

Intouch

News of ministries within
the Affinity Family

NEWSLETTER
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Contents

1 Director's Desk

2 When Christians
Disagree

4 News from the
Emerald Isle

5 Conference Reports

6 Affinity News

Affinity is a growing
network of 1200
Bible-centred churches
and Christian agencies
throughout Britain
and Ireland.

affinity
gospel churches in partnership

Director's Desk

I am often asked, "What is the benefit of churches, agencies and Christians belonging to Affinity?" This raises another question: "Do we have a big view of the church of God, which he purchased with the blood of his own Son?"

Identifying with a wider fellowship of Gospel churches enlarges our vision.

It is important to look beyond our own relationship with the Lord and the local church. There are many Gospel churches we may, as yet, know nothing about.

Standing together as Gospel churches presents a united witness to the people around us.

People who are not Christians are confused by the plethora of churches. It adds credibility to our Gospel witness when we are united with others who may differ from us in some respects, but who all belong to Jesus Christ and proclaim the Gospel.

Working together encourages one another. Belonging to Affinity expresses a desire to

give to others as well as to receive from them, to enrich as well as to be enriched. We live in challenging days and we all need encouragement. We really appreciate your fellowship in support and prayer for the ministries of Affinity. You are a real encouragement to us.

Loving one another and experiencing real fellowship with each other expresses the love of Jesus and prepares us for heaven.

Our Lord "loved the church and gave himself up for her." This countless number come from "every nation, tribe, people and language".

We would be delighted for more churches, agencies and Christians to be in fellowship with Affinity. It would be our privilege to serve you in the Gospel. Can I also encourage you to prayerfully consider how you might be more committed to Affinity? There is so much more we could do.

Warmly yours
Peter Milsom



When Christians Disagree

Mike Plant

Seeing churches torn apart by disagreement has been one of the heartbreaks of my life.

All disunity is tragic but doctrinal disagreement is doubly sad because, instead of Christians turning to the Bible and either coming to agreement or settling for principled disagreement, matters often deteriorate and become vicious and destructive. All church leaders at some point will

find themselves confronting error, sometimes in a very public way, and there are dangers attached to this. I have drawn on material from Roger Nicole's book, *Standing Forth*¹ and one of John Newton's letters for this article.

It is our duty to contend earnestly for the faith. However, when we engage in controversy we may grow in a sense of our own importance or imbibe an angry and contentious spirit.

John Newton asks an important question: "What will it profit a man if he gains his cause, and silences his adversary, if at the same time he loses that humble, tender frame of spirit in which the Lord delights, and to which the promise of his presence is made?"²



Mike Plant

Roger Nicole identifies three basic and widely-applicable principles for engaging in controversy:

1 What do I owe to those who differ from me?

We owe fellow-Christians love (Rom 13:8) and should treat them as we ourselves wish to be treated (Matt 7:12). This includes **praying for those we disagree with**. If Jesus told us to pray for our persecutors (Matt 5:44-45) how much more should we pray for brothers and sisters who are being led astray? This duty to love means **we should seek**

to understand what the person is saying and so we must listen carefully. We should always seek to impute positive, rather than negative, motives to them. **We should try to understand their aims**. If we are defensive and hostile we may not be able to find a point of contact and shared concern. When I read David Watson's autobiography *You are My God*, I was deeply moved by his honesty and desire for spiritual reality. I strongly

disagree with some of his conclusions but I wish I felt his concerns more deeply – that is a point of contact.

2 What can I learn from those who differ from me?

Sometimes I may be wrong! There are fixed points in Christian theology on which the gospel depends, but this does not apply to everything. I have hotly debated some subjects and later changed my

mind completely. ***I may be right but fail to present the subject in Biblical proportion.*** So a Calvinist may sound like a fatalist if he fails to do justice to all of God's truth. ***I must avoid lack of clarity in what I say.*** Paul anticipated being misunderstood (e.g. Rom 6:1, 9:6, 14, 19) and we should respond with clarification when we are misheard. ***Controversy, in God's providence, leads to clearer understanding.*** Historically, a clearer understanding of the truth has advanced as the church has dealt with false teaching. I have had to work through many subjects when confronted with error.

3 How can I cope with those who differ from me?

We protect our own position and explain it clearly. Our resources are:

The Bible

We must use it reverently and carefully, seeking to understand, not explain away, inconvenient texts.

Logical reasoning

We must distinguish between what someone is saying and what we believe is the logical result of their position. For example, we may not accept that the gift of prophecy is for today because this view

undermines the sufficiency of Scripture. Yet we recognise that Wayne Grudem, for example, who holds this view, also accepts the sufficiency of Scripture and seeks to safeguard what he teaches from such implications.

“Controversy, in God's providence, leads to clearer understanding”

History and statements of faith

Historical arguments or statements of faith cannot finally settle a matter, but they may identify the issues and help resolve them in the light of Scripture. So often what is at stake in a discussion, and the crucial texts involved, have already been laid out for us in the past.

A right attitude

We must avoid being a hindrance to others by the spirit or content of what we write or say. The unconvinced may discern the spirit in which we debate. If we do not exhibit the fruit of the Holy Spirit they may, understandably, reject our position. A gracious spirit will often dispose people who do not agree with us to recognise the Spirit of Christ

in us and to take seriously what we say. Also, there are those who agree with us who will learn from our example. If our words are “seasoned with salt” and are guided by the law of brotherly kindness then we will build others up and encourage in them a spirit of true humility.

We can all see the dangers accompanying false teaching and it would be wrong not to feel a duty to respond to it. Are we as aware of the dangers that accompany our response to false teaching? We need to be very careful about our approach to those with whom we disagree. Countless great and godly men have marred their testimony by mishandling theological controversy with abusive language towards fellow believers and dishonestly distorting their arguments. They have failed to live by Christ's golden rule: “Do to others what you would have them do to you” (Matt 7:12).

Mike Plant is General Secretary of the Evangelical Fellowship of Congregational Churches³



Notes 1 “Standing Forth” by Roger Nicole on how to handle doctrinal conflicts, pages 9-26. (Christian Focus)
2 “On Controversy” Works, Volume 1, pages 268ff (Banner of Truth)
3 A longer version of this article appeared in Foundations Issue 54, November 2005.

News from the Emerald Isle

Paudge Mulvihill

I wear two hats; Secretary for Aontas, an Association of Bible Centred Churches in Ireland, and also a leader of a church planting mission on the West Coast of Ireland. Firstly, I would like to invite you to a special Aontas event in September, to promote gospel ministry in Ireland.

The Irish Government has set aside 2013 as a year to visit Ireland. Many cultural and fun events

are being organised across the country (see www.thegatheringireland.com for details).

Have you a spiritual concern for Ireland? We are planning a dynamic event on 14 September called **Gathering in the Irish Harvest** when you will:

- Meet church planters and hear their stories
- Hear about the spiritual state of the nation



- Meet representatives of mission agencies working in Ireland
 - Learn how to pray for Ireland
- Visit www.aontas.ie and sign up so that we can keep you informed about this event.

Recruitment Needs of Calvary Mission 2013-2016



Calvary Mission is a reformed, evangelical body committed to the task of church planting. In Ireland there are 72 towns above 5000 people with no evangelical church of any sort. We want to initiate two new church plants each year and so we need workers to join us.

Pastor Teacher/Evangelist

We need men who are gifted Pastor/Teachers with a

passion for evangelism. They will manage an Evangelism Team and work in co-operation with the wider Calvary Mission team and need to be in agreement with our Constitution (see www.calvarymission.ie) Because the work is slow in Ireland this is a long-term commitment. They need to be prepared to turn their hands to many varied tasks because of the pioneer nature of the work.

- We have immediate openings for a Pastor/Teacher for a church plant in Charlestown, Co. Mayo. We also need two people to start in 2014.
- We have immediate openings in both Charlestown and Claremorris for two people each. In 2014 we will need to recruit 8 further people.

Paudge Mulvihill can be contacted by email at calvarymayo@eircom.net or by phone at **00353 9490 23702**.

FIEC Hub Conference

Trevor Archer (FIEC Training Director)



Not even the blizzards could keep 200 men and women from all over the UK from the first FIEC Hub Conference in January.

For too long, men and women from FIEC and other Independent churches have found the process of plotting a route into vocational gospel ministry far too complicated – and our churches have suffered because of it! The Hub Conference is a key part of the FIEC’s response to help make the journey into and through training for gospel ministry much easier to navigate.

Those who attended were either *Just Looking* (in the early stages of exploring what is entailed in training for gospel ministry) or those who have *Just Started* (mainly Bible College students, wanting to build friendships, gain advice and be practically helped into Independent church ministry).

There was a great buzz to the weekend as those attending

made the most of Bible ministry from Julian Hardyman on “The Heart of Ministry”; 15 seminars

on a range of issues such as ‘Zeitgeist’ (preparing for tomorrow’s theological hot potatoes) through to ‘Matchmaking’ (what to look for in a prospective church) and One to One opportunities with experienced church, college and mission leaders who were part of The Hub Team.

The second conference is planned for 17-19 January 2014.

Affinity Theological Study Conference



This is a study conference; intellectually rigorous, as well as being theologically stimulating. Papers and discussion questions are circulated in advance.

After the speaker introduces his paper and small group discussion, a closing plenary session for that paper allows for further questions and comments – a very helpful format. (Having the papers in advance is a great help. This might be useful for certain types of paper given at ministry fraternals.)

The conference theme, “Using the Bible ethically”, is oft-neglected, albeit one that regularly occurs in pastoral

work. Subjects covered included war and torture, gay marriage, IVF and the beginnings of life, psalm-singing as a teaching medium and the pursuit of economic justice. Quite a collection!

Is such a conference of any real, ongoing practical benefit for ministry? I think so. Without a clear and biblically-reasoned foundation to our thinking, it is inevitable that our practice will become ad-hoc and “sloppy”, being driven far too often by our foibles and our current mental state.

The opportunity to engage with like-minded men from a variety of church groupings is stimulating and edifying. The range of opinions on secondary issues, whilst maintaining an unequivocal stance on primary truths, allows the conference to stimulate thinking in more lateral terms. To hear of the Lord’s work in other churches and parts of the country is a real blessing. Old friendships are renewed and new ones forged, for which all can be thankful.

This report on the Theological Conference of January 2013 by **Richard Myerscough** (pastor of Pontefract Congregational Church) first appeared in fuller form in *Congregational Concern*.

Affinity News

New Members

We are pleased to welcome a new Affinity Associate:
Contact for Christ (www.deo-gloria.co.uk)

Churches and Mission Associates Day Conference

A conference for church and mission leaders will be held on Monday **20 May from 11.00am to 3pm at Highbury Baptist Church, London**. The theme for the day will be "Sending cross-cultural missionaries or supporting national workers?" We have John McDonald (GBM) and Andy Lines (Crosslinks) speaking on this issue and lots of time for discussion, reports and prayer. More details on our website.

Serving God in his church in our generation: Learning from the past while living in the present

Stephen Clark has written an excellent paper addressing the issue of what it means to express evangelical unity in the 21st century. The Affinity Council warmly commends this paper. Further information about how to obtain the full paper, or a shorter summary of the main points, may be obtained from the Affinity website or by emailing office@affinity.org.uk

Personal Members

We are encouraged by the growing number of Affinity Personal Members. Personal Members receive a monthly update and a copy of the Prayer Calendar. If you would like to become a Personal Member please send an email to office@affinity.org.uk and we will be happy to send you further information.

Other Publications

The Bulletin

The latest issue of *The Bulletin* is now available online. This is our regular digest of news and information for churches on the implications of legislation and public policy on social issues in the UK.



Foundations

Issue 64 of *Foundations*, our theological journal, will be available online during May.



Available online at
www.affinity.org.uk



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