

Ploughshare April/May 1998 (scanned version from the original)

From the Rector

I've just received through the post something which has caught my eye and my imagination - no small achievement amidst the mounds of paper I receive. It is about **THE NATIONAL ALPHA INITIATIVE**. It comes from the Church in London where **ALPHA** began, Holy Trinity, Brompton.

The story of **ALPHA** is amazing. Starting as a course for a small group in one local church in 1991, there are now 5000 churches in Britain, 7000 churches internationally and 78 prisons in England and Wales doing the course. This at a time when we hear of decline in Church life. We British tend to knock down anything successful but it would be silly to **decry ALPHA**. Perhaps we should ask instead whether perhaps God is behind it.

In August and September this year, there will be a massive advertising campaign, "an invitation to the nation an opportunity to explore the meaning of life starting very soon at a church near you." This deserves our prayers and our wholehearted support.

As I write, we are nearing the end of our 5th **ALPHA** course and many say what a help it has been. I have been reflecting on what is good about **ALPHA** and I, have narrowed it down to four particular things.

1. *It is based on friendship.* The simple meal together creates a relaxed atmosphere and genuinely warm friendships are formed. It is not remotely threatening.

2. *It gives plenty of time to think.* Because it lasts for ten weeks and includes an unhurried day away - and members are free to do the course again if they wish - there is time to let it sink in.

3. *It gives members permission to ask questions.* No-one is in danger of being laughed at because they are ignorant. Questions that have bothered members for years can at last be aired and discussed informally.

4. *The appeal is both to the mind and the heart.* The course goes thoroughly into the reasons why we should believe and trust Jesus Christ - but it doesn't leave it there. The short journey from the head to the heart is a problem for many and **ALPHA addresses** this. There is always, unashamedly, a short time of worship and, all the way through, an expectation of an encounter with God is built in.

These features are indicative of just how appropriate ALPHA is for our generation. It seems to be God's chosen way to reach out to people on the brink of the 21st century. We are planning further courses this year, starting in April/May and Sept/Oct. Please consider coming and bringing friends with you. Booking forms are available in our churches and by ringing the office (558461). There aren't many better ways to "explore the meaning of life."

Christopher Frith

Quest Club needs your help to help the children in Bosnia.

This year Quest Club children are again supporting the work of **Novimost International** by helping to raise money to send over 2,000 Bosnian young people on a Christian holiday at the seaside this summer.

Sponsoring a Bosnian child for one week at Camp Rio could change his life forever!

For three-and-a-half years the children of Bosnia endured the terror of war, sleeping in cellars, not knowing if the dawn would come. Two years on from the end of the conflict those same young people are starting to look forward with hope to a better future. Many bear the physical scars of war and all carry emotional wounds capable of disabling their development. It is vital that they have the opportunity to feel the healing touch of Jesus and allow him to shape their lives.

CAMP RIO builds upon five years of successful camp ministry with Bosnian young people. In the summer of 1993, Novimost leaders Nikola and Sandra Skrinjaric took seventy youngsters from Mostar, amidst some of the fiercest fighting of the entire Balkan conflict, to the Adriatic coast.

Many of them are now serving at the forefront of the advance of evangelical Christianity in the region and others are fully involved in effective community development and reconciliation initiatives. Their personal encounter with Jesus Christ sparked within them a deep commitment to the Good News and desire to see it applied across their troubled land.

Others have followed their lead at Christian summer camps held in each of the following years. Now, with the acquisition of a superb new beach side facility, over 2000 young people are expected to attend in the summer of 1998, over eighty percent of whom will not be committed Christians when they arrive. That makes it one of the largest evangelical initiatives in the region this century.

More than laughter

Camp Rio is not just about having fun although there'll be bucket loads of it. It's about enabling children and young people to face up to the real issues which confront them now and in the future. They will be making friends across the ethnic and religious lines which have torn their country apart; access the long-term support services which are operated by evangelicals in their home towns; start on the road to healing from the trauma buried deep within them; and begin to see Jesus Christ as God's love-gift to them, rather than the cause of hostility and bloodshed in their community.

Sponsor a Child

You now have the opportunity to sponsor a child from Bosnia to attend one of ten week-long holiday events at Camp Rio in 1998. Your £30 donation will pay the food and accommodation costs for one child whose family is unable to pay. You will receive a postcard from the child(ren) you sponsor, direct from Camp Rio, and a full report on the camp project after it has finished.

Thank You.

Barbara Goodacre

Home from Cameroon

Sarah Frith arrived *home*, after her six months in a remote part of north Cameroon just in time for the Ploughshare deadline. She immediately wrote this contribution, despite being rather sleepy!

I got back from Cameroon this morning after a somewhat eventful flight – my luggage was lost on the internal flight but I managed to get it back at the last minute, about 30 seconds before the final check-in-time for leaving Cameroon!

Thank you so much to all those of you who've been such a great support, through prayer or letters. It was so encouraging to realise how many people were thinking of me, and it was almost a full time job replying to everyone! If you didn't get a reply, then I'm afraid I didn't get your letter.

I've had such a positive experience in Africa, better than I could ever have imagined. Teaching went well, I wasn't lonely, I really felt part of the Kinnaird family, and I had no major illnesses and a thoroughly good time. It was sad to leave, although part of me could hardly wait to see everyone again and 6 months hadn't really seemed long enough.

I have been really aware of your prayer support throughout. Please continue to pray for the Kinnaird family and the work of all the Translators in Cameroon, particularly for protection from the increasing amount of crime in the area.

Hope for Eastern Europe February Journey to Romania

After a very challenging November mission to Bucharest and the leper community on the borders of the Black Sea, I really felt led to thank God for the way he had brought me safely home, and helped me through so many difficult situations.

During those prayers I remember promising Him that I would be available, if He needed me, to help transport the second phase of the windows and doors out to Bucharest, so that the work could continue at Emmanuel Mission for

the new feeding/outreach centre, during the winter months. I also prayed for a prayer partner who had a similar vision to help support the work, both here and in Eastern Europe. Just before Christmas those prayers were truly answered and our Lord confirmed that Hope for Eastern Europe's help was once more needed. My prayer partner also came on the scene. Her name is Rosanne and she is a wonderful blessing.

I distinctly remember a sense of excitement and adventure in my spirit - I knew that if I looked up and trusted God every need would be met and he would equip me to organise this journey. At this point I was prompted to set to work immediately sharing the 'good news' and prayed that God would strengthen me with the help and encouragement I needed, especially as it was winter time when missions don't normally venture out!

It was also very important to get the right promotional material together for requests and to launch the appeal very quickly as the doors and windows would be on the production line just after Christmas.

For this mission to go ahead we needed two experienced Christian lorry drivers and a date for the journey so that I could proceed with the paperwork. We also needed to top up the vehicle with priority supplies to sustain the Romanian workers and homeless children through the winter.

It was truly amazing to experience God in action as everything came together very quickly. First the drivers, Colin Harper and Robert Batten came forward within days of each other. The date was fixed for 20th February 1998. I remember feeling a little apprehensive at this point as it was my first attempt to organize our paper-work (a step in faith).

We experienced many challenges as the date approached, especially regarding the vehicle but, we kept praying and believing ;end the lorry did eventually set off on the evening of the 20th February.

Rosanne and myself travelled out the following Monday to organise and help wherever needed. The lorry arrived on the Tuesday at Emmanuel Mission with two very relieved and happy drivers. The next few days proved to be very testing regarding Customs procedures, but, God did win the victory and there was great. rejoicing as the lorry was finally unsealed.

We all had our eyes opened to many needs especially regarding the homeless street children and the neglected elderly in a geriatric hospital - poverty and neglect are rife in Bucharest. We can now make positive moves to help people recover and begin to rebuild their broken lives with God's help.

If you feel led to make a donation to help renovate a derelict building which will eventually house a homeless family, who will be carers in 'A Family shelter house' for the homeless street children, we would love to hear from you. We also need to fund raise and collect supplies for our mission work.

I personally feel very privileged to be called to help in these times of great need - perhaps God is calling you!

Please remember the words of our Lord Jesus, *'It is more blessed to give than to receive'*

May God bless you all,

Pamela Gratton