

2006

WORLD CUP FEVER

I hardly need to remind you that June sees the start of football's international four-yearly extravaganza, the FIFA World Cup tournament. With so many nationalities represented in our congregation, we must be careful not to become too elated if England do well or too depressed if they do badly! Some members of our congregation will be cheering on Holland, Germany, Iran or Ghana as the country of their birth.



Many people will have been looking forward to the World Cup for four years, ever since the last one took place. Others will have chosen to take their holidays whilst it's on, to escape the saturation media coverage.

But whether we love it or loathe it, one thing is certain. It will be a talking point! And so we have a golden opportunity to use it to point people to *Jesus, the ultimate winner*.

SEIZE THE OPPORTUNITY

During our *Lost for Words* course, we have been reminded that we don't have to make opportunities to talk about our faith, in a manipulative way. Our role is to take the opportunities God gives us – and there will be plenty if we pray for them!

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

[Col 4.2-6]

Our role is to see and then seize the opportunities God gives us. For the person who thinks the World Cup is brilliant – and for the person who thinks it's a bore – we can offer them something to think about. We have ordered 100 copies of TELit's football-themed evangelistic tract, *The*

Winning Goal. This is the sort of approach we could use with people:

"Our church is offering people a leaflet that puts a different slant on the World Cup. Would you like to have a look at one?"

The worst a person can do is to say "No, thank you" politely; but acceptance of a leaflet could be a significant stepping-stone on their journey to faith. God's word never returns to him empty; it always accomplishes what he purposes for it (Is 55.11; Acts 8.26-38).

So please make good use of the leaflets – and if they all go, we can order some more!

WHO WILL YOU BE INVITING?

On *Tuesday June 13th*, from 7.30-9.00pm, we will be holding our own **WORLD CUP SPECIAL** as part of our *Fun and Food for all the Family* programme. There will be a chance to test your knowledge in some quizzes, demonstrate your skills in some games (our own mini-football tournament), and watch a video in which one or more professional footballers talk about their faith in Jesus Christ. And there will be some good food, of course!



So start praying now about whom you could invite - and bring with you - to this topical outreach event. And just in case you were wondering about it, No – England are not playing that night, nor are any of the other nationalities represented in our Church!!

Pray too for the *World Cup Special* night we will be holding for our *Rock Solid* and *Fit for Life* clubs on **Friday 9th June**. Each club member will receive a special World Cup booklet containing plenty of background information on the tournament, a complete fixture list, and testimonies from some of the leading Christian players taking part.

Remember too the **Chaplaincy Team** that organisations like *Christians in Sport* will be

putting together for the tournament.

NO LONGER 'LOST FOR WORDS'?

Those of us who have been participating in our midweek training course in sharing our faith with other people, *Lost for Words*, have found it both stimulating and challenging. The experience of most groups is that they *haven't* been 'lost for words' on a Monday or Wednesday night! The problem has been fitting all the excellent material into a 90-minute time frame.

Here are one or two helpful tips I have picked up along the way, together with some of the key challenges. Col 4.2-6 is our key passage.

- **Pray for your key contacts** – those whom God lays on your heart or brings across your path.
- **Learn how to connect well.** Effective communication depends on good connections. Understand where people are coming from, their background and beliefs. Learn to discern the issues behind the questions they raise and the comments they make. What for them is their natural next step along their journey to faith? How can I be a signpost or companion for them on their journey? Practise makes perfect when it comes to knowing how to answer those common questions well!
- **See and seize your God-given opportunities.** If we are praying for them to arise, God will provide us with plenty of *natural* opportunities to share our faith with other people. We don't have to *make* them, by artificially trying to force Jesus into every conversation! But we do need to *take* them as God gives them to us. That means being alert and sensitive, because the opportunities may come at unexpected times and from unexpected people. We must see other people as God sees them – lost and in need of being rescued, whatever their material prosperity or social standing.

Over the coming sessions, as well as having plenty of opportunities to explore some more 'common questions', we will be learning how to tell 'our story' and God's story'. Continue to pray that the course will make us more effective as God's ambassadors on earth.

We have recently designed a leaflet advertising our church activities, to be distributed door-to-door, especially around new housing developments, of which there are so many springing up in Gateshead. Please let me know if you would like to help with the distribution of these leaflets over the summer months.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

When the attendance levels over our recent Church Anniversary weekend were lower than expected, we wondered in part if it might have been due to us giving

insufficient advance notice of the weekend. So here are some important dates to put in your diary so there will be no excuse for missing them!

- **Barbecue, Tuesday 11th July, 7.30-9.00pm**, as part of our *Fun and Food for all the Family* programme.
- **NE1, 23rd-29th July.** 3,000 young people from across the UK and from overseas are expected in the Northeast for this special time of teaching and practical outreach. We will be looking after a team of 15-20 young people who will be getting involved in some local ground-clearing projects. See Helena Simmonds for further information.
- **Heritage Open Day Coffee Morning, Saturday 9th September** – times to be confirmed.
- **Sunday 24th September, 11.00am-12 noon, Harvest Thanksgiving all-age service.**
- **Monday 25th September, 7.00pm, Harvest Supper and thank Offering evening.**
- **Friday 13th October, autumn outreach event – A Geordie Evening** with Jane Kitson and Derek Minto (times to be confirmed).
- **Saturday 25th November, Prom Praise, 3.00-5.30pm and 7.30-10.00pm.** See David Hunt for tickets.

GIVE THANKS AND PRAY

Please continue to pray that we will receive sufficient grant funding to proceed with the next phase of our building refurbishment work – repairs to the front pediment of the Church and the re-roofing of our Small Hall and Storage Annexe. We are grateful to have received two grants so far, totalling £3,300 between them, towards the total estimated cost of £30,000. Clearly, there is still a long way to go before all the costs are covered, but we give heartfelt thanks to the Lord for the two grants received so far.

THANK YOU

Finally, let me say a very big thank you to all of you who came and contributed so generously to our annual Bank Holiday fund-raising barbecue for the work of IREF. This year the grossed up total raised (including anticipated Gift Aid refunds) was a magnificent and record-breaking figure of **£266.73!** (Last year's total was £109.45). Perhaps the violent hailstorm that descended on us made people feel more sympathetic to the cause! I am planning to round the figure up to £300, which will be enough to sponsor *two teachers for a year* at IREF's Nizampatnam Tribal Colony School.

David Hunt