

Intouch

News of ministries within
the Affinity Family

NEWSLETTER
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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

Psalm 46 is a great encouragement to put our trust and hope in God as our refuge and strength. Verse 6 says,

'Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts.'

We are always in danger of giving too much weight to sensationalist media narratives. But I think it is fair to say that in the UK we are facing one of the most divided and uncertain times I have known – and Christians are not immune to the prevailing fear, anger or cynicism.

We need not fear. It is good to be reminded that the chaos of national and international politics does not control the future – God does. And we can have a quiet contentment in that.

Christians need to beware of investing too much hope in human institutions and becoming angry and frustrated when they fail.

We also need the humility to recognise that many of our political views are matters of wisdom and judgment and we don't have the monopoly on that; only God is all-wise and only his decisions are always just.

As we see truth distorted and selfish motives playing out in the public sphere, we must not lose hope. In God's common grace things can improve and he has been very kind to us as a nation in times past. But we also know that this present conflict, and the ultimate failure of all political systems, is rooted in our individual sinful hearts; these are what need to be changed.

In God's goodness – and with love for our neighbour – we must do all that we can to hold back the tide of evil. But in the end we need God to work so that many people turn to Christ. Only then, when the masses honour God, will our society really be changed. We must work and pray for this – not for our comfort, but for his glory.

Politically and spiritually, when **'he lifts his voice, the earth melts'** (Psalm 46:6).

Graham
Nicholls



ReachAcross: Helping Muslims Follow Jesus



'And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come'.

(Matthew 24:14)

We are witnessing a remarkable 'shaking' of the nations, and God is sovereignly bringing 'the whole world' to our doorstep. What an opportunity to reach them with the gospel! Our passion is 'Helping Muslims Follow Jesus', so ReachAcross has a team witnessing to Muslim communities in the UK.

But we are also deeply challenged by our Lord's words in Acts 1:8, '...you will be my witnesses... to the *ends of the earth*'. About half of the world's unreached (and so far, lost) people are Muslims. And 99.8% of the 1.8 billion Muslims in the world are *not* in the UK. Many Muslim-majority nations are less than 0.1% Christian.

Yet for every 100 missionaries in the world, only one is working among these nations – increasingly being called 'Frontier People Groups'.

ReachAcross has more than 70 years' experience of going to these least-reached Muslims with the gospel. Before 2008,

we were known as the Red Sea Mission Team – after the region where our founder, Dr. Lionel Gurney, began his medical/evangelistic work in the 1930s. We changed our name to ReachAcross to reflect the fact that our missionaries now work in multi-national teams in 15 countries in the Middle East, Asia, Africa, Europe and North America.

As well as preaching the gospel we demonstrate practical love for Muslims, many of whom are poor and needy. Indeed, platforms such as TESOL (teaching English), education or medicine, are often our only means of entry into certain countries. But always, our teams' ultimate aim is to establish fellowships of disciples from a Muslim background – i.e. plant churches. We believe God wants us to go through still-open doors into Muslim countries, counting the cost, but not fearing it.

We try to avoid stereotyping Muslims. The great pioneering 'apostle to Islam', Samuel Zwemer, urged Christians to

'awaken sympathy, love and prayer on behalf of the Islamic world until its bonds are burst, its wounds healed, its sorrows removed, and its desires satisfied in Jesus Christ'.

We need more workers to strengthen our teams. Perhaps for some, that might mean undergoing specialist training such as joining our residential 'Ministry Assist Programme' in Birmingham for a few weeks up to two years, working alongside local churches, reaching out to Muslims in their local community.

It has been a privilege to speak about our work in many churches in the Affinity family, and it is encouraging to hear that some of you are praying for us. Thank you!

Steven Green

Director of Mobilisation & Church Relations (UK)

uk.reachacross.net



EFCC: Exalting Christ in Growing Healthy Churches

The Evangelical Fellowship of Congregational Churches (EFCC) is moving into a new chapter. I have been the Ministry Director for a year now and we are focusing resources and efforts on the new EFCC vision – ‘Exalting Christ in Growing Healthy Churches’. This is why we exist; this is what we do and why we do it. As we move forward we define ourselves positively, and we set specific goals in terms of our vision.



The Lord Jesus Christ is at the centre of all that we do as a group of over a hundred churches in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. We are a diverse group but we are connected by our evangelical beliefs, our love for smaller churches, our independence and our open stance towards infant baptism.

Exalting Christ

In Matthew 14:22-36 the Lord Jesus appears to the disciples walking on the water as they struggle through the stormy sea in a boat. Christ reveals his deity and his sovereignty, and the chapter puts this in the context of the vital importance of fervent and constant prayer. Two chapters later in Matthew 16:18 the Lord Jesus Christ promises to build his church. This is in response to Peter’s statement, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God’. These two passages in Matthew’s Gospel are closely

connected; Christ’s sovereign promise to build his church is linked to our trust in him and our obedience to him.

Growing Healthy Churches – Calling Pastors

Our desire to exalt Christ in growing healthy churches has two main elements: calling pastors and replanting. A little under a third of our churches don’t have a pastor. This is an urgent situation and we are channelling resources and helping these churches to call pastors. This priority has led us to get more involved with Bible colleges

and to seek new ways to reach men who are considering a call to gospel ministry. In Ephesians 4:10-16 Paul the apostle is clear that a pastor is a gift from the risen Christ to his churches, for the building up of the body. We have been emphasising this to show that a pastor is not an optional extra but a central part of church life. We are encouraged that this year the Lord has called a number of men to pastor churches in the EFCC.





The
EFCC AGM
in 2018

Growing Healthy Churches – Replanting

In order for many of our churches to grow again, they will need to receive help, and with help comes change – often radical change. We are not in the business of managing decline. We are in the joyful business of serving the risen Saviour who is able to subject all things to himself (Philippians 3:21).

Sometimes very small churches reach the point when they realise that, if nothing changes, they will have to close in the next few years. We want to step in here and link such a struggling fellowship, especially those without a pastor, with another stronger church nearby to engage in replanting and revitalisation. The model that we are developing and encouraging focuses on our priorities as a fellowship of churches.

We are independent but we must never be insular. We are encouraging larger, more established, churches to come alongside and partner with smaller struggling ones. When this happens, both churches will need to be clear that change must happen in order for them to thrive and grow.

One of the reasons that churches decline is because they believe that faithfulness to the gospel is focused on keeping a building open the way it has always been – that as long as they are filling the pulpit with gospel preachers, they are being faithful. But when churches partner for revitalisation, this normally includes a serious review of the future of the struggling congregation, changes of

leadership and leadership structures, and a review of the use of the building. Above all, prayerfulness and urgent evangelism must be central if a church is to be successfully revitalised. The process is not quick; it may take years.

We pray to the living God that he will grow his church across our nation, and that we may be a fellowship in EFCC where every church is healthy and thriving, where every church has a pastor, where we all work together to exalt Christ in growing healthy churches. This is the vision. I believe that this is where the Lord is leading us in his goodness and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

What is the EFCC all about? 'Exalting Christ in growing healthy churches.'

Tom Brand,
EFCC Ministry Director

Tom
Brand



There's No Place Like...



The Oxford English Dictionary defines the word 'manse' as 'the house provided for a minister of certain Christian churches'.

Many ministers in FIEC and Grace Baptist churches have benefited from this provision during their periods of service in those churches. However, what provision is made for them between leaving a manse on retirement and the gaining of the 'mansion' in the Father's house (John 14:2)?

Ministers who have been on a low salary are often unable to afford to buy or rent commercially on their retirement. This need was recognised and addressed at the FIEC Assembly in 1974 with the establishment of the work of Evangelical Housing Association. The EHA has continued since then and in 1983 it also commenced working alongside Grace Baptist churches. It has also expanded so that retiring missionaries who are members of, or supported by, either group of churches may also apply.

EHA liaises with individuals and their spouses to provide a home when it is time for retirement. To assist with planning and budgeting, potential applicants are asked, if possible, to give 2-3 years' notice of forthcoming retirement.

The Association doesn't hold a stock of properties so applicants are able to choose where they live subject to price and availability. Rent levels are set at a lower than commercial rate for the particular area and tenants have security of tenure. This being the case, funding for purchases has to be raised from the support of loans, trusts, churches, individuals and the sale of vacant properties. Legacies are also a great providence, of course.

A committee of volunteers, including one of the tenants, a representative from FIEC and another from Grace Baptist Association oversee the running of EHA, at present owning and managing twenty properties. The purchase of possibly two more properties is anticipated at the end of 2019 into 2020 and more in years to come.

One of our tenants says: 'The most attractive thing is the security it gives us. We know that EHA won't force us to move out and we have a sympathetic landlord with security of tenure. You can never have that guarantee in the ordinary rental market.'

Our tenants in Paignton say:

'After retiring from full-time ministry it is such a blessing to be happy and settled in our lovely home thanks to EHA.'



News and Reports



Affinity Council Report

Last month the Affinity council met up in London over two days. Representatives from most of our corporate partner churches were present to share in prayer and fellowship and to discuss matters of mutual concern.

We considered plans for our 2021 Theological Study Conference (see column on the right) and how to develop the ministry of our theological journal, Foundations – very soon we hope to have news regarding the appointment of a new editor. We also received an encouraging financial report and decided to use some funds to increase the effectiveness of our social media presence with the appointment of someone to oversee this work on a part-time basis. Then our Director reported on his ever-increasing opportunities to speak on local and national radio. (Many of Graham's interviews can be heard on our Soundcloud page: www.soundcloud.com/affinitytalks.)

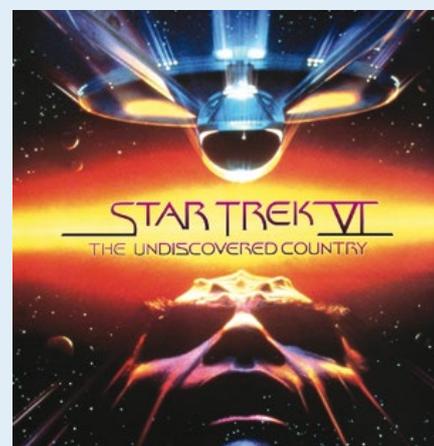
We also discussed how best to respond when a church is targeted by a malicious online campaign: Is it better to simply ignore false claims – however widely they might be shared and believed – or maybe seek to engage face-to-face with those stirring up trouble to establish a relationship of greater trust and understanding?

Paul and Sue Harrison of Christian Safeguarding Services (CSS) came along to discuss how our churches might be better prepared to provide the best and safest environment for children and vulnerable adults in our care. CSS are available to consult with any of our churches to this end.

Finally, it was also agreed to move Affinity from Trust status to become a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) which will help to give us a more appropriate governance structure for the future.

Theological Study Conference 2021

For Shakespeare, 'The Undiscovered Country' is the afterlife: the dread of something after death '... does make cowards of us all' (Hamlet, Act 3, Scene 1). For the screenplay writers of 'Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country', it is the future – something to approach with hope and optimism. Both perspectives fail to reckon with biblical revelation.



Our 2021 conference (March 17-19) will grapple with exegetical, doctrinal and pastoral aspects of eschatology, with our shared conviction that Christ Jesus has '...abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel' (2 Tim. 1:10). Speakers are currently being booked and it is shaping up to be an excellent event so put the date in your diary now. Further details will be published in due course.

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