

Readers far and wide

I am very conscious that, as I write these newsletters each month, I am writing as much for our prayer partners scattered throughout the world as I am for our own congregation here in Gateshead. So let me say a very big 'Thank you' to the 88 people who receive this newsletter by e-mail each month, in places as far apart as Peru, Singapore, Malaysia, India, the USA, Holland and Scotland – as well as many places in England! We greatly appreciate the faithfulness of your prayers for us. It's one reason why each month I try to include a *review* of our activities, as well as a *preview* of what lies ahead.

October's Ups and Downs

One of the real highlights of October was our **Geordie Night**. Exactly 100 people (my personal prayer target!) squeezed into our Church Hall for an excellent evening of entertainment led by Derek Minto (a retired local minister) and his daughter Jane Kitson (a local singer). We tried our hand at translating some Geordie phrases into 'proper' English (something I was hopeless at!) and joined in a number of traditional Geordie songs. The evening concluded with a simple message from Jane about the importance of loving God with the whole of our being and loving other people as much as ourselves. A big 'Thank you' is due for everyone who worked so hard to make the evening such a success.

Another highlight of the month was twice breaking our **attendance record** for a 'normal' Sunday morning service. On 8th October, 57 people were present; and on the following week, 62 people were present! On both occasions, we ran out of church Bibles. So, in faith, we have purchased 20 more. The record-breaking attendances were a great answer to the prayers we offered during our Week of Prayer in September – to move up to the next level of being church (i.e. from about 50 people attending the church each week to seeing around 75 worshipping with us each Sunday).

However, on the first and last Sundays of the month, our morning attendances were very low indeed – only 34 and 32 respectively. The Great North Run, which took place in Newcastle on the first Sunday of the month, adversely affected our morning attendance that week; and the school half-term week took its toll on our turn out for the last Sunday of the month. These fluctuations in our attendance teach us not to become proud or complacent, but to press on to consolidate and build on recent gains. It would be good if, by the end of the year, we were regularly seeing attendances in excess of 50 on Sunday mornings!

Another highlight of the month was seeing our **Under-14 Five-a-Side Football Team** climb to the top of their league - thanks, in part, to them playing against two teams who were unable to field a full team on their most recent match day! However, we have struggled to find enough players for our under-16 team (a new venture for us). So we have been grateful to receive two players 'on loan' from Heworth Christian Fellowship, a nearby church (which Derek Minto and Jane Kitson attend), to make up our numbers.

Another highlight of the month was welcoming Sarah back from **China**, where she had witnessed the baptism of her husband and son in her House Church. We were all deeply moved by seeing video clips of the House Church in action, and touched by their simplicity and evident sincerity. As the world increasingly turns its attention to China, in view of its rapid economic development and hosting of the Olympic Games in 2008, pray for our brother and sister believers who have to meet in secret for fear of persecution from the state authorities.

We also welcomed back Elaine Willmore from the **USA**. She had been living in Houston, Texas, during her six-week sabbatical assignment from work. While she was there, she was able to meet up with our good friends, Chuck and Pat McComb, and worship with them at their Sagemont Baptist Church. A greater contrast with Sarah's House Church in China would be hard to imagine! Instead of the church meeting in a tiny living room, it occupies a 55-acre site. Its staff runs into dozens and its services are attended by 4,500 people each week - one of no fewer than 32 Houston churches with an average weekly attendance of over 2,000! And yet in both places, we were able to rejoice in the remarkable work being done for the Lord.

Looking Ahead

Plenty of exciting activities are lined up for the month of November.

- **Remembrance Sunday, 12th November.** Don't forget the earlier than normal start to our morning service. It will begin at **10.45am**, fifteen minutes earlier than normal, so we can incorporate two minutes of silence at 11.00am, in common with other churches throughout the UK.
- **Men's Lunch-club, Monday 6th November, 12noon – 1.00pm.** For all males! Bring your own food and drop in for a chat and some games.
- **Games Night, Tuesday 14th November, 7.00-8.30pm** - part of our '*Fun and Food for all the Family*' programme of monthly social activities.
- **Prom Praise at the Sage, Saturday 25th**

November, 3.00pm and 7.30pm. We will be welcoming the highly acclaimed All Souls Orchestra from London to Gateshead for a concert of light classical music with a Christian flavour. This is an excellent 'low-key' evangelistic opportunity, to invite our friends and contacts to a high quality Christian event. There are still a few spare tickets available for both the afternoon and evening performances, but you will have to be quick! There are only a handful of tickets left. Please see me if you would like to purchase some.

➤ **Guest Service, with members of the All Souls Orchestra, Sunday 26th November, 11.00am.** We are looking forward to welcoming 8-10 members of the All Souls Orchestra to our Church the day after their concert at The Sage, for a special Guest Service. As well as playing their instruments to accompany our singing, we are hoping that a couple of the orchestra members will share a word of testimony and take our customary "Children's Spot". The theme of the service will be *The Greatest Comeback – ever!* With Christmas less than a month away, an advent theme seemed very appropriate. Think about whom you could invite to this unique service. Lunch will follow for all, to give us an opportunity to mix and mingle with the orchestra members. In view of this, it has been decided that we will not hold our customary monthly International Fellowship Tea that Sunday.

➤ **Church Members' Half Annual General Meeting, Wednesday 29th November, 7.30pm.** This year's meeting will be a very important one as we consider our budget for 2007 and our estimates for 2008. We are very grateful to have been awarded a **Home Mission grant** of £4,000 for 2007, but we will be recommending that we apply for a 'zero' grant for 2008. Home Mission grants are not normally awarded for a period of longer than five years, by which time it is hoped that churches will have become self-supporting. 2007 will be our fifth annual grant, so it would be good to rise to the challenge of being self-supporting in 2008. I am amazed at the way in which our weekly offerings have increased from £122 per week in 2001 to £405 per week currently. We thank God for putting such generosity in the hearts of his people! To be self-supporting (and to break even!) in 2008, our weekly offerings need to rise to around £500 per week.

Our Half-AGM will also be an opportunity to bring you up-to-date with the leaders' latest thinking about the possibility of us receiving a succession of **American Interim Youth Workers**. This is

something that Chuck McComb raised with Elaine Willmore when she was in Houston. We have been busy working on the details of what such an arrangement would entail – the potential benefits, our own requirements, practicalities of accommodation and costs, etc. Come along to share your views! Our Church Meetings are open to all our regular attenders, though, naturally, only church members are entitled to vote.

We are able to report that the **structural work** to the front pediment of the church has been successfully completed, within budget. Work is progressing well on the **re-roofing** of our Small Hall and Storage Annex. It is also expected to be completed within budget.

Christmas is Coming!

Here is advance notice of our various Christmas activities. We hope to have our publicity for them available by the middle of the month. Please use the activities well, to invite friends and contacts to hear about the true meaning of Christmas – the birth of God's Saviour for humankind, Christ the Lord!

- **Christmas Coffee Shop/Lunchtime Drop-in, 10.30am-2.00pm, Saturday 2nd December.**
- **Christmas Special, 7.00-8.30pm, Tuesday 12th December** – a seasonal 'Fun and Food for all the Family' night.
- **Christmas Carol Service, 6.30pm Sunday 17th December,** followed by coffee and mince pies!
- **Christmas All-age Service, 11.00am Sunday 24th December.** No evening service is planned.
- **Christmas Day All-age Service, 11.00am 25th December.**

Thank you and Congratulations

- **Betty Branskey** would like to convey her sincere thanks to everyone in the fellowship who made her 90th birthday celebrations last month so enjoyable and memorable.
- We offer our warmest (though somewhat belated!) congratulations to **Jens Rahmann and Sietske Bouma** on their engagement. A provisional date has been set for their wedding, Saturday 5th May 2007.

David Hunt