



Conference 2008 - Senior Minister's Address

“Stretch out your hand”

I'll begin with a Celtic prayer:

*You are my hiding place, O Lord.
You know me by name.
My thoughts and deeds are seen by you,
and their memory brings pain.*

*I come to you with a tear-worn soul,
I come to you in grief.*

*I need the love from your loving heart,
that I may be at peace.*

*Reach out, my Lord, and touch my soul
and cleanse me from my sin.
Reach out and draw me from the dark
and let your love-light in.*

*Your love that fills my soul with joy,
that makes the wild wind sing,
in cleanness, brightness claim my soul,
my loving heavenly King. Amen*

Two years ago my theme for conference was 'The Heart of the Matter'. I will remind you of the Lord's words in the book of Deuteronomy which I read to you at that time.

'If you seek the Lord your God, you will find him if you look for him with all your heart and with all your soul.' Deut. 4:9

'And now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.' Deut. 10:12

And the words that appeared on the front of the programme:

'Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.' Deut. 8:2

We looked at where our hearts were, how connected they were with the Lord, whether we were following his commands to love him and to love our neighbour or whether we were going our own way.

Last year the theme was 'Breath of Life'. We focused on breathing, taking in the breath of life. We linked the heart
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**A new logo
drawn by
Eric Robson.**

But what for?

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and lungs at the very centre of our bodies, our heart the power house, our lungs the purification plant.

'By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, their stary host by the breath of his mouth.' Psalm 33:6

We imagined the dry bones in the valley in Ezekiel's vision having new life breathed into them, taking in God's word of truth and living from it [Ezekiel 37]. We heard the Lord saying, *"Peace be with you!... Receive the Holy Spirit."* John 20:21-22. The heart and lungs working together affect the rest of the body.

So this year the theme is *'Stretch out Your Hand'*. The heart and lungs renew our bodies, allowing them to live out the commandments of our Lord to love him and our neighbour. We can do that when our hearts are attuned to the Lord and we are breathing in the Lord's truth, at one with heaven. Our whole body is affected by what is going on within. We can focus on our hand as a representative of our body, as being there to carry out what we wish, what we will. When we do anything we almost always use our hands. We use them to reach out to serve ourselves. Think of what you have done this morning, washed, dressed, had breakfast. What could you have done without your hands? We reach out our hands to others and also to the Lord.

One of the joys of meeting at Conference is getting to know each other and that is just what we did last night. We met in groups, talked and shared about ourselves. I wonder how many people you have met and spoken to already and shaken hands with. I invite you now to stretch out your hand to the people near you. Shake hands with them.

I invite you during the rest of this week when you meet anyone, to stretch out your hand and shake hands, make contact. It's a closer contact than talking about yourself. You can feel the other person: you actually touch. I remember as a young girl, a certain minister who had a strong grip. I still wonder why he crushed your hand until it was numb. You didn't forget it... How did your handshakes feel?

In Apocalypse Explained 839 we read, *'The angels of the third heaven know the quality of a person from the touch of their hand'*. I wonder what qualities you took in from the hands you shook. You might like to reflect on that during the week when you shake hands.

We reach out to each other, because God reaches out to us. I would like to read from Isaiah 41:9-13

*I took you from the ends of the earth,
from its farthest corners I called you.
I said, 'You are my servant';
I have chosen you and have not rejected you.
So do not fear, for I am with you;
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.
**I will strengthen you and help you;
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.***

***For I am the LORD, your God,
who takes hold of your right hand
and says to you, Do not fear;
I will help you.*** [Bold added]

Four and a half years ago my husband Dennis died. A few days afterwards I went to a service at Accrington, where a woman, whose husband had died a few months earlier, spoke to me. She reached out to me and we felt at one. It was lovely that her son reached out comfortingly to my son also, sharing how it was for him to lose his father.

I received a bereavement card on which a friend had written, *'The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.'* Deut. 33:27. These words sank deep into me, upholding me. Eight months later my sister died following a heart operation. I had been fearful. I had not wanted to lose my sister, who had supported me after Dennis's death. It was as if my life had fallen apart. I was in the pits. And yet during that time I had a strong sense of the Lord holding me in his arms keeping all the pieces together. I knew deep down that all was well. Arms are even more powerful than hands.

It is good for us to acknowledge what the Lord does for us. In the Psalmist's words, *'My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me'*. Psalm 63:8. We can entrust ourselves to the Lord's hands, *'Free me from the trap that is set for me, for you are my refuge. Into your hands I commit my spirit.'* 31:4-5. The Lord reaches out to us and in our need we can reach out to the Lord, knowing that his hands and his arms are there for us holding, strengthening and empowering us, for without him we are nothing.

In the Bible we read of people stretching out their hands to do things other than help. Abraham in his obedience to the Lord stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son Isaac. An angel of the Lord led him to act differently. The brothers of Joseph took hold of him to kill him. Reuben said to them, *"Don't shed any blood. Throw him into this cistern here in the desert, but don't lay a hand on him."* Reuben said this to rescue him from them and take him back to his father.' Genesis 37:22. We can hold our hands out to each other in friendship or we can lay hands on each other roughly with intent to do harm.

When Jesus was in Gethsemane people laid hands on him not in a loving, caring way but to hand him over to the authorities to destroy him. We need to be restrained from using our hands with ill intent.

In Matthew's gospel we read,

'When you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.' Matthew 6:3

'And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.' 5:30

Our hand can reach out for good but it also has the power to harm. We really need to be aware of where our actions are coming from, and what is guiding and leading our heart. Jesus reached out his hand many times to heal people and to bring them back to life.

'A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately he was cured of his leprosy.' 8:23

'When Jesus came to Peter's house, he saw Peter's mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever. He touched her hand and the fever left her, and she got up and began to wait on him.' 8:14-15.

Whilst he was speaking one time, 'A ruler came and knelt before him and said, "My daughter has just died. But come and put your hand on her, and she will live."... When Jesus entered the ruler's house and saw the flute players and the noisy crowd, he said, "Go away. The girl is not dead but asleep." But they laughed at him. After the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took the girl by the hand, and she got up.'
9 :18, 23-25

And we have the occasion highlighted on the front of our programme from Mark's gospel.

Another time he went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, "Stand up in front of everyone." Then Jesus asked them, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they remained silent. He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored. Mark 3 :1-5

Let us be aware of the power of stretching out our hands. If you are sitting next to someone in distress, you might reach out and gently touch them, possibly hold their hand to give them strength in their need. Let's be sensitive, since not everyone likes to be touched.

How do I stretch out my hand? I see myself as a visionary not a pragmatic person. I thought that I could give a spiritual lead to the church. Yes, I could give a key note address at Conference, and after that I could visit each area picking up the theme in a workshop. The church would be ablaze with it and it would carry us through the year. We would have something to share in common. It didn't happen. I didn't go to the area secretaries and tell them I would like to do this, are you interested?

So what did I do? I took services about once a month. I responded to what needed to be done - interviewing and reporting on new candidates for ministry and monitoring their progress, instituting processes such as mentoring to support ministers, being a link between groups such as the governing council and the committee of ministers.

How do you stretch out your hand to one another within the church and beyond?

At Conference we are going to be looking at lots of new ways in which we might not only reach out to each other in the church but reach out to people in new ways beyond. Our call is not just to ourselves and not just to each other but to the whole world. When Jesus prayed to his Father in Gethsemane [as we read in John's gospel chapter 17], he prayed first of all for himself, then he prayed for those whom his Father had called to him, his disciples. Lastly he prayed for those in the world who would be called. Our mission as a church is not just to each other. It is to reach out by joining other groups and by sharing our interests with others who might be drawn to join in, whether in



baking bread, running a café or artwork. In the next session, we will be encouraged to look at new ways of reaching out. This afternoon we shall have the opportunity of reaching out to the children on a nature walk.

On Thursday afternoon we shall have our ordination service and there we will witness the laying on of hands as Christine Bank is ordained by the Revd Robert Gill. Why do we lay on hands in ordination? The hands correspond to power and the laying on of hands symbolises the transmission of the Lord's power to one who is about to take up his ministry in a new and orderly way.

The key to the use of our hands is the union of the heart and lungs, of the goodness within with the truth we have learnt. They combine in our living a life of service and use to each other. Let us be embodiments of God. Let him be formed in us in our souls, minds and bodies. Let him be incarnated again in us. I am reminded that Jesus said to the woman at the well in Samaria, *"A time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth."* We can all worship in spirit and in truth wherever we are and whatever we are doing. We do not have to have a building to go and worship in. We ourselves can be temples of the Lord. He can live in us and we can worship him. Let our bodies be temples of the Lord, and let us use our bodies in his service, carrying out his will.

I invite you to shake hands with one another again, but to do so this time, being aware that the person whose hand you are shaking is a temple of the Lord. The Lord is in that person. When you shake hands and look at them, you might reflect on what you are receiving from this person. I invite you to forget yourself and what you might be offering them. Shake hands and reflect on what you are receiving from them, from the Lord, in them.

There is just one more way I would like to stretch out my hand and that is in blessing.

'The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious unto you. The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.'

Rev Mary Duckworth
Senior Minister

This is the second part of a presentation given at Conference by Rev Christopher Hasler on the subject of Divine Providence. The first part of the talk was printed in the August issue of Lifeline.

First Law: Each person should act from freedom and reason.

Have you noticed how many religious movements impose strict uniformity on its followers in dress, hairstyles, worship, eating and drinking, various rituals, but above all in thinking. Submission in these things 'proves' the people's faithfulness. With it also comes the power to control the believers. Need I remind you - this is human thinking, and has nothing to do with God's desires

On the contrary, for a very good reason, our Creator made us all different and that means that each one of us has a unique relationship with Him. In that sense, we can quite rightly feel that He really is **my** Father as He is no one else's. It is as if each one of us had our own secret with Him. We surely know all this from our relationship with our children. Each one is quite different and unique.

Yet the Lord does not force any one of us to be part of a regiment of uniform toy soldiers all marching in step. His relationship with us ought to be more intimate than that. Because He truly respects our uniqueness into which He created us. He desires that each one of us should "*act from freedom and according to reason*". What a liberating thought that is!

Second Law: Each person should remove evils from his outer actions because they are sins.

The old idea, that if we put out faith in the Lord as our Saviour, He will remove all sins and evils from our life. We shall be 'saved'. This is strictly not true at all. To do so, would be like removing part of our memory (or brain) and then we would not be who we are. The Lord has absolute respect for our unique personality, which is endowed with varied talents. We might even say, that our Creator has respect not only for each one of us individually, but also for that unique potential in each one of us which distinguishes us from everyone else – even if we never develop all our talents. He will never desire for us to be zombies, but always free spirits who respond to Him and become active in the use for which His love created us. As He has respect for us, so should we have respect for our own personality and its extraordinary potential. No, there will be no brain surgery or any controls implanted into our brain. We shall never become Daleks! We shall be free in mind and body to be truly 'ourselves', and so feel responsible for our actions.

But we need to show that we wish to cooperate with the Lord and continue to remove evil, sinful thoughts and actions from our life.

Third Law: A person should not be compelled by external means to believe the things of religion, but should persuade and compel himself.

In all these laws, our freedom is always preserved and protected. There ought to be no indoctrination, or any forced repetitions of endless creeds. We are creatures of inner freedom and reason. And we cannot be converted by threats or punishments. Once the pressure is removed, we emerge into the light of freedom and reason. We are human beings created in the image and likeness of God, never His mindless puppets.

Fourth Law: A person should be taught and led by the Lord alone from heaven by means of the Word, doctrine and preaching, but to all appearances as by himself.

In all our dealings with us, the Lord allows us to think for ourselves, although He inspires truths and ideas, but we have to do respond to them and accept them into our heart, mind and life. This respect for our freedom and rationality shown towards each one of us by our heavenly Father is truly astounding and wonderful. It should give us self-respect and confidence and increase our desire to grow and more into His image and likeness.

Fifth Law: A person should not perceive and feel anything of the operation of the Divine Providence, but still should know and acknowledge it.

There is that wonderful incident in the Gospel of John, first chapter, when the Lord was forming the group of His first disciples, and Philip brought Nathanael and when Jesus saw him, He said, "*Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!*" Nathaniel was surprised and said to Him, "*How do you know me?*" Jesus answered him, "*Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.*" Nathanael was astonished and realised that he was looking at the Son of God.

A strange little incident, and a very moving one. The Lord knows all about each one of us, yet allows us to be free, without any sense of being under continuous scrutiny. But if we are wise, we shall acknowledge in our heart that the Lord knows everything about us. That watchful presence is for our eternal protection and ought to be a source of comfort and inner peace. Made all the more wonderful by the fact that Jesus tells Nathanael:

"Because I said to you, 'I saw you under a fig tree', do you believe? You will see greater things than these. Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." John 1.50

Heaven opened and angels of God ascending and descending.

We are quite a modest Church. Not given to demonstrations and ecstasy. In that we are true to our teachings, which suggest that when we are caught up in

great movements and perhaps fall under the spell of some eloquent speaker, we could easily lose our freedom of thought and even reason. Our freedom and reason are the Lord's greatest gift which makes us truly human. That does not mean that we are left on our own. We have intimations of truth, which may be manifested as doubts, to help us to change our mind, though it feels we are doing it 'as of ourselves' – meaning, "I want to do this!" But always there is that underlying respect for every individual's inner freedom of thought and feelings which are necessary to the independent mind.

The Lord has appeared to me from far, saying: "I have loved you with everlasting love; therefore with loving kindness I have drawn you." Jeremiah 31.3

It is how the Lord treats every one of us. With true love which would never destroy our humanity which resides in our inner freedom to think and to love as we wish. It is how the angels relate to us, always with respect and in deep love.

As far as the world is concerned, we are enslaved on every side: economically, politically, morally, and above all spiritually. Atheistic doctrine is a form of rape and we need to recognise how all these pressures are taking our inner

freedom of thought away. We must resist it, and turn towards the one book which can restore our courage, freedom and individuality. In **Divine Providence** the Lord lays all His cards on the table and says, "This is how I deal with you; how I have always dealt with you and all my children."

United Study of Divine Providence

Is being prepared and you are warmly invited to join it individually or in groups. Lessons each month will be available through **Lifeline** and also via the internet - as this is more and more widely available. If you haven't access, there will surely be someone in your Society and study Circle. If all that fails, turn to your grandchildren! The young generation is skilled in these matters!

But always bear in mind, this is how the Lord reveals Himself to us, so that we may understand both Him and ourselves, and our own place, nay importance, in creation. Let us come close to Him in this revealed knowledge, which is one of the great treasures for all the children of our heavenly Father.

Rev Christopher Hasler

United Search for Divine Providence

AN INVITATION

Dear Friend,

You are warmly invited to take part in a new course of study of the work *The Divine Providence* published by Emanuel Swedenborg in 1764. This is a wonderful book which clearly explains how the Lord's Providence operates both in this world and then to eternity in the spiritual world.

We live in an age which can become very violent and dangerous and people ask, how a God of love can allow so many horrors to go on age after age. The book faces all these difficult questions and answers them clearly. In fact many of these difficulties have surprisingly clear and simple answers. After all the truth is usually quite simple!

How to join? There are two ways in which you can take part in this study, whether you will be doing this by yourself or in a small group. *Lifeline* will publish each lesson in full from October. The notes will also be available on the *Lifeline* web-site together with a means for asking questions or making suggestions.

This is an exciting venture for the New Church in Britain, and hopefully overseas also. It is in our interest to understand more clearly how the Lord's constant care provides for us each moment of our life on earth and at the same time respecting our freedom of choice.

Please use these facilities which the General Conference is providing for all those who would like to take part. *Lifeline* will begin to publish the actual lessons from October. You will also need a copy of the book: *Divine Providence*. Some paperbacks are under £5 from the Swedenborg Society.

Please consider this invitation prayerfully. It is our privilege as members of the New Church to be able to share this marvellous revelation of the way the Lord's provides for our every moment of life now and to eternity. How much such knowledge can help in this uncertain and divided world!

Christopher Hasler



Conference 2008 - Report

Conference is always a challenge and this year's Conference was no different. There was the physical challenge of a demanding and busy programme of events, of plentiful and excellent food, of a very hot start to the week and of making contact with friends from the past and new friends for the future. But there was also the deeper, inner, spiritual challenge arising from what was heard, seen and felt – to leave our comfort zone and take up the Lord's challenge: *And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me."* Isaiah 6:8

The short reports of Conference 2008 that follow can only give a glimpse of both the physical and spiritual challenges involved but hopefully it will also convey something of the excitement, activity, emotion, thoughtfulness and peace involved.

Monday 28th July

After the preliminaries of registration and signing the roll there was Opening Worship led by Rev Esther Bryne. Esther considered the situation with people who don't stretch out their hands, giving as an example Pontius Pilate who simply washed his in a bowl of water. The service was followed by messages of greetings and then an Extraordinary General Meeting which formally adopted the 'Pledge of Commitment' presented at last year's Conference.

In the evening there was a 'Getting to know you' session where everyone was encouraged in small groups to learn something about the other people present. Then to close a very hot day there was worship led by Gordon Kuphal. Gordon used as his text the story of Samuel's call and he gently reminded us of the need to listen carefully for the Lord calling us.

Tuesday 29th July

Opening worship on the Tuesday morning was led by Geoffrey Bentley with Jonathen Morell, age 12, at the piano. Geoffrey took as his theme the command to take up your bed and walk. It was later remarked that Geoffrey was celebrating 50 years as a recognised worship leader.

After the service the Senior Minister, Rev Mary Duckworth gave a talk entitled '*Stretch out your hand*'. This is printed on page 1 of this issue.

Following a break for coffee Rev David Lomax, Principal of the New Church College, led a presentation on '*The changing face of ministry*'. He explained that he would be talking not so much about the ordained ministry but about how the church could minister to its local community - how it could 'stretch out its hand' in changing times.



Stephen Russell-Lacy

After a brainstorming session on what ministering means he introduced 3 clips from a DVD '*Fresh Expressions*'. He explained that this DVD had resulted from a study undertaken by the Anglican and Methodist churches into identifying fresh expressions of being church.

The first clip was called '*Taste and See*' and was about an initiative in Kildgrove to establish a church within a coffee shop. This was seen as a means of taking the church to the people rather than expecting the people to come to the church.

The second clip was called '*Messy Church*' and involved a large monthly activity event for children in the Portsmouth area. The children came together with some family members to enjoy a range of practical craft activities followed by a very brief family style service and then a meal.

The third clip '*Mind the Gap*' explored the setting up of 'cells' of small groups of people in Gateshead to talk about their faith and life issues. As each cell grew it divided and a new cell was formed. Once a month all the cells came together for corporate worship. Use was made of the Alpha Course as a means of bringing new people into the cells.

After each video clip we were invited to discuss in small groups what struck us about the fresh way of being church that was described and what we particularly connected with or got excited about. Later in larger groups we looked at the question of what these clips said about our own congregations or the organisation generally and about the whole issue of ministry.

After lunch there was a Bible Study on Matthew 12:1-14 which covers the account of the disciples eating heads of grain on the Sabbath and Jesus healing the man with the withered hand, also on the Sabbath. The study took

place in groups of 6-10 people with a leader and the text and some notes were provided to help the process. As is frequently the case in group discussion a wide range of observations and insights were drawn from the text.

Following a break for tea, there was a choice session with a Nature Trail in the grounds for children led by Margaret Presland and a talk by Stephen Russell-Lacy on '*Feeling good about oneself from a Swedenborgian perspective*'. Adults were also invited to go along on the nature trail and to get in touch with the Lord through the natural creation. Stephen talked about many of the themes contained in his new book *Heart, Head and Hands* recently published by Seminar books.

The final session of the day was a further presentation by Rev David Lomax, this time on the work of the College or Swedenborg Open Learning Centre (SOLCe). He started by saying that Stephen Thomas of Bournemouth had now received a certificate in New Church Education. He then went on to present certificates to Christine Bank - a graduate certificate showing completion of her course prior to ordination; and diploma certificates to Jack Dunion and Helen Brown.

preparation for the Passover; John 4:4-30, the Samaritan woman at the well; True Christian Religion 700, the real benefits of the Holy Supper. The focus of Christopher's address was to show us how we might see these passages as speaking to us now as we gathered to celebrate the Holy Supper, how we might properly prepare for it and what blessings we could receive from the Lord through taking part. It was a beautiful service put together and led with great feeling and thought.

Wednesday 30th July

Opening worship on Wednesday was led by Phillip Brooks who used a passage from Proverbs 6 about a slug and an ant to show us how we must overcome any sluggishness in our lives, both physical and spiritual.

Then it was the Report of the Treasurer, Nigel Sutton. His message was straightforward and simple - we are living beyond our means. Nigel explained that not only were we operating in a difficult economic climate affecting the country as a whole and individuals as well we had reached a position in Conference where



Christine Bank

Jack Dunion

Helen Brown

Rev David Lomax

David then described the approach now being made to revise the scope of training at SOLCe and three examples of this were given through the personal statements of Christine, Jack and Helen. Christine talked about her preparation for ordained ministry and what it meant for her to be starting out soon on that life. Jack showed a brief video reading of a wonderful poem entitled 'Broken Open' by Jude Simpson and then talked about where he saw his focus needed to be in practical social care and filling a spiritual void. Finally Helen talked about her journey to ministry and how her vision of creative spirituality was developing. Towards the end of this session David Lomax showed how training was changing with regard to the balance between awareness (heart), knowledge (head) and skills (hands).

At 8pm we assembled for the Holy Supper service celebrated by Rev Christopher Hasler and assisted by Rev Esther Bryne together with four lay servers. The key readings during the service were Luke 22:7-13, the

expenditure had expanded by 15% and income reduced by 13% so that there was an operating deficit in 2007/8 of £281,981. Of course much of the increased expenditure was good news associated with a renewed Purley Chase and an increase in students for Ordination. But income had gone down because of reduced gifts and donations from Churches and individuals as well as a reduction in investment income. In the recent past the sale of property, particularly closed Churches, had offset deficits but this approach could not continue into the future as it would markedly reduce the availability of capital for new investment in growth areas. But the key issue is that we simply cannot go on with these huge deficits.

The questions and answers that followed centered on the need for expenditure to be prioritised and giving to be increased.

After the coffee break the Chairman, David Sharrock,

presented the Report of the Governing Council. In talking to the report he highlighted a number of key items:



David Sharrock

- Line management of ministry would be undertaken by the Chief Executive for organizational matters and the Senior Minister for spiritual issues.
- The Executive had been expanded with the addition of Helen Newton, Training and Development Officer.
- The scheme of link members on the Council had been extended to members of the ministry so that in any key area such as Education there was both a Council member and a minister who allocated as a link person.
- There had been an increased use of information technology to simplify correspondence and the movement of documents within the organisation.
- The Conference web site was being substantially enhanced.
- The Open Day at Purley Chase in June 2007 had been a wonderful occasion with 350 people attending. The new programme had now become established and was proving very successful. It was particularly interesting to note that there were now substantial sales of books, CD's and other materials in the shop.
- Jan Millar had completed a series of visits to Churches to consult about short and medium term needs and ambitions.
- Meeting the requirements of the Charity Commission was becoming increasingly onerous – for example the Charities Act 2006 now requires a charitable body to be able to demonstrate public benefit.

- Helen Newton, Training and Development Officer, had already achieved a great deal in her role with the establishment of a programme of workshops, the first on 'Walking the Labyrinth' and the second on 'Symbols, Cycles and Soul', and the production of new resources including an entirely new book written by Helen and Becky Jarrett.
- A mentoring scheme for ministers was now being established.
- The transfer of the assets of the former Missionary Society to a Conference restricted fund had now been completed.
- Rev Norman Ryder was continuing his excellent work of maintaining and extending his contacts with New Church organisations and individuals around the world.
- Sylvia Fay and all others involved were thanked for their work in maintaining the production and distribution of the weekly Home Worship.

At the end of David Sharrock's review he invited Conference to appoint Jean Chambers as an Honorary Life Member. Following a unanimous vote Jean then spoke briefly of her gratitude in receiving such a wonderful honour.



Michael Hindley

Jean Chambers

The session on the Governing Council report had continued past lunch and was then followed by a session led by Helen Newton on '*The Church in the World*'. Helen spoke initially about the cultural gap that now existed between spiritual seekers and the external church and how could this gap be bridged? She then introduced three people to give their personal experience or 'story' of church in their lives.

Lara Nicholls spoke about her experience as a child at Purley Chase and what she had gained from it and how she was now experiencing joy in seeing her own children taking part in Purley Chase activities.

Jan Millar described her early life in the Anglican Church and her late arrival in the New Church some 10 years ago at the age of 47. Her earlier dissatisfaction had arisen from the way Communion had been explained to her but she had found its celebration in the New Church a most meaningful experience which had changed her life.

Kathy Brooks described her ancestry in the New Church and how she grew up in a family that moved around the country and experienced different New Church approaches to worship. She met her future husband at Purley Chase and ultimately settled back in her spiritual roots at Keighley where she became intimately involved in the move to new premises at Braithwaite.

We then moved into groups of about 8-10 people to discuss these 'stories' and our own experiences of church in our lives together with the rituals and routines involved and the symbols by which the church is known. Groups were encouraged to review all these expressions of church and then highlight what seemed essential.

Following a break for tea we re-assembled for a further series of three personal presentations on 'fresh expressions of church' similar in vein to the video clips presented by Rev David Lomax on Tuesday morning.

Thelma Wilson talked about she left the Anglican Church in 1992 and found the Preston New Church which rapidly became her new spiritual home because of the warm welcome she received and an inspiring sermon by Rev David Allsopp. She soon got involved with training for worship leading and was baptised into the New Church. As decline set in at Preston she became more and more involved and has now helped the group move into a new rented hall with new technology and new possibilities of worship. She referred to this as "a new tent of worship".

Rev Dick Keyworth described his work at Auckland in New Zealand, as providing as many gates as possible for people to enter the church. So the emphasis was on a range of approaches to worship and small groups offering skills and practical help to people in the community.



Sally Ross and David Gaffney open the 'Bit of a do'

Helen Newton then spoke about an internet based ministry (visit: www.swedenborgiancommunity.org) provided by the Swedenborgian Church of North America. The web site effectively creates an online experience of church for people anywhere. The mission statement for this enterprise includes the words - "We aim to create a community where our members are known to each other, where they feel free to share openly their personal journey of faith, and where they feel nurtured and supported in their walk with the Lord."

We then returned to our groups for a second phase of reflection aimed at discovering what fresh expressions of church we might be able to offer. As with the session the previous day on 'The changing face of ministry', this was a deeply challenging session. Some groups felt able to report back with positive suggestions for going forward but others felt they needed more time to reflect and consider the implications both organisationally and personally. However there was a clear view that the process of considering and developing fresh expressions of church needed to be continued and undertaken at local level.

The evening meal was followed by a 'Bit of a Do', hosted exuberantly by Jan Millar, during which there was a wonderful outpouring of talent in singing, playing,



One of the many items during the 'Bit of a do'

drama, speaking and dancing. Peter Schofield then brought everyone quietly together for closing worship emphasising the challenge to listen for the 'still small voice' (1 Kings 19:12 KJV) and to respond to the Lord's calling with 'Here am I!, send me' (Isaiah 6:8).

Thursday 31st July

Nigel Sutton led opening worship on Thursday with the backdrop of a large picture of his late but much loved dog Murphy. He compared the tendency for a dog to go off and do its own thing and get into trouble with the way we do much the same thing. But with the Lord leading us and in control we are far less likely to make mistakes.

"I will go, Lord, if you lead me. I will hold your people in my heart."

Rev Robert Gill then introduced the Report of the Committee of Ministers during which he highlighted a number of issues including the following:

- Consideration was being given as to how to improve communications between the Ministers' Committee and the Governing Council. One suggestion was to appoint a Deputy Senior Minister but at the moment alternative solutions are being considered.
- There was a need to revise the curriculum under which ordination training is carried out by the New Church College on behalf of Conference. There is a desire to increase the range of options available to students for ordination but this implies a possible reduction in the 'core' curriculum which needs very careful consideration.
- Procedures and guidelines have been established for the appointment of Lay Pastors. These are seen as a possible way forward for some Churches and a pilot scheme of 2/3 lay pastors is proposed to see how it goes.
- The Committee for Auxiliary Ministry continues to be very effective in increasing the number of well trained and capable auxiliary ministers and the Ministers' Committee strongly affirms and supports the work of Auxiliary Ministry. This year there has been a further increase in the number of celebrants authorised to perform sacraments and ceremonies. This is seen to be particularly important in the area of funerals and resurrection services which inevitably happen at short notice and for which ordained ministers are becoming less available.
- The Ministers' Committee have considered a Report of the Homosexuality Study Group but have come to the view that it is not a suitably finished piece of work able to be published to the wider Church. This is a very complex issue to work through since it involves theology, pastoral care, the organisation and increasingly the law.

The questions and answers that followed this presentation majored on the issue of the Homosexuality

Report and the need for both urgency and thoroughness in bringing the study to a conclusion.

After coffee Jan Millar presented the Report of the Committee for Auxiliary Ministry. She recalled that last year Conference experienced the very moving award of 'medallions' to recognized worship leaders and she had much joy in announcing the presentation of 4 more this year to David Sharrock, Peter Schofield, Janet Jessop and Kathie Freyhan. These four worship leaders came forward to receive their medallions and a blessing from Rev Mary Duckworth, Senior Minister.

At this point Geoffrey Bentley was invited to come forward to tell Conference something of his experience of becoming a recognised worship leader in 1958. This proved to be a very amusing insight into how recognition took place 50 years ago.



Geoffrey Bentley

This was followed by Madeleine Taylor who described how the Committee for Auxiliary Ministry (CAM) came into being from early developments in 1985 and establishment in 1989. CAM has provided opportunities for training in worship leading, group leading and pastoral care although most training has been in worship leading. The Ordination in 1996 of Rev Mary Duckworth, the first woman minister for Conference, gave a great impetus to the development of auxiliary ministry. Jean Mrozek then described how she had taken over from Madeleine and how the team had tackled the issue of few people coming forward for training to be recognised as a worship leader.

The final session on Thursday morning was a



Rev Christine Bank

Emily Bank

Geoff Bank



All the ministers present gather together after the Conference Service

presentation on Divine Providence by Rev Christopher Hasler. Part one of this talk was published in the August issue of Lifeline and part two appears in this issue on page 4.

The highlight of Conference came on Thursday afternoon with the Conference Service and the Ordination of Christine Bank. For this service we moved from our conference hall to the nearby Chapel which was perfectly suited to the occasion. The Worship Leader was Rev Mary Duckworth with the Address being given by Rev Robert Gill. The ordination was conducted by Rev Robert Gill with assistance from Rev Christopher Jackson. The Director of Music was Barbara Fordham and the pianist David Glover.

The congregation ranged from the very young (two babies just 3 weeks old!) to the much older and at the beginning of the service all the ministers present together with Christine Bank processed to the front of the chapel as the choir and then the congregation sang the Taizé chant *'Bless the Lord, my soul'*. The first hymn was *'Immortal, invisible, God only wise'* and then after prayer Rev Rita Russell invited all the children present to come to the front and look at some pictures of uniforms - postal worker, soldier, nurse, policeman among others and to try on some of their uniforms. She then talked about a minister's uniform and in particular the 'stole' which she described as a yoke linking the minister to Jesus. Then everyone sang the popular children's song *'My God is so big, so strong and so mighty'*. After the children went off for activities linked to uniforms the

Ordination part of the service commenced with the Lord's prayer and a song chosen by Christine – *'Jesus take me as I am'*. Rev Robert Gill then led Christine through the profession of faith and duty and then ordained her into her ministry by the laying on of hands. Then there was a moment of affirmation from her colleagues in ministry who had gathered around her and then greeted her one by one. After this Christine's family were then invited to greet her and finally Robert presented Rev Christine Bank to the congregation and they walked together to the back of the chapel and then returned.

As her first role as newly ordained minister, Christine read Luke 10:1-12 (Jesus sends out the seventy-two).

The choir then sang an anthem *'I will praise you'* written and composed by Christopher Pickett and based on Psalm 138 after which Rev Robert Gill gave his Address *'Labourers in the Harvest'* (this was printed in the



Rev Christine Bank presented to the congregation by Rev Robert Gill

August issue of Lifeline).

Following the blessing of the offertory and closing prayers and blessing the choir sang 'The Lord bless you and keep you' by John Rutter. As the ministers left the chapel everyone joined in that wonderful hymn of encouragement, trust and confidence 'I will go in the strength of the Lord'.

After a break for tea there was a presentation on 'Purley Chase reaching out' and then a session on the New Church Youth Association. After the evening meal a choice of sessions was offered: Rev Michael Stanley talking on 'A change of heart and terminology', the AGM of the New Church Historical Society, and the opportunity to join in Sacred Dance.

Friday 1st August

Friday morning began with a period of quiet meditation to beautiful music provided by Barry and Ruth Friend.

During the following announcements it was reported that the Conference Offertory had amounted to £3067.

The final session of Conference then took place with Helen Newton talking about the new resources becoming available for reaching out to others. In this session David Glover talked about his work in updating the Conference web site and he urged church members to make sure that new events were regularly added to the web site. Helen then described the new course that had been developed by Helen Brown - 'Nurturing the Soul'. A pilot course has been held and it includes 16 sessions using music, meditation, art, prayer and reflection as well as the writing of a journal. Helen then concluded by describing the Soul Symbols workshops which were now taking place.

During the Conference Review two subjects came over

as most important. Firstly there was again discussion on the need for the Report of the Homosexuality Study Group to appear as soon as possible. Secondly it was recognised that this Conference was a wake up call about children. There were lots of children at Conference including their parents and grandparents. Hilda Johnson and Tanya Osborne were thanked for their work looking after the small children and many people wanted a subsidy again next year for children and their parents. However it was generally thought that the Family Worship sessions had not adequately included children, indeed there wasn't a single children's song used. Additionally there was little in the Conference Hall for children.



Hilda Johnson caring for children

Conference 2008 concluded with a beautiful and moving service led by Rev Christine Bank.



Pictures from Conference 2008

To view a larger selection of pictures from Conference go to

www.new-church-lifeline.org.uk

Then click on Image Library and follow the instructions. You should find a folder called Conferences and within that Conference 2008. If you would like a high resolution copy of any picture go to the Contact page to email the Editor.

Lifeline

Contributions should be sent to the Editor, Alan C Misson
27 Woodland Way, Shirley, Croydon, CR0 7UB Tel: 020 8777 5098 Email: alanmisson@btinternet.com

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