

## ***A Happy New Year to you all!***

Around 80 people receive this News Letter each month by e-mail, in places as far apart as Singapore and Peru, the United States and India. So let me take this opportunity to wish *all* our readers, near and far, a new year full of the Lord's richest blessings, as we walk our lives day by day in his company.

A new year means a new start for us all. But first, let's take a moment to look back on some of the wonderful things God did amongst us during 2003.

## ***2003 Revisited***

### ➤ **Baptisms and new members**

- For many of us at DRBC, the highlight of the year was the Baptism service held in June - the first for over a decade! We gave God all the glory and praise as five Iranian men and one Nigerian woman testified to their new-found faith in Jesus Christ.
- In addition, four other people were received into membership during the course of the year: one Chinese woman, one Ghanaian man, and a British couple, who had spent several years in Africa as missionaries! God is making us ever more international in our mix of members. The additions bring the total number of new members over the last two years to 16, for which we give God all the praise and glory.

### ➤ **Attendance figures up**

- Over the course of the year, **262 different people shared Sunday worship with us** at DRBC (*compared to 254 in 2002*). 60 adults and 7 children (*96 and 10 in 2002*) were visitors from other churches, leaving 153 adults and 42 children (*121 and 27 in 2002*) for whom DRBC was their only church connection.
- The average **Sunday morning** attendance over the course of the year was 35 (*30 in 2002*). On four consecutive Sunday mornings towards the end of the year, the attendance exceeded 40, including 46 for our Christmas all-age service.
- The average **Sunday evening** attendance over the course of the year was 29 (*23 in 2002*). Not surprisingly, the baptismal service, held in June, was the best attended service of the year, with over 100 present.
- Between the morning and evening services, **on average 52 different people worshipped with us each week** (*significantly up on the figure of 42 for 2002*).

- Attendance at our **midweek meetings** was steady at around a dozen, the same as for 2002.

Once again, a remarkable feature of those who attended the church during 2003 was their wide-ranging **international mix**. On some Sunday mornings, half of those present originated from overseas. We enjoyed welcoming people from 17 new countries: Angola, Belarus, Burundi, Canada, Czech Republic, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guatemala, Kenya, New Zealand, Norway, Rwanda, St Lucia, Somalia, Tunisia, and Uganda. These were in addition to the 18 countries represented in 2002 (*Albania, Azerbaijan, Brazil, China, DR Congo, Croatia, Germany, Guyana, Inner Mongolia, Kosovo, Latvia, Nigeria, Russia, Singapore, South Africa, Taiwan, the USA, and Zimbabwe*).

### ➤ **Children and Young People**

- 51 children aged 7-11 years attended our **Friday Club** during the year (*20 in 2002*), with an average weekly attendance of about 8 (*slightly lower than in 2002*). Our numbers were somewhat disappointing during the second half of the autumn term. So we should pray that they will pick up again in the early part of this new year.
  - 58 young people attended our **Rock Solid Club**, for 11-14 year olds, during the year (*30 in 2002*), with an average weekly attendance of about 10-12 (*about the same as for 2002*). Many of the young people who attend the club come from very difficult home backgrounds. During the second half of the autumn term, some of the more disruptive young people stopped attending the Club (either at their own initiative, or at the leaders' directive!) and the quality of the Club nights improved markedly.
  - The vast majority of the children and young people attending these clubs are from a non-church (and in many cases socially deprived and/or disturbed) background. So it has been particularly encouraging to see sixteen of these non-church children/young people attend a Sunday service at some point during the year, although none are attending regularly - yet! Pray on!!
- ### ➤ **A Growing International Work**
- As well as continuing with our monthly **International Fellowship Teas** and weekly **International Bible Studies**, 2003 saw the introduction of monthly **International Outings** to local places of interest and the commencement of a weekly **International Drop-in Centre**. Both

these new initiatives benefited generous grants from The Community Foundation, for which we are most grateful.

### ➤ **Amazing Financial Provision**

- We continue to be amazed at the Lord's remarkable provision for our financial needs. At the time of writing, it looks as if our *weekly offering* target of £192 will be well exceeded. Up to the end of November, offerings were running at around £210 per week.
- We have also been blessed with *gifts* totalling £2,500 from friends outside the fellowship. Such generosity leaves us feeling very humble - as well as most grateful!
- Projections indicate that our total *income* for 2003 will be about £4,000 higher than we had anticipated. So with our *expenditure* keeping well within budget, our deficit for the year (to be taken from reserves) may be only around £1,500 rather than the £8,800 we had anticipated. These figures include a transfer of £3,000 to our Building Fund, for our planned refurbishment work. We give God all the praise and glory for his wonderful provision for our financial needs from so many different sources.

*"How good is the God we adore,  
our faithful, unchangeable friend. ...  
We'll praise him for all that is past,  
and trust him for all that's to come"*  
[Joseph Hart]

## **2004 Anticipated**

### ➤ **Our Verse for the Year**

Our 'motto' verse for 2004 will provide a challenge and stimulus to us all throughout this new year:

*May the Lord make your love increase  
and overflow for each other  
and for everyone else, just as ours does for you.*  
[1 Thessalonians 3.12]

### ➤ **New sermon series**

Later in the year, we may return to Nehemiah and the Songs of Ascent to complete the series of studies that we began last autumn. But for the start of a new year, we have lined up two new brand new teaching series for our Sunday services.

- Our **Sunday Morning** studies in 1 Thessalonians will teach us how to be *a model church* - not one that proudly claims to have 'arrived' at a state of perfection already; but one that is making steady progress in the right direction.

- Our **Sunday Evening** series in Mark's Gospel will trace our Lord's journey from Jericho to Jerusalem, as he set his sights on the cross, in *The Week that Changed the World*.
- Our **Mid-week Meetings** will continue their normal monthly mix of an overseas focus, a look at local concerns with a visiting speaker, a Home Bible Study, and a Powerhouse Prayer Meeting. Plan to be a part of these meetings. They have been excellent over the past 12 months, but we could always do with more in attendance.

### ➤ **New Financial Targets**

The new calendar year sees the start of a new financial year for us as a Church. Our **weekly offering target** for 2004 is an ambitious **£250 per week**. In November 2003, we managed a magnificent £235, by God's grace. Perhaps this is an opportune time for each of us to review our giving to the Lord's work at DRBC. God's Old Testament people were required to tithe their income (give 10% of it) to the Lord's work (Dt 26.12-13; Mal 3.10). The emphasis in the New Testament is on us being as generous as we can (2 Cor 9.11), giving cheerfully and regularly in proportion to our income (1 Cor 16.2). When we give God first place in our giving, as in everything else in life, he honours that, and promises to meet all our other needs according to his abundant riches (2 Cor 9.6-8; Phil 4.15-19).

### ➤ **India 2004**

This month will be a busy one for me as I prepare for my two-week visit to India, leaving on 27<sup>th</sup> January through to 11<sup>th</sup> February. There will be an opportunity to hear what I will be doing at our first mid-week meeting of the year, on 7<sup>th</sup> January. A Prayer Letter is available, giving details of the teaching and evangelistic work I will be undertaking, in partnership with other members of the 2004 team. Thank you for all the encouragement, support and prayers that I have already received and know I will be taking with me. The part of India I will be visiting was struck by a devastating cyclone in the middle of last month. Many within the IREF family of believers lost all their possessions and homes, and there was some structural damage to a number of IREF's school buildings. IREF(UK) has been able to send out an initial immediate gift of £300 for the relief appeal, and the Trustees are considering further ways in which we may be able to help.

David Hunt