



Bournemouth Nativity Service

Bournemouth New Church held its Nativity Service on Sunday 13th December 2009. It was very well attended - the extended family of the baby baptised the previous week swelled the congregation as they came to see Alisha as baby Jesus. Two years running now we have been blessed to have a baby lying in our little manger. It makes the Nativity service even more special.

Lifeline

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Editor: Alan Misson, 27 Woodland Way, Shirley, Croydon, CR0 7UB
Tel: 020 8777 5098 Email: alanmisson@btinternet.com

Distributor: Howard Turner, Kensington New Church, 5 Pembridge Villas, Kensington, London, W11 3EN Tel: 020 7229 9340
Email: howard.turner@generalconference.org.uk

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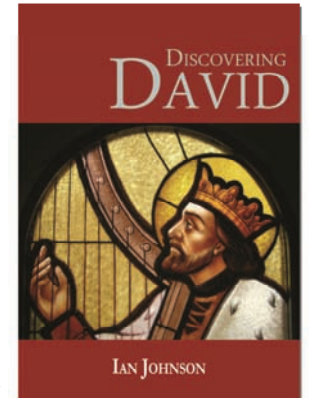
new church

Lifeline



Christmas Tree Festival

For the second year running the West Wickham Church organised a Christmas Tree Festival to coincide with the West Wickham Street Party. Under Rev Gillian Gordon's enthusiastic direction twelve trees were decorated by users of the hall and church people on the theme of the Twelve Days of Christmas. Amazingly 220 people came into the church to see the display.



Discovering David

Ian Johnson's new book Discovering David is now available to download freely from the Lifeline web site. He offers Discovering David as a resource book in which he attempts to share the meaning that he has found in the stories of David in the hope that others will also find powerful and beautiful messages. To download your free copy go to:

www.new-church-lifeline.org.uk

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Our mission is to express, share and experience with others in life an inclusive, non-judgmental vision of God's kingdom.

Humility

Years ago, someone commented (with me there) that humility is the greatest virtue of them all. Obviously it registered because I have been making that connection ever since and come to admire humility. If I had to define humility in my own personal words I would say that it is about being quietly accepting of yourself and of life, not pushing your views or your influence on others, and perhaps being a fairly gentle person all round.

In the continuing turmoil of global economy, this humility seems to have great relevance. People are coming to realise that we have been over-consuming, even greedy, and that we need to rethink what matters most. A market crash and subsequent fall in share values and all that comes from this can be quite humbling as people find they need to cut back down on things they simply took for granted not long ago. I'll stick my neck out and say that doing that every now and then does us good.

Humility itself is a fascinating word. It's closely related to other similar-sounding words - humus (vegetable matter in the soil), humid (dampness), humour (either laughter or body fluid or mood) and human (which comes from a word meaning 'earthy'). They all seem to carry the sense of the ground or earthiness in some way. So, humility is about being here where you are, and being content about that. It seems a good place to be, and what makes us the nice people we can be.

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and valuable discussion. Three themes weaved together: the Lord, his people and what we learn from Him. Could we all agree a vision of reaching out to the Lord's people in our individual ways to enable lives to be more fulfilled? Our very mixed group was able to relate to this, each person in his or her personal way. With this lovely concept in mind the business started.

We are all acutely aware of Conference's financial pressures, which result in some seemingly harsh decisions but also new creative thinking. Our organisation is smaller than it was with the resulting need to do things differently in future. It is a sad fact that we can no longer afford to pay people as in the past - reducing the wages bill is the only way to bring the accounts into the black. The Council has agreed to do this by ceasing employment when employees reach sixty five, in general. Those who know our employees will realise the potential challenges of this decision as key-workers reach that age. Much of the church is supported now by volunteers. The Council foresees that this will need to increase in the future as roles are re-defined, simplified and broken-up. Please plan to attend the Conference from 26th to 29th July 2010 to share the planning, discussing and volunteering. Your Church needs you! Our Senior Minister has plans around the theme of 'love' to inspire our meeting and lead us forward. You can't miss this surely?

The long agenda contained many issues which are of importance with only personal issues kept within the Council. All other minutes of the meeting are available for you to read. Please let me know if you do not see them.

I wonder if anyone is inspired by the 'nosy parker' article to volunteer as Recorder? Yes, you can read the minutes, but they are inevitably abbreviations of longer debates. YOU have opportunities to be in the debates either by observing or by taking part as a Trustee. There are potentially three vacancies from July and your application needs to be with the CEO by May at the latest. Please let Michael Hindley know if you are at all interested to volunteer in this way - or otherwise please talk to one of the current Trustees.

To add to our thoughts about Moses, Revd Mary Duckworth led us in related but seasonal thoughts - the angel said to Mary, '*The Lord is with you ... do not be afraid ... with God anything is possible.*' May these thought be with us as we contemplate our visions for the church and meditate on ways in which we, or people we know, might volunteer to help progress the Lord's work.

Judith Wilson

January 2009

Am I the only 'nosy parker'?

Over six years ago I saw my opportunity! A Recorder for the Governing Council and Executive was wanted. At last, I thought, I can observe all that goes on without any of the responsibility - and that is what I did!

The first meeting was a bit scary, not because of the Trustees whom I knew and who were welcoming and friendly (although they seemed not to notice me in the meetings) but because the work was new to me. The CEO supported me and I scribbled and listened in fascination. At last I knew what was happening at these meetings!

And what was the result of my nosiness? I chose to volunteer to join the band of Trustees and I am still 'enjoying' the work and the involvement.

Isn't anyone else nosy like me? We need another Recorder for the Governing Council. It is necessary to be computer-literate and to be available for the meetings - four lots of two days annually with all expenses paid. There is also a short session before and after Conference but this is not essential.

Would this satisfy your curiosity - or that of someone you know? Please think about it - we need more volunteers in these challenging times. Aren't you a little nosy like me?

I am sure someone is!

Judith Wilson

From the Governing Council ...

It's lovely to observe the passing seasons at Purley Chase. The recent meeting on 14th and 15th December took place in warm comfort with a log fire in the evening, red serviettes and cloths, twinkling lights, a nativity scene and a wonderful view through the bare branches of trees. It was beautiful!

Vision was high on the agenda. Rev David Lomax opened the meeting reading from Deuteronomy: Moses saw the promised land but then died. Thirty years passed then Joshua took the lead in new and different ways. We reflected as I am sure you will too - how does this apply to our visions and expectations? Combining this with the results of Becky Jarratt's survey and a paper entitled 'The process of change' from Rev Helen Brown moved the Council into an open

There are two things, though, that humility isn't or shouldn't be. It isn't putting yourself down or making out you don't matter. That's like Uriah Heep in Dickens' David Copperfield who wrung his hands and called himself "ever so 'umble" but was after his own scheming purpose. Nor is it about humiliation, which is putting someone else down or making out they don't matter. That's about the worst thing we can do to someone.

Real humility is so unassuming you would almost never notice it. It's something there between you and God alone.

That idea comes out very well in a verse from the Old Testament, in Micah 6:8 -

He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?

I mentioned the terrible idea of 'humiliation' earlier. Strangely, it's a word that gets frequent use in our church's teachings, but in a totally difference sense. It pays to know this if you're reading a passage. When God took on human form and became a man, he 'humiliated' himself - in other words he reduced his divine powers to be able to live as a human being and do what he did. He came down to where we are.

The other common reference to 'humiliation' is that the angels of heaven worship God with complete humiliation. They humiliate themselves before the grandeur and majesty of God. But they do that with absolute joy and intense adoration, knowing that they depend on God for everything they have. They are not denigrating themselves but putting themselves on the receiving end with thankfulness and praise.

So, adopt the right kind of humility and be part of everything. Our children had a marvellous toy that I loved playing with. You put plastic cogs on spindles on a board so that they mesh together. The bottom left cog had a handle for turning it. When you turned that one, all the cogs on the board turned too - each in its place, all helping the others.

Rev Julian Duckworth

Teaching what truth is without what good is amounts to walking like someone blind, it being good that is the teacher and leader, truth the one that is taught and led. Between the two kinds of teaching there is a vast difference, as great as that between light and darkness. If the darkness is not lightened by means of the light, that is, if truth is not lightened by good, or faith by charity, it is nothing but darkness.

Arcana Caelestia 4844:4

United Search for Divine Providence

Session 16



The Lord cannot act contrary to the Laws of Providence, because to do so would be to act contrary to the Laws of Divine Love.

The operation of the Divine Providence for the salvation of man begins at his birth and continues right to the end of his life, and afterwards to eternity. (DP 331-337)

We have come to our last Session. How many students have we lost along the way? If we did, this is regretful since this closing chapter ties up some of the loose ends and gives us a very pertinent insight into the contemporary debate concerning 'Natural Selection' versus Divine Creation.

Section 1 (331-334) This gives a very personal reassurance to us since we are always curious as to how and when Divine Providence steps into our life. The real answer is that since Providence is eternal, each one of us has always existed in the Divine Mind. No, don't try to understand it - just feel the wonder of it in your heart. Only there can you perceive it and realise that it must be so. The text says that Providence has been with us 'from birth', but clearly conception and gestation are equally involved. The saying "God works in a mysterious way" should now be amended: "God works in an orderly way, His wonders to perform." He is eternally present and aware of all things. In the work we have been studying we have been learning just how He operates, yet without taking our freedom away. But at any time, if we wish, we can say, "No, I can't believe this. There is no evidence for it."

How free is God then, when we are told that He cannot act contrary to His Love and Wisdom? If we do not think very deeply, we might think that God can do just anything! Yet He cannot act against His selfless love and wisdom - unlike you and I who at times are prone to do the most foolish things! Yet in our more rational moments we do realise that there are certain things we could not do against our deepest love. So you see, Divine Love is our highest security and

over. I think that many of the answers were personal ones - how that person sees the church. The ones that have more than one response seem to be ones that could be used as a 'brand' or 'strap line' to help people easily find something out about the New Church.

The answer with the most responses is about heaven. Two people had almost the same words - either building heaven on earth, or brings heaven on earth, and the third was a little different - prepares people for life in heaven.

Summary

In summarising the responses in this way it is difficult to highlight just how much variety there has been in the answers. I think perhaps that the question about values (question 8) encompasses this - there were 123 different values mentioned by those people who responded.

From reading some people's questionnaires the whole way through, one can get a true sense of pain. However, when you look at particular questions, like the image of a colour/animal, asking people to visualise like this gives a very different flavour or feeling. Using visualisation seemed to help put people in a positive piece of mind. It seemed to focus them to allow them to let the Lord flow in and bring something out of them that they may not have been aware was there.

To me, the strongest points that came out are as follows:

- Moses, and the Israelites in the wilderness
- Love
- Writings/Teachings
- Fellowship
- Sharing our message with others

I would like to thank all of the people who responded. They have certainly helped me understand how people in the church are thinking at the moment. This material has been passed to the Ministers' Committee and Governing Council, and I hope that they may be able to take something from it to help the church move forward. You, the people reading this, may also be able to do so, in your own way! I am handing it over - it is now in your hands.

Becky Jarratt

13. What does the church not do?

Number of Responses: 46/51 – some with multiple points!

This was a deliberately ambiguously worded question!

There were three facets to the answers to this question - what should the church do that it does not at the moment; what the church should not do; and things people are happy the church does not do. There were many different answers here, but the most common response is that the church does not sell or promote itself to those outside the organisation. Therefore, are we letting people know about what makes us unique?

14. Which projects would you prefer the church not to take on?

36/51 responses, some with multiple points

There were a few answers with more than one point:
All projects are worthwhile as they are in the Lord's hands
Projects that are too modern or 'New Age'
Nothing that dilutes our message
Evaluate projects thoroughly first

After this, a lot of responses seemed quite individual.

It is quite hard to make a judgement on the responses to this question. On one hand, the strongest response seems to suggest that we should be willing to take on new projects, and some people thought this was true because they come from the Lord. Others pointed in the direction that we should be careful not to involve ourselves with projects that other people are tackling, perhaps because we do not want to overload the people who will have to undertake the work for these projects. Perhaps the last two are quite telling - we need to look carefully at our projects, allow lots of people to discuss them, and make sure we have enough resources to fulfil what we have started.

15. Add 3-6 words to explain what the essence of The New Church is: The New Church –

45/51 responses. A couple with more than one point
Those who have responded in 3-6 words = 28/45

- 3 Building/brings heaven on earth/prepares people for life in heaven
- 2 (True) worship of the Lord
- 2 A reason for life/new life
- 2 Spiritual insight/deeper insight into the Word
- 2 Enlightening

There was a great deal of variety in the responses. There was not a lot of cross-

source of peace. Because in our hearts we know that God will never turn into a capricious tyrant!

Notice in 332 a reference to the orderly process of the laws of order - from the first creation. Yet so many natural disasters happen! And yet, our turbulent world seems to reflect our turbulent and violent nature! Notice the phrase that everything proceeds with unfailing constancy according to the laws of Divine Providence. A lovely, reassuring phrase! Read with particular care 333 in which it is explained that the Lord foresees everyone's state - whatever it will be, and constantly provides for every eventuality. Especially in providing opportunities for doing good, but never forcing anyone against a personal desire or choice. Whatever we choose His Love will never give up on us. Even if it is a wrong, selfish and evil choice, He will still moderate its consequences.

Section 2 (335-337) We are now thinking about our salvation and eternal life. We cannot think about anything more important! Please read the following passages slowly, allowing some time between each one to feel how they affect you. Realise how close to your heart that Divine voice is. All passages are from John's Gospel: 5:39-40; 6:32-35 and 48-57 and 60-63; 8:12; 10:27-28; 11:25-26. And now you can tackle DP 335-337!

Section 3 (338-339) Why is the concept of instantaneous salvation from immediate mercy impossible? It is the old question of thinking that if God is 'Almighty', then He can do anything He wants. That is our human idea of course, and we forget that whatever the Lord does is always entirely orderly and just. To do something disorderly would bring a universal disaster. We can rest assured that the Lord in His mercy will never break the laws of order and so deprive us of our humanity, that is, of our freedom:

"I will praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvellous are your works, and that my soul knows very well." (Psalm 139:16)

But there is an important warning in this section: We can never understand these truths if we persist in thinking naturally. Natural thought cannot comprehend spiritual states. So rejoice in being able to grasp spiritual truths, because they will be with you for ever!

Section 4 (340) Instantaneous salvation is a very dangerous doctrine, which undermines the Christian Church. It is of course very much tied up with the doctrine of Three Divine Persons and the Son's mission is to prevent the Father's 'righteous wrath' from condemning all sinners to hell. Until the Christian Church accepts the unity of God in which the Divine is manifested in the Human of the Lord, the doctrine of salvation will never be able to rest on a firm foundation. And that foundation is the Lord's Divine Love and mercy for all people: however they choose to exercise their freedom.

Prayers without words and Meditation

We have done some of these meditations at the beginning of No 335 in the opening of our heart to the Lord's presence. Recently I have been drawn to the story of the giving of manna, the bread from heaven in Exodus 16 (please read it). Now try to realise that it is not just a story of long ago, but an assurance of a daily gift provided by our heavenly Father. We should begin each day by becoming aware that we have a portion of our daily bread - our life and strength for the next 24 hours. And that strength is not to be used selfishly, or hoarded just for ourselves. If we do that, it will deteriorate. Think about it for a few moments when you wake up and send grateful thanks to the Lord.

Addendum

Recently we have heard or read a lot about the debate on Creationism verses Evolution and Natural Selection. Professor Richard Dawkins has been the main proponent of the scientific view and opponent of the biblical defenders who claim that the world was created in the year 4006BC (something that is definitely not in the Bible!). Dawkins maintains that there is simply no scientific evidence for a Creator. The book we have been studying together clearly shows why the Creator leaves no visible footprints. We discussed this mainly in the 5th Law of DP (175-190). Recall that this work was published in 1764 - therefore long before this debate started after Charles Darwin published the On the Origin of Species in 1859. The 5th Law established the truth that we should never perceive or feel anything of the operation of the Divine Providence, but we should know something about its operation and acknowledge it. If we did feel, or see anything of the divine operation, we would no longer feel free to act as of ourselves, and perversely we would want to destroy such influence and banish it from our lives. The Lord certainly understands our rebellious nature! But He cares, that we should have that freedom to choose to believe or not believe. Love that is forced or demanded under threat is not true love. But, hopefully since we have been studying the operation of the Lord's Providence and the freedom in which it maintains us every moment of our life, we should have no problem in acknowledging it and be grateful to the Lord for His eternal love and care, which are so gentle and yet equally all-powerful.

Thank you for staying with me to the end.

Christopher Hasler

Don't forget that the whole of this wonderful course by Christopher Hasler is available online. To find out more go to:

www.new-church-lifeline.org.uk

Using teachings in our lives - 27 points

The teachings help people to make sense of their lives, to explain why we have unwanted thoughts and feelings, how we can move forward in our lives, how Divine Providence works in our lives. It is wonderful that many people feel that the church really does make a difference to them in their everyday lives.

Having the Lord in our lives - 13 points

There was a strong feeling here that through the church people have come to know God and have developed a relationship with Him. People also spoke of understanding the Bible, which I feel can come into this category. Having the Lord in people's lives seems to be a priority.

Friendship/Fellowship - 13 points

It is important to some people to be with like-minded people who have shared values. Others said that the church was their life, or had been for much of their life, and that this was something they could share with family. There was a general emphasis on belonging, being made welcome, and sharing love and friendship. The sense of sharing or of being with others in this way came across as being important to many people.

The fact that the teachings help people live their lives is something very real, very concrete. The relationship with the Lord, and, therefore, the relationship with other people, is also something that is happening right here, right now, for people. Working with people in their lives right now has to be something very worthwhile.

12. If there was one guiding principle for the church, what might it be?

46/51 answers, some with multiple points.

Love	23
Share our teachings with others	9
Live our love/belief in our actions	7

These are the principles that came out highest. I could not entirely categorise all of the points about love, but again that came out as the highest, especially love for others.

These three answers connect with the values question, question 8 - the top three there were love, teachings and fellowship. There is a fair amount of crossover, although living our beliefs in our actions feature more strongly here. Perhaps fellowship is something people go to church for, rather than what they think the church is all about? Without asking everyone I cannot be sure.

Vision Questionnaire Results

part 2

This is the second part of a summary of the results of the Vision Questionnaire. The first part may be found in the January 2010 issue of Lifeline.

9. What would be *your* mission statement for the church?

41/51 responses

8 would keep existing one 5 would not have one at all

28 would have something different, to include:

Sharing/spread our faith/beliefs/teachings/in a meaningful way - 14

The notion of sharing or spreading our beliefs is part of our existing Mission Statement. From reading people's own mission statements, I feel that they mostly reflect what we say already, but using different words. Some are much simpler than the statement we currently use. The real difference is that most of the 13 answers are much more explicit about sharing the teachings of the New Church.

10. What would be your vision statement for the church?

38/51 responses, a few with more than one point

- 10 Share message with others
- 5 Lord in lives - improved action
- 4 Church will grow/attract new members/reach out
- 4 Happy with the one we already have

I think it is fairly from what is above that the highest scoring answer promotes sharing our teachings with others, which was also a feature of the Mission Statement responses. Perhaps this is something that people feel we are not doing enough of at the moment. From the way the responses were worded, I felt that people wanted to share, but in a compassionate way, rather than 'we have all the answers'. Growing, and/or reaching out, seemed to go hand in hand with sharing our message, but there are different feelings on how we should 'grow' - the numbers in church, or those who have access to the teachings of the church.

11. Complete the following sentence: I am passionate about the church because...

47/51 responses, a couple with more than one point

For me, there are three main categories of answers:

Marriage for All! ... as long as ...

In true marriage, the two are still not parted by the death of one, since the spirit of the dead man or woman constantly lives with the spirit of the one who is not dead. This continues up to the death of the other; when they meet again and are re-united, loving each other more tenderly than before, because they are then in the spiritual world.
Conjugal Love 321

Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink, but you have saved the best 'til now. John 2 :10

I was filling in a form with and for a single lady of 87. Suddenly, she confessed, 'I would like to have been married but no-one ever asked me'. In 1946 she was 20. My heart went out to her. Maybe the man she would have married was killed in the 2nd World war. I just said, 'You may be married one day'.

Why did our Lord change the water into wine? This miracle was the prelude to the life of our Lord. This is what He came to do. To turn our knowledge of His Commandments into spiritual ideas which are loved.

The drug addict is willing to 'do to others as he would have them do to you' especially when it comes to sharing 'smack' when he hasn't got any. His sharing is out of self interest. Is he as willing to share 'cold turkey' with a friend as they try desperately to break their drug dependence?

We are all at different stages of spiritual growth and awakening. Cast your mind back to life in the late 'teens and early 20's. what were your concerns? To become a secretary, a worker in growing food? Engineering? teaching? working with the deaf or blind? WHY?

To earn money to pay for somewhere to live - yes, but ...

To be able to get married and bring up children - yes, but ...

To be a good companion to a very busy husband or wife - yes, but ...

To be a useful citizen and have some purpose in life - yes, but ...

WHY?

(Continued on page 8)

Self fulfilment - feeling that I am of some value in this world; that I have a place in society so that people will look up to me.

Because I want to marry a beautiful girl or handsome young man with plenty of money - as in the pursuit of young footballers. - but **WHY**.

Modern sport is riddled with cheating with drugs, fouls, underhand deals and false ideas of what is really valuable in this life.

In marriage if we marry solely for external attraction, then the marriage is doomed. The girl or woman has to link herself with the man's ideals, his 'truth'. If he hasn't got any, the relationship remains on a very superficial level.

There has got to be something more in us and in our marriages.

A good teacher has the desire to impart knowledge and skills to the pupils so that they may be good citizens and lead useful lives which will admit them to heaven. The WINE in this is to enable children and young people to choose between right and wrong, to love what is good and delight in it.

A good doctor may delight in the skill of restoring sight, of treating cancer or diabetes so that his patients can be happier. The WINE in this is the removal of the restrictions of illness so that true choices between good and evil can be made. So that a person can resume a life of spiritual freedom.

In youth we may not think of a need to do our best in everything we do. Yet, all the time, our Lord is trying to convert the water of everyday concerns and needs into the wine of spiritual concerns and needs.

This marriage of Divine Truth in us to a New Love which He inspires in us is the beginning of heaven. In a marriage where both partners are trying to achieve this, their joy transcends all worldly joys and disasters.

One final thought, when we die, we will awaken a single, unmarried person again. Some find their partners quickly, others more slowly. **YOU CAN ONLY MARRY IN THE SPIRITUAL WORLD** if the marriage of truth and goodness has started in this world; if some of the water has been converted into wine. It really is 'Marriage for All' provided that the inner spiritual marriage has started within us.

My statement to my 87 year old friend was not made out of a pious hope, it was made out of a living certainty!

Geoffrey Bentley

Homosexuality - the discussion continues

The June 2009 Lifeline contained an article on Homosexuality. This preceded a presentation by several ministers at the Annual Meeting of Conference in July, which you may have read about in the September Lifeline or elsewhere. The Ministers' Committee met again in early December and it was thought that it would be useful to give some information about what has been happening over the last few months on this subject.

At Ministers' Seminar in September, we had the opportunity to look further at some of the issues behind what we have been discussing. A lengthy paper relating to the church's teachings on gender and relationships was presented by one of our ministers. As well as looking at matters from a doctrinal point of view, it also presented some scientific research relevant to these questions. There was a further paper presented by another minister looking at how we need to change the way we normally think about gender when we talk or think about God.

We also had a visiting speaker from the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement, who came to Purley Chase with her partner. This organisation works throughout different church environments in presenting the perspective of the lesbian and gay community and working to ensure that people from this community can be active within the church. It was useful for us to hear from someone from this background, especially as she had looked into our church's teachings. As well as giving us some background information, she presented us with some "real life" scenarios to discuss, in a similar vein to the exercise undertaken at the Annual Meeting.

All of these presentations were challenging in different ways and our recent discussion at Ministers' Committee continued to demonstrate our difficulty in making easy progress in this area. However, we feel that the dialogue in which we are taking part is useful and positive, even if we still don't see a clear way forward. One of the things which was suggested was that we may like to consider having a visiting speaker on this subject, but from a different perspective, at the next Ministers' Seminar and we feel that we need to keep on developing our ability to communicate about these matters, both within and outside the Conference organisation. We hope and pray that in discerning a way forward in these matters we may be experiencing something of the Lord's guidance.

Rev David Lomax