

Issue 24
Winter 2022

intouch

News of ministries
within the
Affinity Family

A person wearing a purple shirt is holding a large blue sign with white text. The sign is centered in a large red circle. The text on the sign reads "Hello, my pronouns are..." followed by a dashed line.

Hello, my
pronouns are...

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A blue-tinted photograph of a church service with a network diagram overlay. The network diagram consists of numerous colored circles (white, orange, red, green) of varying sizes connected by thin lines, forming a complex web. The background shows a group of people, including men and women, some looking towards the camera and others looking down or at each other. The overall mood is one of community and connection.

Affinity is a growing network of 1,200 Bible-centred churches and Christian organisations throughout Britain and Ireland. We declare and demonstrate the unity of Christ's Church for the advancement of Christ's kingdom.

Director's Desk

A warm welcome to the Autumn edition of our InTouch magazine. We trust you are knowing the Lord's presence and grace in your lives and ministries.

Sadly, at the time of writing, the war in Ukraine continues with no prospect of peace at the moment, and in the UK we are experiencing political instability and the challenge of rapidly rising prices for food and energy.

In all this, it is reassuring to know that none of these things are startling if we read our Bibles and we can know for sure that 'God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.' (Psalm 46:1)

Since our last edition, we have had the privilege of meeting many of our members in person through attending various events and launching a new online initiative for Agency members – four of whom have written for us in this edition!

One of our newest members is the Christian Medical Fellowship. We are so pleased they have joined Affinity and also become part of our Social Issues Team. One of their team, Bex, writes about the dilemmas facing Christian nurses as they consider whether it is right to go on strike. Another of our Agency members, True Freedom Trust, writes on using preferred gender pronouns. Also, Cornerstone UK writes about the missional call to foster. We also have a profile on Edward Connor Solicitors, a Christian law firm able to give professional legal advice, which is always in demand.

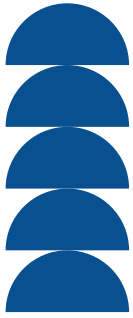
Affinity has continued to speak up in the public square with interviews on radio and TV. We have been working in partnership on the Greater Love Declaration, a positive explanation of the Christian views on sex and gender and we have also launched a book called *Challenging Leaders* about how to prevent and investigate claims of pastoral abuse.

We trust you will find this edition of InTouch encouraging and informative and we would love to hear from you with any comments or questions. You can write to me at director@affinity.org.uk

Wishing you God's richest blessing as we enter this Christmas period.

Graham Nicholls





Nurses and Midwives are on their knees: will you join them?



Propping the staff room door open with her foot, Maria leans out into the corridor and shouts, 'Bex! You coming for lunch soon?'

When I finally pull myself away it's gone 4 pm.

'I did make you a cup of tea' Maria gestures to the cup nearest me, 'it might be cold now. Sorry.'

'Don't worry, I think it's my first drink of the day. Don't tell bed five, I keep nagging him to drink but I'm doing worse than he is!'

'It's better than yesterday, we didn't stop at all. Wouldn't it be nice to get a proper break? Meet up with a friend or sit in a park?'

'I'd settle for drinking a cuppa uninterrupted', I say, pulling myself up to answer a patient's buzzer.

As I return, she asks, 'What

would you do if you weren't a nurse?'

'I'd be a florist.' I answer without hesitation. 'Being surrounded by beautiful flowers all day. What could be stressful about shrubs?'

'Bet it smells better than this place as well,' Maria laughs. 'Actually, I saw that the Waitrose on the corner is hiring. I'm sure the night shift pay can't be that different.'

'I've read that nurses are having to use food banks to feed their families.'

'I'm having to pick up extra shifts as agency. I don't know what I'm going to do if petrol prices go up any further. I might have to start sleeping in my car in-between shifts.'

'The problem is I couldn't do anything else. I love this job. I can't walk away.'

'...Me neither.'



This is us at our best, fantasising about what we'd do if we didn't nurse. Laughing. Joking. Making the best of it as we always have. At our worst, we cry in our cars on the way to work, dreading the day ahead, having seen on the work WhatsApp that we're short-staffed again and haven't found any help. We know we won't have time to do our jobs as well as we want. Running pillar to post, pulses racing. Stress weighs on our shoulders like a heavy woollen cape from the uniforms in the sixties (although this isn't so easily whipped off and hung up on the coat hook when we get home!).

Both the Royal Colleges of Nursing and Midwifery (RCN and RCM) say that we're at a crisis point. Unfair pay ultimately puts patients at risk, as pay continues to fall behind inflation and significantly contributes to a lack of staffing. This winter, members of these unions will be called to vote in a ballot to strike. The Christian Medical Fellowship (CMF) is also calling upon

its members. To engage their hearts and minds, and to pray. Across nearly 5,000 people (including nurses and midwives) there are varied opinions on whether to strike or not. Ultimately, it's a conscience issue. But we agree that nurses and midwives are on their knees, and we need to join them – on our knees in prayer. Will you join too? Let's humble ourselves before God, call on him to have mercy on a nation and make a difference.

'The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.' (Psalm 34:17-18 NIV)



Bex Lawton is a paediatric nurse, and has been working at the children's hospital in Oxford for 17 years. She now also works for CMF as Associate Head of Nurses and Midwives, with a vision to unite and equip nurses and midwives to live and speak for Jesus. Find out more about CMF's work with nurses and midwives by visiting:

www.cmf.org.uk

Here are three prayerful ways you could join nurses and midwives on their knees this week:

Speak. Do you know any nurses or midwives? How are they coping financially, mentally and spiritually? Offer to pray for them if appropriate.

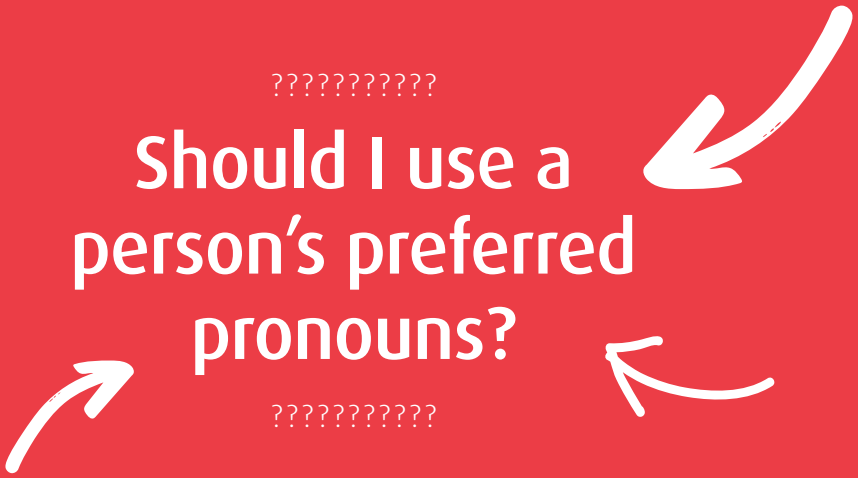
Fast. Consider doing a 'shift fast' – don't eat until 4pm, as if you were having a late lunch break. It's not about going on a hunger strike in order to manipulate God into answering our prayers. But he loves us to submit ourselves, body and soul, before him. If you struggle with food, think about a social media fast.

Give. When you do your weekly food shop, buy extra non-perishable goods, and put them in the food bank bins next to the checkout. Pray for those who will need them.

????????????

Should I use a
person's preferred
pronouns?

????????????



Hello, my
pronouns are...





True Freedom Trust is a confidential pastoral ministry providing support for Christians who experience same-sex attraction or gender incongruence, and who wish to live under traditional biblical teaching. At our speaking events, we're frequently asked, 'should I use a person's preferred pronouns?'. The question refers to whether it is right to refer to someone by pronouns that do not correspond to their biological sex e.g. calling a biological male she/her or using non-binary pronouns that don't correspond to either sex such as they/them.

When faced with any ethical dilemma like this, the first question we must ask is, 'does scripture give us a direct, unambiguous, answer?'. If it does, we apply that truth to our dilemma graciously. If it doesn't, which arguably is the case here, we have some work to do. We must find an answer that sits well with our conscience, draws on all we know of scripture, and is also pastorally sensitive to the people in our care. In seeking to do this, we can ask ourselves six questions to build our answer.

What biblical principles should inform our response?

Is this response requiring more/less of the other person than the Bible asks?

What might this response communicate to the person we are discipling?

What effect will this response have on our long-term ability to share the gospel with this person?

Does this response feel consistent with how we might approach similar matters?

Are we allowing our own sin/prejudice to cloud our judgement?



Arguments **AGAINST**

Arguments against using a person's preferred pronouns often come from a desire to acknowledge the truth of how God has created the person. We see two parallel truths in the key verse of Genesis 1:27. The first is that God creates us in his image, and the second is that he creates us male and female. The parallel suggests

these two things are of equal importance, and so to compromise on one might quickly unravel what it means to be human. Beyond what we say about the individual, another concern might be that to use a preferred pronoun communicates submission to a worldly ideology that suggests sex and gender are two different things; sex referring to a person's genetics, gender referring to a person's inward sense of being a man or a woman.



Arguments **FOR**

Arguments for using a person's preferred pronouns usually take a broad view of the impact of our use of language on others. These arguments emphasise interacting with our surrounding culture respectfully in order to build bridges and avoid causing unnecessary distress. We can make an argument from Acts 17:27-28 where Paul quotes extra-biblical poetry, borrows the pronouns that would originally have referred to Zeus and uses them to point to Yahweh. This might suggest a biblical

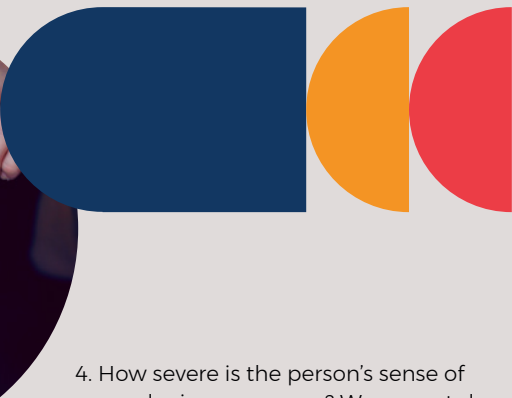
precedent for borrowing the language of the culture of the day for the sake of pointing someone to the gospel. This view would also question that earlier claim that we would be lying about the way God has created the person if we used their pronouns, as the one making the request likely isn't using the pronouns to describe their biological sex, but their sense of gender. As they would hold these to be two different categories, they do not use the language in the same way others might, and therefore our using it as they do does not communicate a lie.

Finding the way

This is a complex debate, with both sides offering cogent arguments. We may resonate with one side of the debate more than the other, but it's also important to remember we're dealing with people, and it's always wise to listen to their stories and understand where they are coming from before letting them know our decision. We may find that the wisest, most loving thing we can do for a person in this area may vary on a case-by-case basis. Here are some further pastoral factors that might influence our decision making.



1. What does the person believe about God? Does the person have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ? If not, we may be more comfortable using their preferred pronouns as we wouldn't expect them to be familiar with what the Bible teaches about sex/gender.
2. What does the person believe about themselves? Asking this question shows genuine interest in the person and helps us to understand where the request is coming from. This will help us decide what we are communicating by using/not using the person's pronouns.
3. What age is the person? There are additional considerations if the person making the request is under 18. Here, we could argue that using preferred pronouns could reinforce a child's connection to a worldview they are not yet fully equipped to explore. We are aware of cases of children transitioning socially at a young age, who then change their minds as they go through the puberty associated with their biological sex. This might be a reason not to use a child's preferred pronouns.



4. How severe is the person's sense of gender incongruence? We cannot deny the genuine distress that some people experience related to their sense of gender. For some, using the pronouns associated with their biological sex will trigger intense feelings of dysphoria. We may choose to use their preferred pronouns to avoid causing unnecessary distress.
5. What pronouns are they asking us to use? While some may wish for us to use the pronouns associated with the opposite sex, others may prefer to use pronouns that are neither male nor female, such as they/them. We may be more comfortable accommodating these requests.

For some, a helpful middle ground in this discussion is to avoid using pronouns altogether and refer to someone by their legal name, the gender association of which varies according to culture. Whatever our choice, we can respond in a loving and gracious way befitting of disciples of Christ, not giving up hope that all will come to see their biological sex as a good gift from God.



Simon Byrne is the Teaching & Outreach Manager at True Freedom Trust. He regularly speaks at churches, bible colleges and other events across the UK.



Greater Love Declaration

Affinity is glad to be involved in an initiative called *The Greater Love Declaration*, which is a statement by ministers and pastoral workers from across the different Christian denominations about orthodox Christian teaching on marriage, sex and identity.

What is especially helpful about this statement is that it is succinct and positive – it's simple and short so can be quickly read and understood. The main focus of the statement is to talk positively about the goodness of living sacrificially in Christian marriage or singleness following the example of Christ.

We trust it will be a useful rallying and reference point for Christians who want to resist all attempts to make Christian teaching illegal or unacceptable.

To find out more or to sign the declaration visit www.greaterlove.org.uk



Bringing accessible Christ-centred legal expertise to the 21st century

This November Edward Connor Solicitors had the privilege of speaking at the FIEC Leaders Conference in Blackpool (7-9 November).



After the pandemic, it was particularly wonderful to be able to celebrate with the FIEC their centenary, marking 100 years since Edward Poole-Connor (from whom we take our name!) formed an 'association of mutual helpfulness' for independent churches.

Poole-Connor's aim was to see independent churches receive the same help and support as those from established denominations. And he recognised that access to information on legal matters was an important part of what that association needed to provide.

If it was the case that independent evangelical churches needed help with legal issues in 1922 when



the law of the land was much more closely aligned to biblical principles, how much more is it the case today? When the law has a totally different definition of marriage to the Bible's definition – when suggesting someone shouldn't have sex outside marriage is called abuse, when churches have to prove how they exist for the public benefit and people can lose their jobs for telling people about their faith.

In such a climate, we know that the law can seem scary and very distant from the daily ministries of churches. We know too it can be easy to think of legal requirements in terms of restricting ministry, and it would be forgivable to want to have as little to do with it as possible!

But as Christian lawyers, we can see that there are times when to thrive as a church in this culture, legal compliance is really

important. We want to help churches and other Christian organisations see how sound, biblically-based legal compliance can contribute to a healthy church culture, enabling gospel ministry and allowing it to flourish now and in years to come. We want to make accessible, Christ-centred legal expertise available wherever it will help the gospel to flourish.

Our aim at the conference was to resource and equip churches with steps they can take to really help their gospel ministries. In the area of charity law, we spoke about how good governance, clarity about charity structure, and accountability of trustees and spiritual leaders can help create a healthy church.

In the area of property law, we shared the importance of dealing properly with church property, probably a charity's most significant

asset and how that can ensure church ministries have a place to operate for the long haul.

And finally, in the area of employment law, we looked at the Equalities legislation and what steps churches can take to enjoy the protection for beliefs afforded in legislation.



Edward Connor Solicitors is an Agency Member of Affinity. If they can help your church or Christian organisation with a legal matter they would love to hear from you. Email info@edwardconnor.com or call 01858 411568 to have an initial chat about your requirements and how they might be able to help you.



Affinity Theological Study Conference

Oli Gross is the pastor at Buckingham Chapel in Bristol. He is a regular attendee of the Affinity Theological Study Conference. Here he shares some of the reasons he makes this conference, in particular, a priority in his calendar.

My first Affinity Theological Study Conference was in 2011. Since then I've attended every one (including online in 2021). So why, you may wonder, do I keep coming back?

The first reason is the **UNIQUE FORMAT**. I've attended conferences which largely consist of sermons, and they have been helpful. But what I really appreciate about the Study Conference is the opportunity to question and discuss what we are hearing from the front; a 'conference' in the strict sense of the term! The speakers' papers are sent out in advance for us to read, allowing us to engage with the subject before we even arrive. Then at the Study Conference,

the speaker reviews their paper for 20 minutes, after which we break into small groups for about 45 minutes of discussion. Then we all come together again for the plenary session when anyone who wants to can interrogate the speaker. All this makes the conference not just helpful but also extremely enjoyable and engaging.

The second reason is the **STIMULATING TOPICS**. In the years I've attended we've considered the doctrine of scripture, Christian ethics, union with Christ, mission in a post-Christian culture, worship and, most recently, eschatology. These have all been profitable themes to mine. Next year's theme 'A firm foundation: priorities for the rising generation' definitely sounds like it will be again!

The third reason is the **SWEET FELLOWSHIP**. At the Study Conference, I meet up with friends and brothers in the ministry who I no longer see regularly. It's a pleasure to



have an opportunity to catch up, hear their news and share mine. I also enjoy meeting new people, including some who are there for the first time. To be with saints, both male and female, from a wide spectrum of evangelical traditions, eating three fine meals a day together, praising and praying to the Lord together, is such a blessing; a true foretaste of paradise.

There are other positive features too: a pleasant and comfortable venue, good quality coffee, and copious sound books to browse and/or buy. But for me, the fourth

reason I like this conference so much is that it's **SHORT AND SWEET!** As a family man, I find two nights away is plenty. After that, I want to be back home, and for me, as I guess most people, Northampton isn't that far away.

Those are my reasons for going. Perhaps, if you join us, they'll be yours too!



Hosted every two years, the Affinity Study Conference seeks to be both theologically rigorous and practically helpful. In 2023 we're exploring together what pastoring a church in the 21st century looks like and how to stay faithful amidst trial and persecution. Find out more at

www.affinity.org.uk/studyconference

Called to foster

If I were to ask you to think of a missionary, what would be the first thing that came to your mind? Is it that friend of yours in Africa or Asia? Perhaps you think of the Apostle Paul, journeying across Asia preaching the gospel and planting churches.

That was certainly my understanding of mission and calling. Jesus may have sent us out to 'Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth' (Acts 1:8), but to me, mission was out there in *the ends of the world*. And if I were to think of local missions, they were all social justice centred. For most of my life, I never considered that home could be a mission field and a family the missionaries. Yet all over the world, there are families responding to a call from God and serving him in their homes. Just like other mission fields, the call comes in many shapes and forms.

For Chris and Mary, the call came when they were buying a home. They were looking for a 2-bedroom home for their family when



they felt God prompting them to get a 3-bedroom. 'We didn't need a 3-bedroom house. We didn't know why God was directing us like that but we obeyed God,' Chris and Mary share. 'We bought a 3-bedroom house without really knowing what the spare bedroom was for... It didn't take long for God to put fostering on our hearts.'

For Edimar and Maria, the call came as they were struggling with infertility. They felt God calling them to care for other children even as they were trying to have their own children. They answered that call whilst holding on to hope: 'We are going to do this in the meantime and we're going to wait on the Lord to have our own children one day.'

Each of our foster carers can tell you the story of how they felt called to foster. Motivated by their faith, our foster carers welcome children into their homes, expressing fruits of the Holy Spirit such as love, patience, kindness and faithfulness. Sometimes they have the children for short periods and sometimes they have them for years; others have even



gone on to adopt their foster children. Regardless of the length of stay, they faithfully welcome and love the children God places in their homes, knowing that God, who orders everyone's steps will use their time with the children for his glory. For foster carers, the call is to do all they can with the time they are given. They know that some people sow, others water, but it is the Lord God who brings growth. As they hold onto hope for the restoration of a child who has been through incredible trauma, they experience and celebrate the joys that the child brings to their family.

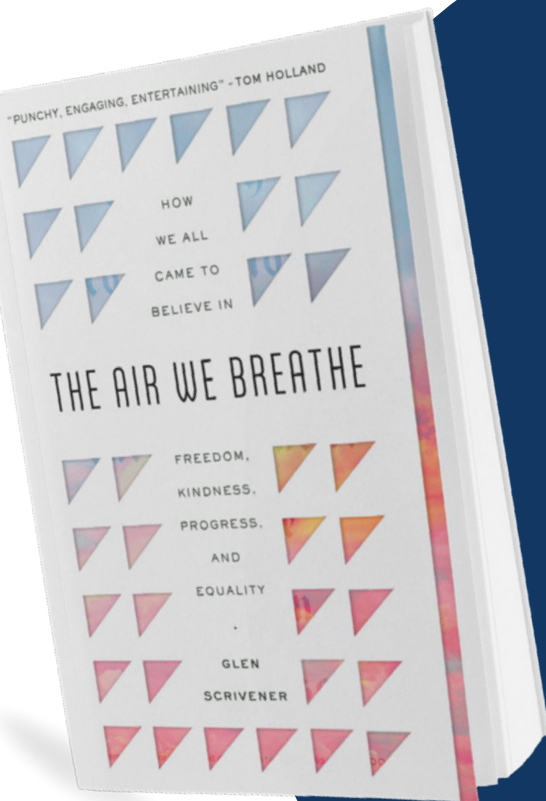
In all its difficulties and joys, fostering is a mission

field unlike any other. However, like other mission fields, it needs supporters. The Apostle Paul teaches us that there is a place for all when it comes to missions, those who can't participate by going can participate by supporting the missionaries. The whole church can support and welcome children and families who foster and adopt. In fact, if every church in the UK had just one family who fostered, there would no longer be a shortage of carers. Whether it's in prayer, dropping off a meal, arranging a playdate, or listening to a foster carer, we can all make a difference in this mission that we are called to. After all, God has called all of us to ensure that vulnerable children are cared for.



Dorothy Muraya is a Foster Carer Recruiter at Cornerstone Adoption & Fostering Agency. Cornerstone UK is the only Evangelical Christian fostering agency in the UK. From their staff to carers, board and trustees, everyone in Cornerstone is motivated by their faith. Cornerstone, who are an Agency member of Affinity, believe fostering is a way to respond to the biblical mandate to care for vulnerable children. To find out more about the work of Cornerstone UK visit: www.cornerstoneuk.org

Book Review



REVIEW BY

Graham Nicholls

Local Pastor and
Director of Affinity

The Good Book Company,
2022, 240 pp, £8.49

Some people might think the values we hold, the instinctive responses that we have to injustice, pain and suffering are just there because they are there. It's as if morality just exists - there in the ether. No one created it, it just evolved by itself, and yet we seem to think it is an absolute. We reason that being a cannibal is ok for spiders and sharks but not for us. In particular, we assume our modern values of equality, diversity, human rights, etc., are obvious, natural and universal. Media interviewers ask questions on the basis that truth matters and that there is some kind of value system to be judged against. Our friends at the pub all believe in right and wrong, and a set of universals that they argue about but probably can't argue for.

But those values in the air we breathe are there for a reason. They are there because of a person, a divine person, who put them there.

In this rigorously researched but easily accessible book, Glen Scrivener takes us through bible texts and a vast swathe of history to show that our values not only come from the recent influences of Western Christianity, but their historical roots go back much further, in fact to the creation of the world and the order, justice and morality God set in place which flows from his character.



We may have distorted the discussion and shaped it around our idolatrous world views but still, the imprint of the creator cannot be scratched out

Part of the genius of this book is it provides us with really intriguing historical insights which are set against the conversation going on in our culture right now, tapping into the debates around slavery, #metoo and *Black Lives Matter*.

Scrivener shows us that there is essentially no issue that we discuss and debate in politics or popular culture, no issue in the news or current campaign that does not trace its driving force from us being image-bearers. In the process, he convincingly demonstrates that the conversations we are having now are just the kind of moral dilemmas you would expect from moral agents created by God and in his likeness. For example, Scrivener helps us see that the current issue of equality is rooted in the special creation of human beings and that the ancient and modern creation myths are all about chaos, fighting and slavery.

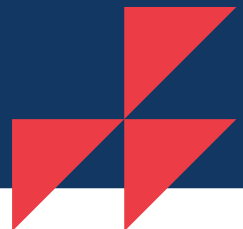
It is interesting to note that the random accident evolutionary model for the origins of our world, with its chaotic beginnings and the striving for survival, shares more with ancient Greek mythology than you might at first think. Science itself is only an

observation of what God has ordered in creation. Even the way the universe works, is discoverable and behaves consistently is all part of the ordering, not chaos, that God puts into his creation.

Scrivener then goes on to show that the concept of compassion as a virtue is rooted in the character of God and doesn't arise naturally from us being just evolved animals. And then again, the importance of consent – in particular in the area of sex – arises from the love of God and the dignity of human beings.

Scrivener then walks us through the ideas of freedom, justice and human rights, showing that they only make sense if humans are special creations under God's authority.

All in all, this is a great book for Christians to read – you will be better equipped for conversations about our culture. The book is full of useful facts and stories and is also a fantastic resource to give away to friends and family to get them thinking about the God who made and shapes 'the air we breathe'.



Book your place

at the next Theological Study Conference

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A Firm Foundation:
Priorities for the
rising generation



Peter Sanlon
Identity and
World View



Rev. Robin Gray
Genuine Conversion



Phil Heaps
Sanctification and
Consistent Godly Living



Mark Thomas
Pastoring the Twenty-First
Century Church



Rev. Dr Patrick Fung
Faithfulness amidst Trial,
and Persecution

CONTACT

Graham Nicholls, Director
director@affinity.org

Joel Upton,
Executive Assistant
office@affinity.org

PO Box 905
Haywards Heath
RH16 9TJ
www.affinity.org.uk

  @AffinityTalks

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