

can be expressed before God (in a phrase linked to St Francis, being "naked before the naked God"), but we need human agents too, whether this is supportive church fellowships, individual Christians, a colleague, friend or spiritual accompanist. The other side of this coin is empowerment where, through the encouragement of others (and ultimately the encouragement of the Holy Spirit), we can grow in ourselves and our ministry as part of God's people, bear good fruit and 'whistle in the light of Christ'.

## DREAMING DREAMS

### Paul Beasley-Murray

*For a number of years we have been running a small café at the front of our church premises, four days a week, selling soups and sandwiches, pizzas and jacket potatoes, and a range of desserts, together with a variety of drinks. Staffed by volunteers, it's well patronised by students and seniors alike. In spite of rock-bottom prices, we make a healthy profit. The café does not have its own dedicated premises. Instead we run it in our church's 'Friendship Centre'. This has disadvantages, but one advantage is that by coming into the café, people are coming into the church itself. This summer we put on a three-course 'thank-you' lunch for the café staff, with wine as well. At the end of the meal I thanked everybody for their dedication and hard work, and made the following speech:*

I love that quotation from Joel which Peter used on the Day of Pentecost: "I will pour out my Spirit on everyone: your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams". Dreams are not just for young people - they are also for older people too. Let's spend a few minutes dreaming together.

Over the years, the work which we now call Oasis has changed amazingly. When I first came, there was 'Open Door'; then it became 'The Big Munch'; and now it is 'Oasis'. What will Oasis become, I wonder? One thing for certain, Oasis won't remain the same, for if it does, then it will die. Living things always change. Will, for instance, the day come when Oasis has a paid cook or a paid manager? This has been suggested before and been dismissed, but the fact is that there are churches which find it

useful to go this way. The other week I was at a church in Shoeburyness, and discovered they employ a professional chef.

We operate four days a week, from 10.30 a.m. to 1 pm. But some churches operate their coffee shops all day. The Oasis Coffee Shop which is part of the Baptist Church at Leigh Road is open from 9.00am until 5.00pm, five days a week.

Or do we want to be more adventurous in the things we serve? Baguettes are becoming increasingly popular. At a time when more and more people are drinking bottled water, might we want to have an Aqua Aid fountain. People's tastes are changing.

Many Christian coffee shops are also book-shops: should we consider selling books? Or if that is beyond us, what about having a book of the month which we sell?

Before we get into the detail of the future, maybe we need to ask ourselves what the purpose of the Oasis Café is? The other month, I talked about Oasis as being an expression of corporate hospitality. It is a place where we welcome people - especially lonely people, single people, elderly people. Yet I often see young people, and young families. Not everybody is lonely.

'Open Door' offered a listening service - being there for people with problems. Then the café was part of the church's social action. What we now call 'Oasis' is seen as part of the church's outreach. and in our church handbook is listed under evangelism. I find the name 'Oasis' suggestive. In a desert an Oasis is more than a place of refreshment - it is a place of survival. Travellers in the desert who fail to find an Oasis die.

But in what sense is Oasis evangelistic? I looked up one Christian coffee shop on the web. There a lady said: "People see the love of Jesus on our faces and taste it in our coffee and pastries. We may not be shoving it in anyone's face, but they can see our faith in every cup we serve, and you can't tell me that's not planting seeds". But is that sufficient? I was speaking to a woman who has just started attending our morning service, and she told me that the first time she had a drink in Oasis, she had no idea we were a church. That may seem hard to believe, but it's true. Clearly she hadn't looked closely at the menu card. But is there more we should do to indicate to people that this is a church?

*Having sown the seed of change, I distributed to our lunch guests a questionnaire, with the request that they fill it there and then.*

1. What is your dream for Oasis? How would you like to see Oasis develop over the next five years?
2. What are the present strengths of Oasis?
3. What are the present weaknesses of Oasis?
4. What one change would you like to see in the next twelve months?

*This simple questionnaire proved most effective. Although many of our helpers are of a somewhat conservative disposition, we received a host of ideas for moving forward. I commend the questionnaire as a non-threatening tool for vision-building.*

## **A JOURNEY OF DIS-EMPOWERMENT**

### **Susan Stevenson**

*Minister of Chatsworth Baptist Church, West Norwood*

#### **Two stories and some questions**

For the last 18 years I have lived and worked as pastor of a south London Baptist Church. Among a congregation of 200 or so, we have about thirty different nationalities and many more different cultures. At times it's been tough: constantly negotiating difference and seeking to interpret people to one another is exhausting. So why keep battling on, when less diverse situations seem to thrive?

#### **A story that inspires: the Azusa Street Revival.<sup>131</sup>**

In May 1870, in the bayou country of Centerville, Louisiana, William Joseph Seymour was born. In this centre of Ku Klux Klan violence, as a black man, any education Seymour got, he found for himself. As soon as he could, he left the south in search of greater freedom and by 1906 he was in Los Angeles, serving as a pastor and preacher. These were times of intense spiritual searching, and in April of that year a spiritual breakthrough occurred in the prayer group Seymour led. One of the group, Edward Lee, "burst

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<sup>131</sup> For this section I am indebted to Richard Foster's '*Streams of Living Water* (HarperCollins, London, 1999).