



Branching Out

Why have we designated next year's summer conferences at Shepton Mallet to different regions? What does this mean for the churches in your part of the country? John Coles answers your questions and shares the long-term vision for New Wine

What do you long for when you think of God's Kingdom coming in this nation? Is it your family knowing and worshipping Jesus? Is it people opening their homes to the single and isolated? Is it the poor being befriended, helped and included? Is it the sick being healed? Is it the oppressed being set free and transformed? Is it justice for the downtrodden? Is it many different nationalities worshipping and serving God together? Is it your street being a safe and happy place? If it is any of these things, it's all part of the New Wine vision for seeing the nation changed. But how can we achieve this?

LOCAL HOPE

We believe with Bill Hybels, the senior minister at Willow Creek Community

Church, that 'the local church is the hope of the world.' This is because it is the church that is entrusted with the good news of Jesus. Cynics might say 'Some hope!' when they look at the life of many local churches. Frequently they are known more for: disunity rather than harmony; boring rather than vibrant worship; being full of the elderly and wealthy rather than all ages and all economic backgrounds; withdrawal from, rather than engagement with, our modern culture; and doubt rather than faith.

But if the church is filled with the life-giving Spirit of God it can still be the means of bringing the change we dream of. One of the four strategic priorities of New Wine, and the one for which we are best known, is the running of summer conferences.

These are designed to give people a fantastic Christian holiday and an experience of 'church' that gives them a bigger vision of the grace and generosity of God and of his power to change people's lives. Over the last 17 years more and more people have attended these conferences and left with stories to tell of what God has done, and renewed hope for what their church could become and achieve in their communities.

THE NEXT STEP

Over the last few years the New Wine leadership team has talked and prayed about the next step for developing these conferences further. Two years ago when Shepton Mallet was reaching capacity we heard the cry of the North to 'come and help us'. New Wine North was born, and has been successfully led by Ian and Nadine Parkinson and their team of leaders. Coming together to seek God's presence and power for the summer conference they leave with renewed vision to see the North changed. And because they come from the same region they are finding that they are able to maintain fellowship and continue to support each other throughout the year.

What the North has learnt and pioneered we now want to apply in the rest of the country. For 2007 Mark and Lindsay Melluish will be recruiting a leadership team for the first week at Shepton Mallet from churches in London and the South East, and Mark and Karen Bailey will be doing the same for the second week from those in the Central and South West regions of the UK. Their initial vision is to draw together churches and leaders who want to worship and learn together; but they will increasingly take responsibility for running other New Wine events specifically for their regions. Our vision is to see every region containing hundreds of churches effectively equipped and fulfilling their dream of the Kingdom of God coming in their communities.

‘Surely we couldn’t see the Kingdom come with healings and other wonderful evidences of the Lord’s love and power and yet offer no help with these major issues?’

WE HAVE ALREADY BEEN ASKED A HOST OF QUESTIONS ABOUT WHAT THIS MEANS IN PRACTISE:

Q. What region am I in?

A. The regions are loosely defined - we don't have strict 'parish boundaries'! Go where, when, and with whom you would like to.

Q. Do I have to go to the event for my region?

A. No. Church leaders will in most cases suggest to their people that they should go to their regionally targeted conference, but no one is obligated to do so. We realise that for many people relationship with friends and the desire to be at the same summer conference will take priority over regional loyalties.

Q. Does this mean that I can't come for two weeks?

A. We'd be happy for you to come for two weeks if you would like to. We are

aware that many people come for one week to receive and benefit from the teaching, then spend the other week serving on one of the teams.

Q. I have come on team for two weeks in the past. Can I still do so?

A. Yes of course. We are grateful to everyone who is willing to come to serve others in this way.

Q. What difference will regionalisation make to the feel of the summer conferences?

A. There won't be many obvious differences for delegates, because of our commitment to the same values. But more church leaders and churches will have the opportunity to play a significant role in leading ministries in the summer.

Q. Won't New Wine fragment?

A. No. We are all equally committed to our vision and values, and to our relationship with each other. Moreover we believe that we can achieve far more if we stay together than if we were to go our separate ways; the vision of the nation being changed necessitates a united national strategy. Anne and I will continue to lead New Wine, oversee the development of New Wine Networks, and will have a significant role in all the regional summer conferences. Other members of the leadership team will visit other regions as and when they are able to do so. The mission continues!

John Coles, Director of New Wine