

Lawrence Moore, Director of the URC's Windermere Centre, introduces Vision4Life, the next phase of Catch the Vision

We've been doing structures for the past three years now under *Catch the Vision*. That's not what people expected, or wanted, but it was necessary in order to stop all our time and energy being siphoned off in serving a structure that was designed for a Church twice the size that we are now. Keeping the show on the road was such a task that it became an end in itself. For all that we elected to become a Church that exists for mission, we found ourselves talking wistfully of mission and doing "maintenance". So we've been freeing ourselves up for mission — to respond faithfully to God's call to join in God's saving work of transforming this world into the Kingdom of God.

Structures aren't the only things that have sapped resources of time and energy. Because we're a broad Church, we include in our membership people with very different — and often conflicting — theological viewpoints. We have members in the URC who make Billy Graham sound like a dangerous liberal, and others who make Don Cupitt seem like a fundamentalist. We all hang out together in the URC because we believe that unity is important. We believe that we're enriched by breadth and diversity, and deepened in our faith by having to look at things from a different standpoint to our own.

The trouble comes when there are contentious issues around. That's when difference very quickly — and almost automatically — degenerates into conflict. When an issue like human sexuality presents itself, the differences which rumble along beneath the surface, occasionally bursting out in irritated arguments, then explode into open warfare. It becomes "us" and "them" — where "they" aren't proper Christians, or don't believe the Bible.

It's no good pretending that differences are any less deep-seated than they are. You have only to look at the Letters pages of Reform to realise that the liberal/evangelical divide is alive and well and living destructively within the URC. They're deep-seated because they belong to different spiritualities — different ways of understanding faith, reading the Bible, praying, setting priorities etc.

That's why it makes sense to talk about the different "wings" of the Church. Tragically, the wings were keeping us apart — and what we really wanted to do was to fly! So in December 2005, a group of evangelicals and liberals got together at Hothorpe Hall simply to talk about the things that mattered to us. We read the Bible together, prayed together, talked about our faith and told our faith stories. We shared our hopes and dreams, and our passion for the URC to live up to its vision statement: "Called to be God's people, transformed by the Gospel, making a difference in the world for Christ's sake".

That's what we discovered is the cement that holds us together. What is more, we discovered that the key to finding one another as brothers and sisters in Christ was to share our faith stories, pray together and read and discuss the Bible together. It was a transforming experience for all of us. We found ourselves getting excited about our faith, our mission and our shared (and newly-discovered!) relationship in Jesus Christ. All sorts of new possibilities emerged — possibilities for a Church that has broken out of the sterile in-fighting between liberals and evangelicals; possibilities for the URC to be properly evangelical — where the "e" word doesn't designate a particular Christian subculture, but a deep rootedness in and excitement about the Gospel and about following Jesus Christ.

We'd stumbled into something bigger and more exciting than we anticipated. This wasn't something just for a small group to experience: this was something that could be a source of renewal and transformation for the whole Church.

That's how **Vision4Life** was born. It's the second phase of *Catch the Vision* — the phase that deals with the renewal of our spirituality. There will be a three-year engagement with Bible study, prayer and evangelism. This is where we found our roots and seeds of renewal to be, and we're returning to them for new life that will make us better able to live out our vision of being God's people, transformed by the gospel, making a difference in the world for Christ's sake. It's beginning officially in 2008, but we can begin it right now! By God's grace, it's flying time ...

Lawrence Moore