

# 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

Greetings in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ! It is a great privilege for me to take over as Director of Affinity. We are grateful to Peter for his faithful service and pray for him as he continues to work for the Lord in various ministries. With God's help, I aim to continue the work of promoting gospel unity and partnership. I have already enjoyed meeting some council members and it will be good to hear the perspectives of anyone associated with Affinity.

Haggai 1:12-15 describes a time of spiritual revival amongst the exiles who had returned to Jerusalem. This is what we long to see in our churches.

### It begins with the Spirit-empowered Word of the Lord

The obedience of Zerubbabel (governor) and Joshua (high priest), is a response to the "voice of the Lord their God". Where are they hearing this voice? In "the message of the prophet Haggai".

*We pray for many faithful prophets bringing the word of the Lord, the Scriptures, in these days.*

We know it is not enough for the people to hear good prophetic preaching.

The Lord needs to bring the Word to life; to bring a heart response. The Lord sends the prophet but he also "stirs up Zerubbabel and Haggai... and the whole remnant of the people".

Later, Jesus says to his disciples, "you will be my witnesses". But declaring the eye-witness accounts and interpreting them would not be enough. Jesus promises, "you will be clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). He's talking about the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost.

*We pray for the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in bringing the Word of God to life.*

### It results in kingdom building

The people are caused to fear the Lord, are stirred in their hearts and start the building work. Today, this means people joining the church and becoming kingdom builders themselves.

*As I begin my new role, my prayer is that the Word would be faithfully proclaimed, that God the Holy Spirit would be powerfully at work and that the church continues to grow.*



**Graham Nicholls**

# Edinburgh Theological Seminary



## **Rigorous and Reverent Scholarship coupled with Relevant Application for Today's Church**

Edinburgh Theological Seminary (ETS) stands in a long tradition of theological excellence. Until 2014 it was known as the College of the Free Church of Scotland because it was, and is still, owned and run by the Presbyterian denomination of the same name. In 2014, as a result of an extensive review, the Free Church of Scotland decided to present itself more openly by changing the name to Edinburgh Theological Seminary. This did not indicate either a dilution of theological content or compromise in faithfulness to the Scriptures. It spelled a determination to share its theological heritage with as many students as possible. There has been a marked increase in student intake, as well as an ever-developing interest in the courses taught.

Accredited by Glasgow University, the Bachelor of

Theology course at ETS includes Systematic Theology, Old and New Testament Studies (which include original languages as well as theology), Practical Theology and Church History. In addition, we offer two Master of Theology degrees (also accredited by Glasgow University): one is a Taught course in Scottish Theology and the other a research course with a variety of options. As well as being an academic college, ETS, by means of its link with the Free Church and other churches, provides training in a variety of relevant areas of pastoral work. Our vision is to develop these along with a mission centre to support and prepare students and workers in a variety of differing areas of gospel and mission service.

Conveniently located right at the heart of Scotland's capital the ETS building looks out over Edinburgh and serves as a continuous reminder that God's purpose is to bring the truth of the gospel into a world dominated by secular thought. The challenges "out there"

should not be met with a "less-than-academic" response but a message which is informed, well researched and skilfully formulated. To present the gospel in today's world doesn't require less preparation – it requires more.

Today's rediscovery of Reformation theology has crossed ecclesiastical barriers both here in the UK and in the USA, and resonates strongly with the teaching at ETS. Over the last year ETS has worked together with FIEC to provide ministry education for a growing number of independent evangelical students, with additional classes and seminars focused towards independent church distinctives and ecclesiology. This arrangement has made for stimulating and healthy interaction, which we believe God is blessing as he leads students towards preparation for ministry and mission work.

ETS is inviting applications now for the September intake. Please visit our website [www.ets.ac.uk](http://www.ets.ac.uk) or call Heather Watson on

**0131 226 5286**  
for full details.



# Ministering in the South Wales valleys

God is calling a new generation of men to gospel ministry in these communities that have experienced decades of decline. The mines have closed, manufacturing industries have gone, employment and social need have increased. Young people leave and do not return.

Many chapels have closed; congregations that remain are small and elderly. Some churches are the last remaining gospel light in a whole valley of tens of thousands of people. We focus here on two men who have been called here by God to take up the challenges of gospel ministry: John Funnell, pastor of Noddfa Baptist Church, Abersychan, in the Eastern Valley in Gwent and Owen Batstone, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church, Ogmore Vale, near Bridgend.

## 1. Tell us about yourself and your family.

**John:** Harriet and I have four children. We came to faith seven years ago. I serve as part-time pastor and also work in full-time secular employment. I hope to be full-time at Noddfa soon, with the help of a grant from The Particular Baptist Fund. I have been at Noddfa for two years.

**Owen:** Rita and I have two children. Rita works for the Welsh Assembly Government. I grew up in Heath Church, Cardiff and Rita grew up in Bethany Church, Clarboston Road in Pembrokeshire. I have been at Calvary for four years.



## 2. Tell us about your church.

**John:** Noddfa was founded in 1846 for the local mining community. Today we have 25 members and the population of Abersychan is 10,000. There are several other small congregations, mostly elderly.

**Owen:** We have seven members who are fighting to put Jesus at the centre of our lives and at the core of our community. We run lots of weekly meetings and often non-Christians outnumber Christians three to one. This is glorious! Most attendees are young (20s-40s), which is neither good nor bad, but is quite unusual for a valley church.

## 3. Tell us about the community.

**John:** It is wonderful, filled with loving and welcoming people. We are truly blessed to be here.

It is a deprived area because most of the heavy industry has gone and unemployment is high. The more affluent part of the village serves as a commuter belt to Bristol, Cardiff and Newport. There are several struggling chapels. The Lord had refined Noddfa to an ember of less than 15 elderly regular attendees, but, by his grace, we now have 30 attending each week.

**Owen:** Ogmore Vale is a quiet, polite and godless village. By this I mean the people are generally very friendly, sociable and law abiding but they love themselves more than Jesus. They have a remarkable propensity to talk and think only about themselves and are reluctant to let Jesus fix their disintegrating family units. I love and care for them deeply and long for the gospel to change their lives.

## 4. How many people actively serve in the church and how many wage earners do you have?

**John:** We have one deacon and a handful of members who help to run the youth ministries, building maintenance



"I love and care for them deeply and long for the gospel to change their lives."

## The Eastern valley, just below Abersychan

and finances. We have four wage earners, including myself. Others of working age also attend but are either unemployed or in poor health.

**Owen:** We have six or seven active members, who all support the church financially.

### 5. How do you reach out to the community?

**John:** We run weekly children's meetings, a Mothers and Toddlers' group, monthly family-friendly services, women's meetings and themed events. We use posters, Facebook and Twitter. I write letters to the community and am involved in school assemblies, mission weeks, and Holiday Bible Clubs. Living in the community provides many opportunities; eating at our local café, haircuts at our barbers, going to the park with the children, kids' clubs; football, boxing, music lessons and being a school governor. We make the church building available for community projects.

**Owen:** You name it, if it's consistent with biblical principles, and I've probably done it. However, it's always the case with us that most people get reached when Christians are fired up for Jesus and talk about him in everyday situations.

### 6. What are the main challenges of ministering in a valley community?

**John:** They are spiritually dark places. The enemy's activity is seen in nominal Christianity or outright atheism. Valley churches are seen as old-fashioned, ageing and out of touch, because they are. For decades congregations have dwindled and churches have lost their links with the community. People see the churches as irrelevant and have no desire to attend. Those who have a job often have to work on Sundays.

**Owen:** Nothing outside what has been promised in the parable of the sower: the wicked one snatching away gospel seeds; the world appearing scary with its trendy academic arguments against the Bible; and the pleasures of sin appearing better than the pleasures of Jesus.

### 7. What have been your main encouragements?

**John:** The Lord has blessed our outreach. Our youth ministries have grown five-fold. The monthly family-friendly service averages over 50, most of whom are un-churched. Attendance at Sunday services has doubled and now reflects the demographic of the

community. We have had to set up a Sunday School. In 2015 we were blessed with six baptisms.

**Owen:** People have been saved! But also, I've seen moments when Jesus was more precious to the Christians than anything else on earth. I can't think of a higher joy for this pastor than to see that.

### 8. How can we pray for you and your church?

**John:** Please pray for the regular ministry of the Word; for the young converts and that more will be converted; for opportunities to engage with the people around us; that, as we grow, the Lord will continue to sustain the elderly core members; and for revival.

**Owen:** "Sometimes movement in church is just the congregation turning over in its grave." My prayer is not simply that more people will attend but that believers would move closer and closer to God and be really alive in him.



Owen Batstone & family

# Introducing Stranmillis Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Belfast

([www.atstranmillis.com](http://www.atstranmillis.com))

Our congregation was established in 1927 as one of the first congregations of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. We moved to our present site on the Stranmillis Road in 1971. We are right in the heart of the university area of Belfast, surrounded by students. We have 103 members and attendances of around 120 (am) and 75 (pm). We have been richly blessed with a significant number of young families. Our members are drawn from a wide area of the city and beyond and it would probably be true to say that we operate more like a “downtown church” than a congregation in a specific locality.

## Leadership and future plans

The congregation has been served by just three ministers: Rev W J Grier, Rev Derek Thomas and, since 2000, Rev Gareth Burke. There are four elders and twelve deacons. Our building is no longer suitable to reach out to the community around us, especially the students, so we are in the process of



Gareth & Ruth Burke

raising finance to erect a new building on our existing site.

## Youth work

There is much happening among children and young people. Some of the activities are aimed at the instruction and upbuilding of the covenant children while others are more directly evangelistic. Children are transported by minibus from a nearby housing scheme for some meetings. We greatly value the contact we have with these boys and girls but long to see more spiritual fruit.

## Student work

Since the end of ‘The Troubles’ Belfast has become a much more attractive location for international students. There is a real mission field on our doorstep with around 130 students at our weekly Student Café. An international student Bible study is held each week. We are delighted with the many students we have contact with and long to see more of them coming to a clear faith in Christ.

## Prayer and Fellowship

Like most evangelical churches we have a weekly prayer meeting and there are also monthly prayer groups in which a significant number of the members are involved. The ladies have a monthly meeting for fellowship and teaching.

## Missions

We have four missionary couples connected to the church: Sid and Jean Garland (ACTS literature ministry, Nigeria); Ed and Kate Underwood (One Hundred Fold, UFM); Andrew and Eunice Moody (Uganda); Sam and Jenni Ray (Ethiopia).

## Evangelism

Whilst we have seen some growth in recent years and are, by and large, encouraged and very aware of the Lord’s goodness, we long to see more conversions. Alongside the student and children evangelism, our Parent and Toddler group has also had a number of very useful evenings for mums and friends. Please join us in prayer that our contacts will, by God’s grace, become converts.



The student café

The building project



# Affinity News



## Affinity on Facebook

We have recently started an Affinity Facebook page. If you use Facebook and would like regular updates and links from Affinity and our partner organisations please visit and “like” the page at [www.facebook.com/affinity.org.uk](http://www.facebook.com/affinity.org.uk)

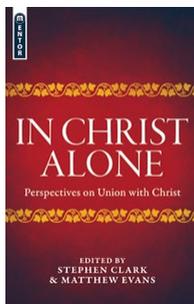


## New contact details

Please note that our contact details (phone and post) have changed. Our postal address is now: **3 Limedale Close, Cambridge CB1 9BQ** and our phone number is **07989 773043**. Our email address remains as [office@affinity.org.uk](mailto:office@affinity.org.uk)

## In Christ Alone: Theological Study Conference book now available

We are pleased to announce that the book of the papers from last year’s Theological Study Conference is published this month (288 pages, £12.99). Copies can be ordered from Amazon or direct from Christian Focus Publications ([bit.ly/1Y85nJU](http://bit.ly/1Y85nJU))



Union with Christ is the jewel in the crown of salvation. It has many and varied facets. Indeed, the reality denoted by the words “in Christ” is unfathomable. But the importance of this great truth is such that Christians need to seek to plumb its unsearchable depths. The present volume seeks to show how union with Christ is expounded by two New Testament writers, how it was understood by two great theologians, and how it relates to two key areas of biblical teaching, before a final chapter plots the scriptural development and structure of this great truth and its practical relevance for us today. Contributors include: Cornelis Bennema, Tim Ward, Robert Letham, John Fesko, David McKay, Paul Wells and Stephen Clark.

## 2017 Theological Study Conference

Bookings for next year’s conference will open next month. The dates are 1-3 March and the venue is once again King’s Park, Northampton, which is readily accessible by road and rail and by air to Birmingham. The theme is ***The Christian Church – Its Mission in a Post-Christian Culture***. Papers will be circulated in advance for in-depth discussion and debate at the conference. We look forward to you joining us for this very important and timely subject.

**Paper 1:** *‘Light to the Nations and Aliens and Strangers: an Overview of the People of God in the Old Testament’* – David Green

**Paper 2:** *‘Light to the Nations and Aliens and Strangers: an Overview of the People of God in the New Testament’* – Chris Bennett

**Paper 3:** *‘When Society is Collapsing: Augustine and The City of God’* – Paul Helm

**Paper 4:** *‘The Church Militant and Martyred: The Reformation till Today’* – Ken Brownell

**Paper 5:** *‘On Understanding our Times’* – John Stevens

**Paper 6:** *‘On Serving God in our Generation’* – David McKay

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