On an autumnal September Sunday morning, over 400 delegates from the length and breadth of the South England Conference (SEC) gathered together in the Royal County of Berkshire in the town of Maidenhead for the SEC’s first mid-term constituency meeting on 20 September 2009.

Opening the meeting, SEC president Pastor Sam Davis welcomed the gathered delegation and introduced the morning’s devotional speaker, Pastor Don McFarlane, president of the British Union Conference. Pastor McFarlane spoke on the theme ‘Building Up, Reaching Out’. Using Acts 11 as a foundation for his discourse, Pastor McFarlane stated that the only form of evangelism that works is not to spend all the available time talking about it or training for it, but doing it. We have a duty to preach to other cultures as well. We are one of only two or three unions where the composition of the Church is almost the exact opposite composition of the host country (Israel and Holland are the others). We have to come out of our comfort zones. We have to reach others—that has to be the burden we have as a conference. Our duty is to reach the population of this country.

He further stated that even in times of difficulty we cannot give up the work of preaching the Gospel. We are always going to have problems of dissension and disunity in our church, or we might be lacking in not having a building, but there should be nothing that prevents us from preaching the Gospel. His presentation was quiet and deliberate, both serious and humorous, insightful and compelling in its recognition of the evangelistic task that faces the conference.

The devotional was concluded with a song by the group Faith Vocals, followed by a prayer session led by Dr Emmanuel Osei, Ministerial secretary for the SEC.

Pastor Sam Davis presented his presidential report in the form of a DVD produced by the SEC Media Centre. Under the theme ‘Building Up, Reaching Out’ he spoke of how the SEC is being built up evangelically, spiritually, financially and educationally through ministries spearheaded by SEC directors. Touching on the issue of diversity, he announced a series of meetings to be held around the SEC to grapple with this complex issue.

Paul Lockham, Executive secretary, provided the statistics of the conference’s current membership which now stands at approximately 20,000. It was heartening to know that this year is proving itself to be one of the best years in terms of accessions to the Church through baptisms.

Earl Ramharacksingh, SEC treasurer, reported that for the past two years tithe has increased and our members have continued to be faithful. God has blessed the SEC, and for this we are grateful and continue to give him thanks.

Departmental reports followed from the SEC directors who took questions from the floor. These reports can be seen at www.secadventist.org.uk.

As the meeting was coming to a close one delegate, going over time for the second time, had just begun a story about meeting a witch in his door-to-door evangelism. The president stood up and said,...

It was a long day, with much ground to cover, but it was good-humoured, well-ordered and informative. Though many of the questions sought answers to difficult issues and, indeed, some remained unanswered, still no whips needed to be cracked to maintain order, no voices were raised in loud dissonance, and there was no sense of us and them. There was just the sense of a Church purposefully, prayerfully and passionately concerning itself with ways of preaching the Gospel in a difficult and challenging age. It was a mid-session meeting that raised the bar for the session proper in two years’ time.

Week of Prayer dates: 7-14 November
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Choosing and being good youth leaders

by Des G. Boldeau, Youth director, BUC

The challenges of youth ministry in the twenty-first century are immense, complex and frustrating. Youth ministry requires leadership to be cognizant of those challenges and to lay plans to address them. Youth ministry presents great opportunities for meeting and ministering to young people, but those who minister must be aware of their own giftness and limitations as they venture to touch the constantly changing faces of these young ones. As church boards and nominating committees sit and consider the best person to work with youth, may I be so bold as to suggest that the following would be a good reference for some of the qualities needed by those who would qualify to work with them.

1. What characteristics make a good youth leader?
   - A genuine love for youth and interest in helping them to live a healthy, functional and fulfilling Christian life.
   - Interest in their salvation.
   - Willingness to model the principles of the Kingdom to them.
   - Willingness to spend yourself and to be available for them.
   - A keen and deep spiritual experience.
   - A good sense of adventure and humour.
   - Learning and knowing their names.
   - Letting them know that you are praying for them, especially at crucial times in their lives, like exams, periods of family tension and relationship issues.
   - Planning activities with them not just for them.
   - Empower them to become involved, to take ownership of plans and nurture them if they are a little shy.
   - When they mess up, support and counsel them.
   - Stand up for them, irrespective of how they may behave. Then chat with them about their actions afterwards in a private moment.
   - Visit them in their homes, schools, universities or at work.

2. What advice would you give to a young youth leader just starting a term of service?
   - Be yourself and don’t try to be someone else.
   - Be a servant and not a know-it-all leader.
   - A genuine love for youth and interest in helping them to live a healthy, functional and fulfilling Christian life.
   - Don’t be slow to ‘fess up’ and apologise.
   - Maintain the same principles at all times and situations in order to retain your credibility.
   - Be transparent in the way you live your life and be always available and waiting for them to acknowledge him and invite him to become part of their lives.
   - ‘Where they’re at’ and to retain them and involve them for the Kingdom.
   - Act and live with integrity.
   - ‘When they mess up, support and counsel them through their parents and other adults who will do enough of the pointing of the finger and the ‘told you so’.
   - When you mess up, don’t be slow to ‘fess up’ and apologise.
   - Maintain the same principles at all times and situations in order to retain your credibility.
   - Appreciate and respect your honesty and consistency.

4. Know and understand your motives and philosophy for working with the young people in our Church.

My personal philosophy for doing youth ministry is found in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23. It reads very aptly from The Message paraphrase.

Even though I am free of the demands and expectations of everyone, I have voluntarily become a servant to all in order to reach a wide range of people, religious, non-religious, moral, immoral and abandoned. For this reason, I have decided to follow the path I’ve taken on my way of life. I keep my eyes fixed on Christ – but I entered the world and tried to experience things from their point of view. I’ve become just about every sort of servant there is in my attempts to lead those I meet into a God-focused life. I did all this because of the message. I didn’t just want to talk about it, I wanted to be in on it.

I call this ‘the all things to all people’ approach. I believe that when working with the Lord to bring his youth to him, there are no limits or barriers that would prohibit me from going to meet one of his young people in order to work with them to bring them from where they are to where he wants them to be. The Spirit of God will accompany me into the very presence of the devil, in necessary, in order to find and be an agent to deliver young people back to God.

I see the way God dealt with Israel of old – how he was always patiently searching for them, how he would bear with them even in their rebellion against him and, when he found them, he would bring them home. He always expressed his concerns and warnings and outlined the consequences of disobedience, but was always available and waiting for them to acknowledge him and invite him to become part of their lives.

The rewards?

Seeing some commit their lives to God in some form of service, maturing into responsible adults in society, carrying leadership roles or serving their community, entering and forming relationships which empower them to marry and have a family or some other mark of success in their career journey towards becoming citizens of God’s Kingdom – these are the rewards of your hard work.

3. Here are some of the most important lessons I have learnt in working with young people over many years.
   - Always be available for them in good and rough times.
   - Avoid criticizing and condemning attitudes towards them and their peers.
   - Be transparent in the way you live your life and try to become someone they can trust.
   - When they mess up, support and counsel them through their parents and other adults who will do enough of the pointing of the finger and the ‘told you so’.
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   - Maintain the same principles at all times and situations in order to retain your credibility.
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BUC EDUCATION DEPARTMENT SPONSORED EVENTS

These events seek to promote an understanding of the principles and practice of Adventist education and home schooling. Every year the South England Conference misses out on millions of pounds because donors fail to give through the Gift Aids scheme, which lets us increase our contribution by 20% of what we give because donors fail to give through the Gift Aids scheme. The rewards?

In aid of Walthamstow’s church building fund a Day of Fellowship is being planned, consisting of two parts. A morning worship service, where you will be inspired through testimonies and blessed with inspirational music from Mark Bunney, Walthamstow Choir and the Ambassadors, to name a few. You will also be uplifted by our guest speakers, Pastor Sam Davis, Dr Elliott Williams and Pastor Clive De Silva. In the evening a spectacular concert is being held. International artists BLD, formerly known as Breath of Life Quartet, will be performing in the UK for one night only. See poster above for further details.

December 5 is Sign Up Sabbath!

by Dr Richard Delisser, Stewardship director, SEC

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Somehow along the line I think we missed the point. I am constantly reminded of the difference between the secular and the sacred, the worldly and the spiritual. Have you ever wondered why so much energy has been spent labelling parts of our life? I remember being taught that I should develop my academic life, my professional life, my family life and — you guessed it — my spiritual life. Over the years I have noticed that if each area of my life were compared to a slice of pizza (can’t help it; my family is Italian), then my spiritual life was just another slice of the pizza.

In practice, this meant having to do my morning worship to feed my spiritual life before I faced the secular world. It meant dedicating one day a week to my spiritual life, the Sabbath, while caring for my needs the rest of the week. It meant having to choose certain music as sacred and ignoring others as secular. Some friendships were spiritual while others were worldly. Maybe you can relate. If you are happy with this, please forget this invitation and stop reading now! If you are not fully satisfied with this formula, read on . . .

When I realised what my life had become — a compartmentalised complex of disconnected interests — I did what I’m inviting you to do: I got rid of my spiritual life. ‘But I thought you were a pastor,’ I hear you say. ‘No, I’m free! For example, my music collections are no longer secular v. gospel. There are certain tunes that I simply deleted from my iPod. Other tunes that I would have considered ‘secular’ and listened to with a slightly heavy conscience, now speak loud and clear. I am more aware, just as an example of each, I no longer listen to ‘Learn to Fly’ by Foo Fighters, while many songs by Leon Russell have become deeply spiritual to me because of just how accurate they are in describing my love for Amy, my wife (The first time I ever saw you; Here I am; Footprints in the sand; and so on).

I can now see God everywhere I look. When my life was divided, I used to ask a very silly question: ‘Where is God?’ Now that everything is spiritual, the real question is: ‘Where isn’t God?’ My ministry involves people to see where God has been in their lives all along. I no longer take God to the ‘secular’ people as God can be quite heavy! I truly believe that God is already there.

This has given me incredible freedom to explore my life as a dynamic whole. Everything changed.

When I read the story of Jesus it is abundantly clear that he would never have referred to his spiritual life, because everything he did was spiritual. Sure, he spent much time in prayer, but that had no more spirituality than healing the sick or going to meals and parties. Paul goes further: ‘So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.’ (1 Corinthians 10:31.)

So how is my life now? Well, I’m free! For example, my music collections are no longer secular v. gospel. There are certain tunes that I simply deleted from my iPod. Other tunes that I would have considered ‘secular’ and listened to with a slightly heavy conscience, now speak loud and clear. I am more aware, just as an example of each, I no longer listen to ‘Learn to Fly’ by Foo Fighters, while many songs by Leon Russell have become deeply spiritual to me because of just how accurate they are in describing my love for Amy, my wife (The first time I ever saw you; Here I am; Footprints in the sand; and so on).

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In Acts 14 Paul addresses a crowd that really doesn’t believe in God and preaches: ‘Yet he [God] has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rains from heaven and crops in their season; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy.’ (v. 17.) It was God who gave them rain, food and joy. The next time you see a family playing and laughing in a park, it is God who is giving them that joy — but they might not be aware of it yet.

So once again, let me invite you to get rid of your spiritual life and discover the amazing truth that everything is spiritual. Join me as we take prayer without ceasing to a whole new level. Walk with me through the streets of our cities showing people just how close God has been all along. So once and for all — please get rid of your spiritual life . . .

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Monday-Thursday
Everyone's special!

Can you guess how many hairs you have on your head? Jesus said that you are so special that God knows exactly how many hairs you have. Jesus also said that children are very special and anyone who hurts a child deserves to be drowned in a lake! You can help other children by being kind to them, even when people are teasing them and bullying them. You can be their friend, stand up for them, and tell a grownup what happened. Do you know someone who finds it hard to make friends? They are as special as you are! How could you be their friend and make their life happier?

Help if you are being bullied

Childline – www.childline.org.uk, 0800 11 11
Kidscape – www.kidscape.org.uk

Don’t forget to tell a helpful grownup when you are being bullied, or if you see someone else being bullied.

Eat your own face!

Make a healthy sandwich that looks like you! Take a slice of wholemeal or brown bread. Find a glass or bowl that fits inside the slice of bread. Turn it upside down on top of the bread and use it to help you cut out a circle from the bread. Use the crusts in a nut roast or feed them to the birds. Toast the bread or leave it soft. Then spread a healthy topping over the bread, like peanut-butter, hummus or honey. Use slices of fruit and vegetables, nuts and grated carrots and so on, to create a face on top of the spread. Make a whole family of faces and share them with your family for supper. Feeling extra hungry? Make a face on the cut side of a baked potato for a more filling snack!

A verse for you

Write your name on each of the blank spaces and then read the verse several times, until you feel how special you are to God.

For God so loved _____ that he gave his one and only Son that if _____ believes in him, _____ will not perish but have everlasting life. John 3:16

Jesus said, Feed my lambs.” John 21:15

Did you know that Jesus loves children? He didn’t like the way the disciples bullied those who wanted to bring their little ones to him. Jesus said that although he was tired he always had time to say a prayer of blessing over the children.

In this text Jesus is telling Peter to be like a shepherd to the church members. Jesus says the first ones he should look after are the children. Did you know Jesus wants you to be a shepherd, too? Here is one way to do it. Draw a picture of some lambs and make them fluffy by sticking some cotton wool on them. Next to the lambs write the name of a younger child you know and pray that Jesus will help you to look after him or her.

I am special

Unjumble the letters to make the words of a sentence. The capital letters are the beginning of each word. Keep the words locked in your heart!

Excellent

Delightful

Wise

Artistic

Beautiful

Determined

Helpful

Witty

Rare

Immediate

Karen Halford, Anne Pilmoor and Heather Haworth

Feedback from children who visit Christian Stars Children’s pages – or from their parents – is welcome. The address is children@adventist.org.uk. Heather Haworth, Children’s Ministries director, BUC

For God so loved _____ that he gave his one and only Son that if _____ believes in him, _____ will not perish but have everlasting life. John 3:16
Love Action (MK) receives Queen's Award for Voluntary Service

The late Cheryl Arthur took the initiative and got the support of the church to meet the needs of clients she met as part of her daily work as a social worker. Since her untimely death, the balcony has passed to Anne Laflin and the work has expanded to the point where Love in Action (MK) Limited, a Community Interest company created by the Milton Keynes church, regularly caters for up to forty people each week through the provision of a warm meal, community worship, clothes and a bag of groceries.

No seats were going spare for the baptism at Grantham church of Helena Ventress and Daniel Hammond on Sabbath 5 September. Grantham minister Pastor John Ferguson baptised both candidates. There was, he said, a contrast between the two. Helena has been a friend of church elder Karen Shelbourn for many years. No one would be easy to assume that she was already a member, but her situation reminded the pastor of a similar one he encountered when he was pastor at Grantham. We rejoiced to have Margaret and Eric among us for the day. Pastor Lowe, now executive secretary of the Mission, said: ‘What story have we fallen into?’ The answer, said the speaker, was the most fundamental question we answer in our lives.

Cambridge VBS

This summer Cambridge church held its fifth annual VBS programme: ‘Crocodile Dock – Where fearless kids shine God’s light’. The local church opened the divine service with a combination of old and new songs, and the congregation was then introduced to the singing of local language hymns. His message, ‘Have you seen Jesus?’, was a timely call to all who attended to renew their commitment to the Lord in a land far away from home. All left with a determination to reclaim any lost love and commit to living for Jesus once again.

The spirit of kingdom living

Pastor Gifford Rhamie, lecturer in Pastoral Studies at Nkewald, was the guest speaker for this year’s Welsh Mission Day of Fellowship on Sabbath 26 September. For the third year running the event was held at the Pavilion in the Welsh spa town of Llandrindod Wells. Also for the third year running we were blessed with beautiful weather, meaning that the two hundred or so who attended were able to have their picnic lunches outside.

The Sabbath School time was led by Pastor David Foster and members from the north of Wales, with separate classes for the children and youth by Pastor Clyde and Mrs Anette Moore, and Pastor Rhamie and Mrs Rebecca Lowe, respectively.

A praise band from the Swansea church opened the divine service with a combination of old and new songs, and the congregation was then introduced to the newest member of the ministerial team, David Rancie, as he told the children’s story. Shortly afterwards David, together with his wife Dusanke, came to the front for a special

In his afternoon workshop Pastor Rhamie continued to develop his theme, but this time with a much more focused and hard-hitting approach. Describing his ‘stream church’, he came up with a predictive list of qualifications that concluded with the line, ‘My dream church is a church that interprets truth in terms of God’s love’. Sadly, dream churches are hard to come by, partly, Pastor Rhamie said, because there are forces created to split our churches into two – one of which is fundamentalism. A broad definition of fundamentalism was extracted from the congregation by divining into discussion groups, with the consensus being that those with ‘fundamentalistic’ characteristics tended among other things to be demanding and judgmental. To combat this secretely, be church leader, see things in black and white, focus on things which are quantitative and measureable, such as standards and end-time events, and generally be rather mean-spirited.

Pastor Rhamie finished on an upbeat note. ‘As far as I am concerned, we are a true church. And I mean that we are a church where we do not just accept people as members. We are a church where we love our members. And we are a church where we are strong in the fundamentals, yet soft in the periphery.’

Love in Action

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Love in Action

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Holloway: You raised me up

Utter dependence and total surrender to Jesus were the themes of the campaign at Holloway church from 5 to 13 September.

The speaker for the ‘You raised me up’ campaign was the UK’s own Anthony Fuller, recent graduate of Theology at Oakwood College and remembered by others as the former president of the London Youth Federation.

His objective was clear and Spirit-led: to unpack the familiar basics of the Christian faith and to challenge us to live by them. Basics such as ‘abiding in Christ’, ‘righteousness by faith’, ‘dying to self’, ‘fruits of the Spirit’ and the ‘armour of God’ were explored in detail in front of a full congregation – with many others also watching live online from all over the world.

The congregation also included a significant number of people from the local community. All admired the young preacher’s ability to break down the great themes into simple, practical steps without losing the profound importance of what he all pointed to: Jesus. ‘The only deliberate effort of the Christian is to seek fellowship with Jesus: not trying to be right but knowing the Righteous One’, he said under the sermon title ‘What must I do to be saved?’ Here we were also reminded that these principles were meaningless unless our primary goal was to get to know Jesus.

Like any other teacher who anticipates the questions of his students, Anthony Fuller drew upon his own personal experiences of occasions when his faith was tested to demonstrate how remaining in Jesus was a daily struggle. ‘Conversion was only meant to last a day. We must die daily to self if we are to remain in him’, he reminded us.

While the first week explored the basics of our faith, the second week focused on its application with the emphasis on remaining in Jesus. Referring to the acrostic G.R.O.W.T.H (Go to God in prayer, Read God’s Word, Obey God moment by moment, Witness, Trust God and Holy Spirit), we soon realised that our A special place

Let me tell you about a small street in North London, hidden but in full view. Let me introduce you to a congregation who love the Lord, love to worship and find joy in praising God. Let me tell you about a church bursting at the seams but which always has room for a visitor or two or three.

The street is Cuckoo Hall Lane and the congregation is at Edmonton.

We started this year with a spiritual extravaganza inspired by the Holy Spirit and led by our resident pastor, Steve Roberts. For the first nine Sabbaths of 2009 our souls were watered as Pastor Roberts presented salvation from the pulpit. As members renewed their relationship with God, six new souls committed their lives to God on Sabbath 28 February (see picture).

Galvanised by this Spirit-filled start to the year, we embarked on our community projects – feeding the homeless, car wash programmes to supplement the ADRAG ingathering campaign and health screenings. Our Community Guests Days attract members of the public as the Sabbath School and Personal Ministries teams took to the streets to invite in and pray for those who accepted the offer. Our hearts expanded with joy and praise to God as we realised the importance of fellowship and the witness of his ministry among the people, not in the pews.

Tenth anniversary for mother and toddler outreach

On Thursday 24 September the church in Bournemouth celebrated ten successful years running their outreach programme – the ‘Sunshine Club’ – a local mother and toddlers group for young families in the Winton area of Bournemouth.

The Sunshine Club has worked with many families over the years. Joy Elliott, founder and leader of the club, continues to manage this weekly event, supported by church members. The love and care given to each family has established a strong bond between the church and the local community.

The former Mayor of Bournemouth, Mrs Emily Morris-Cross, a committed Christian, who was present at our fifth anniversary, was invited once again to officiate at our short service. Wearing as before her sunshine outfit in honour of the club, she cut the cake, assisted by some of the children, helping to make our celebration a very special occasion.

Emily was welcomed by our resident pastor, Ian Leek, and retired pastors Martin Anthony and Richard Vine also took part in the service. Mothers currently attending the club and former mums mingled and exchanged stories, and the special cake ordered for the occasion was enjoyed by all.

We pray that this club will continue to reach out to young mothers and toddlers in need of support for years to come.

More information can be found at http://bournemouth.adventistchurch.org.uk/mtco/mtco/dennis.
On Sunday 30 August, Brother Astley Donald and Sister Merdeline Daley attended a celebration held in their honour at the Watford Town church where they have been members for over forty years. (It is said only broken by a brief sojourn in Manchester, Jamaica). As Brother Daley – Donald to his friends and family – watched the pale English sun, he need not have worried, as the sun shone throughout the day. Save for the chill in the air, the majesty of the moment was the church which has been a source of comfort, solace and support over the years.

Fifty years ago the last thing on Donald’s mind was whether it would rain. As he prepared himself for his wedding, perhaps he wondered whether Merdeline would turn up? Merdeline, radiant in white, arrived to warm the Caribbean sun as they were married at the Bird’s Hill church on 27 March 1959 in Clarendon, Jamaica. The couple were well supported by the bride’s parents, Brother Hubert and Miss Beatrice Morgan, and the groom’s family. One thing was clear. Donald and Merdeline could not have had a better place to hold their very different life as they would be prepared to celebrate their golden anniversary. Ronald (Donald’s son) welcomed the guests to the church, which was resplendent with flowers, which were testimony to Merdeline’s skill at flower arranging. Ronald reminded his parents that, unlike other achievements, marriage had no finish line, and they could not sit back on their laurels and still had hard work to do. Pastor Cecil Perry, former British Union Conference president, with characteristic warmth and humour admonished them to keep on loving and supporting each other. He surprised the couple by assisting them to renew their marriage vows, surrounded by their witnesses, their five children, in-laws and eleven grandchildren. Only one of the witnesses from the original ceremony, Violet and Wilbert Williams (the bride’s sister and brother-in-law), were there to witness the renewal of vows.

The couple were grateful for the music provided by Valerie McCleary and her husband Ralford, and sister Heather Meikle. Sister McCleary performed the ever popular ‘Love divine all loves excelling’, while Heather Meikle sang a medley of favourites from the Daley’s family worship, such as ‘To the blessed hour of Prayer and ‘Dear Lord and Father of mankind’, and Troy Campbell (grandson of the couple) surprised them with a violin piece that he had been practising especially for the occasion.

Pastor Roy Chisholm, former minister at Watford town, invited all of the married couples to join with the Daleys in presenting their marriages to the Lord. He reminded them that their marriages in trouble could be touched by God’s blessing and inviting him to honour their commitment as couples in a society in which marriage is increasingly seen as temporary and dispensable.

BUC receptionist

The British Union Conference has an impending vacancy for a receptionist and is looking for a cheerful person, conversant with modern switchboard operations and able to offer a wellcoming, helpful and professional approach to visitors and callers, both in person and on the telephone. Responsibilities include oversight of photocopying, franking and the machines, supervision of the post room, the maintenance of general office supplies and light secretarial duties. Employees in the BUC Office are expected to be committed to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Salary £17,000-20,000 per annum. In accordance with experience. Closing date for applications is 2 November 2009 with interviews in the following week. Applicants must have the right to work in the UK. Application forms are available from Executive Secretary, BUC Office, Unit 11, Park Industrial Estate, Letchworth, Herts. AL3 2OR or secretariat@adventist.org.uk

The Daleys’ Golden Wedding

On 23 August, Mike and Heather Thompson celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary. Their three children, Gail, Lisa and Keith, arranged a very lovely afternoon tea for them and their friends and family as they entered the church which has been a source of comfort, solace and support over the years.

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FRANCES ELEANOR COOMBE (1909-2009) was born on 27 June 1909 in Southend, Essex. She was the youngest of four daughters born to Maud and Edwin Coombe. Her family attended the Baptist church and her faith was developed in her home. She was very proud of the card sent by Her Majesty the Queen on the occasion of her 100th birthday, some three weeks before her passing.

KARL JOHNSON

On Thursday 6 August Sonja Eikum and Alan Brazendale came together in the beautiful setting of Queens Chapel in Aberdeen and were united in marriage. They had known each other for some time and had decided to set up home in Canada two years previously. Everyone was delighted to be present for the wedding, perhaps he wondered if it would rain. As he prepared himself for his wedding, perhaps he wondered whether it would rain. As he prepared himself for his wedding, perhaps he wondered whether it would rain. As he prepared himself for his wedding, perhaps he wondered whether it would rain. As he prepared himself for his wedding, perhaps he wondered whether it would rain. As he prepared himself for his wedding, perhaps he wondered whether it would rain. As he prepared himself for his wedding, perhaps he wondered whether it would rain. As he prepared himself for his wedding, perhaps he wondered whether it would rain. As he prepared himself for his wedding, perhaps he wondered whether it would rain.
Faiths and the feminine

Women and their role and treatment in world religions was the theme for a lecture at Newbold College last week attended by about 100 people of different religious backgrounds in Bracknell, Wokingham and further afield. ‘Faiths and the Feminine’ was the title for the 2009 Beach Lecture at Newbold College given by Dr Elaine Storkey, writer, broadcaster and theologian, on Tuesday 6 October.

Dr Storkey began her lecture with a sociological sketch of the position of women in the world. She described contemporary and traditional religious attitudes to women and to their exercise of spiritual authority in the major world religions. In inter-faith dialogue we find that patriarchy and male hierarchies enforcing their power by reinforcing dress codes on women is characteristic of all the major world religions, she said. ‘Religious leaders in all of them are challenged by the question, “Who may have spiritual authority and what does it look like?”’

As a leader of different Christian organisations and director of the charity Tearfund, Dr Storkey has had extensive experience in inter-faith dialogue around the world and the process of relating first-hand to women and men of other faiths. She recounted different experiences in different religious contexts as she answered the question. ‘How do Christians work with the traditions and systems which are in place while maintaining our own Christian freedom?’

Finally Dr Storkey looked at the ways in which the process of inter-faith relations draws religious people from different backgrounds into considering bigger global issues where gender remains a factor. She described in graphic detail the problems of poverty, illiteracy, gender-based violence, child bride practice, trafficking of women, female genital mutilation, and the abortion of girl children in China and India. She concluded with descriptions of initiatives where women of different faiths are working together to alleviate some of these problems.

The lecture was attended by representatives of the Binfield churches, Bracknell Churches Together, Wokingham Churches Together, Bracknell Forest Faith Action group, three members of the Bahai faith. Newbold’s sociologist, Valerie Bernard, chaired the meeting.

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The Beach Lectures have now been running for over a decade, said Dr Michael Pearson, Newbold’s vice-principal and chair of Newbold’s Diversity Committee. ‘They are an annual gathering for thoughtful people of different faiths and no faith in the towns around the College and further afield.’

Note: The Beach Lecture was sponsored and organised by the Centre for the Study of Religious and Cultural Diversity at Newbold College. It was endowed by Dr Bert Beach and his wife, Eliane, to build bridges between Christians and those of other faiths.

For further information go to www.newbold.ac.uk.