

Report on the Mission in St. Andrew's Leyland, April 2-10, 2011

The team consisted of Nick Moore, Chris and Dawn Styles, Paul Kerry and James Gwyn-Thomas from Wycliffe Hall, and from OCCA Wendy Adams, Chelsea Carpenter, Brandon and Claire Eidson, Jacob and Pritta Daniel, Andy Moore and myself.

Preparation had included my preaching at the Carol Service in December and the whole team going up for a 'get to know you' weekend in February. The church is outstanding. It is strongly Christ-centred and evangelistic in ethos, majors on every member ministry, and has shared leadership for its four congregations, all under the warm, shrewd leadership of the Rev. David Gibb. I have rarely been on a parish mission where the planning has been so meticulous, the preparation so thorough, the prayer so earnest and the ownership by the congregation so marked.

There was such a lot going on in all areas of the community that it is impossible in a small space to give any idea of the level of the team's engagement with all ages, within the church membership and far outside it. We preached at all the services both Sundays, ran a lunch and talk daily on the punchy parables of Jesus, handled hard questions at evening meetings, and concentrated on youth – the Infants' School, the C. of E. High School and the FE Community College, a vast institution to which students bus in from many miles around. An excellent woman chaplain works both these schools – no easy job. Our team taught 17 RE lessons, took 5 assemblies, a whole afternoon on spirituality, and CU events in the High School, and the Christian Head was delighted (some of the unbelieving RE staff less so!). In the Community College we used 2 talks but mainly questionnaires, in partnership with Christian students, and this opened up many good conversations, drawing several of the senior students to events in the church. Their timetable was a challenge, but there was real progress, deep discussions, and one or two of the students have come to Christ during the week. There were home meetings, meetings with children of all ages attached to the lively young peoples' organisations in the church, a film night for youth, paintballing, a men's breakfast and golf at the Golf Club (addressed by the chaplain to the Pro Golf Tour), a magnificent Ball which was heavily oversubscribed, evangelistic outreach with drama in the market (which attracted the local radio) and two major events led respectively by the Asst. Chief Constable Robin Oake and Jonathan Aitken. There were two presentations on BBC Radio Lancashire, a Tea Dance, four schools Easter Services, skateboarding, a large meeting for gardeners and so on.

The mission opened doors for various possibilities in the future: a regular business breakfast, occasional tea dance, new youth initiatives, a regular stall in the market, rugby training in a Junior School, use of drama in church, open air work, and more film events.

Throughout the week we used a response slip for people to tick 'Count me in' if they had committed themselves to Christ, and 'Tell me more' if they pledged themselves to attend a Christianity Explored course. This was a blunt instrument but meant the church had contact details to follow up people who had been touched. We had a large response, and this escalated at the end of the week when powerful evangelistic services on the final Sunday were very fruitful. On the last night people were challenged to come forward publicly to show their new commitment to Christ, (or rededication after having lapsed), and the front of the church was full of them. Joy was everywhere, and the vicar

was hugged by joyful, weeping people as they left. Superb hospitality, a good bookstall, plentiful food and drink at almost every event made for a very welcoming atmosphere, as did the carpeted church where robes were absent, powerpoint present, and pews had given way to flexible seating and a superb photographic exhibition in the chancel..

The follow –up, often a weak area in such missions, has been carefully planned to run a series of short courses for enquirers (including many who came to meetings as agnostics or atheists!) and others for those who are starting out on the journey of faith. The task facing the clergy team there will now be formidable.

Reflecting on the attitude of the public, I loved the pleasing northern directness, and the opportunities accorded to the church. But I noted an increasingly militant atheism and the extreme reluctance of the average person to even cross the threshold into a church, even one so attractively furnished as St. Andrews. These are hard times spiritually as well as economically, but direct preaching of the gospel remains effective. One strongly agnostic man who never went to church, was dragged along to the evening service on the last Sunday by his wife (who had been deeply touched at the morning service). That evening both joyfully professed conversion , and he told me that he had never previously heard the gospel explained with clarity and directness. That shows what a task faces the Church in England. It also shows that, valuable as courses like Alpha are, men can encounter Christ after a single proclamation of the good news.

This mission will long be remembered. The dedication of the church membership and the visiting team was tremendous, but God is the only hero!

Michael Green 11/4/11