

"As I was ... so I will be"
[Joshua 1.5]

These are the reassuring words we read together at our recent half-yearly Church Meeting. They were originally spoken to Joshua as he prepared to lead God's people into the land the Lord had promised to give them. They reminded us that ...

Looking back gives us confidence to face the future

As Joshua stood by the banks of the River Jordan, on the threshold of the Promised Land, he was able to remind himself of God's amazing track record. Joshua had witnessed the remarkable miracles God had performed on behalf of his people - first, to deliver them from slavery in Egypt; and then to provide for all their journeying needs as they edged their way slowly to the Promised Land. So it was inconceivable that, having taken his people this far, God would now abandon them! "I will *never* leave you nor forsake you," God assured Joshua. The Lord committed himself to go ahead of his people, to enable them to take possession of the land he had promised to give them.

Similarly, as we look back on all the remarkable things that God has done amongst us at Durham Road over the past two years, it gives us fresh heart to be confident about the future he has in store for us.

- **231 different people have worshipped with us at Durham Road this year - so far!**
- **6 people were baptised** earlier this year, and others have recently made enquiries about being baptised. A new series of baptism and church membership classes will be starting this month, on Mondays 7.15-8.15pm.
- **15 new members** have been added to the fellowship since the middle of last year, and a further person has recently asked for a church membership application form.
- **Over £2000** was raised from within the church for our annual Thank Offering this year, 15% up on the figure for last year.
- **We have received £8,500 in grants** for the work at Durham Road this year, in addition to our £6,000 Home Mission grant for supporting the ministry.
- **Many new ventures have started up** over the last two years.
 - Our monthly **International Fellowship Tea** enables us to hear what life is like for God's people living in other parts of his world.
 - Our weekly **International Drop-in Centre**, monthly **International outings**, and weekly

International Bible Study Group, cater for those from overseas.

- We have enjoyed our monthly '**Food and Fun for all the Family**' evenings which successfully make contact with people in our local community.
- Our **Rock Solid Club** reaches local 11-14 year olds, and we also now run an **under-14 football team**, which plays in the North East Churches' Indoor 5-a-side League on Saturday mornings.

As we look back on all the remarkable things God has done amongst us over the past two years, it gives us to believe he has an exciting future for Durham Road Baptist Church! "As he has been, so he will be."

We can point too, to some very specific recent answers to our prayers.

- ⇒ We have been praying for the Lord to bring **new families** to the Church. And so we have been delighted to welcome William and Claudia Nkombo, from the Congo, with their young children Marlene and Terry; and Rashida from South Africa, with her daughter Yasmin. We pray they will feel at home amongst us, in the Lord's family at DRBC.
- ⇒ We have been praying too for **a young female** to help with our Rock Solid Club. So imagine our delight when the Lord brought us Naomi Brain to fulfil that role, a recent graduate in Youth and Community Studies from Durham University!
- ⇒ We have also been praying for an additional **musician** to assist with our Sunday worship services, particularly on the two Sunday evenings each month when we are without a pianist. Imagine our further delight when we discovered that Naomi's flat-mate, Helena Simmonds is able and willing to fulfil that role for us!!

Could God have brought us this far, only to abandon us now? That would be inconceivable! Looking back on all that God has done amongst us gives us confidence to believe he has a bright future in store for us.

"I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."
[Jeremiah 29v7]

One of the giant mobile telephone companies came up with the slogan, "The future is bright because the future is Orange" for its initial advertising campaign. We could adopt that slogan to read:

The future is bright because the future is God's!

But if looking back gives us fresh confidence to face the future, ...

Looking forwards makes us realise how much there is still to do

In Joshua's day, God's people were told that they would be given the land God had promised them (vs 2,3,6). But they were also told that they would be given it *as they took possession of it* (v11,15). They would be given it *as they advanced into it* (v3). The land wouldn't be given up easily by its present occupants. So the Israelites needed to be able to call on people who would be prepared to *fight* to take possession of all that the Lord wanted to give them (v14).

Today, our fighting is done on our knees in prayer (2 Cor 10.3-5; Eph 6.18; Col 4.12). And as we look to the future, we realise there is much still to do until we have taken possession of all that the Lord wants to give us.

- There is plenty to do **physically** with the 19th century buildings we have inherited, to make them fit for the 21st century. We are in the process of arranging a meeting with a local architect who will be able to advise on the best way forward. A recent estimate for the work needing to be done on our buildings came up with a figure of around £180,000! Please continue to pray that we will be given wisdom and clarity as we seek to be good stewards of the resources God has placed in our hands, both material and financial.
- There is much also much to do **financially**, and not simply in connection with our refurbishment project. We are amazed at the Lord's wonderful provision for our needs so far this year. We had anticipated that by the end of September we would have had to draw £5,500 from our reserves to balance the books. But incredibly, *our income exceeded our expenditure* by £120 over the first nine months of the year! We praise God for the generosity he has put into the hearts of his people, both within our fellowship and from outside it. We are immensely grateful for the grant of £7,000 that has been promised us by Home Mission for 2004, to help sustain pastoral ministry in the Church. But our aim should be to reduce our dependency on Home Mission funding over the next five years or so. We would hope for an increase in rental income, once our premises have been refurbished. There is great demand for office space and meeting room space in central Gateshead, and we continue to receive a steady stream of enquiries for use of our building. We should also look forward to continuing numerical growth over the coming years, and this too should result in an increase in revenue.
- Time didn't permit me to share any **attendance** statistics at our recent Church Meeting. Whilst there is much cause for thanksgiving, there is certainly no room for complacency. 96 different people worshipped with us during October: 12 adults from other churches, plus 64 adults and 20 children/young people (a new monthly

record) for whom DRBC is their only church connection. Nine of these adults and nine of the children/young people were with us for the first time. But our *average* Sunday attendance figures for October were no higher than those for the same month last year: we averaged 37 at our morning services (37 in 2002); 27 at our evening services (28 in 2002); giving a total of 51 people worshipping with us each Sunday, on average (53 in 2002). This is the first month there hasn't been a year-on-year rise in our average attendance figures. We must continue to pray for a greater consistency in people's attendance and a greater retention rate amongst newcomers.

- There is clearly plenty to be done **evangelistically**. On average, about 50 people worship with us each Sunday. That's up by two-thirds on two years ago. But 8,000 people live in Bede Ward, the local government ward the Church is situated in. And there are a further 8,000 people living in each of the adjacent wards, Bensham and Saltwell. This means about 25,000 people live within a mile of the Church building! The parable of the Lost Sheep reminds us that as long as there is just one sheep outside the safety of the shepherd's fold, that one lost sheep is the shepherd's priority. May we continue to have a missionary concern for the thousands of people living so close to the Church building, who as yet are separated from their rightful Shepherd, who gave his life up in death to save them. We haven't fully 'occupied the land' until all have been gathered into Christ's kingdom.

As we look to the future, we take great encouragement from the past. The Lord says to us, as he said to Joshua, "*Be strong and courageous, be bold and obedient* (v7). And I will continue to be with you to prosper you, and grant you success in what I am calling you to do for me."

Information Update

Here are a few more items that were shared at our recent Church Meeting, for the benefit of those who were unable to attend.

- ✓ **Sarah Xu Ji** - approved for membership.
- ✓ **Lewis Wilson** - re-elected as a deacon.
- ✓ **Northern Baptist Association** - details shared of the Autumn Assembly taking place at Whitley Bay Baptist Church, Saturday 22nd November.
- ✓ **Christmas Programme** - Carol Morton will be co-ordinating our own in-house 'Shoe Box' appeal, to provide a Christmas gift from the fellowship for those who worship amongst us from overseas. Further details of our Christmas programme will be given next month.
- ✓ **India 2004** - At the invitation of the India Rural Evangelical Fellowship, the Pastor will be teaching and preaching in India from 27th Jan - 11th Feb 2004.

David Hunt