



Working at the cutting edge

Living Christians

Working at local community level with specially recruited and trained volunteers, The SPIRE Trust supports pupils in religious education at secondary school level. Their main role is to provide 'living Christians' who can assist teachers in responding to real issues in a practical and relevant manner. This is done through pupil conferences, workshops and extended assemblies. Responding to the needs of LEAs and individual schools and the introduction of Citizenship, The SPIRE Trust intends developing its pupil conference work significantly.

Chief Executive, David Grubb, previously an RE teacher and then Headteacher, expresses the distinct role of SPIRE in this way: 'We want to

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promote dialogue and create a focus for faith within the highly demanding and structured school day. RE needs to be relevant and real. It needs to feel right. That's why music, drama and creative expression are vital factors in the way issues are explored, and the SPIRE team needs to be made up of people who have personal experience, not just expertise.'

SPIRE's 'Cutting Edge Conferences' are designed to maximise pupil participation in response to key issues such as prejudice, medical ethics, the environment, war, euthanasia, abortion, science and faith, and challenges to Christians.

The four Rs

The SPIRE Trust works on the basis of what could be called The Four Rs. It believes that RE in secondary schools needs to be relevant, real, right and revealing. To be **relevant** the experience of RE must be set in a context of today, the current scene, the challenges and catastrophes and sheer excitement of the 21st Century. This will involve

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problem-solving, calls to action, examining how information is handled.

To be **real** in the minds and lives of young people RE needs to be primarily about people, in particular young people. It too often appears to be about ritual, roles, texts and tribes.

The third R is to do with secondary school pupils feeling **right** with the subject matter, the way it is presented and the position it places them in as individuals and group members. If RE doesn't switch them on it could be because they are suspicious, feel exposed to what they perceive to be attempts to evangelise or feel that the subject expects too much. The problem of articulation and communication is immense in a subject that does not appear to be like any other subject.

The fourth R is the greatest challenge of all. RE appears to be massively concerned with other people's revelations, an ancient tapestry of other

people's narratives. What about **self-revelation**? School pupils will only find the greater meaning and experience of RE if they are encouraged to express their ideas in their own voices. The texts, music, poetry, dance and drama of their own youth culture have to be trusted to deliver the lesson of RE. Discussion, dialogue, listening to what pupils believe in and don't believe in lies at the heart of the matter.

UK-wide

For all these reasons The SPIRE Trust is introducing new ways of working, new ways of presentation, new forms of engagement in addition to the work in schools across the UK.

The SPIRE Trust has created four dynamic services for use in churches and schools for Education Sunday, Lent, All Saints and Advent. Additional thematic and interactive services will be forthcoming.

The SPIRE Trust, in association with Canterbury Press, has compiled an anthology of poetry, prose, artwork and activities related to the power of prayer and the rich diversity of acts of worship. *Sounding Heaven and Earth* has a Foreword by the Archbishop of Canterbury and a Preface by Ronald Blythe. The intention is to provide a challenging and inspiring text for teachers, youth workers, students, ordinands and other individuals, getting them to explore every aspect of praying, from silent prayer to the prayer screamed in anger and desolation.

Art works

In order to engage with more people The SPIRE Trust launched its first national poetry competition last year. The theme of 'Keeping Faith' attracted entries from the UK, France, the USA and Canada, Germany, Italy, Australia and Sweden. This year's Poetry Competition is on the theme 'Welcoming Strangers' – the competition opened on 4 May and closes on 12 November 2004.

'All these initiatives build awareness of the work of The SPIRE Trust,' enthuses David Grubb, 'What we now want to do is reach out to the wider public and to this end an exhibition of art entitled 'In Human Likeness' – created by E Charlotte Wright and based on the theme of the Stations of the Cross – has been touring the country this year. The exhibition was enhanced by the launch of *Sounding Heaven and Earth* and the intention is to involve schools, churches and youth groups as well as local Christians.'



In Human Likeness by E Charlotte Wright

The SPIRE Trust works UK wide with Bill Scott heading up the North and Brian Pepper managing Greater London as well as co-ordinating Cutting Edge Conferences and workshops nationally.

Listening to pupils

'We need to be good listeners as well as good presenters,' says Brian Pepper (Manager of SPIRE in Greater London and co-ordinator of the Cutting Edge Conferences). 'We respond to specific needs in each school and the pupils soon realise that it is their thoughts, ideas and skills that create the dynamic energy on the day and hopefully for a long time after. Increasingly we notice that schools are basing their continuing coursework on the lessons learnt at SPIRE conferences or workshops.'

Bill Scott stresses the importance of pupil feedback received during and after the Cutting Edge Conferences. Here are just a few of their comments:

- It was very touching; the stories about the children made me realise how lucky we are.
- I thought the day was very well organised.
- I thought it was good the way we were allowed to put our views across in the group.

- I was touched and it was very upsetting, but it made me think.
- Very good; allowed us to express our views.
- An enlightening and thought-provoking day.
- Got you thinking.
- It made me change my views.
- Enjoyed being in groups and acting out different scenes.
- You learned what was actually going on in the world.

Rupert Kaye

Postscript

I recently heard some sad news concerning The SPIRE Trust and I quote from its website: www.spiretrust.org.uk

'... levels of income have reduced ... [and] ... the funding requirement for continuing activity cannot be met. The SPIRE Trust will therefore cease to employ staff both centrally and regionally from the end of May 2004.'

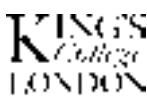
Please remember David Grubb, Brian Pepper, Bill Scott and all those presently and formerly involved with SPIRE in your prayers.

Should you wish to make contact and offer ideas please feel free to get in touch with Lady Benyon, Chair of The SPIRE Trust at:

Englefield House, Englefield, Reading, Berks, RG7 5EN

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(full and part-time)



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**No salt, no taste.
A light that's
hidden gives no
light at all.**

**Christians are to be salt and light
to the world.**

That's why LCM evangelists take the Gospel to people where they are – at home, work, school and on the streets – to let them taste and see God's goodness for themselves.

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