

# Actions

## *Speak louder ...*



### 201 decades of evangelism

In 1988, at the Lambeth Conference, bishops called on the Anglican Communion to move from a culture of 'maintenance to mission'. In consequence, the 1990s was officially designated 'the decade of evangelism'. So it was that in the last ten years of the twentieth century the *Alpha Course*, which had been running at Holy Trinity Brompton in central London since the late 1970s, suddenly became the vehicle of choice for Christian outreach in workplaces, community centres, pubs and churches across the UK.

Speaking in 1998, Dr George Carey, Archbishop of Canterbury from 1991 to 2002, remarked: 'We are actually in the 200th decade of evangelism as the Christian Church has been going for a long time.'

Now, in 2008, as we draw close to the end of the 201st decade of evangelism, it seems appropriate to take stock of recent initiatives – some of them



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in the educational arena – to share our faith message with others. Big events have included *Message 2000* in Manchester, *Soul in the City 2004* in London and the imminent *Hope 2008*. These events are about helping Christians to both *speak* the Good News and to *be* the Good News.

### Speaking and being

*Message 2000* involved 10,000 young Christian volunteers working in partnership with churches in Greater Manchester on social, environmental and crime-reduction projects. During a ten-day project in Swinton on the Valley Estate, formerly referred to as 'The Bronx' by locals, there were no recorded incidents of crime on the estate and, since the summer of 2000, there has been a sustained 43% reduction in crime. (Source: [www.message.org.uk](http://www.message.org.uk))

*Soul in the City 2004* involved 9,500 Christians from 772 partnering churches working on local community-focussed projects. These included cleaning up graffiti, getting rid of rubbish, painting community centres, gardening, and leading DJ workshops and music gigs designed to bring communities together and allow the Church to serve with no strings attached. (Source: [www.soulsurvivor.com](http://www.soulsurvivor.com))

*Hope 2008* will involve Christian initiatives to serve people living in more than 900 villages, towns and cities across the UK. Impressively, *Hope 2008* is supported by, amongst others: Rev David Coffey,



*as the Body of Christ, we are called to  
be and do church all the time*



President of the World Baptist Alliance and Moderator of the Free Church Council; Parmjit Dhanda MP, Cohesion Minister, Department for Communities and Local Government; Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, Archbishop of Westminster; Lord John Stevens, former Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Service; Steve Webb MP, Chair of the Liberal Democrat Election Manifesto Team; and Dr Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury. (Source: [www.hope08.com](http://www.hope08.com))

### Christians in education

Each of the four national education systems in the UK were, to a large extent, founded on Christian principles by Christian leaders in the nineteenth century, long before the 1944 Education Act or the development of the modern welfare state. Prior to the nationalisation of schooling at the end of World War II, the Church had been the main funder and provider of schooling for children in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

Over the last 60 years the UK Government has been the main funder and provider of school-based learning. But a century ago, close to 100% of schooling in England was Christian in character. Now only 25% of primary school places and less than 10% of secondary school places are at schools with a Christian foundation. I cannot help wondering whether society as a whole has lost out because of the Church's diminished role in education.

Today there is a new cry from pulpit and pew that it's time to reclaim the heritage that once was ours. The phenomenal growth of the Faithworks Movement is proof enough that Christians are ready to re-engage in social action. So, too, is

*God has either got all of our life or none of it!*

investment in City Academies by Christian philanthropists. It's great to know that Christians are using their influence and wealth to impact education.

Perhaps our view of Christian service needs to be challenged. We need to appreciate that, as the Body of Christ, we are called to be and do church all the time – not just in a particular building on a

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specific day of the week. We are all in full-time Christian ministry because we are all called to be full-time Christians.

### 24/7 Christianity

Who we are and what we do in the home, the community and the workplace is just as sacred as our service to our local Christian (church-based) fellowship. As an old colleague of mine once said: 'God has either got all of our life or none of it!' Being a Christian teaching assistant or school governor is just as much a call from God as being an ordained church minister. It is refreshing to know that many Christians working in schools and colleges see their daily interactions with children and adults as Christian ministry.

For Christian educators, the old theological tension between personal faith and social responsibility is no longer relevant. Rather than being dialectical (held in tension), personal faith and social responsibility should be seen as dialogical. Hence, the care and attention given in an after-school club to children at risk of social exclusion is seen as being every bit as important as the opportunity for a Christian to speak at a Christian Union meeting or Christmas carol service. James writes: 'Show me



your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do' (James 2:18).

## Influencing the system

If our work in the education system is a call of God, then how can we influence that system to the glory of God?

Firstly, we can be an example of good practice. I was overjoyed when, in 2006, I learned that my wife, a teacher at a local comprehensive school in



Birmingham, had received top marks from an external consultant for a classroom assessment. God takes everything we are in the classroom and uses us to impact children (and consultants!) alike.

Secondly, I think it is important that Christian teachers and educationalists influence the policy agenda. I have recently had the privilege of working with a parliamentary think tank to influence and shape the educational agenda around those who have been excluded from school. Often, we find ourselves in the position of trying to influence policy and practice after the horse has bolted.

At every level Christians should be influencing their departmental team, leadership team and governing body; their Local Authority; their professional association or trade union. We must constantly ask: 'Lord, how can I bring your agenda to the table? How can I bring "salt" and "light" to this discussion?'

We might not all be able to influence national policy formulation on a daily basis, but we can influence what happens in our classroom and staffroom. We can also prayerfully support the work of our respective Association of Christian Teachers as it seeks to guide public discourse about education. And, of course, we can use our

vote in elections to support policies and values that are in tune with God's priorities.

Thirdly, there is the opportunity to engage young people in education beyond school hours. Where I live in Birmingham there are many examples of Christians running faith-based after-school clubs and Saturday schools for children who are struggling with an aspect of their education.

## Conclusion

I am not surprised that, like the first disciples, many Christian educators feel called to serve people with problems and needs; those who are marginalised and oppressed; those who are sick or disabled; and those who are poor and powerless.

A number of Christian teachers work in the voluntary sector for Christian organisations like The Lighthouse Group (TLG), serving young people who are at risk of exclusion or have already been excluded from school. When young people fall

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through the educational net, it is often faith-based educational organisations that pick up the pieces.

However the education agenda changes, it's great to know that Christians will continue to influence policy and practice in this country for decades to come. Whoever we are and whatever we do, God has called (yes, 'called'!) every one of us to be a person of influence. When we make a difference, let us do so in His strength and for His purpose.

■ Mike Royal

Photos: The Lighthouse Group

## Information

The Lighthouse Group (TLG) is a Christian charity that works with young people who are at risk of exclusion from school. As an alternative education provider, TLG exists to give young people a second chance no matter what circumstances they may find themselves in.

TLG staff work with hundreds of disaffected young people each year to tackle the issues that underpin behavioural difficulties and help them to develop learning skills and achieve their full potential.

TLG was established in 1987 as a small drop-in centre and community diner serving the local

community of Bradford and has since become an Alternative Learning Centre with DCSF (Department for Children, Schools and Families) independent school status. Our vision is to develop centres of excellence in every major UK city.

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