

"I thank my God...because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now" (Phil 1:3-5)

Dear Gospel Partners

2003 finished with terrifically encouraging news. Emma Desmond wrote to let the Trustees know that in addition to the support that the Trust had been able to pledge for her time at theological college she had been able to raise the necessary additional funds from other sources. Consequently she heads off to Oak Hill in September knowing that her financial needs have been met. We pray that she will be the first of many!

Each New Year brings fresh challenges and new opportunities. January is traditionally the time that those of us who work in the City look forward to a bonus. For several weeks now the papers have been speculating regarding the overall bonus pot; will it be up, or will the weakness of the dollar have put paid to that? And how will it be spent? I am told that the 2002 Burgundy that is about to go on sale will be wonderful....

Jesus spoke about new wine (Mark chapter 2) and used it as a metaphor for the radical change that his arrival heralded. Trust in Jesus' death is incompatible with other forms of religion. In oenology, first century-style, pouring new wine into old wine skins was a recipe for disaster – the skins would burst and both wine and skins would be ruined. Similarly, Jesus' arrival meant an end to tradition; a message that was so unpopular with some that within a few verses they were plotting to kill Jesus.

Opposition to the gospel is, sadly, a present reality and not merely a feature of "back then". Certainly, the arrival of Tony Jones as minister of the Claypath congregation in Durham has not been welcomed by all. Having been locked out of their own church building the local families and university students have been meeting in a school hall and also in a city-centre hotel. There is a wonderful opening for the gospel amongst the many young people in that University City and the Gospel Partners Trust is thrilled to be a partner in the work that Claypath is engaged in. Please pray for them as they seek to be both bold in taking hold of the opportunities that lie before them, and wise as they respond to the challenges and opposition that they face.

In recent weeks the Trustees have received a number of other requests for financial assistance for Church planting opportunities, as well as requests for help in funding men and women through theological college and in hands-on Church-based apprentice schemes. Please pray for wisdom for the Trustees as we meet in the near future to discuss the merits of these. (They all look worthy of support, but our finances are limited! Which brings us back to the subject of bonuses.....)

Thank you for being Partners with us in this exciting work!

Simon Pilcher
Chairman
Chairman

UPDATE ON PEOPLE AND PROJECTS

> Working with Muslims in Tower Hamlets
"Abdul" is a Muslim Background Believer (MBB) who is studying on the Cornhill Training Course and seeking to reach Muslims with the gospel.

The cost of discipleship for an MBB is heavy. In the past year Abdul has suffered "insults, discouragements, mocking, pain and suffering". But he is full of gratitude that the Lord has enabled him to tolerate all of this and to serve

Him. Amazingly, he writes, "2003 has been the most productive and satisfying year of my Christian life".

The outreach to local Muslim business men is growing and Abul has written and had printed a leaflet and plans to hand out 500 copies of it to Muslims.

> Steve Smith

Studying at Oak Hill College

Steve and Gwyn Smith have their sights set on long-term gospel ministry in East Africa, and hope to work with children and families in small churches where there is currently limited opportunity for people to learn how to understand the Bible for themselves and develop teaching skills.

Four months into his training, Steve writes, "I've been overwhelmed by what a privilege it is to be studying in an academic environment that combines intellectual rigour and devotional study with a profound respect for the sufficiency of Scripture. I pray that God will use this time at college to develop in me a breadth of knowledge and depth of understanding that might be well employed for years to come in service of God's people."

> St Helen's Associate Scheme, London

A full-time church-based training scheme

Richard Bray, currently in his second year on the scheme, writes: "Starting the St Helen's Associate Scheme posed two big questions for me. Would it provide stretching and relevant Bible training? And would I get good, meaty ministry experience? The answer to both has been "yes". The training programme, centred around group study of two of Paul's letters and Isaiah, has given me confidence in understanding scripture, and in its power to change lives. Having real-life ministry experience alongside the training has provided a first-class mix that's given me an excellent head-start in a lifetime of gospel ministry."

The cost per associate each year is around £10,000. Could you sponsor one of the September 2004 intake?

PEOPLE AND PROJECTS NEEDING SUPPORT

> Claypath Church, Durham

Claypath is a city centre church with a thriving student work in the heart of the Durham. Each Sunday evening, 250 university students gather, eager to hear the Bible taught. The morning "core" congregation has increased to about 50 people since the summer, but is still too small to fund the costs of the ministry as a whole. The opposition to Tony Jones' appointment and difficulty over a venue means additional unplanned expenditure. But it also means more opportunity for gospel partnership, in prayer and practical support. Could you partner them?

> Long-term Investments

Gospel Partners Trust helped six individuals start theological studies in September 2003. Michael Francis, at Westminster Seminary, Philadelphia, is one of them: "I was expecting lots of "Reformed rigor", and have not been disappointed. Biblical Counselling has been the most challenging and even revolutionary class I have taken so far. Its "big thing" is the application of serious, disciplined Bible study to the real "muck" of our sinful lives. It's an immense privilege to be so personally challenged, and equipped for ministry."

We're encouraged by reports like this to see that the people we're partnering are receiving such good training. We'd like to support them throughout their time at college (three or four years each). We'd also like to support others

who've approached us for funding to start college this September. But even for the six already at college, we can't guarantee support. We need more Partners to invest in future gospel workers.

> Chris and Sophie de Witt

South Africa is fast developing into a post-Christian society. Biblical Christianity's message that belief in Jesus cannot be combined with traditional African religions does not sit comfortably with post-apartheid pluralism. Secular materialism is the dominant worldview among both whites and the emerging black middle-class. People are looking to the churches to respond to the huge social problem of HIV/Aids, but without preaching the gospel.

South Africa needs more workers equipped with confidence in the truth of the Bible to preach an unpopular gospel. Chris and Sophie de Witt's long-term aim in going to South Africa is to be involved in training a generation of South African Christians to do just that. Between them they have eight years' experience of full-time ministry among students and workers in London. Initially, they will train at George Whitfield college in Cape Town for three years. Their focus will then be ministry in a local church congregation with a view to indentifying and training potential full-time workers. Their funding shortfall is currently around £9,000 per year.

For further information, please contact:

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