A hundred and ten delegates, both laity and clergy, attended the South England Conference Festival of the Laity at Hotel Splendid in Montenegro, Sunday 29 October to Sunday 5 November. The brainchild of Personal Ministries director Dr Richard de Lisser, the project was organised in partnership with the Ministerial Association and Church Growth departments as part of the SEC’s ongoing evangelistic initiative, ‘Tell Southern England’.

The teaching at the Festival encouraged those who attended to witness, and provided them with tried and tested evangelistic techniques. They also learned of the religious and societal trends and faith traditions that they may encounter.

The Festival opened with remarks from Pastors Walters, de Lisser and Miodrag Zivanovic, president of the South East European Union, responsible for the church in Serbia and Montenegro. The keynote speaker was Dr Bertil Wiklander, president of the Trans-European Division. Dr Wiklander told his audience that they need a connection with Jesus Christ to enable them to ‘Go’. He spoke of changes taking place in the mindset of individuals who are lost and who think differently today, while emphasising that God’s truth does not change. Dr Wiklander emphasised the promise in Isaiah 41:10: ‘Fear thou not; for I am with thee’, encouraging members to go out and do God’s work, wherever they are sent.

One of the successes of the Festival was the calibre of the plenary and seminar presenters. The three guest speakers were Dr Peter Prime, Associate secretary of the General Conference Ministerial Association with responsibility for evangelism and church growth; Dr Derek Morris, Senior pastor of the Forest Lake church in Florida and adjunct Professor of Preaching at Southern Adventist University; and Mrs Ruthie Jacobson, Prayer Ministries co-ordinator for the North American Division.

In his lectures, Dr Prime challenged the delegates to be effective witnesses, but he emphasised that this can only happen if your life is in line with Jesus Christ. The mechanics of preaching was the dominant theme of Dr Morris’s presentations, while Mrs Jacobson not only spoke on her favourite subject, prayer, but led out in some of the prayer sessions during the week.

Our seminar lecturers were also experts in their fields. Pastor Richard Elofer, president of the Church in Israel and director of the General Conference World Jewish Friendship Centre, spoke on how to minister and witness to Jews. In contrast, Pastor Petras Bahadur, co-ordinator for Adventist-Muslim relations, gave practical insight and instruction on how to connect with the Muslim community.

Many of the SEC department directors also gave presentations or led out in worship during the week and were joined at the weekend by Pastor Don McFarlane, president of the British Union Conference, and Pastor Paul Clee, Personal Ministries, Sabbath School and Health director of the Trans-European Division.

Members from Montenegro joined the festival during the weekend, with the Adventist choir from Zelenika providing a musical introduction to the Sabbath, and some 120 members from the Podgorica, Zelenika, Niksi and Bar churches attending the Sabbath morning worship.

Local media picked up on the success of the festival, which led to Dr de Lisser’s being interviewed and broadcast twice on the television. Speaking to BUC News as he landed in England, he said, “It was good to see our members so excited to ‘go’ and fulfil the Gospel Commission.”
That Christmas Eve the shops were still open at 5.30pm and, not too long before the tills stopped ringing, I signed the queues.

Ah, at the checkout, the assistant looked exhausted, but still managed to be courteous to every customer.

Progress was slow. That enabled me to strike up a conversation with the elderly lady who was in front of me. She told me that it was many years since she had been on the freeways of the High Street but that she wanted to buy one last card. She showed it to me. It was, we agreed, very special. When she arrived at the till, she presented the card and envelope to the courteous till lady who, despite the fact that two security men had locked the shop doors some minutes before and were holding a final door open and looking meaningfully in our direction, beamed warmly at the old lady.

Encouraged, the dear soul, after fumbling in her handbag for a mega purse, proceeded to count out the change ever so slowly. At the time she handed the transaction, she responded to the assistant’s dismissive, ‘Have a really happy Christmas’ by showing her an old photograph and introducing the grinning man in it as ‘my Reg who I lost in 69’.

She was May, she explained. Then she said, without conviction, ‘I’m looking forward to all the good telly over Christmas.’

By that time the young people behind me in the queue had given up, set down their purchases and walked out through the door. The security men proceeded to lock it behind them. The till was still open. The checkout assistants had cleared away. The lights in the store were going out by section. Just before they did I noticed that ‘SAUNA’ signs had become prominent.

But May was in no hurry and, if the thought of being locked in Smith’s over Christmas did not come for a fortnight, to do the deeds necessary for our salvation and then leave in a hurry for the place whence he came. He came among us as every- body does, was raised in a rough and tumble town – and he stayed for a generation. Humans had no room for him and no time to either, but he lived his whole lifetime among those who would not receive him.

The first message of Christmas is: God has time for us.

And the first ‘matter arising’ from God has time for us, that, as a consequence, we must have time for one another. And ‘one another’ does not just mean those who live in our comfort zones. It means ‘the least of these’ who live on the periphery of our vision: alone in the holidays, and desperate for company, or starved or sick for want of the basics whose images are beamed into our living rooms in pauses between entertain- ment.

Notice the titles Paul gives to God in this wonderful parable:

To the first as God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

Now please don’t miss Paul’s pointed conclusion:

For just as the suffering of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. (2 Corinthians 1:3-5, NIV)

The God of Comfort comforts us: ‘As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you.’ (Isaiah 66:13.) Unlike the gods of Greece, indifferent to human pain, the God of the Bible lived through pain – and overflowed compassion to those in pain so that we, in turn, may overflow compassion to the lonely and the needy. Those who experience the God who was in Christ do not have the option of non-involvement. And the coinage of involve- ment is not just gift-aided pounds. So often the coinage of compassion is units of time rather than units of currency.

‘His own’ you will recall, ‘did not receive him.’ And it’s still happening. His own may not turn him away in person, but in the persons of those on the periphery of their vision – the lonely, the marginal- ised, those in want. For, as Albert Schweitzer wrote, ‘he comes to us as One unknown without a name...’

Whatever we are – we count with God. He has time and compassion for us. The heavenly switch- board does not give out the busy signal. God is always at home, and waiting for your call.

The ‘Glory to God in the highest’ anthem was premiered by Heaven’s choir – for the benefit of all those who have time for want of the basics whose images are beamed into our living rooms in pauses between entertain- ment...
October 19 marked a formal celebration of two kinds: former students returned to Stanborough to pick up their individual awards, and current students got to go home because mid-term break was just about to start.

Speech Night is an annually held tradition where parents, alumni, and old friends gather to honour achieving students from the previous school year. In this year’s edition Roger Murphy, the new headmaster, gave the traditional ‘Year in Review’. Pastor Cecil Perry gave the address, and Eunice N. and Christopher L. were the student speakers of Speech Night 2006.

Musical highlights included an excellent violin duet performed by current students Song-Ah and Michael C., and the Kirk Franklin classic ‘My Life is in Your Hands’, beautifully sung by the Year 9 Choir.

On a side note, it seems like there’s always enough room to honour the contributions of the former headmaster, Stephen Rivers. This time we expressed our thanks with a candied picture slideshow that was as humorous as it was embarrassing.

All in all, Speech Night provided a good opportunity not only for visitors to see Stanborough, but also for old friends to come back, reunite, and catch up.

Brixton: Seventeen baptised after autumn campaign

The campaign at Brixton church thundered into existence with the arrival of Pastor Everett Smith, who had flown over from Jamaica to be our special speaker. The campaign, started on 30 September and ended on 14 October. Every night, apart from Tuesday and Thursday, the service the food was taken to the Youth Hall and sold and food parcels were made up so that others could benefit from this labour of love.

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Harvest Festival at Brixton

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Middlesbrough Shoebox Appeal
by Pastor Peter Jeynes
When the ADRA poster promoting the annual Shoebox Christmas present collection arrived at the Middlesbrough church, and a large increase in the regular quantity was suggested, it is likely that people went home wondering if they could collect so many parcels. If so, they reckoned without the hard work that Judy Hamilton-Johansson put in with her small team. Of course, the ADRA team had a lot of help. Our local shoe box provided shoebox after shoebox – the manager wondering where they were all going! Our local newspaper, The Gazette, ran a story about our collection, which featured one of our younger children.

One of the reasons why we promoted this collection was to encourage our members to meet the locals. Each home in the street where the meetings took place in Plymouth, organised by daughters Julia and Davina, was attended by Angaza church from 5 to 26 November. The meetings were advertised in our local newspaper, and a written message from Pastor and Mrs Alan Norman, now living in Florida, Sylvia and Colin’s was the first wedding Pastor Norman performed and he still has the rings.

The bridge of 50 years was again called upon to give a speech, and enlightened the gathered group of how he and Sylvia had met all those years ago, with Newbold College playing a part. Special events throughout the past 50 years were recalled, not only in word but in picture as well. Both Pastor Norman’s message and Colin’s speech concluded with the thought that, as happy as this celebration was, we can look forward to a greater celebration when we can all be together in Heaven.

Golden Wedding
Sylvia and Colin Hawken reached the special occasion of their Golden Wedding Anniversary on 27 September 2000. A celebration took place in Plymouth, organised by daughters Julia and Davina. Guests enjoyed a special meal, reminiscences of 50 years ago, musical entertainment from various family members and a two-tier anniversary wedding cake, made to replicate the original.

The wedding service, which was held in Gromis Adventist Church in 1956, was recalled with photographs, the playing and singing of the two wedding hymns, and a written message from Pastor and Mrs Alan Norman, now living in Florida. Sylvia and Colin’s was the first wedding Pastor Norman performed and he still has the rings.

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Five accept Jesus at Angaza
A public evangelistic campaign was held by Angaza church from 5 to 26 August at Tundale Baptist Church. Reading, when God used lay evangelist Amon Mukangura (from Dar es Sallam, Tanzania), mightily Betty Desouza steered us through health talks, which people really enjoyed, and David Abogaye gave free health checks.

Special music was brought to us by the ‘ladies’ singers from Dar es Salaam, which uplifted the souls of everyone, including Baptist church members attending their Sunday service.

Preparation for the meetings was made well in advance, including the booking for the hall as early as April, with payment made. But two days before the meetings were due to commence, we received a cancellation with full refund. All brains froze except God’s, who sorted the problem out by giving us the Tundale Baptist Church as our new venue for the meetings.

In the end, five precious souls accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour and testified to the world through the waters of baptism.

‘A far cry from the NHS in Manchester’
Kish Poddar, Executive-director, STOP International

What you get when you put the vibrant energy of Adventist youth together with a physically challenging project in a tropical country? The answer is – an amazing experience of a lifetime.

This took place in July of this year with the STOP International charity. Fifteen young volunteers from the Wilmsox, Leamington and Stafford Park churches, aged 12-24, together with five adults, travelled to India for two weeks. They raised their own fares – just over £8,000 – to travel to Howrah, near Bangalore, to build a dormitory for the boys of the Besso orphanage. In addition to funding their own air fares, they raised the entire cost of the dormitory – £10,000. Having worked for months raising funds through sponsored 24-hour badminton, swimathons, sponsored bike rides and so on, they arrived in Bangalore on a British Airways flight to begin the construction.

The work began at the Besso Orphanage site the day after they arrived, with piling bricks around the foundation which was made ready for the volunteers by the local contractor. Human brick chains made easy work of this piling, and bricks flew through the air from one pair of hands to another until they were in position for brick-laying. Then the mortar had to be mixed by hand in barrel loads. Having been shown how to do this back-breaking task, load after load was mixed uncomplainingly. This was to continue day after day in the heat to supply the demands of the bricklayers.

Under the expert guidance of the local ‘brickies’, the team gradually started laying bricks. Within minutes, the principle of laying bricks Indian style was mastered, and the walls began to rise surprisingly quickly. The local expert stretched a fine nylon line and a layer of bricks was laid flush against it. Then the line was raised and the next would go on, with the challenge of completing the next layer faster than the one before. By the end of the second day the building resembled more something living in, and by the end of the first week even the local contractor was amazed at the achievement. The walls looked straight, in proportion, and sturdy. In spite of minor distractions such as heat, interesting bugs, a cobra, the lovely orphan children, and more heat, the work progressed steadily.

One volunteer rigged up his MP3 player to locally-purchased speakers to provide music while the team worked. This greatly enhanced the pace of the brick-laying. The target was to build the walls up to lintel height before returning home, leaving the local contractor to complete the two-storey building. The energy of youth is a marvellous thing. Not only did the team meet the target but, in addition, they concreted the floor of the whole building within the deadline. In spite of the fact that it was the monsoon season, not a drop of rain fell to delay the work of construction. However, as soon as the concrete floor was laid down on the final day and the celebration photographs taken, the heavens opened up and it poured for a few hours. It seemed to be a remarkable sign, just as the rainbow was a few millennia ago, that God had been with us all along and had blessed the efforts of this small band of willing and committed youth.

While the young people were constructing the boys’ dormitory, Drs Andrew and Eileen Baildam and Annette Kowarin took two days out to conduct village clinics for the Ananth Asthma Medical Centre. This involved driving around from village to village in the mobile clinic. The main tropical illnesses that the villages suffered was a mosquito-borne viral fever called chikungunya. Ordinarily, during a working day in Manchester the doctors would examine between 20 and 30 patients. They were not prepared for the 170 to 300 patients they treated in a day! The conditions were hot, humid, mosquito-infested and sometimes a little hostile due to the crowds – a far cry from the NHS in Manchester.

The enthusiastic youngsters put as much energy into completing the project as they did in absorbing the novelty of the tropics, the Indian customs, shopping in Bangalore and Mysore, sightseeing by Indian Railways, and competing with the lively orphan children at cricket, tug o’ war and throw ball.

What motivated the team members, made up of school pupils, university students, doctors and a nurse, most of whom had never laid a brick in their life, to go out to India and work tirelessly to meet a building deadline? The unanimous response from the team members was the ‘orphan children’. The children’s uninhibited expression of love and happiness in a deprived lifestyle seemed to squeeze the altruism from within every individual in the team. It was inevitable and spontaneous and amazing to behold.

If you would like to find out more about STOP international, visit www.stop-intl.org.uk, or if you would like to go on a humanitarian trip next summer contact us at kishpoddar@onetel.com.
European ValueGenesis Survey
ONLINE SURVEY

for 14–25 year olds

by Paul Tompkins and Corrado Cozzi

Important information on how to administer and complete this online survey

When? 1-31 December

Suggestion to Youth leaders for launch of survey:
Organise a preliminary meeting on the first Saturday afternoon and Sunday in December, at a given and appropriate venue where several computers are available with access to Internet. Bringing all that age group together will create a sense of common mission fellowship. You could provide some refreshments like pizza, and maybe some videos.

Explain the aims of the ValueGenesis survey: what, how, when, etc. The information is on a PDF support on the page ‘Materials’: www.valuegenesis.com

1. The questionnaire will be online. It will be necessary to click on the small flag correspondent to your country.
2. The questionnaire will be online only during the month of December.
3. You will receive the passwords from your Conference/Union.
4. Distribute the password to young people who qualify (14-25).
5. Youth leaders who are responsible for administering the survey must fill in the Check List form: it is important to write the name, age, and confirmation that they have received the password. (Remember that this list is fundamental for the organisers and research company, because it is the sample reference base. Even if the youth provide names, the questionnaire is absolutely anonymous.)

Check List form must be sent directly to the organisation that has been given the password – the Conference or Union.
6. Invite youth to fill in the questionnaire at once. As soon as the last answer to the last question has been given, the password will expire. The data is completely anonymous, and will be kept and analysed by a professional information company. The final analysis of the data will be edited by the ValueGenesis’ scientific commission.
7. Check at the end of the month that everyone has completed the questionnaire.
8. If young people do not have access to computers, please arrange for this to be made available for their convenience and also to ensure that no one is denied the opportunity to participate in this valuable survey.
9. Keep in mind that there are some young people who may not have been to church for a while. If they are within the age range, please contact them and invite them to participate and to express their opinion too.
10. On completion of the survey for your church, it would be a good idea to organise an event that could bring them all together for a social function and there complete the feedback form which will be part of the package that will be sent to you.

Associate Director needed
ADRA-Sudan, Northern Sector, require an Associate Country Director (administrative officer in charge of general day-to-day operations), to locate in Khartoum. Applicants must have BA or Masters degree in field of development, administration/related areas, with at least three years administrative and/or international work experience.

Salary according to ADRA-Sudan wage scale and benefit package.

Letters of application, with current CV and email addresses of two referees should be sent to: Raafat Kamal, ADRA Trans-Europe Regional Director, 119 St Peter’s Street, St Albans, Herts, AL1 3EY
Tel: +44 (0)1727 860331
For further details please email: rkamal@ted-adventist.org, or visit www.adra-te.org/pages/experience.html.

Deadline for applications: 8 January 2007.