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The Pioneer Journal – Issue 12



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Upside Down

I was from an unchurched background. During the summer between my second and third year at university, I was introduced to group of Christians. As I hadn't been brought up in such strange company, normally I would have run a mile. But I had to admit, these people impressed me.

God, it seemed, was active and involved in every detail of their lives. It was not religion – it was reality. In the end, I decided that I wanted what they had. I also wanted to be a part of the loving community that enveloped them. So, on July 21st, 1980, I went through the standard evangelical process of conversion that many of us have experienced. I committed my life to Jesus.

But it didn't stop there. Someone then asked if I wanted to 'receive the Holy Spirit'. What – there was more? I had no idea what to expect, but in my fledgling faith and full of naivety, I was up for anything. I said, 'Yes, please'.

As these people prayed, something quite unusual started happening to me. What I can only describe as waves of God's love poured over me – from the top of my head to the soles of my feet. That was dramatic enough. Then came the icing on the cake. I began to speak in a strange language. What? Yet I had not been near a *Linguaphone* recording (available on cassette and vinyl at the time). I had no preparation for suddenly speaking in apparent gibberish!

However, I was assured this was normal. Normal? I wondered what could be more unorthodox than this. After two months of *intensive* discipleship, I returned to university. My poor unsuspecting friends couldn't believe – or understand – what had happened to me. And I had only a basic grasp of it all.

Yet my world had been turned upside down.

I know many of us have similar stories to share. In this edition of the Pioneer journal, Gerald outlines some of the things that were happening across the UK in the lead-up to my encounter with God. Our movement is rich with stories of fires being ignited, people coming to faith, being filled with the Holy Spirit, new churches being birthed all across our islands – and more!

We also share of fires being re-lit in recent days. My prayer is that as we look back and remember what God has done, our hearts would be enlarged to believe for more – and to see it happen now. Let's revisit the prayer of William Booth:
'To burn up every trace of sin,
to bring the light and glory in,
the revolution now begin,
send the fire!'

Caroline Kennedy



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PIONEER

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LEADER TALKS

MIND-STRETCHING and challenging – that is how one delegate has described the new Pioneer training programme, *Growing In Leadership*.

Based in the south-west of England, the initiative is also about to be launched in Greenford, London. The aim of the part-time course is to produce ‘well-rounded and well-grounded leaders’ with a good knowledge base and the skills to apply it.

The course is designed for people with current leadership responsibility, or who are likely to become leaders in the near future. So far, feedback has been positive. ‘The course has proved to be challenging and mind-stretching,’ said one delegate. ‘It’s not like any other course I’ve been on – there’s far more interaction.’

According to the organisers, *Fresh Biblical Insights*, *Church History and Leadership Studies* form the backbone of the course – ‘but always with an eye to relevance for today’. Consisting of nine Saturday seminars a year and a weekend retreat, *Growing In Leadership* runs over two years, although each year can be taken alone.

The cost is kept low to make it accessible and currently is £350 pa, which includes accommodation costs for the retreat (fees are reduced for those on low income). Further details from: Richard Roberts (*Growing In Leadership*), The Chimes, 8 Shadrack Street, Beaminster, Dorset DT8 3BE (richard@millchurch.fsnet.co.uk).

Street Prayer

AUTHOR, speaker and Pioneer church leader Baz Gascoyne and a team from Wales went out on the streets to pray for people, recently. They prayed for a man in an electric wheelchair who allegedly experienced healing – to the astonishment of his not-quite-yet-Christian friends!

ATHEIST ADMITS

STREET evangelist Steve Lee offered to pray for a man who said he was ‘an atheist’. As Steve started to pray, the man reportedly cried and said, ‘I’ve wasted my entire life’.

Revisiting revival

INSPIRED by personal prophecies about awakenings, Gerald Coates has decided to return to Emmanuel Centre, Marsham Street – the Westminster venue of the famous *Sowing Seeds Of Revival* meetings he spearheaded with others in the late 1990s.

In partnership with Emmanuel Centre pastor Wee Hian Chua, he is staging weekly meetings for ‘worship, prayer, healing and getting right with God’. According to Gerald, this is the result of three separate pairs of prophecies given in different places about ‘new shoes and a new journey’ and ‘re-digging wells’.

He has also been encouraged by reports of a new interest in revival, emerging from the much-publicised – and controversial – meetings in Lakeland, Florida. Leaders and members of Pioneer churches have visited the large-scale rallies hosted by evangelist Todd Bentley, which have produced a mix of excitement and criticism.

‘When Pioneer’s National Churches Forum met early summer, there were exciting stories,’ said Gerald, ‘of healings, deliverances, “signs and wonders” evangelism out on the streets, reflective – and at times boisterous – impartation meetings and a heightened sense of the presence of God, confession of sin and salvations.’

After the recent National Prayer Breakfast, Ground Level leaders Stuart and Irene Bell spent a couple of hours with Gerald and Anona Coates. Stuart said he was drawn to the story of Ezekiel who was taken ‘back to the river and then the banks’.

After the recent National Prayer Breakfast, Ground Level leaders Stuart and Irene Bell spent a couple of hours with Gerald and Anona Coates. Stuart said he was drawn to the story in Ezekiel 47, when the prophet was taken ‘to the bank of the river’.

Stuart believed that in the present day context, the river represented the Toronto Blessing, which offered refreshing. But the Lakeland Outpouring was like the river and the banks, where there were leaves for the healing of the nations, and many different kinds of fruit.

‘Our prayer is this is just the beginning, the shallow end,’ said Gerald. In the 90s, Marsham Street proved to be the launchpad for a number of significant ministries – including prayer minstrel Godfrey Birtill and Martin Scott’s prayer tours.

The new series of meetings starts on 24th July at 7.30pm – and every Thursday until further notice. Refreshments will be served from 6.30pm. Free parking is available in adjacent streets.



VETERAN REVIVALISTS: Dave and Pat Bilbrough were part of the first run of Marsham Street gatherings – and even recorded an album there



FIRE FALL: Hundreds of revival seekers flocked to the Marsham Street events in the 90s.

A Right Royal Do



ONE of Britain's greatest national landmarks – Windsor Castle – is to be the venue for a special gathering of Christian leaders this autumn.

Hosted by Gerald Coates of the Round Table, and Christen Forster of River Church, a Pioneer congregation in the Thames Valley, the November event will feature California pastors Bill Johnson and Che Ahn, John and Carol Arnott from Toronto, and Pioneer founder Gerald Coates.

It will be held in the Vicar's Hall, St George's Chapel, where Elizabeth I practised the laying on of hands and prayer for the sick. There will also be a 24-hour prayer room in a castle turret, and a conference at Maidenhead called *Under An Open Heaven*. This event is hosted by Pioneer and River Church.

River Church has been particularly encouraged by the teaching and guidance of Bill Johnson and Che Ahn. Leaders Christen and Judith Forster have led teams to America to 'catch the culture of faith' – as they put it – at Johnson's church.

'We saw increasing breakthrough in healings, deliverance, prophecy and favour,' said Christen. 'We saw Parkinson's healed, backs, ears, a girl crippled in a car accident throwing her crutch away and running round the room.'

The church tried to invite Bill Johnson to the UK, but he was in demand. Christen and another of the leaders, Andy Read, wondered

about booking Windsor Castle. 'As we laughed in our cynical European way, there seemed to be a change in the atmosphere,' Christen recalled, 'and Andy said, "I think that's a really good idea!"'

They found a church member who worked at the castle – and she had the authority to book a room that would take 90 people. 'The only workable date was sent to Bill and Che,' said Christen, 'and amazingly, they agreed to come.'

According to Christen, they have received 'favour on favour' in planning these events. 'I don't know exactly what the Lord will do at Windsor Castle or the *Under An Open Heaven* conference,' he said. 'But it feels significant.'

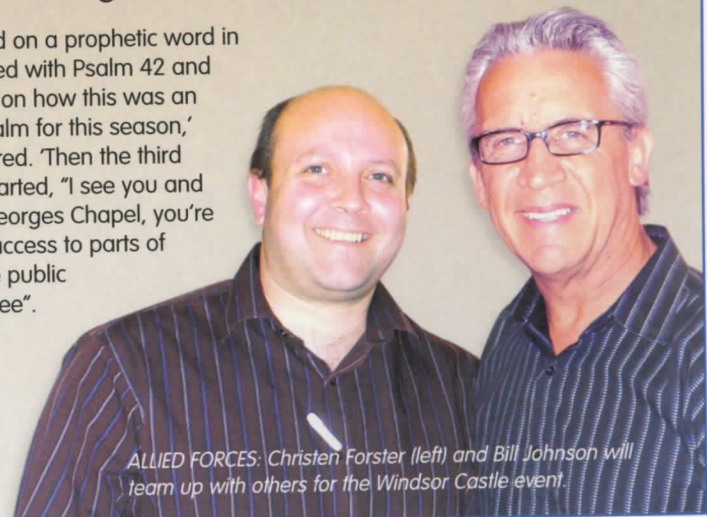
'We saw a stream of healings'

He reflected on a prophetic word in 2006. 'It started with Psalm 42 and an emphasis on how this was an important psalm for this season,' he remembered. 'Then the third paragraph started, "I see you and Judith in St Georges Chapel, you're being given access to parts of the castle the public don't get to see".'

Christen confirmed that those things have now happened. In May, River Church put on two meetings as a response to the so-called Florida Revival – the first saw 650 people crammed into a venue for 400.

'We saw a stream of healings,' said Christen. 'At the second meeting we saw over 400 – despite the Bank Holiday and half term. There were more healings.' He believes that the Windsor Castle gathering and the conference are in God's timing, 'part of his agenda to equip and release the church with the wisdom and power it needs for this point in our history. Pioneer is being a key catalyst again'.

For more information, visit the River Church websites – www.riverchurch.org.uk or www.riverevents.org.uk.



ALLIED FORCES: Christen Forster (left) and Bill Johnson will team up with others for the Windsor Castle event.

Hungry for the Spirit

They were the days of Billy Graham, The Beatles and LSD. But an alternative community was getting high on God. Gerald Coates charts the rise of the 'house church' movement

Freshly immersed in a new experience of God, we no longer felt at home in either the parish church or Brethren assembly. Like spiritual orphans, we sought refuge in our tiny terraced house for fellowship and breaking of bread. We had no idea we were part of a radical movement that was about to shake the wider church.

Let me explain.

American priest Dennis Bennett had rocked the historic churches as early as 1960 with his admission of being filled with the Spirit – and promptly appeared in *Time* and *Newsweek*. Many Christians read his story in the book *Nine O'Clock In The Morning*. Controversy followed his pronouncement.

Here in the UK, the renewal was sweeping primarily through the Anglican Church – though not exclusively. Michael Harper was a key figure this side of the Atlantic, spreading the word about the Holy Spirit. I had been largely unaware of all this, tucked away in my tiny Brethren assembly in Cobham.

Real shock

In the late 60s, there was a split at the trusty old Gospel Hall. Half of us held an alternative gathering, and drew people from other church traditions. For the first time, we found out that a person could follow Christ without having to be a

member of the Plymouth Brethren. That was a real shock!

We held coffee bars in 1967. There were new converts and people on the edge of church life who'd never fit in with our beloved chapel. 'I've been praying for this area for 30 years,' an Indian woman, Elsie Kidd, told me, 'and I believe you're the answer to my prayer!'

She invited me to a retreat. It was full of people who would later become household names. The likes of Roger Forster, Arthur Wallis and Maurice Smith were talking about kingdom and church – subjects that were way over my head. They were fasting – which I'd never done in my life. I spent the whole time working out how I could nip to the loo and have a quick snack on the way. But I could tell they were men of the Spirit. I wanted what they had.

Later, I was riding on my bicycle. Like any good evangelical, I was singing a Wesleyan hymn. Suddenly I found myself using another language I'd never heard before! I had never heard 'tongues'. My wife Anona and a few other friends also received this same 'baptism in the Spirit' – as it was called.

Remember this was the 60s. The world was reeling from the effects of Billy Graham, The Beatles and LSD. In our small corner of leafy Surrey, we were high on what came to be branded as 'charismatic renewal' – with speaking in

'We were full of wonder about the new thing among us'

WHAT THE LEADERS SAID

'It is thrilling to see the church in many places becoming a real community. Folk are sharing their time, money and homes, their joys and tears' – Maurice Smith

'It's happening everywhere. God's people are coming closer together to work out their commitment as family all over the world' – John Noble

'The whole thrust of the New Testament is that I am not intended to go it alone' – Ern Baxter

WITHIN TENT: The Kingdom Life Conference rolls into Cobham – and more than 2,000 turn up to hear Sir Cliff.

tongues, interpretation, a little bit of prophecy, and a little bit of healing.

Full of wonder about the new thing happening among us, I went to the leaders of our Brethren assembly to tell them about it. After all, they had been our spiritual mums and dads. We needed to respect them. They were very sweet, but they didn't share our enthusiasm for the Spirit and his gifts.

'We don't believe in these things,' they admitted. 'What if God gave you a tongue one Sunday morning – and there was nobody to interpret it? What would we do?' They were very confused, theologically. I'd already left my nominal Anglicanism. Now the doors of the Brethren were shut behind me.

So the next Sunday saw five of us breaking bread. I put out a cloth on the coffee table with some bread and wine. I realised I'd brought the Gospel Hall to our house. It was 1969 and it was the start of Cobham Christian Fellowship, which became Pioneer People, and now Church In The Theatre, Leatherhead.

There wasn't much of a 'Christian subculture' those days. You could barely buy a charismatic book at a Christian bookshop. Pentecostals were marginalised. Spring Harvest and Stoneleigh had yet to be invented. The Keswick Convention had been forged in the fires of revival, but had become very conservative. There was no 'worship music' scene as we know it today.

(Continued on next page)

'There will be all manner of ways in which we can be involved with one another: baby sitting, decorating, gardening, hobbies, sports and in specific needs as well. This may mean fewer meetings as such, but it if helps to develop friendship it will be worthwhile' – Graham Perrins

'So we commenced house fellowships. Imagine my surprise when I discovered that Anglicans, Methodists and Catholics were all beginning to do likewise in our area' – Barney Coombs

(Quotes taken from Fulness magazine, vol 10, 1976)

SHOW MAN: Gerald with 'Bind Us Together' – one of the tours that took place in the early days



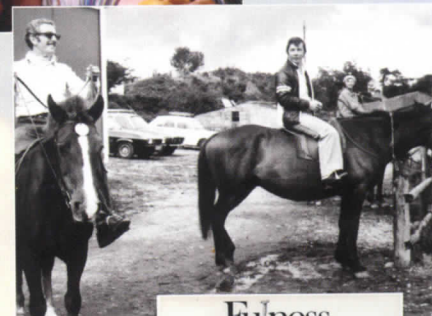
FREE HOUSE: No 41 Tartar Road, Cobham Surrey. Birthplace of a revolution

SEX TALK: Among the house church controversies was the odd book or two - including one by John Noble (left)



TRUE PIONEER: Missionary Peter Hill, pictured here with wife Jan and son James, led the movement that became the Nationwide Festival Of Light, now CARE.

MAGNIFICENT TWO: House church veteran Maurice Smith shows Gerald how to be a pioneer



PAPER TRAIL: Fulness – an early publication of the house church movement

KINGDOM LIFE CHRISTIAN BRETHREN

Hungry for the Spirit

Continued from page 7

But people like John Noble, Maurice Smith, George Tarleton and Arthur Wallis would speak to our little congregation of 18-20 in our front room. Folk would come to Christ and be baptised. And as we entered the 70s, we embarked on an exciting journey of discovery – back to the roots of faith.

Casting demons

We were often asked, 'What on earth do you think you are doing?' But what people didn't realise was – we were asking the same question of ourselves. One night we were casting demons out of a girl, and she started screaming. The neighbours came round and asked, 'Would you quieten down, please?'

On another occasion we were meeting in the family home of the commander of the Ark Royal aircraft carrier! It was a huge house. That was the first time we sang in tongues – for 45 minutes, non-stop! This time the neighbours thought a choir was performing, and asked us to come back. That's progress.

'It was exciting, grassroots and informal'

We were finding out some radical things. We were exploring a non-religious approach to Christianity – we weren't creeping around on a Sunday morning, going through religious exercises. Our spirituality was based on a commitment to one another, rather than to a particular ecclesiastical system.

In the past we only accepted pastoral or evangelistic giftings. But now there was a recognition of other ministries – apostolic, prophetic – that sort of thing. The home was seen as a place for Bible study and prayer, just as it had been in the early church. So hardly any of these practices were 'new', just new to us.

If we didn't have a 'common pot', there was money to help the poor in the Christian community, to give to others. It was exciting, grassroots and informal – on reflection, with a touch of the monastic. People now talk about a 'new monasticism'. We were practising something of that without realising it.

We were very much a community. We worked out we didn't all need to own lawn mowers. We could share one. We were young, and we didn't have money. So we shared homes, holidays, gardens and lifts to work.

Strange times

Musicians and songwriters like Graham Kendrick, and later Noel Richards, would attend our meetings. They would sit and listen to some of the leaders of this fledgling 'house church' movement – as it was called – and they would write songs that reflected the teachings of this wing of the Church.

This led to an interesting phenomenon. The broader evangelical community would never have someone like me to speak at their events. But they would be quite happy to sing worship songs that had emerged from our ministry – and later on, compositions that I wrote with Noel. They were strange times!

There was a lot of networking. So whenever we heard of something else going on – which could have been Lance Lambert in Richmond or something in Chard or Liverpool – we were keen to find out. Under God's gracious hand, and in the light of scripture, we were making this up as we went along.

We heard of other fellowships springing up, with a similar approach to ours. There would also be occasional informal get-togethers to talk about bigger issues like 'the kingdom'.

Up to then, 'the kingdom' was somewhere you went to when you died – or something the Jehovah's Witnesses talked about.

There was no kingdom theology.

HALL OF FAME: Interviewing Malcolm Muggeridge at London's Royal Albert Hall

There was little appreciation of the fact that it's God's world, and God is at work in his world as well as in his Church. The world was seen as the enemy. The world needed plucking from hell. We didn't relate to the world – we wanted to leave the world. But we learned the kingdom is about God's rule, and the Church's job is to see that expand.

The 70s saw the start of a small Christian sub-culture, with the growth of *Buzz* magazine edited by Peter Meadows. Later that decade, Peter spent a day at my home to talk about house churches, apostolic ministry, house groups, breaking bread and community. A major feature duly appeared in the publication – the first time there had been any recognition of our work.

By this time, around 30 people would crowd into our house for meetings – filling the front room and going up the stairs. It was becoming impractical. So we moved the gatherings to a local hall, which made it a lot more public. People from the area started turning up, to see what was going on.

Although the major Christian events had hardly started, Capel Bible Week became a rallying point for many. It was held in the grounds of Capel Bible College, which was the Elim Pentecostal training centre.

That had a huge effect and was the forerunner of the charismatic Bible weeks. Many of us 'charismatics' found a home with our Pentecostal brothers and sisters. Like us, they had also been ignored by the wider evangelical community.

'We were making this up as we went along'

Another initiative that attracted the attention of many of the house church pioneers in the 70s was the *Nationwide Festival Of Light*. I can remember 30,000 people packing out Trafalgar Square as a witness to Christian values and biblical truth. Cliff Richard, Arthur Blessitt, Larry Norman and Malcolm Muggeridge were involved. That work has continued in the form of CARE.

On top of that, in 1974 there was a musical called *Come Together*. The idea was to unite God's people in praise, worship and prayer. The well known American speaker and author Jean Darnall came to one of the early gatherings of house church leaders and gave a presentation about it.

She came down to Surrey and we talked about the project. David Taylor, who was part of our church, became the administrator for the tour. The whole initiative, which visited centres all across the UK, was managed in Cobham – and by our church. I can remember being on duty at Westminster Central Hall, and it was absolutely amazing. The atmosphere was electric.

It did a huge amount to create unity. That's always been at the heart of what was to become known in the '80s as *Pioneer*. Amid a wholesale disillusionment with denominational Christianity, our spiritual DNA was being formed. We didn't plan that. All we knew was that we needed more of the Spirit.

We were hungry. But that hunger was to take us to another level of engagement with each other, with God, and with the wider community around us – as the house churches became too big for our houses.

We were being called to occupy new territory.



FRIENDS TOGETHER: Gerald and Christian singer-songwriter Larry Norman, with Malcolm Muggeridge



Gerald Coates is Executive Editor of *Library Of Lives*, and founder of the Pioneer network of churches, ministries and teams. The second instalment of his story will appear in the next edition of this journal.

Lifeline for leaders

How Pioneer created a unique training course – and why it's now come to an end.
The story behind *Equipped To Lead*

It was a simple question. 'How are we going to train church leaders for the 21st century?' It's being asked today in many places. And it's producing various answers and initiatives.

However, back in 1990 it seemed there weren't too many solutions. Certainly there were no ideas true to the vision and values of Pioneer.

For Jeff Lucas, Martin Scott, Roger Ellis, Stuart Lindsall and Steve Clifford – all leaders in Pioneer – doing nothing was not an option. As a result, *Equipped To Lead* was born.

They came up with an unusual format. At that time, leadership training seemed to require either full-time attendance – perhaps over a year or more – or turning up for ad hoc seminars.

Quickly expanded

What ETL offered was a part-time course, over a whole year, running on Saturdays and whole weekends, making it accessible to those in employment outside of church. The formula 'scratched where people itched'.

Here was purposeful, structured training, tailored to the needs of those typically in leadership or trainee leadership in a new church setting, dealing with the issues they faced.

Initially, those who attended were drawn from Pioneer churches, with 60 delegates gathering in the South of England. Skilfully administrated by Kay Lucas, *ETL* quickly expanded to regional centres in Bristol, Sheffield, Telford, Nottingham, Manchester and Belfast. Modules were run in Italy and Germany.

This open secret began to 'leak' beyond the borders of Pioneer. Jeff Lucas' increasing profile, particularly within the Spring Harvest constituency, helped to draw attendees from a wider range of charismatic evangelical backgrounds. Other networks saw the value of partnership for a season, using ETL as part of the strategic development of their leaders.

By 2002, ETL was an established initiative. More than 2,000 people had been trained. Things could have carried on as they were. However, Jeff and Kay shared a growing conviction that something needed to change.

'The formula scratched where people itched'

Something unexpected

Their own life and ministry had undergone radical developments. A significant proportion of their time was spent in the States, where Jeff had become Teaching Pastor at the rapidly growing Timberline Church, Colorado.

Apart from this, they simply felt ETL in its current format had run its course. They went to the January training weekend prepared to announce that it would cease. Friday evening arrived, the team assembled at an Indian Restaurant in Derby – and something unexpected happened!

Over the course of the meal, as Jeff and Kay laid out the reasons for winding up the programme, God somehow spoke into the situation. To their surprise, they found themselves instead talking about how ETL should be re-born.

There was to be a new emphasis on the 'Favour of God', with a new structure, and new people in place in the UK to shoulder some of the work that was difficult to do at a distance of thousands of miles.



FULL HOUSE: Just some of the thousands of delegates that have enjoyed Equipped To Lead



SERIOUS STUDY: Well known for his wit and humour, Jeff Lucas (left) still managed to break into intense academic mode

And so *Equipped To Lead Favour* was advertised, with some people who had completed the original course returning for what was now a completely new programme. In fact, in that first year of *Favour*, two people who had just finished the old course came straight back for more!

Over the next few years adjustments were made, and partnerships pursued. The Ground Level network, led by Stuart Bell, who had a gap in their own training programme, joined with *ETL* – as did Paul Reid with the *Lifelink* network in Northern Ireland.

Later, Steve Chalke's Oasis did something similar. Steve had been a regular contributor to the programme, and, with his leadership team, saw good reasons for closer partnership for a season. Spring Harvest, UCB Radio and River Church also partnered with the course.

However, during 2007 Jeff and the team felt it was time to once more review the future of *ETL*. While back in 1990 the course had been unusual, now many other denominations and networks have their own similar programmes.

Feedback from delegates was still extremely positive, but among the team was a feeling that perhaps the time had come to call it a day. Rather than simply make a subjective decision, advertising literature was prepared and distributed as before.

Bookings started to come in, but not quite at the levels of previous years, and the team agreed they knew what should happen. At the start of September 2007, with a mixture of emotions, the decision was reached that *ETL* should close.

Strategic connections

Cold statistics tell us around 3,000 people were trained during *ETL*'s 17-year history. However, behind those numbers lie a host of important, often moving stories – people whose

lives were shaped and futures changed because of the course.

Several used *ETL* as a 'staging post' while they listened to God about changes in life and ministry – some going on to full-time training elsewhere. Strategic connections were made that have taken God's kingdom forward in the UK. Even in what was to be *ETL*'s final year, one delegate said on the last day the course had been a lifeline – helping to push away suicidal thoughts in a time of depression.

'Over the years there were countless stories of delegates being stunned and surprised as God broke into their lives through *ETL*,' said Jeff. 'Kay and I remain so grateful to the wonderful team who worked so hard through the years to deliver something we believe Pioneer can be glad and grateful for. To all of our speakers and hosts, we want to express our sincere thanks.'

What the people said

'Equipped To Lead' has been fantastic, inspiring and it has reawakened my hunger for God and his word'

'I'm very grateful for this oasis of inspiration and distilled wisdom from seasoned leaders'

'This has helped me to think through my approaches from outside of my usual constraints. The air has been fresh and the insight sharp'

'From week one I have loved the passion and enthusiasm that has shone from each speaker – a real sense of personal growth and moving forward in the calling that God has put on my life'

'A fantastic opportunity to be trained in leadership and hear from speakers who show us how to do it in real life'

Journeying with children

How do we make sure our kids' work is not all style and no substance?
Doug Horley offers some insight

After doing weekends of concerts, family services and children's worker training in Northern Ireland over a period of time, I thought it would be good to do a larger, citywide event in the Province. So I started praying about that.

I talked to some people over there about the ideas. And... it all came to absolutely nothing at all! About two years later, having forgotten about it (spot the man of faith and perseverance!), I was contacted by the Billy Graham Organisation. They asked me to run their KidsFest celebration during the citywide Franklin Graham Festival in Belfast. God is amazing.

Just over 5,000 people attended that morning back in April. To find myself watching nearly 1,000 children streaming down from the Odyssey Arena's tiered seating in response to the gospel message was immensely moving.

Fast-moving

It has been fantastic to work with the Billy Graham Organisation. I've been involved in three large events with them now. Kids' events are a fairly recent addition to their festivals (they no longer call them crusades) and they've always used American 'artists' before. So it's a privilege to be part of it.

I continue to travel the UK and other countries. We've seen thousands of children respond to the gospel. The great thing about having done this for 16 years (no wonder the hair has disappeared!) is that I'm hearing stories of people who became Christians at our events years ago and are still following Jesus, often becoming worship leaders and children's workers themselves.

My heart is simply to be good news to children – and to reach out in a way that's relevant to them. So today the praise parties are a fast-moving mix of pop songs, puppets, illusions and a gospel message presented with dancers, colourful multimedia graphics – and lots of fun stuff!

FUN-FILLED FAITH: Comedy and creed go together in Doug 'Duggie-Dug-Dug' Horley's children's work

I've also been thinking a lot about the importance of 'journeying with children'. I don't want us to end up with kids' work that is lots of fun, but superficial and lacking in depth. I think children can go deep in God, but we don't get there in one go. It takes time. We need to journey with them.

But of course, you can't go on a journey if the other person isn't on board. You won't journey anywhere! For me, it's vital to have the children 'with us'. And it's hard, particularly as their attention spans are so short.

Teaching style

In fact, educational thinking is that the attention span of a child is that child's age in minutes – plus or minus a minute or two, depending on the capability of the child. It's also been said that whatever age you are, your attention span never goes beyond ten minutes, before the teaching style needs to be varied.

So to grab the kids' attention and to have them 'on board', we use all kinds of wacky ideas – including everything from air guitars to puppets and some crazy dancing. We use British Sign Language, which has helped the children (and grown-ups) stay involved with the quieter songs.

I'm even travelling with a breakdancer now, which has really helped some of the older boys come on board. If we make the start of the journey fun and involving, then the children are much more likely to stay with us. Then we have the opportunity to journey somewhere deeper.

'To grab the kids' attention... we use all kinds of wacky ideas'

Doug Horley is a Pioneer associate, and an internationally renowned children's worker. Some years ago his song *We Want To See Jesus Lifted High* was chosen as the theme song for Global March for Jesus.

