



The Evangelical Fellowship of Congregational Churches

**CONGREGATIONAL
COMMUNICATIONS**

**Newsletter of the General Secretary
and information for the churches**

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EFCC MISSION STATEMENT

**TO BE A FELLOWSHIP OF CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES
EFFECTIVELY WITNESSING TO THE GOSPEL IN THE 21ST CENTURY**

We want to achieve this by promoting:-

- **Gospel Truth** Advancing Evangelical Christianity through Independent Churches.
- **Gospel Fellowship** Promoting fellowship and encouraging prayer, co-operation and mutual support for the churches as they witness to the gospel.
- **Gospel Independence** Bearing witness to the Scriptural principles of the autonomy of the local church and the freedom of believers in Christ.

PLANTING & WATERING (1 Corinthians 3: 6)

EFCC Leadership Newsletter (Number 58) September 2012

Dear Friends,

Some thoughts in response to 'They Have Forgotten' by Ruth Palgrave

I think most churches in EFCC will have received a copy of this booklet – it was intended to be sent to every evangelical church in the United Kingdom. Its lengthy subtitle: 'An urgent plea for evangelicals to recognise the danger of the Ecumenical Movement and remember the stand that the British Evangelical Council and Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones took against it' very well describes the content. A few comments by way of response:

1. I was fearful as to what the tone of the book would be and to the authoress' credit it is uniformly courteous and pleasant. I am very grateful for that as so much polemical writing is unpleasant in tone.
2. It is reasonable to raise questions about the accuracy of some of the details of the book as there is an over reliance on second hand information. For example the Editor of the Evangelical Times is quoted making sharp criticisms of the launch of Affinity. Having been present I wrote a reply, which was published, to say that his criticisms did not accurately reflect the meeting that had taken place.
3. The root issue is a PERCEIVED movement from the stance of Dr Lloyd-Jones, which is SAID to have allowed private fellowship but no church fellowship with those in mixed denominations, to a position which allows unity with those in mixed denominations and which it is stated will then lead to union with Rome.
4. Those of us who were around in the 1980s remember the furore about secondary separation – the belief that we must not only

separate from those in error and not have fellowship with them but also we must do the same to all who fail to separate from them. This position was never adopted by the BEC, although it doubtless reflected the views of some, and EFCC as a constituent body agree with that decision.

5. This then leaves us with the issue there are not only real gospel Christians but also real gospel churches within mixed denominations. To have fellowship with such churches is not to have fellowship with all churches, however heretical, in the same denomination nor will to do so lead to union with Rome. That doesn't mean it is right or wrong but just that some of the consequences imagined are simply imagination not reality.
6. A further significant issue is the changes that have taken place in the UK church scene since 1966 and that what we do must take notice of this. One example would be of Anglican churches church-planting across parish boundaries and the resulting churches being non-Anglican. Would this mean we could have fellowship with the church plant but not with the church that planted it? The existence and the spread of Gospel Partnerships also raises questions for us that are not simple ones.
7. Principles, and these don't change, have to be applied in constantly changing situations and Affinity is seeking to do that. Not to change in any way as the circumstances change around us gives an appearance of faithfulness that I think is deceptive – genuine faithfulness means constantly seeking to apply biblical principles in a changing landscape and the challenge of this is immense.
8. We need to constantly check ourselves as to whether we are still on course. Even if we do not agree with all this booklet has to say we need to remember the simple truth that someone else being wrong doesn't mean we are right. Affinity of course constantly needs to re-evaluate the decisions it makes – to be convinced we

are right in principle does not mean we will therefore always be right in the detail of every decision that we make.

9. The booklet does remind us of principles we share and it should be recognised that a number of those involved in leading Affinity as well as those now critical of it made significant sacrifices because of these very principles. Currently, we all need to check that we are driven by Biblical principle and not by the weariness that grabs for a pragmatic solution to life's questions.

In Christ,

Mike Plant

DISILLUSIONED WITH THE MINISTRY (4) WALKING BACK TO HAPPINESS!

Cure is harder than diagnosis when we are dealing with spiritual issues and problems. That disillusionment is a major problem for ministers is obvious and it appears to be an increasing one. Some of the reasons are also obvious and I have sought to draw some of them out in issues 55, 56 and 57 of 'Planting & Watering'. What do we do about them? Here the problem is that the answers are Biblical and have been available to all God's people since they were written down so they are in the realm of the general. In contrast, the problems are particular to our own time and culture. So my fear is that reiterating old truths will simply make people fear I have failed to empathise with the issues and to address them sensitively. The truth is that if the Bible doesn't have the answer you can take for granted that I don't - so please read and engage in the hard work of meditation and application.

Firstly: Become Convinced about What You are to Do and How You are to Do it If you aim at nothing then you stand every chance of hitting it! Here again is the list of ministerial tasks quoted in Issue 57:

1. Declaring the truth of God
2. Praying

3. Equipping all others in the church for ministry
4. Warning of error
5. Exercising church discipline
6. Helping others in the church to recognise and utilise their spiritual gifts

If you are unsure of your calling in ministry and what you should be doing then you need to work out what it is. The answer is not putting the blinkers on and working harder. If you biblically determine what God requires of you then your responsibility is to do this faithfully and joyfully. You need to work out (for yourself) how you should live this out where you are. Thus you need to become convinced of the HOW as well as the WHAT you are to do. The answer to both questions is 'prayer and the ministry of the word'. It is notable that in 2 Timothy 3: 10 – 4: 7 the answer both to equipping the 'man of God' and to enabling him to 'preach the word' is 'God-breathed' scripture. One of our problems in feeling disillusioned is that we fail to apply truth we really believe, that the Bible is God speaking to us and that this word is sufficient for all our personal and ministerial needs, which means it is sufficient for the reality of our ministry at this point of time.

Secondly: Get Real about What is Involved in Ministry Because ministers handle scripture routinely and professionally we can be blinkered about what it actually says and not absorb its raw emotional impact. The context of 2 Timothy 3: 10 – 4: 7 is 3: 1 – 9, surely one of the most bleak passages of scripture, and the context of preaching ministry is 4: 3 + 4. Take one verse in the passage and apply it – 2 Timothy 3: 12, 'Indeed all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted'. This means that you, assuming you seek godliness and obedience to Christ in your ministry will experience the bitter reality of persecution. You will be hounded, vilified, abused – disillusion with ministry often stems from its failure to live up to our dreams and never because God deceived us by not telling us what was involved.

Thirdly: Share God's Joy In Luke 15 we have the parables of the lost sheep, coin and son. The issue at the heart of the passage is that the Pharisees and Scribes failed to enter into the joy of Jesus by reaching

out to lost sinners. The parables in this chapter show that God takes joy in repentant sinners and that we act obediently by making their salvation our goal and rejoicing in welcoming them home to God. Further thinking about it, the list above tends to assume that the pastor's task doesn't include evangelism. It does include direct evangelism and also leading and structuring the church so it is increasingly missional in its outlook. For many of us it can be all too true that long years without many converts mean they are no longer our priority. So in reality we go through a ministry pattern that neither passionately evangelises nor passionately prays for the effects of the evangelism we engage in. Our sorrows are not deep nor our joys profound as a result of this wrong orientation.

Fourthly: Grow in Your Ministry I am due to speak on the subject of ministerial progress at the Ministers' Prayer Conference in November so don't want to pre-empt myself. However it is clear that the way to happiness in any area of life is joyful obedience to our maker's instructions and therefore we should be taking passages like 1 Timothy 4: 6 – 16 to heart and working out our obedience to them in detail. The training is spiritual and general (1 Timothy 4: 7), 'train yourself for godliness' and specific to ministry (1 Timothy 4: 11 – 16), 'Command and teach these things set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity ... devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have ... practise these things, devote yourself to them'. Clearly to start with a genuine calling to ministry and hence the needed gifts is insufficient and we are to commit ourselves wholeheartedly to the practise of ministry and the living out of the godly life that corresponds with this. We have an enormous responsibility to God for our own growth and development and not only will this benefit others but it is the only way we can actually and concretely work out our own salvation. 1 Timothy 4: 16 makes this clear, 'Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, of by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.' Too many of us are satisfied to keep going on the basis of what we learned at college and if we lose the thrill

and excitement of newly discovered or realized truth then our hearers will suffer accordingly. We must be thrilled to thrill them.

It is for this reason that every minister should have a self-imposed programme of Bible Reading and also of wider reading. Dr Lloyd-Jones recommended we read through the Bible at least once a year – you can use McCheyne's Calendar, you could use Don Carson's two volumes of commentary on this: 'For the Love of God' or my own Bible Reading Calendar (free by e mail) to help you with this. For systematic deeper study of scripture IVP's 'Search the Scriptures' is excellent or like me use that to set your programme and use various commentaries to stimulate and help you. In your reading you could use a commentary to study a bible book in depth or study themes such as prayer or typology. Then Dr Lloyd-Jones recommended devotional reading, such as the Puritans (or I suggest his own sermons), then we need to read theology working through all the major topics over a lifetime of ministry, then church history and biography so it stays living and warm rather than simply being a theoretical construct. Then we need to read books in defence of the faith – tackling subjects like evolution and creation, psychology etc. Then we need to read the books that will develop us pastorally – particularly recognising the fact that we need stimulus to make us think about our preaching and how it is to be worked at and honed for effectiveness. Finally we need to do the general reading that keeps us in touch with what people think. Reading Richard Dawkins is not as intimidating as he may hope.

Fifthly: Look at the Big Picture Looking at my own experience I am sure that much of the disillusionment that I experienced had to do with a failure to see what was a disagreeable or seemingly pointless duty from the perspective of my overall calling. I remember Derek Swann telling me that early in his ministry he asked Dr Lloyd-Jones about the practise of congregational visitation – he had gone to a Liberal church, no-one wanted to talk about spiritual things and it seemed pointless. Dr Lloyd-Jones told him to keep visiting because the time would come when they did want to speak about spiritual things. Very often we visit and seek to build relationships and it is slow work and we feel like giving up.

But it is the building of relationships that means that people turn to us in time of need. We need to keep that in mind when the actual activities we are engaged in seem unrewarding and pointless in the present.

Finally: Be Spiritually On Your Guard I cannot avoid the deep feeling that to be disillusioned with ministry is a perilous spiritual situation to be in. The concern I have is that the disillusion is in some way with God and his word and his providence rather than simply with the ministry. If that is the case repentance and urgent use of spiritual remedies is vital. Think deeply about the scriptures we have looked at and pray them home and pray that God may grant you recovery from a spiritually toxic condition.

CHANGING TIMES – WHAT DO WE DO?

I received an E Mail from a friend in the ministry which responds to an earlier article and asks about the right way ahead. The question comes in response to comments in the last P & W:

Talking to a friend who had been involved in a church plant in a newly regenerated area he pointed to a contrast between those under and over forty. Those over forty would attend morning and evening and midweek but might not interact socially/spiritually with anyone else in the congregation outside of formal meetings. The younger age group attended faithfully in the morning but then rarely attended in the evening and often not in midweek. However they constantly interacted with other Christians in less formal situations and 'doing coffee' and having fellowship and discussing spiritual matters was a constant pattern, which strikes me as pretty healthy.

Unlike previous churches I've attended, has a tendency for many of its members to attend only on Sunday mornings, while being keen on small-group Bible-studies and meeting with 1 or 2 others for prayer and personal accountability. As you say, this

leaves a feeling that they are not committed, which is a misrepresentation. It also leaves the Sunday evening and midweek meeting dominated by pensioners, which inevitably affects the tone and can therefore be self-reinforcing.

I've been concerned about this, as I've thought of this tendency as being, (1) individualistic, (2) consumer-orientated - "what meets my needs", (3) lacking an appreciation of the need for corporate worship of God and preaching. However, I wonder if I'm wrong, and we should accept and adapt to this tendency, and in fact one occasion of public worship per week is about right (I sometimes feel as if I'm meeting the consumer-desire of the older section of the Church by running some meetings, rather than really doing what is best for the life of the church and glory of God). Another concern I forgot to mention: that the emphasis on meeting in two or threes or small groups instead of traditionally-understood corporate worship can be fragmentary of the church. Certainly these self-selecting groups tend not to be very diverse - made up wholly of middle-aged mothers or men in their fifties or Chinese etc. We even have a group meeting together calling themselves "..... academics" and a group of "young professionals" - both of which I object to in their exclusivity.

This is a very helpful contribution and raises three major questions:

1. How do we understand the changes? Are they positive, negative or indifferent spiritually?
2. What is 'right' in the circumstances? What should we now be doing? Or what would we do if starting with a clean slate?
3. What is a helpful church response? We don't start with a clean slate so what exactly do we do to benefit and edify the church? This obviously must involve preserving its unity without which it cannot be benefitted.

My responses are provisional and it would help tremendously if others were to share their wisdom and experience:

UNDERSTANDING THE CHANGES Talking to a number of younger ministers I think they accurately perceive that ministry is relational rather than institutional. Therefore our structures which are essential for church life are not ultimate. We could be equally faithful with one main service a week as with two. If we are effectively engaging with non-Christians and presenting the gospel then we don't need a mass of meetings organised in order to help us to do so. There is however a big BUT – what about commitment to the fellowship? My concerns are that the informal 'fellowship', which people will commit to in preference to organised meetings, may only be social friendship with other Christians. Which is fine, but anyone Christian or not, generally like to socialize with people of similar age, race, and social and educational background. Additionally, to look at flaws in our inherited system, what do we make of people, of any age who regularly attend services but show no desire to relate to those in the fellowship outside of the services?

Regarding the 'Academics', 'Young Professionals' groupings I see the concern but wonder if these are seen to involve mutual support in facing similar pressures. I know Tim Keller makes a good deal of seeking to help those with particular professional problems and these groups if purposeful and focused could have constructive value.

MAKING THE RIGHT RESPONSE Only completely new churches start with a clean slate. Those leading them tell me it is astonishing how fast they develop traditions. Most of us start with two services and a formal midweek meeting. Now while I have very little experience of the situation pictured for us I have experience of a church consisting of several cultures which is relevant.

How does a church cope with an influx of people from another church culture and the inevitable culture clash? The clash might be English/African or English/Traditional Welsh or age based and it is almost irrelevant what the clash is based upon. We can cope by assimilation – those from outside have to become like those already there in order to be recognised as truly godly and truly belonging – or by adaptation – this implies that the two cultures both have to adapt

themselves and recognise what is good and bad in each culture and also what is biblically mandated and what is optional. We automatically do 'assimilation' although we may do it in the kindest possible way. How would we adapt?

A HELPFUL CHURCH RESPONSE It seems to me that a helpful church response may not simply mean we do what we would do if starting with a clean sheet. However what principles then apply? How do we hang on to a vision for the church rather than simply become negotiators between different and equally intransigent interest groups? (TO BE CONTINUED – hopefully with help and input from you)

MIKE'S ITINERARY

2ND – 9TH OCTOBER – MACEDONIA FOR BIBLE MINISTRY

Wednesday 3rd Meeting with elders at Shutka and preaching at the midweek meeting

Thursday 4th Meeting elders at Central Church and speaking and answering questions at a seminar on 'Christian Maturity' (part 1)

Friday 5th Seminar on 'Christian Maturity' (part 2)

Saturday 6th 10.00am – 5.00pm Seminar on 'The Prayer Life of the Believer' including session on 'The Importance of the Unity of Believers'

Sunday 7th Preaching at Central Church am and Dracevo Church pm + meeting with elders at Draveco Church

14th Nazeing am

28th Millbridge Evangelical am + Henley pm

4th Geneva Road Baptist, Darlington am + pm

18th Reeth am + pm

25th Morley am

FOR MINISTERS

2012 PRAYER CONFERENCE 5th – 8th November – are you coming? If so have you returned the booking form, deadline 1st October 2012

ROBINSON TRUST

Brief outline of the trust and those whom it can help below. If anyone needs help they (or someone on their behalf) get in touch with me and I can send them a form. This requires details of their ministry etc as well as details of their financial circumstances. Although the majority of our applications are considered in June, we accept applications at any time of year, as and when the need arises.

Elizabeth Lawson (Robinson Trust) ealawson@btinternet.com

Who was Samuel Robinson?

Samuel Robinson (1752-1833) was a successful architect in Hackney. He was the surveyor to the estates of St Thomas's Hospital, St Olave's Grammar Schools, the Cordwainers' Company and the parishes of St Magnus Martyr and St Margaret Lothbury. In 1812 he established a trust for the benefit of widows of Pastors or Ministers of Independent and Baptist Churches resident in the British Isles, housing them in alms houses in Retreat Place, Hackney which he designed. The Robinson's Relief Trust was created in 1833 under Samuel Robinson's will for the benefit of Independent and Baptist Ministers, either married men or widowers, resident in England and Wales. Both charities are now administered together as Robinson's Retreat and Relief Charities. The Trust Deed requires the Trustees to apply the income in relieving need either generally or individually by making grants of money or providing or paying for items, services or facilities calculated to reduce the need, hardship or distress of beneficiaries. The charity has interpreted the spirit of these terms to include women ministers, widowers of ministers, and those ministers whose marriage has been ended by divorce as well as death. There are other charities that also provide assistance to retired ministers and the widowed. Robinson's is unusual in also being

able to give assistance to serving ministers, provided that they are married men or widowers living in England and Wales. (We do not know why he excluded bachelors and Scots from his benevolence!). Despite the charity's attempts to publicize the help it can give through the moderators and superintendents, the take up, especially from serving ministers, has been low. The charity has recently sold off the building in Retreat Place that replaced the alms houses which has increased the funds at its disposal. The charity gives annual grants to those in financial need. This means that it is unable to help with longer term commitments so that, as a matter of policy, it does not pay fees for long term residential care or school fees for children. It is not allowed to relieve public funds.

Ministers approaching Retirement

The EFCC Trust Board has a small number of properties for the benefit of retired ministers which may become available from time to time. If a Minister within a few years of retirement is interested in occupying such a property, which would be let at a realistic rent with the minister claiming any needed rental support, please can they write in to the Office so that we know what their accommodation needs are likely to be and where they would be interested in living. Owing to the limited number of properties we cannot guarantee a property will be available.

PRAYER SUPPORT

EFCC Committee meeting 15th – 16th October 2012
Kings Park, Northampton

Day One Living Word Calendars –

Day One Living Calendars to be used as a tool for outreach by local churches into their communities. The Calendars are month by month with a picturesque scene + a scripture verse. Prices are £0.38 each for 50 – 99 copies or £0.33 each for 100+ copies – (40% discount).

Postage free. When distributing churches may want to attach details of their special services.

Enclosed with this mailing is a sample + an order form.

FORTHCOMING CHURCH EVENTS

If you send details to the office we will include them on the EFCC website.

SECRETARIES

Pension Information – we have received information in the office regarding pension changes, this is included in this mailing.

Insurance valuation – this has been mentioned in previous Congregational Communications, it has come to our attention that an affiliated church is well undervalued. This is an **important issue**. We are in touch with a company who do reinstatement valuations, we may be able to get a “group” rate.

With this mailing is a form to complete and return if the church is interest in being part of the “group”.

PHILIPPINES – an appeal was made due to the devastation caused by flooding, I am pleased to inform you that we have been able to transfer £1625.40 to our brothers and sisters.

They would want me to convey their heartfelt thanks for this practical expression of Christian love and support.

Devotions – we meet in the office at 9.30 a.m. for prayer, if you have an urgent prayer item please contact the office.

Dear Friends,

You will have seen the advertisements for our 10th Triennial Meeting in 2013 (in Australia) in the recent issue of Our Congregational World.

Australia is a long way from many of our member fellowships, but I encourage every fellowship to be represented if at all possible.

Some member fellowships will struggle to assist a representative (or two) to travel to Australia and the individual representative(s) may not have the resources to pay for their own expenses. Maybe some other fellowships can reach out with financial assistance to allow these brothers and sisters to join us at the Meeting.

Now is the time to consider these matters, rather than leaving it to next year. Assistance can be offered from fellowship to fellowship if a need is known, or even from an individual church to a member fellowship. Alternatively, you might like to consider forwarding a gift for this purpose to our WECF Treasurer, Bill Brandon (see OCW for contact details) - this will allow us to provide some assistance if requests come to the WECF Executive Committee. As we do not have membership fees and rely solely on donations, the WECF coffers are never very full - any donation, however small, will be greatly appreciated.

I ask that you encourage your people to consider travelling all the way 'downunder' for our 10th Meeting - we are looking forward to a wonderful time of encouragement, challenge and blessing.

Yours in Christ,

Alan Best (WECF President)

The EFCC Committee agreed to make the above appeal known to EFCC churches. If you would like to make a donation to support the above please send to the EFCC – cheques payable to EFCC, on the paperwork please ensure you mention WECF Conference support.

Closing date 30th November 2012

Thank You Anthony