



All Age Gathering

(see page 15)



Lifeline

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new church

Lifeline



God is Love

Twelve Key Teachings



Home

Welcome to the 'God is Love' web site

God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.
[1 John 4:16 ESV]

This web site presents Twelve Key Areas of Teaching found within the Theological Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg and provides a regular blog on related subjects. Each area or Key Teaching together with its introduction can be found in the appropriate drop down menu. Individual articles within each area can be found from the menus which will open to the right of this.



We hope that you enjoy reading the contents of this site and that in the process you may discover new insights that will be of help to you in your own spiritual journey.

Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him. [Revelation 1:7 ESV]

God is Love

WordPress

July 2012
Number 411

Our mission is to express, share and experience with others in life an inclusive, non-judgmental vision of God's kingdom.

Conference 2012 - Programme Summary

Monday 23rd July

- 14.30 Signing of Roll
- 15.30 All age Family Worship – Rev Clifford Curry
- 16.30 Greetings, in memoriam & business
- 16.45 Our Church in a changing culture - Rev D Lomax, Rev M Stanley, Mr S Russell-Lacy
- 19.45 Extraordinary General Meeting - Mrs Zoe Brooks
- 20.15 Statement from Committee of Ministers
- 21.00 Evening worship - Mr Phillip Brooks

Tuesday 24th July

- 09.30 Family Holy Supper - Rev Bruce Jarvis, Rev Christine Bank
- 10.20 Keynote address - Rev G Gordon
- 11.15 Unity in diversity & question time - Rev Michael Stanley, Rev David Gaffney, Rev Bruce Jarvis, Rev Jack Dunion, Rev Mary Duckworth; chaired by Mr Alan Misson
- 14.15 Any answers - Rev Helen Brown
- 16.15 Vision session - Rev D Lomax
- 19.45 Choice session or free time
 - Spiritual Geography - Mr Alan Bowie
 - Conjugal Love - Rev D Gaffney
 - Meditation - Rev Helen Brown
 - New Church Children's Society AGM
- 21.00 Closing prayer in choice groups

Contents

Conference 2012 - Programme Summary	2	Without a parable He did not speak to them	10
The Spiritual Olympics	4	God is Love - a new website	13
Describing the Indescribable	7	All Age Gathering at Bournemouth	15

For the current issue of Lifeline, back issues and other resources visit:

www.new-church-lifeline.org.uk

All Age Gathering at Bournemouth

On Saturday April 21st we had our first All Age Gathering at Bournemouth New Church. Our theme was touch. We were warmly welcomed with tea and coffee. Some had travelled a fair distance to be there.

47 children and adults enjoyed a fun-filled day. Mr Potato Head made an appearance in our first worship – helping to show our five senses. We then had two sessions before a delicious shared lunch. The adults were led in a Bible reflection while the children, with adult support, did a variety of activities involving touch – clay modelling, playing with cornflour and then some flubber (which was enjoyed by both children and adults alike!), hand-printing leaves on a tree and on a large piece of paper, writing our names next to it. Making beautiful cards was a very popular activity as was making cookies and the topping for an apple crumble. We were kept very busy!

After lunch we used our sense of touch trying to guess what was in ten feely boxes. We got rather sticky and messy!

This was followed by a fun hour playing team games before we all watched a short drama by the older children on Jairus' daughter. The day concluded with worship.

Over a final cup of tea and tasting the cookies we all agreed we'd like to do it again. (We have another four senses to go!)

A very big thank you to the Bournemouth Church for their hospitality and to all those who made the day such a success.

Lara Nicholls

New Church Children's Society

The Annual General Meeting of the New Church Children's Society takes place on Tuesday July 24th 2012 at 7.45pm at the Hayes Centre Swanwick during the annual Meeting of The General Conference. All are welcome to attend.



From the Writings ...

In the spiritual world, where space is only apparent, wisdom causes presence and love causes union, and the reverse. There is an acknowledgment of the Lord from wisdom and there is an acknowledgment of the Lord from love. Acknowledgment of the Lord from wisdom, which in its own right is only a kind of knowing, comes from a belief system. Acknowledgment of the Lord from love comes from living by what that belief system teaches. This latter brings about union, the other brings about presence. This is why people who reject beliefs about the Lord move away from him; and if they also reject the life, they cut themselves off from him. If they reject only the life but not the beliefs, they are present but still cut off. They are like acquaintances who talk with each other but have no love for each other, or like two people when one talks cordially with the other but is still an enemy, full of hatred.

Divine Providence 91:2

In every person after death, love for the opposite sex continues to be what it was like inwardly, that is, what it was like in the person's inner will and thought in the world. All a person's love goes with him after death, because love is the inner being of his life. And the dominant love, which heads the rest, remains in a person to eternity, along with other loves subordinate to it. These loves remain, because love is properly an affection of the spirit in a person and is felt in the body from the spirit. And since a person becomes a spirit after death, he consequently carries his love with him. Moreover, since love is the inner being of a person's life, it is apparent that a person's lot after death becomes such as his life was in the world.

As regards love for the opposite sex, this is universal in all people, for it is implanted from the moment of creation in a person's very soul, from which comes the essential nature of the whole person, and it is implanted for the sake of propagating the human race. This love remains especially, because after death a man is still a man, and a woman is still a woman, and there is nothing in the soul, mind, or body which is not masculine in the male and feminine in the female; and the two sexes have been so created as to strive for conjunction, indeed, for conjunction in order that they may become one. This impulse is the love for the opposite sex which precedes conjugal love.

Now because an inclination to conjunction has been engraved on each and every element in the male and female, it follows that this inclination cannot be wiped out or die with the body.

Conjugal Love 46

Wednesday 25th July

09.30 Family Worship - Rev Helen Brown
10.00 Report of the Committee of Ministers
11.15 Report of the Treasurer
12.00 Report of the Council with discussion
14.15 Report of the Council continued with discussion
16.15 New Church Youth Association
17.00 Ballots & Motions
17.30 Debate on One Member One Vote (OMOV)
19.45 Social
21.15 Evening worship - Mrs Becky Jarratt

Thursday 26th July

09.30 Family Worship - Rev Gillian Gordon
10.00 All Age Day & Families
10.35 Who will do it? Mrs Judith Wilson
11.15 SOLCe
12.00 CAM
14.30 Conference Service - Rev Jack Dunion
16.45 Purley Chase
17.00 Debate on the future of the Church - Mrs Kathie Brooks
18.15 South African trip - Rev Clifford Curry
19.45 Choice session
Historical Society
Sacred Dance
Film 'Heaven, Hell & Other Places'
21.00 Evening worship - Rev David Gaffney

Friday 27th July

09.45 Workshops
10.15 Children show what they have done
10.45 Break for Coffee
11.15 Conference Review & Votes of Thanks
11.45 Chairman's closing remarks
12.00 Closing Family Worship - Rev Mary Duckworth

Rev Christopher Jackson

It is with great sadness that I report the passing into the spiritual world of our much loved minister, Rev Christopher Jackson. A memorial notice will appear in Lifeline shortly. **Editor**

The Spiritual Olympics



In the run up to the London Olympics, it seems appropriate to examine the Olympic Games from a spiritual point of view. To do this, we will think about three athletics events, the 100 metres sprint, the middle distance 1500 metres, and the marathon. First we need to investigate the spiritual meaning of “running”. Part of the resurrection narrative in John’s gospel reads as follows:

Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. [John 20:3,4]

Now 'running' means some leaning or inclination towards something (Arcana Coelestia 3131) so we can assume that an Olympic athlete has an inclination to doing the best they can in their event. Also, 'walking' means making spiritual progress (Apocalypse Explained 97) so we can think of 'running' as making better spiritual progress. In the verses from John’s gospel, the other disciple, who is John, signifying the works of charity, outruns Peter, signifying faith, because the works of charity bring us closer to the Lord than does faith on its own.

Now let’s consider the three races. The 100 metres is the shortest, fastest race of all. With top athletes competing, it is all over in less than 10 seconds from gun to tape. It starts with an explosion of effort, accelerating for the first 30 metres or so to maximum speed. The remaining 70 metres is spent trying to maintain form and not slow down, but most athletes do get a bit slower towards the tape. The winner can be thought of as the one who fades least rather than the one who runs fastest. However, the winner is often described as the “fastest man on earth”.

Now think of the unfolding of a 100 metres race. Long before the race start, each athlete will physically prepare themselves by doing a warmup, when they stretch and lightly exercise their muscles to avoid injury. They will also mentally prepare themselves by visualising the race itself. Then they have to get into the stadium and go through the ritual of setting their starting blocks and being introduced to the spectators. All these preliminaries take considerably longer than the race itself but the 10 seconds of the race is what all the other activities are about. Without proper preparation, the athlete is not giving him - or herself the best chance of success.

So what spirituality lies behind all this? On the positive side, we can see that the athletes well motivated to do well and, once the race has started they get to the finishing line as quickly as humanly possible, that is, they make a small amount of spiritual progress in a very short time. For the winner, there is the glory of receiving the gold medal, but all the other competitors have also made spiritual progress, whatever this means to each of them.

God is Love - a new website

In March 2009 I wrote a proposal for a new website to follow on from the Spiritual Wisdom site but to cater for a rather different audience - those for whom 'church' and theological language were not barriers to taking on board new ideas. Such a site could present New Church Teaching in a more traditional Christ and Bible focussed setting.

The proposal suggested the site should have the domain name www.god-is-love.org.uk and should be developed around Twelve Key New Church Teachings.

I invited members of the Ministry to join with me on the project and a small group was soon established who worked together for about a year on the teachings that the group considered as 'key'. Eventually this led to an agreed structure for the website and then work commenced on producing initial content. At this stage in the middle of 2010 four people were working on the project: Rev Robert Gill, Rev Ian Russell, Alan Bowie and Alan Misson.

One year later sufficient initial content had been produced that we were able to turn our attention to the design of the site itself. Originally I had planned to produce the site in the same way as Spiritual Wisdom but having attended the Writer’s Weekend at Purley Chase in March 2011 I realised that I needed to change technology and develop the site with Wordpress and incorporate a regular 'blog' as part of the site. Finally the site was launched on 1st May 2012.

God is Love can be found at:

www.god-is-love.org.uk

Currently the site has at least one article for each of the Twelve Key Areas of Teaching and more are being written by members of the team. And as of the publication of this issue of Lifeline at the beginning of July 2012 there are 7 posts in the blog.

Alan Misson

Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.
[1 John 4:8 ESV]

God is Love Itself and Wisdom Itself, these two making up his essence.
[Emanuel Swedenborg in True Christian Religion 37]

the Olympics. We shall not take someone else's place, since the Lord loves us equally and is far more anxious than an earthly trainer that we should get a gold medal! But there is a similarity between preparing ourselves for heaven and going for gold in the Olympics, because there has to be constant practice, constant correction of smaller and larger faults. We must not give up or stop!

In one sense, the Lord may sound very harsh: "If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you!" Now here is determination. And the effort must not stop after everyone has gone home from the Olympics. The training must go on daily, even hourly sometimes. The hells can be very subtle, and we shall not always recognise their way of encroaching and insinuating into our thoughts and desires. Then think of the Lord, the true and loving Trainer, who loves you and has your eternal happiness constantly before Him. When we grasp this, we shall also realise that His command is neither harsh nor in any way exaggerated. We do need to cut off those things which drag us back into the material world with its many attractions and faults. All the Lord asks of us is that **we should be in charge of our life!**

"If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you, for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell."

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ our heaven Father we thank you for your revelation of the inner meaning of your Word as it teaches us about the spirit within the letter. We are also grateful that you could reveal so clearly the inner meaning of your parables. The spiritual sense of your Word is no longer hidden, but shines in all its heavenly glory. Help us to tune in to your Word with greater understanding and thankfulness. Open our hearts and minds so that we can draw on the infinite resource of your infinite love for each one of us. Amen.

Here is a quote from our doctrines, from Arcana Caelestia 4637

All the details mentioned by the Lord in His parables represent spiritual and celestial qualities in His kingdom, and in the highest sense Divine qualities in Himself; and anyone who does not know this cannot make anything out of the Lord's parables other than ordinary comparisons, which hold nothing deeper within them. The details in the parables, in their outward form, look like such ordinary comparisons; but in their internal form their nature is such that they fill the whole heaven. This because the internal sense is contained within every detail; its spiritual and celestial content spreads like light and flame throughout the heavens; and this sense is utterly superior to the sense of the letter, flowing from every phrase and word, and indeed from every letter.

Rev Christopher Hasler

I suggest that the spiritual progress is the same or similar to someone who is a church goer that is initially very enthusiastic and perhaps tells everyone that on a specific day and time he or she was saved by Jesus. This they feel is all they need to know, and they simply continue to live the same way as they lived before they were saved. It must be a wonderful feeling, that you have been saved and all your sins washed away, but is it realistic? Our misdemeanors are part of us. They can be forgiven but not removed altogether – ever. It's only when we repent each sin individually that the Lord helps us to marginalise it.

So the 100 metres sprinter is a good starter and represents a good beginning to our own spiritual journeys as we progress through life on earth.

Do you remember the 1500 metres race at the Moscow Olympics? It was won unexpectedly by Seb Coe. Coe was favourite for the 800 metres but blew it, finishing 2nd. Steve Ovett was favourite for the 1500 and had won the 800.

The 1500 metres race is much more tactical than the 100. 3¼ laps of the track in about 3½ minutes gives plenty of scope for trying to outwit the other competitors, and also for self-doubt. All runners will have a "plan A" which is their ideal way of racing. The problem is that all the other competitors also have a "plan A" and they could all be different. Most "plan A's" usually end in a sprint over the last 150 - 200 metres, but sometimes tactics are such that someone makes a long strike for home from 400 or 500 metres out. In the race in Moscow, the East German Straub knew that Coe and Ovett could outkick him in a sprint finish, so he tried to outfox them by slowing the race down for two laps then running faster than normal for the rest of the race, trying to sap all the energy in their legs.

Every athlete needs to have a variety of race plans to cope with several eventualities. Dare I go to the front with more than a lap to go? When do I start my final sprint? A lot of thoughts/ doubts /fears can go through your head in 3½ minutes!

Of course each athlete goes through a warmup and mental preparation to increase their heart rate and gain confidence so that they are absolutely ready for the race. They will each rehearse their "plan A" in their mind's eye, aware that it may have to be altered or abandoned depending on what others do.

It's clear from this that middle distance races like the 1500 metres are won by thinking athletes who have their own race plan and are capable of reacting to the tactics of other competitors, as well as having an immense amount of talent. But what does this all mean spiritually?

Each 1500 metres runner is intent on winning the race just as a 100 metres sprinter wants to win. But how the race is run is totally different. Instead of blasting out of the blocks and going as fast as possible, as in the 100 metres, all the athletes cannily watch each other in an attempt to work out everybody's plan A's while executing their own plan A's. This makes for fascinating watching.

I also suggest that the spiritual 1500 metres runners are thinking people who continually seek to understand the world about them, making decisions and learning new truths as they progress through their lives and able to progress faster when required. Never satisfied with the knowledge and understanding they have, they seek to gain more and try to learn from every race, every situation in which they find themselves.

The marathon is the longest race in the Olympic Games. The distance run was fixed at 26 miles 385 yards (42.195 km) in 1921 as the distance run in the 1908 Olympics in London. The name Marathon comes from the legend of Pheidippides, a Greek messenger. The legend states that he was sent from the battlefield of Marathon to Athens to announce that the Persians had been defeated in the Battle of Marathon which took place in August or September, 490 BC. It is said that he ran the entire distance without stopping and burst into the assembly, shouting We have won, before collapsing and dying. Mass participation marathons are very popular nowadays with upwards of 30,000 participants. Fortunately not many finishers collapse at the finish like Pheidippides!

Every runner completing a marathon is totally exhausted at the end. This is what a marathon is all about - endurance and determination. The world best times are 2h 3m 15s for men and 2h 15m 25s for women. In 2005, the average marathon time in the U.S. was 4 hours 32 minutes 8 seconds for men, 5 hours 6 minutes 8 seconds for women.

Tactically, the marathon is much more straightforward than the 1500 metres. Top athletes like to run the second half faster than the first half, the so-called negative split. Potential winners will try to stay with the leading group but some will run at their preferred race pace, checking each mile time as they pass the markers. For most marathon runners the objective is to finish the race no matter what, so their tactics are not to go too fast at the start. This corresponds to the determination to cope with every situation in which we find ourselves.

Throughout our lives good things and bad things happen to us. We have to learn to enjoy the good things, not taking them for granted, and deal with the bad things so that we can put them to one side and not let them interfere with our lives. The marathon runner, by virtue of the long distance they have run, is well placed to do this both physically and spiritually, making steady but unspectacular progress towards the finish, and towards heaven.

Finally, I ask you, what kind of spiritual runner are you? Are you the sprinter, progressing in short, sharp bursts? Are you the 1500 metres runner, thoughtfully progressing at different speeds as the situation demands? Or are you the marathon runner, progressing steadily and surely but determinedly? Perhaps you are a combination of two of them, or all three? Whatever kind of runner you are, the Lord is there as your spiritual trainer, helping you along the path to heaven.

Alan Bowie

Perhaps we should remind ourselves first that most of us are “right-handed”. We do the most important things with our right hand: we write with it, do some very delicate things with it and in a sense express our personality with it. Perhaps the nicest thing is when we offer our right hand to a friend and shake his or her right hand! It expresses our desires and love. The left hand, in most cases acts as a helper to support and express our emotions and loves, to complete our wishes.

Our hands, and especially our right hand are our ‘instruments’ by means of which we express so much of what we are, or what we wish to say.

Now back to that rather harsh saying of the Lord, **“I your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you, for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.”**

What is the Lord really saying to us? He is really asking us to consider just how much we are really in control of our life. We often have personal desires, which, if looked at seriously, may in themselves be quite wrong: and we know they are wrong! It is our responsibility to decide whether to go ahead. It is simply the Lord’s way of saying, “No you must not do this! This is dishonest, because you will be cheating somebody. Or you are about to vent your anger at someone you feel has cheated you. You are not really sure! But your desire for revenge will not solve anything!”

The Lord is saying to us, just do not go ahead, take the steam out of your boiler, cut off those immediate reactions, let your anger or burning desire fizzle out.” And yes, we can see that the Lord’s words are very accurate: you can cut off all the power (or the steam) from your inner desires. That is very accurately described as “cutting your right hand off” - without that anger, or greed, the power of your hand is gone. But of course, you have not lost it: on the contrary, you are now in a better control of it!

“If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you, for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.”

If you stand back, as it were, from the whole situation and examine what is going on, you realise that the Lord is talking to you ‘person to person’. In no way is He speaking to us from on high, from a throne in heaven! That is why He became incarnate, so that He can be close to us, on our side; and if we can grasp it, He has placed Himself on equal footing. He is reminding us of our human responsibilities and strongly implying: “You can do it!”

We are now approaching the Olympics and there are hundreds, nay thousands of trainers all round the world who are telling their charges, “You can run a little faster! Jump higher! Swim with greater determination!” But of course, our eternal life - our attaining a place in heaven - is way above the value of a gold medal in

Without a parable He did not speak to them

I invite you to think about parables. In Psalm 78 verse 2 we read:

I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old.

In the gospel of Matthew 13.34, this verse is recalled:

All these sayings Jesus spoke to the multitude in parables, and without a parable He did not speak to them, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: *I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things kept secret from the foundation of the world.*

In the New Testament there are some 40 stories which might be called 'real' parables, like The Sower, Weeds, Lost sheep, Good Samaritan, The Prodigal Son.

However, the quote from Matthew suggests that the Lord, in whatever He said, was speaking in parables, so that we cannot take His words literally in any passage.

Therefore the Lord was not simply making up some stories, using examples from ordinary life, but was actually saying something quite directly to each one of us today. He put it very strongly in Matthew 5. 30: **"If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you, for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell."**

Now that does not sound like a parable, but it must be included in the list of those things which the Lord said which had a higher, or spiritual meaning. And I believe most people have taken it as a saying which has a deeper and personal significance: we do not see churches full of people without their right arm! And rightly so.

Let us get closer to the meaning of the Lord's commands. Our arms, hands and fingers are merely finely attuned instruments which enable us to put our desires into action: think of a pianist playing his or her heart out in lovely music; or a very busy man who at last has time to eat his sandwiches! But when we see a lovely painting, we do not praise the artist's fingers which actually painted that picture, but we admire the artist.

Important as our hands and arms are, they are the last manifestation of our will and personality. So what exactly did the Lord mean when He said, "If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you."?

Describing the Indescribable

Last year at the Annual Meeting I gave out a sheet as part of my SOLCe presentation. I chose twelve descriptions of the church and asked people to select any that they personally connected with. I received seventy-one of these sheets back and below are the results. I've grouped descriptions together, based on how many people chose them:

Description	No of times
A safe place where people can build relationships based on care	
A place where people gather to worship God	50 +
A group of individuals committed to their own and each other's	
A home for spiritual seekers	
A body transmitting the doctrines of the New Church	
A gathering of followers of Jesus Christ	43 - 45
A group of explorers travelling together on a spiritual journey	
A place where questions of faith can be asked and examined	
An embodiment of Christian values in a practical way	33 - 36
A group of people sharing a common heritage and set of beliefs	
An organisation in decline	19 - 21
A charity and limited company with financial and other assets	

Making sense of these results is a matter of interpretation and is almost bound to be subjective, so I'm aware that other people may have very different reactions to my own. In compiling the descriptions initially I was aware of wanting to look at various aspects of the church and to see how important those present at the Annual Meeting considered those to be. (I am taking those present as a representative sample of the General Conference - that may or may not be the case, but I feel that I have to work on that basis). For instance, some of the descriptions I used are about what might be considered a traditional view of the church, whether from a specifically New Church or a more general Christian

perspective. Others at least offer the possibility of a more consciously open or innovative approach.

I also included two descriptions which looked specifically at the General Conference as an organisation or institution. As you can see above, they came bottom of the pile. To some extent, that wasn't a surprise to me. However, I think it's worth noting that this was the case when those attending an Annual Meeting were polled. One might expect that those attending such a gathering would be tuned into the organisational aspect of matters, but it appears that only a minority were. (It is possible that I "skewed" the results in some way by the precise wording I used. I talked about "an organisation in decline", which may have made it difficult for some people to connect with this. If I had said "an organisation with rules and other structures" this might have proved more popular).

Coming back to the Annual Meeting itself, there is a question that this begs for me. If it is the case that only a minority of people at our Annual Meeting are focusing on the organisational aspect, how do we go about looking at what our organisation does and where it is going? I have also wondered if this result demonstrates one part of why it might be difficult to find people willing to stand for the Council, as the Council deals with all aspects of the organisation as an institution.

Moving up the above table, the next two descriptions were selected by around half the people filling in sheets. I had some very specific thoughts about each of them when I chose them. I put in "sharing a common heritage and a set of beliefs" because this is my impression of what our church has become. However, it doesn't look like this to a good number of people. The reason I chose to put this in is that I wonder to what extent we are aware of how difficult it may be for other people to take on our "heritage" or "beliefs". The majority of people within our organisation have known each other for many years, often a lifetime. When that happens, it *can* make it very difficult for other people who have not been part of that shared experience over many years to come into this environment. I wonder if we need to be more aware of this and the fact that this comes lower down the list may support this. On the other hand, this may not be as much of an issue as I think it to be.

What I was thinking of in relation to the other description in this grouping has two levels to it. I have been thinking over the last year or two about the need for teachings and the values that emerge from them to come out in practical living. One aspect of this is the idea that what we hear in church or read on our own within the church's teaching needs to affect our daily life. Another aspect might be that the church as a body encourages, facilitates or even carries out some type of work that directly affects people's lives on a practical level. Historically, members of the New Church have been very much involved in issues such as

child education and readers of Swedenborg were influential in discussions which contributed to the abolition of slavery. It seems to me that we have lost a sense of this type of approach over time, for whatever reason or reasons. I have wondered if there is any appetite for any collective re-discovery of this part of church life or whether it is best left to individuals.

I don't propose to look at the rest of the descriptions individually. However, I'd like to encourage people to look at the results and also to consider the following. I've already indicated that some of the descriptions were formulated to reflect traditional attitudes or practice. Others (in my mind at least) lean towards a more "person-centred" approach. As one example of this, looking at *questions* of faith may be very different from focusing on or presenting doctrines which may be seen as having *answers*. Perhaps you'd like to look for yourself and see if you can see this difference in emphasis. If you *can* see such a difference, you may also like to consider how each approach is represented in the top eight.

To some extent, writing this article follows on from other items in *Lifeline* over the last couple of years. Becky Jarratt sent out a vision questionnaire and published the results in January and February 2010. Alan Misson also wrote a two-part article on "church" published in December 2010 and January 2011. In addition, I'm aware of articles by Alan Bowie (November 2009), Richard Lines (November 2010) and Pauline Grimshaw (October 2011).

It seems to me that there are a number of threads which run through these contributions, which are re-affirmed by what emerges in the above results:

1. Because some of the "forms" of church we are used to have been influenced by historical and cultural factors, they are not *necessarily* going to be attractive or successful in the society in which we live today.
2. As Alan Misson put it, "church" (or "ecclesia") "exists where good affections and true ideas are brought together in loving service for others". In the above results and in the responses to Becky Jarratt's questionnaire there is a balance between the church's teachings (with references to doctrines and sharing our ideas) and fellowship (emphasising relationships and care for others).
3. It is difficult for us to know exactly what the church may need to evolve into not only in order to survive but in order to thrive and to continue to make a positive contribution to the lives of people in this era and into the future.

Rev David Lomax