people and training 4,000 Christians with *Standing Strong Through the Storm* seminars, which help Christians prepare for and deal with persecution.

"The Open Doors seminar has given me hope and encouragement," said Mary Patmajhi, 17. "The exhortation that we as young people received, to give ourselves to the Lord and the community, makes me want to serve the Lord by becoming a person of influence for Him."

The *Great Big Tea Party* is a way that Christians, by just putting kettle on, can walk with their persecuted brothers and sisters while helping to raise awareness and funds to provide much needed Bibles and Christian literature, training, financial and practical help, and livelihood skills opendoorsuk.org/teaparty



media matters

by Charis Gibson, Senior Press Officer

It's all hotting up on the Christian front in soapland. Pentecostal pastor Lucas Johnson arrived in *EastEnders* in April, with his first conversation launching a storyline about his transformation through faith from wide boy to preacher.

"I used to be bad at one time, very bad," he said. "And it's taken me a long time to get out from all that."

In true *'Enders* form, his clean-living image has some big shadows over it. But his faith is a strong part of his character, motivating him to run a soup kitchen and generally stand up for the underdogs of Walford.

Up the M1, *Coronation Street* has also welcomed a friendly evangelical into its close-knit community. Captain of the school swimming team, Ben Richardson enters the soap through his relationship with main character Sophie Webster, who promptly converts to Christianity.

In both soaps, the issue of sex is inevitably explored, with Lucas refusing to sleep with his fiancée and Corrie's teenage couple taking a pledge of celibacy (see p9). But the storylines aren't one-dimensional. These characters are interesting and approachable, and while their evangelical lifestyles raise a few eyebrows, they're a far cry from the stereotype that Christians are all drawing their pension.

The Alliance has advised both soaps on these storylines, helping them keep the characters and their churches lifelike. We don't have any control over the plot, and we've already seen that these Christians can behave in a very ungodly manner, but their flaws will make them more authentic.

EastEnders and *Coronation Street* regularly pull in more than 10 million viewers each, so watching Christians living out their faith in Walford or Weatherfield can have an amazing impact on public opinion.

As one broadcaster tells me about *Coronation Street*, "The storyline's probably achieved more towards a good press for Christianity than all my years of religious broadcasting."

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REAL EGGS FOR EASTER. Christian charity World Emergency Relief this year asked people to turn one chocolate Easter egg into 150 real eggs for a hungry family in Africa. As part of its *Be a Good Egg* campaign, WER purchased a laying hen for every £6 donation – the cost of a typical chocolate Easter egg – and gave it to an impoverished family. The goal was to get one in every 5,000 people in the UK to donate the cost of an egg, which would be enough to purchase 12,188 laying hens. They would produce more than 1,828,317 eggs in a year.

"Easter is normally a time of chocolatey over-indulgence," said Alex Haxton, WER's director of operations, "so having one less Easter egg was good for our own health but also helped change someone's life for the better into the bargain." He noted that providing laying hens is one of the easiest steps a poor family can make towards self-sufficiency in terms of both food and income.

"For us the eternal chicken and egg question is a no-brainer," he said. "You need the chicken first in order to get the eggs and this is how we hope to help needy families and communities around the world feed themselves." wer-uk.org

Christians head for Boot Camp

The music and mission ministry NGM has launched a new training course for artists, which will be held at its Caedmon Complex in Bristol. The course, called Boot Camp, is designed for singers, dancers, DJs, musicians, presenters and engineers who are committed to using their creativity to shape culture.

A one-year course starting in October, Boot Camp incorporates performance development, studio recording, biblical studies, understanding culture, live performances and mission

opportunities to the poor. In addition, NGM also runs a week-long Boot Camp Summer School in August for young people aged 13 to 19.

Caedmon has been described as one of the UK's premier music and arts centres, with recording studios, dance studio, programming rooms, media suite, rehearsal venue and rehearsal rooms. Training comes from experienced artists such as On-Off Switch, the *Luv Esther* cast, DJ Studios and other NGM artists and trainers. ngm.org.uk

Abbey hosts skate festival

The 850-year-old Malmesbury Abbey was the unlikely host of a Christian skating festival in late-February, which organisers say temporarily turned the church into "probably the oldest skate park in the world – by a few hundred years". The event was the brainchild of the vicar, Rev Neil Archer, and Phil Williams, head of Alliance member Christian Surfers UK. Permissions needed to be obtained from not only the local church council, but also the Bishop of Bristol.

After the Malmesbury Abbey team laid a temporary floor and protective hay bales, Christian Surfers installed a series of mobile skate ramps, which were used by more than 300 skaters over three days of competition. The result drew international media interest, including coverage on national BBC radio and television (plus a BBC



Persia camera crew), allowing the participants to share the fact that God loves skaters as much as anyone else.

The skateboarding and rollerblading competition was accompanied by a lively café as well as a number of musical performances from the girls' school band Collective, who also offered a singing workshop. Hundreds of spectators turned up for the Friday night final contest. During the awards ceremony, Chris Coombes from North Devon shared his faith and 12 local skaters made commitments for Christ. Two hours later, the Abbey was back to looking like a normal church again. christianskaters.co.uk



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Olympic outreach to kick off at Wembley



Norman Brierley covers a Crystal Palace athletics competition for Alliance member 2K Plus International Sports Media, a group of Christian journalists who have covered the Olympics as part of More Than Gold over the past 17 years.

said Chief Executive David Willson. "We are incredibly excited that London 2012 offers all of us the opportunity to build on the successful programmes that have been delivered elsewhere, while engaging Christians in new and innovative projects for the 2012 Games".

More Than Gold has already been working in the UK for two years, but the Wembley conference offers leaders from denominations, organisations and local churches the opportunity to explore how they can engage in the development and delivery of the vision for London 2012. morethangold.org.uk

The Christian organisation More Than Gold, which coordinates outreach programmes around the Olympic Games, will officially launch in London with a Games Engagement Conference at Wembley Stadium on 16 July.

Looking forward to 2012 London Olympics and Paralympics, More Than Gold will draw on its 17 years of experience delivering innovative Christian programmes in countries that have hosted the Games.

"More Than Gold has been a huge success in cities like Athens and Sydney,"

ACEA suspends operations

The Alliance will continue to represent members of the African and Caribbean Evangelical Alliance after ACEA's announcement in late-March that it suspended operations due to lack of funding. ACEA members are also automatically members of the Evangelical Alliance UK, and this affiliation and representation continues to stand.

Dr R David Muir, the Alliance's executive director of Public Theology and a member of the Black Christian Leaders Forum, said, "We were deeply saddened to hear that ACEA has had to suspend operations in this financial climate. I have been involved with ACEA since its foundation, and seen the sterling work it has accomplished in bringing black and white Christians together."

Coming Together for Good

9 May, Leeds / 16 May, Swindon

This one-day conference with Samaritan's Purse will explore what it means for churches and Christians to live out their calling to mission, as well as finding out more about global church partnership. Speakers include Joel Edwards, international director of Micah Challenge International, and Wandy Shongwe of Samaritan's Purse Swaziland. samaritanspurse.uk.com

TBN National Conference 15 May, London

With the theme "Use your skills to make a difference", this conference from Transformational Business Network will explore how business skills can make an impact in the most needy areas of the world. Speakers include Paul Collier, professor of economics at Oxford University and director of the Centre of African Studies, and Lord Hastings of Scarisbrick CBE. tbnetwork.org

National Family Week 25-31 May

This new national initiative aims to bring families together while celebrating and promoting the social and personal benefits of family life in all shapes and sizes. During the week, numerous activities and events will take place across the UK run by schools, charities, youth groups, shopping centres, community groups, local authorities and National Family Week's commercial partners. nationalfamilyweek.co.uk



Pentecost Festival 29-31 May, London

This dynamic Christian festival, co-ordinated by Share Jesus International, will take place in the parks, coffee shops, bars, churches, clubs and theatres of central London, showcasing what the Church in the UK is all about. The Alliance will bring its *Don't Be a Stranger* photo exhibit, along with free debt counselling. pentecostfestival.co.uk

Global Day of Prayer 31 May

Nearly 180 nations are involved as people come together to pray for their countries and the world. In the UK, events are planned in Driffield, Norwich, Gillingham, Southampton, York, Nuneaton, Stroud and Fintona, with more to come. On 11 July, a March of Repentance is also planned for London, culminating with a rally in Trafalgar Square. globaldayofprayer.co.uk

Together on a Mission 8-10 June, Brighton

Newfrontiers' annual conference gathers more than 5,000 delegates from 50 nations for inspiring teaching, worship and ministry. All are welcome, as the event is made up of two strands: one for students and young adults, and another for those in leadership roles, from pastors to administrators to children's workers. newfrontiers.xtn.org

Justice & Peace Conference 17-19 July, Swanwick

On the Road Together: A-Mazed by Migration is the title of Housing Justice's 31st annual conference, which invites churches from all denominations to bring together their experiences and ideas on the issue of migration. The weekend will also include resources and practical action tips. housingjustice.org.uk

The Alliance Notice Board (online)

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Refuge offers hope

Thanks to the generous gifts of Christians across Britain, street children in Cochabamba, Bolivia, now have a safe place to stay, away from life on the streets or from a dangerous family situation. The funding project started two years ago as the Christian charity Toybox, which works with street children in Latin America, recognised the need for a refuge centre in Cochabamba to help children through the transition stage between the life on the street and a long-term solution.

The charity believes that children must be carefully supported as they make the decision to leave their past lives and take the opportunities offered to them for a hopeful future. The new refuge is the only project of its kind in Cochabamba and works through a partnership with the authorities, churches and the general community. Now the Toybox workers who make contact with children around the city – living on the streets or at high risk in a home – will be able to offer them temporary accommodation.

Time at the refuge will focus on the children's rehabilitation and personal development; they will be provided with a social worker and psychologist, as well as health care and education. This is a level of care that they may not have experienced from their own parents and family situation, and the goal is that they will also experience God's love through those who are caring for them.

If family situations can be resolved and relationships between the children and their parents restored, the children may return to their family homes, where they will be given ongoing support. If, however, the relationship with their parents is irresolvable, or if it is unsafe for the child to return, an alternative long-term solution will be sought.

The project's director, Julia Ferraz, said she is excited about this new venture, bringing together the work of so many

people both in Latin America and the UK to help make a huge difference to the lives of so many street children. "I thank God for people who pray, people who offer, people who are mobilised to publicise what is being undertaken, people who give their time and effort to make this a reality for many Bolivian children," she said. "For me this is an answer from the Lord to the problem of great need here." toybox.org.uk

Putting Christian unity to work

In every country of Latin America, visitors are certain to come across two things: a high number of street children and small, committed church groups desperately trying to help them. Through a new initiative in Bolivia, South America's poorest country, these groups are drawing on a growing sense of unity within the Christian Church to help keep children off the streets.

In 2006, with funding from UK charity Toybox, the Viva network in Bolivia began to radically rethink how to best assist children in the city of Cochabamba. The result is *Early Encounters*, a pioneering citywide approach that uses a coordinated effort to train local "scouts" such as market stall holders, taxi drivers and shop owners to look out for children who are newly arrived on the streets.

Connecting 17 Christian organisations and 11 churches from a range of



denominational backgrounds, Viva's coordinated approach helps these children get the tailored care they need. And catching children at this early stage means they may never need to live on the streets at all.

The aim is to use this approach to help more than 27,000 children in the next five years across Bolivia, Peru and Guatemala. viva.org

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SQUARE
mile



1 is for influence

The Alliance's Square Mile initiative is equipping churches to provide mercy, influence, life discipleship and evangelism to their communities. In the second part of our four-part series, Hazel Southam finds out how Christians are offering a positive influence...

Cherie Blair and Steve Chalke launch their book *Stop The Traffik*, challenging churches to take an active role in stopping human trafficking.

Influencing our society should be a normal part of being a Christian," says the Alliance's Churches in Mission Executive Director, Krish Kandiah. "But it's not. Because we feel that we are becoming marginalised and feel nervous about talking about our Christian faith, we have lost a lot of power and influence that we used to have."

Some might argue that Christians have every right to be concerned about their status in society. Although 72 per cent of people told the last census that they were Christians, fewer than a million people attend weekly Sunday services.

In fact, there may soon be more practising Muslims than active Christians in the UK, according to figures from think-tanks like Christian Research. Some reports suggest that by 2035 there could be about 1.96 million practising Muslims in Britain, compared with 1.63 million churchgoing Christians.

In that context, what influence should and can Christians have? And how is that influence being lived out in churches across the country today?

Kandiah is clear: there won't be "a return to Christendom when Christians ran the country". Instead, he says, we find ourselves in something resembling New Testament times, when the early Christians were "hounded by the authorities and reliant on Christ for their power". This, he says, has to be the model for today's Church in Britain.

"The Church exists for the benefit of the non-members," he says, "but we often seem to only be here for our members. Would anyone notice if the Church ceased to exist? I want to encourage people that it's possible to make an impact on society."

That is part of the Square Mile, the Alliance initiative that seeks to help individual Christians and churches make an impact on the community around them, whether that's people in the office, neighbours or the streets surrounding the church building. As a resource, the Alliance has launched a DVD, workbook and website to help Christians have an influence on those around them.

The campaigning Church

Of course, many people are using their influence already. At the launch of *Stop the Traffik*, a book by Rev Steve Chalke and Cherie Blair, Chalke was quick





Simon Rawles

to praise the Church for its campaigning role. It had, he said, been integral in seeing Cadbury announce that its Dairy Milk bar would be made with Fair Trade chocolate from the summer.

"People should be congratulating themselves," he said. "A lot of the energy that drove this change came from churches. The Church got stuck into this issue."

What's driven churches on this issue is UN statistics that show that some 284,000 children in West Africa are either trafficked into cocoa plantations or are working in enforced conditions. It believes that as many as 36,000 trafficked children could be working as slaves in Africa's cocoa plantations.

While buying Fair Trade chocolate isn't a guarantee against trafficking, it's the next best thing. And Cadbury cites the desire to ensure that trafficking isn't happening as one of its key reasons for moving Dairy Milk to a Fair Trade status.

The UN estimates that, at any given time, some 2.5 million people are being trafficked against their will into prostitution, forced labour, crime, begging, enforced marriages or armed conflicts. Of these, more than half come from Asia and the Pacific. The non-governmental organisation Free the Slaves estimates

that there are 27 million slaves in the world today, some 200 years after William Wilberforce helped to abolish the slave trade.

Ben Cooley set up Hope for Justice when these numbers started to impact him. One day he was walking along a beach in Ireland, praying for God's

guidance. "This voice started shouting, 'Help!'" he recalls. "I was thinking, 'Shut up, I'm trying to focus on Jesus.' But I felt God saying, 'That is the image of the Church.' We are doing our meetings, but we are ignoring the voice that's crying out for help. We are too busy."

Ben set up Hope for Justice to encourage teams of people around the UK and across the

world to pray about the issue of human trafficking. People influence each other, getting friends and colleagues involved in the scheme.

Passion for the poor

Sharron Hardwick is a full-time carer for her husband, Dene. She might not always be viewed as someone who is able to use her influence in society, but the reality belies the image. Sharron has combined her passion to help the poor and her love

I think that the small things we do will make a difference

As part of Peace Week, children take part in the annual lantern parade at Old Trafford in Manchester.



Sharron Hardwick

Members of Deer Park Baptist Church in Tenby, Pembrokeshire, take a public stand as part of the Make Poverty History campaign.

of writing to inform people in her local area of Pembrokeshire about issues in the developing world.

Sharron is a local media volunteer for the Christian development agency Tearfund. "I wanted people in Pembrokeshire to know what is going on in the world," she says. "Poverty is awful. It makes me feel sick that some people have so much while others have so little. It just seems so unfair."

Trained by Tearfund, Sharron organises events and writes stories for the local newspaper, *The Tenby Observer*. "It's impacting people," she says. "My neighbours always respond to the stories. People have phoned me to follow up stories. The Rotary Club wanted to get involved in one project. I've had phone calls about Tony Blair and put people in touch with Tearfund."

And she says that informing others has been a spur to her own faith. "It's given me a sense of purpose," she says. "Because I'm a full-time carer, it's not easy to get out. I think, perhaps, that the small things we do will make a difference. I always say that together we can make a difference; we just don't know what we will achieve."

Ian Black runs a media hub in Dundee, providing the local media both there – and now also in Glasgow – with positive stories about what the churches are doing. "I want to change the way that people view the Church," he says. "I love to demonstrate that the Church can be cool and contemporary, not embarrassing and twee. You can



end up with the Church being an organisation that is always embroiled in scandal or up in arms about something. But it's relatively easy to engage with the local media. They are always looking for good stories, and giving stories to them isn't rocket science."

Like Sharron, Ian has concentrated his efforts on the local newspapers rather than TV and radio. He has already made good contacts and says that he is "now viewed as a trusted source" by journalists because he "only puts out good stories".

Stories concerning schemes run by local churches have appeared regularly in *The Dundee Courier*. And

now Channel 4 has picked up a report about the local crisis pregnancy centre. "It's the most exciting thing," says Ian. "The idea that Christians are victims is not a healthy one. The big worry is that people are just indifferent to Christians these days. I want to show that being a Christian is different from how they think, and that Christians really do make a difference in society."

Using influence

But what would it look like if the Church didn't take part – if it didn't use its influence? Paul Keeble, spokesman for Manchester's annual Peace Week and a committed Christian, knows all too well. The event, originally organised by Carisma, is held each year in a bid to reduce gun and knife crime in South Manchester. Its highlight is the annual lantern parade in Old Trafford.

"Manchester has this reputation as 'Gunchester', which we resent," says Paul. "We wanted to show that there were other things to Manchester, to show the positive side of the community."

However, he says, very few churches have got involved. "I can count them on the fingers of one hand," he says. "As a Christian I always think that

there's lots in the Bible about peace and lots of ways for churches and faith groups to get involved. I thought it was a no-brainer for churches, but it's been disappointing."

Paul recognises that some local churches are just trying to survive. The think-tank Christian Research has warned that some 4,000 churches could close by 2020 if congregations continue to shrink at current rates.

However, Paul says that Christians need to be willing to work with non-Christians and people of other faiths to effect change around them. "Evangelicals work with other people of like mind," he says. "But the business of peace is getting together with people on an issue of mutual concern no matter what their worldview."

It's this, Paul feels, that's kept some Christians away. But he has a clear message for the Church both locally and nationally about how they can use their influence. "It's very practical," he says. "People look to see who's turned up [to take part]. That's how they measure who cares. Saying 'We will be in a room over here praying for you' doesn't count."

The big worry is that people are just indifferent to Christians

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– Tom Wright, Bishop of Durham





Born for such a time as this

In the wake of horrible violence, one mother has drawn on her faith to help others in a remarkable way. She tells her story to *Hazel Southam*...

Patsy McKie is standing on a footpath in the Hulme district of Manchester. It was here, a decade ago, that her 20-year-old son Dorrie was shot and killed. It was a random attack. Dorrie was sitting in a car with a friend, when they saw some other young men coming out of the subway.

"His friend said that they didn't look right," Patsy says. "He told my son that they should get out of the car and run. My son said, 'Why do I have to do that? I don't know them. Why do I have to?'"

In a decision that was to cost him his life, Dorrie was persuaded to leave the safety of the car. The two young men fled up the footpath. Dorrie was shot twice, once in the arm and once in the chest.

Ten years on Patsy has used her grief and her faith to help found Mothers Against Violence, a Manchester-based lobby group that met with former

Prime Minister Tony Blair and is now advising with the Government on gun and knife crime legislation.

"What helped me deal with my own grief is that it is the will of God," Patsy says. "I see it as the will and plan of God in bringing me to the place I am meant to be. One of the things that I have learned is that my son never belonged to me. As a mother, you are just the vehicle for helping them come into the world, like Mary with Jesus. You have to let them go."

"Nobody's ever been caught for my son's murder. Justice for me would be if the young man came to me and said, 'I killed your son.' I wouldn't hand him into the police; justice comes from God. I want him to know my God and saviour."


Photo: P. B. B. B.

‘ **If my son hadn’t died, I wouldn’t be doing what I’m doing** ,

A wider community

Patsy came from a strong churchgoing background and has clung to her faith over the last decade. But she says Dorrie’s murder also challenged the way that she lived her life.

“My community was the church,” she says. “I went to home, work and church. That was my world, nowhere else. Anything that happened in the wider community, we had an answer for it. They were sinners, weak and evil.”

But Dorrie’s death forced her out of this closed-in world. It also mobilised her – along with other women who have been affected by crime – to set up Mothers Against Violence and to deal with the problems of the wider community, working with the police and politicians.

“I really believe that I’m doing what I was born to do,” says Patsy. “I was born for such a time as this, to bring

into being what is happening in these communities. For me that’s enough achievement; my son died for that purpose. If he hadn’t died, I wouldn’t be doing what I’m

doing. I’d be going to church and work and that’s it.”

She’s clear that her son’s death hasn’t been in vain, and that Mothers Against Violence is making a difference in Hulme and in communities across the country. “We have forged the way for people to talk,” she says, “especially people who are suffering in regards to gun crime and now knife crime. Mothers are now free to say what they want to say.”

Since the 1980s, 47 young men have been killed in shootings in Manchester. In 1999 Mothers Against Violence was formed following four shootings in one week that left two people dead. Several mothers,



I believe it's very important to be part of the political arena

including Patsy, from across South Manchester came together to try to work out how they could stop the killings and help their children to avoid being sucked into gun crime. Today, the organisation supports groups of mothers in other British cities, including Birmingham, London,

Leeds, Huddersfield and Nottingham.

And it's not just reaching out to mothers. "We're now working within the community with young men who are affected by gun and knife crime," says Patsy. "Before that, there was no-one working with them specifically. We go into schools and prisons. We also work with young

people and children, so we've affected their lives as well. We're working with the Home Office, going to round table meetings, changing policies. People have written to us and said how much we have affected them."

Having an influence

Patsy says it's vital that Christians are out in the wider community and working with politicians to change society for the better. "I do believe it is very important to be part of that political arena," she says. "If you're not you can't influence policies."

Ten years after Dorrie's murder, Patsy continues to try to raise the profile of crimes such as this and to find ways of preventing other young people from being killed. On 23 August, she is forging plans for the Million Mothers March to draw attention to the issue. She's hoping that women from across the UK and the world will take part in local marches in their area. And she's even written to Michelle Obama and Hillary Clinton about it.

By taking part in this kind of event, and by working in communities and with government officials, she's hoping that women like her won't have to walk down a footpath to see the place where their son was shot dead.

► For more information visit: mothersagainstvviolence.org.uk

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Lionsgate

Talking about... justice

Viggo Mortensen stars in the film *Good* as John Halder, a professor who loses his moral footing when he neglects to stand up against Nazi rule.

Whether we are talking from a pulpit or over a garden fence, *Tony Watkins* helps us to give relevant answers to the big issues raised by contemporary popular culture...

Scientists have recently discovered that people's reaction to injustice is disgust. When people are treated unfairly in a game, their faces react in exactly the same way as when they taste something foul or see images of filthy toilets. According to the researchers, this suggests that, "not only do complex thoughts guide our moral compass, but also more primitive instincts related to avoiding potential toxins".

Is a sense of justice something innate in us, or is it something we learn? Every parent knows that children have a strong instinct for fairness. A child will be up in arms if someone else gets more than their fair share. Yet they never complain when they're the ones who benefit. They're quick

to ensure that wrongdoers are dealt with, as long as the wrongdoer is somebody else.

So is it selfishness, then, which prompts young children to declare, "It's not fair!",

**We are created in
God's image and
we are also
anti-God rebels**

rather than an inborn sense of justice? Surely it's both. The biblical view of human beings is that we are created in God's image and that we are also anti-God rebels. These two sides of our nature are in

constant conflict. What comes out, then, is often a sense of injustice. We feel it deeply.

As children mature, they begin to develop empathy and learn to feel for the injustice that others experience. But adults are still often driven by the perception of being treated unjustly.

This is a key theme in countless current films. *Good* tells the story of John Halder (Viggo Mortensen), a mild-mannered academic in pre-war Germany who objects to the Nazi party's encroaching power dictating what he can teach. For selfish reasons he nevertheless allows himself to be sucked in, while his closest friend Maurice (Jeremy Isaacs), a Jewish



**We are rightly
appalled at
corruption
because
justice and
truth
are always
the first
casualties**

Helen Mirren plays a ruthless newspaper editor in *State of Play*, an American film based on the British TV series about political corruption and injustice.

psychoanalyst, faces increasing injustice. This injustice is not just at the hands of the state, but is also a result of Halder's self-interest.

This idea also can be expressed as a conviction that someone must be brought to justice for the bad things they have done. This is what motivates the attack on senior Roman Catholic figures in *Angels and Demons*, which Robert Langdon (Tom Hanks) heroically attempts to unearth.

The issue of liberty

There's plenty of talk about justice within our society, but there are competing views on what it is. It's closely bound up with issues of liberty and rights.

For Austrian philosopher Friedrich von Hayek, who was a colossal influence on Margaret Thatcher, justice was all about liberty. The ultimate good is the freedom to do whatever you like on your own property, providing you don't interfere with the rights of others. So laws should be about preserving individual liberty, not bringing about social justice.

One problem with promoting individual freedom at the expense of social justice is that it easily results in marked inequalities. While our economy was doing well, we didn't give this too much thought. But now there's a widespread sense about the injustice of huge bonuses for bankers who presided over the disaster.

Another influential philosopher, John Rawls, argued that Hayek was wrong: justice comes before liberty, and must

include the notion of equality. He believed that a just society guarantees more liberty for more people. Justice, which he saw in terms of fairness, is "the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought".

Rawls insisted that there is such a thing as social justice. Some people in society are disadvantaged and therefore lack freedom and self-respect. One of society's highest concerns should be to deal with this injustice. His thinking at this point reflects the Bible's deep concern for dispossessed, downtrodden and marginalised people.

Despite the rise of moral relativism over the last half-century, justice is still a central value in our society. We frequently talk about it in terms of human rights, seeing injustice as something that infringes those basic rights.

This is a central idea in the *X-men* stories, including the latest film, *X-men Origins: Wolverine*. The mutants like Wolverine (Hugh Jackman) are constantly on the receiving end of prejudice, bigotry and hatred, raising the question of what their rights are and how they should respond when they are treated badly.

Commitment to justice

These issues have always been important in *Star Trek* too, especially in the early series when creator Gene Roddenberry saw each episode as a morality tale. The commitment to justice is still there in the new film, which goes back to the origins of the USS Enterprise crew and their first conflict with

the Romulans who threaten the peaceful Federation.

Such stories resonate strongly because the issue of justice matters so much to us. We instinctively cry out for justice when we hear of a terrible crime being committed. We are rightly appalled at corruption because justice and truth are always its first casualties.

The political thriller *State of Play* has human casualties too, leading journalist Cal McCaffrey (Russell Crowe) into a web of intrigue, deception and danger. The tension of films like this comes not just from the hazards facing the hero, but from the question of whether there will finally be justice.

This is a big question in real life too. We feel this need for justice so deeply because it is innate: it is a vital aspect of being made in God's image. And we need to know that even when human justice fails, God's perfect justice will not.

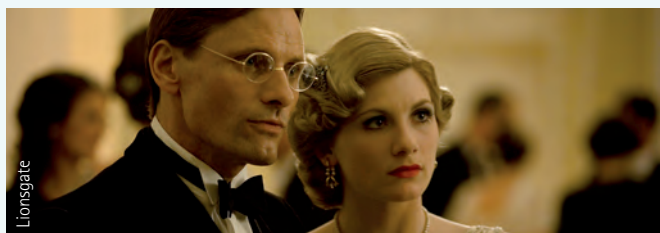
► Find out more about the issues raised in this article at: damaris.org/ideamagazine
► Toolsfortalks.com contains quotes and illustrations taken from the latest films, music, magazines and TV – updated weekly.

Tony Watkins is managing editor of *Culturewatch.org*



Film clips

The appeal of cinema crosses most of society's boundaries. And since films often examine important themes, they can spark lively conversation with neighbours about something more important than the weather. The following aren't for family viewing, but they can ignite discussion about significant issues...



GOOD (15) is a slow-burning parable set during the rise of Hitler's Germany, as an anti-government professor (Viggo Mortensen) only joins the Nazi party to save his job. But this starts an almost imperceptible slide toward becoming a ruthless SS officer, all the while declaring his loyalty to his Jewish best friend (Jason Isaacs). This is a clever, dark and extremely haunting film about how easy it is for ethics and morality to be undermined if you're not paying attention (17 Apr).



HELEN (PG) centres on a 17-year-old (Anne Townsend) raised in care and about to be released without ever having experienced what it's like to be loved. Meanwhile, at school she's asked to stand in for a missing girl in a reconstruction of her disappearance, during which she makes an unexpected connection with the girl's parents. While building a powerful sense of expectation, this artful film is a tender, emotional look at a child emerging from society's margins (1 May).



IS ANYBODY THERE? (12) traces the offbeat friendship between a boy (Bill Milner) who lives in a nursing home and a cantankerous new resident (Michael Caine), a magician who refuses to quietly fade away. Their interaction and adventures are often hilarious, but the film achieves a perfect balance between the witty banter and the often grim realities of life. The entire cast is terrific, including Anne-Marie Duff and David Morrissey as the boy's parents (1 May).



SYNECDOCHE, NEW YORK (15) is a curious concoction, as a playwright (Philip Seymour Hoffman) uses an arts grant to recreate his whole life on a massive stage. The title is a brainy pun, and writer-director Charlie Kaufman (*Eternal Sunshine*) packs this fiendishly surreal film with so many witty observations that we're never quite sure what's truly going on. But along the way, he also finds honest emotional resonance in his growing cast of terrific characters (15 May).



SUGAR (15) tells a stunning story about immigration through the eyes of a young baseball player from the Dominican Republic who's drafted into the American minor leagues. His new life with a conservative family on a Midwestern farm is full of cultural barriers, and his career brings even bigger obstacles to face. Inventively shot in an almost documentary style, this film dares to explore real happiness as opposed to Hollywood's clichéd idea of success (5 Jun).



KATYN (15), impeccably directed by Polish master Andrzej Wajda, tells the long-hidden story of the murder of 12,000 Polish officers in the early 1940s, which the Soviets blamed on the Nazis for nearly 50 years. It's an extremely grim slice of history, but the film centres on the wives of the missing men as they tenaciously seek the truth in an increasingly murky time and place. It's also a cautionary tale about how important it is to keep government leaders in check (19 Jun). *RC*

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In our 11-part series looking at how the Alliance's Basis of Faith is Good News for our neighbours, *Justin Thacker* discusses...

11. The personal and visible **return of Jesus Christ**

to fulfil the purposes of God, who will raise all people to judgement, bring eternal life to the redeemed and eternal condemnation to the lost, and establish a new heaven and new earth.

Justin Thacker
is the Alliance's
Head of
Theology



This is the final clause in our Basis of Faith, but we will start a new series in the next issue looking at how the Alliance's Practical Resolutions relate to mission.

Among the many motivations that we have to proclaim the good news, these things are pivotal: the return of Jesus Christ, the fulfilment of God's purposes, the judgement that awaits, the promise of eternal life, the tragedy of eternal condemnation, and the glory of the new heaven and new earth.

Perhaps this is most obvious in respect of the judgement that we will all face. In our ongoing debates about the precise nature of hell, one of the points that is often forgotten is that, while those who believe in annihilation deny eternal conscious torment, they do not deny the reality of post-mortem judgement.

As the report of the Alliance's Theological Commission puts it, there is "more than mere annihilation at the point of death. Rather, death will lead on to resurrection and final judgement to either heaven or hell." The reality of such judgement must then be a spur to mission.

In saying that, it is interesting that the majority of Jesus' discourse on hell was directed either at the Pharisees or his disciples, both of whom would have assumed that they were not especially in danger of going there. Less frequently did Jesus speak of hell with the general population or with the marginalised. Hence, the reality of hell is a reminder that none of us should take our own salvation for granted, and it should also drive us to mission for the sake of others.

that it had arrived in Him. When John the Baptist was languishing in prison wondering whether Jesus really was the Messiah, the reply came like this: "The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor" (Luke 7.22).

Now we might be tempted to think that by responding in these terms, Jesus was trying to prove to John His miraculous power, as if the Messiah was simply the one who would come and perform amazing deeds. Far more likely is that Jesus was drawing attention to the Old Testament prophecies that described the nature of the kingdom the Messiah would inaugurate. It would be one in which there would no longer be any suffering or death. So Jesus' reference to these miracles was to draw John's attention to the fact that these are the signs you should expect of the coming Messiah – and so, yes, He is the one they have been waiting for.

It is for precisely this reason that when we, in Christ's name, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, heal sickness and so on, we are also demonstrating the character of the kingdom that He brought into being. It is not just that we are doing some good humanitarian work – though we are – and it is not just that we are opening the path to more explicit verbal evangelism – though we are doing that as well: it is that we are acting as signs and foretastes of the kingdom that is currently only glimpsed, but that one day will be fully realised. Moreover, as we hold out by both practical action and verbal proclamation the promise of this kingdom, we

Not all bad news

Jesus' more typical mode of proclamation was in terms of the good news of the kingdom, namely

Next issue:
The basics
in action

announce in words and deeds the good news, the Gospel, that Jesus proclaimed.

God's purposes

As Paul reminds us, though, that Gospel did not begin with Jesus, but was “preached in advance to Abraham” (Galatians 3.8). So what we experience in Jesus is the fulfilment of God’s purposes from the start. In particular, it is the fulfilment of the Abrahamic covenant that, through him, “all peoples on earth will be blessed” (Genesis 12.3).

When in Galatians 3.29 Paul concludes his disputation on faith and law, he does so by drawing together our present status in Christ and our inheritance of the Abrahamic heritage. “If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and



**The kingdom is currently
only glimpsed, but one day
will be fully realised**

heirs according to the promise,” he writes. In other words, what God has now brought to completion in Christ, and is bringing to completion in us, is the fulfilment of that which began with Abraham.

That promise finds its ultimate fulfilment, of course, in the new heaven and new earth in which we will enjoy fellowship with God and one another forever. Moreover, we have the privilege now of working with God to bring that kingdom to reality.

Millard J Erickson has put it this way: “The Church, then, is called to mediate the presence of Christ, who in turn mediates the future of God. But how do we mediate this hope? It is not by merely waiting passively, or even by announcing what is to come. The community has been called upon to bring about that future.”

The fact remains then that one day Christ will return and God’s purposes for the world will be fulfilled. In the meantime we have the glorious responsibility of inviting others to join in this cosmic reconciliation project. What a wonderful privilege!

► The Alliance's full Basis of Faith can be found at:
eauk.org/faitth

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Seeing the difference

In this discussion of how churches are having an impact on their communities (*M Is for Mercy*, Mar/Apr), it's important to remind people, including ourselves, of the difference Christians are making.

Just a year ago, we published the landmark Gweini report, *Faith in Wales: Counting for Communities*, to tell politicians and the general public about the benefits that faith communities in Wales bring to wider society. And we wanted to do this in terms that they would understand: the numbers of people involved, and the financial equivalent. Before we started, we had no real idea of how big the figures would be and, frankly, we were delighted to find out that there are no less than 42,000 volunteers involved in projects organised by faith communities to serve the wider community in Wales.

Armed with these results we launched a *Faith in Wales* Tour last autumn, aiming to visit the entire nation to present to churches and government representatives accurate local figures on the numbers of volunteers and the value of the total contribution to local society.

The first effect of this has been to boost the confidence of the churches. Many churches simply do not see the good they are doing. It has been a real thrill to see local church people's confidence rising when they think of the average 2,000 volunteers they are mobilising to serve their communities.

Another effect has been to help build up relationships between churches and local government officials. Many officials, including Welsh Assembly Members, have come to local presentations and have left keen to work with churches.

So far, the tour has visited 15 local areas, and plans are firming up to visit the rest. It has been a great experience so far, and we can see the difference it is making to Welsh churches, and through them, to civil society in Wales.

John M Evans, Cardiff

Arguing for honesty

The letter from Derek C James (*Your Voice*, Mar/Apr) quotes me as saying, about climate change, "unless we announce disaster, no one will listen." I have never made any such remark. On the contrary, I

constantly argue for absolute honesty and point out how exaggeration can be misleading and counterproductive.

Regarding the global average temperature, also mentioned in his letter, it is true that between January 2007 and January 2008 it fell by 0.09 degrees C. However, the net rise in global average temperature during the 20th century amounted to about 0.75 degrees C, of which 0.4 has occurred since 1975. There is strong evidence that most of this increase is due to human activities in burning coal, oil and gas.

May I also point out that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has never inserted alarmist statements into



its reports, although false accusations to that effect have been circulated by bodies representing vested interests. In fact, many scientists have pointed out that the IPCC reports have turned out to be too cautious. Recent climate change observations are bringing home the serious nature of climate change impacts – rising sea levels, more frequent and intense floods, and droughts in many places that will cause increasingly greater problems especially (but not only) to many of the poorer nations of the world. Christians should be at the forefront of action to combat these problems.

Sir John Houghton FRS, Snowdonia

Watch your language

I write to you as an evangelical Christian, a doctor and a gay man to express my unease at your wording of the news piece *Conference Aims to Redeem Sex* (Mar/Apr). My chief concern is about your use of the reference to the "gay and lesbian agenda".

I think you will agree that these days the word "agenda" is usually used in a pejorative sense, to suggest something subversive and undesirable. While some might certainly agree with this interpretation, I think your approach could have been more impartial.

It is also interesting that while most of us would be more than ready to agree that sex and sexuality urgently need to be redeemed in our society, it is apparent that those organising the conference have, quite extraordinarily, decided that this need does not extend to heterosexual sexuality, and that they – for reasons best known to them – have decided only to focus on homosexuality. Would it be too much to suggest that they perhaps have an agenda of their own here?

Name withheld on request

Other options

In response to the letter *Where's the Proof?* (Mar/Apr), I suspect there are a lot like me in this country. I have no debt, I worked hard and went without to pay off my mortgage as soon as possible. I am now without work and having to live off my savings. I am 52 years old. I resent the way that my savings now earn me nothing and my pension fund is worth less than what I have put in to it. But there is no mainstream political party that is voicing my resentment, and that is why you don't hear it.

What we have is an economy that is dependent upon the government, and no one dependent upon government money is going to make a big fuss about the future problems this government is creating for us. Keynes's theories work in the short term, but in the longer term, someone has to pay the government's debt and that will be the taxpayer. Repaying that debt will take money out of the economy. Keynes himself recognised that conundrum and his answer was, "In the long term, we are all dead." This is another short-term fix built on the idea that we can spend now and pay later.

There are other options. For example, if everyone in the UK spent £1 a week more on UK goods and services, and therefore less on imported goods and services, that would add £3bn to the UK economy in one year. Imagine what impact that would have. Or if everyone with debt paid off £1,000 of their long-term debt this year, that would give banks confidence about their balance sheets.

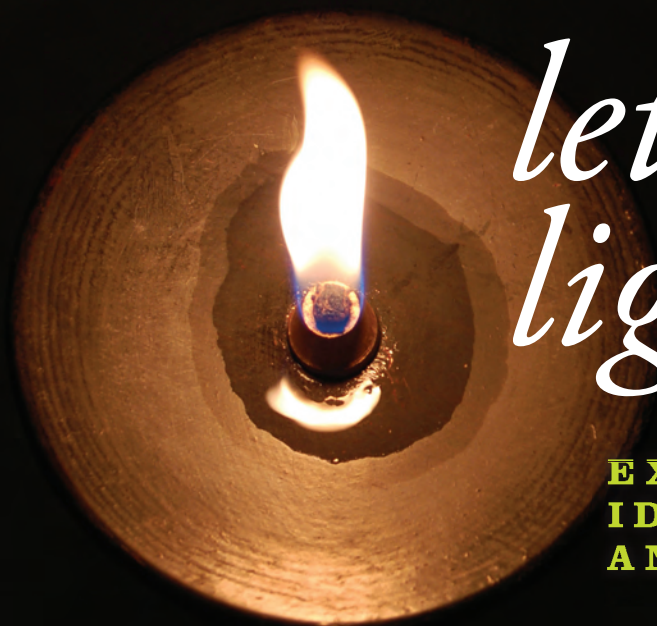
Of course, these measures seem very old fashioned in a spend-now-pay-later society, and are unlikely to be adopted or promulgated by political parties.

David Taylor, Wombourne, Staffs

Letters should be sent to idea@eauk.org or *idea*, 186 Kennington Park Road, London SE11 4BT. Be sure to include your name, address and phone number. The Editor reserves the right to edit letters for length and clarity. We regret that we are not able to engage in personal correspondence. Everyone who has a letter printed on this page will receive a thank you gift.



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Seeing through the credit crunch

The Alliance's director for Scotland, Fred Drummond, tries not to get lost in the fog of recession...

I have recently watched a few old movies starring Basil Rathbone as the great detective Sherlock Holmes. One of the funny things about these films is that whenever they are chasing a villain in the streets of London a fog descends making it that much easier for the bad guy to get away. I am not sure how foggy it was in London during the times in which the movie was set, but the producer obviously thought that a good plot device was to make fog so thick that you could cut it with a knife.

Fog has been on my mind recently. The image came to me after two conversations with friends who lead Christian organisations. Both expressed concerns that the credit crunch had affected their spiritual vision. They were spending a lot of time reworking budgets, looking at staffing levels and encouraging supporters to think about their levels of giving.

Both recognised that these exercises could be useful and that pruning can ultimately lead to growth. They were also aware that these same issues affected almost everyone, and we could not hope to avoid some fallout from the terrible financial situation that the country is in. However, their main concern was that the credit crunch was having an effect upon vision and faith.

One told me that, in the midst of trying to maintain the organisation, it was easy to lose sight of who it was that had called him and why he was actually in the role in the first place. The weight of maintenance was destroying the joy of mission; the stress to make savings was diluting the thrill of relationship with Jesus. "It is as if the view of Jesus is somehow restricted," he said.

Tentative steps

I remember being out with friends on the Isle of Skye when fog suddenly descended. I vividly recall what happened: our view became more restricted and seeing ahead became almost impossible. Not being able to see ahead had a huge impact upon our confidence. We were unsure where to place our feet. When trying to move forward, tentative steps replaced big strides. Fear of the unknown meant that we would rather not move at all than twist an ankle or break a leg.

Why not just stand still and wait until things change? There are two dangers with not moving. One, of course is that you don't know how long you will be standing still, and the other is that you might just get hit in the back from someone who is still moving. Eventually, it took courage - and the desperate desire for a stiff drink - to ward off the cold and move on.

I believe that the recession gives a chance for the Church to speak prophetically about the future. We could be the people who can open a creative conversation within our society about

worth, status and hope. Many people have seen their dreams and aspirations suddenly taken away without warning. There is real tragedy taking place, as advancement and opportunity for the future seem to have vanished.

New and unexpected pressures are piled up on families who are struggling to find any light at the end of a series of dark tunnels. So we have an opportunity to dialogue on issues of human identity and the future we face together. We could be challenging our society by the quality of our communal lives.

Bonny Thurston, writing in *Spiritual Life in the Early Church*, concludes that this sense of togetherness "pervaded the whole of life and called persons from isolation into communities of concern and self-giving love. These communities were extraordinary. People noticed them and wanted what they had to offer."

The early Church was a radical counter-cultural body: flexible, open to God and bristling with energy. It was marked by sacrificial, costly love.

A real opportunity

In a time when people have been let down and trust appears to be at an all time low, we have a real opportunity to present the radical alternative: Jesus' way. It's a community of

faith marked by its authentic relationships, honesty and a passion for Jesus, who calls us to a different life and a different lifestyle.

Here is the dilemma we may find ourselves facing: just at the time when we have a great chance to show the world a better way, we find that we may lose sight of our very calling. As the mists of job uncertainty and rising levels of debt begin to fall, is it actually beginning to prevent the Church from being bold and exercising faith? Could it be that we too may lose sight of the one who has called us and of all the benefits that are ours in Jesus?

As believers in Jesus, we are not exempt from the real hardships and pains of this present difficult global financial situation. However, the question for us is how we respond to the situation. The challenge is to meet the difficulties with sacrificial love and renewed confidence in God's grace.

As Leslie Newbigin says in *Proper Confidence*, "The confidence proper to a Christian is not the confidence of one who claims possession of demonstrable and indubitable knowledge. It is the confidence of one who has heard and answered the call that comes from God through whom and for whom all things were made: 'Follow me.'"

► For resources and stories that can help us face the recession, visit: lifebeyonddebt.org



Are the mists of uncertainty preventing the Church from exercising faith?



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- That officers and their **families** would be protected from the effects of stress and know God's peace in their lives
- That **Christian Police Officers and Support Staff** will be strong and effective in their witness within the Police Service
- That God would crush the forces of evil that are at work in the lives of individuals and communities which lead to **addiction, despair, crime and disorder**
- That the church would respond to **local issues** and help bring communities together with the police to tackle local problems effectively

Your Police Service needs Christians to support them in their work. Please consider linking with local Officers and Staff to develop prayer networks and support community projects.

For further details contact:

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my name is Arafa

I live in Kibera, the biggest slum in Kenya, with my parents and six siblings. My mother and father find it difficult to raise us in this environment and sometimes we go without electricity for weeks. My father is struggling to find work so he can bring food home for our family.

My parents couldn't afford to buy me text books and the school uniform, but since I have been registered at the Compassion project they no longer have to worry. My family is Muslim, but I enjoy going to the Compassion project, going to church and reading the Bible. My favourite subject is English. When I grow up I would like to be a judge and help my whole family.

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