

# Reaching out

What does the word *evangelism* mean to you? Tracts, surveys, door-to-door, street preaching, literature work, Bible study groups – the list is endless.

Oh yes, and English classes.

In our classes we are always focused on introducing the message of the Bible to our English students as well as giving them a good English lesson. The BBC has excellent resources on its website and we try to link a theme to a Bible passage to read and to discuss, as well as using word games, tongue twisters, poems, etc. You have to be a bit creative! Sometimes you know that God has taken matters in hand, though.

One evening Lara, a veiled Muslim from one of the Gulf States, invited us for a meal at her place. When we arrived we found that Anil and Rita from India and Anthony from Hong Kong were there too. All attend the English classes (and also Pat's French class through which the contact was first made). They invited me to give thanks, which I did in Jesus' name. The food was plentiful and delicious. "Eat, eat, why aren't you eating?" came the cry every time we stopped for breath!

As we ate, Rita looked across and said "Mister Alan, why do the innocent suffer?" I thought of the man born blind in John 9. I explained that the Bible says that in this world suffering strikes indiscriminately at the deserving and undeserving. It is not true that because someone suffers they did wrong before they were born or in a previous life. Neither were they more guilty than anyone else. In the end we are all infinitely guilty before God, but the amazing thing is that the one person who was ever truly innocent experienced the deepest suffering ever when he was crucified for us.

The next English class Lara turned up on time but everyone else was late. She said "Why did the God give us the book? My daughter keeps asking but I don't know the answer". I explained how God spoke to us and gave us the Bible because he loves us. "But did he need to?" No, he didn't need to, but he loves us anyway. "So tell me, is Jesus Son of God or sent by God?" We read John 3:16,17. "But if he is Son of God, explain that to a child and they think the God married Mary." I said that the measure of truth is not our ability to understand, and we read some more: Colossians 1, Hebrews 1, Isaiah 53. We talked about how all the prophets sinned – Abraham, Noah, Isaiah, Jonah, but only Jesus lived a perfect life, then died for our sin and rose again. Lara returns to her Gulf State this June, but we know there is a church there and we hope to keep in touch.

These conversations have been months in gestation, the result of the drip, drip, drip of Bible reading together. Our prayer is that faith is also in gestation, that the Spirit of God is opening the hearts of these people to hear, receive and believe the Word of God. Please pray for Lara, Anil and Rita (not their real names, but God will know exactly who you mean.) Anthony came to Bordeaux a Christian and he is being baptised in June. Please pray that the whole English class will be there to witness his profession of faith.



Leafletting in the park.



Joint mission team.

## Why did the God give us the book? My daughter keeps asking but I don't know the answer.

"Oh no ! Oh no ! Man invented God and no good came of it. When you think of all the wars and conflicts, the wars of religion, the conflict in Northern Ireland, the middle east... Oh no ! Oh no !"

I thought, "Well that touched a nerve! All I did was invite him to the Calvin exhibition. He doesn't want to come, does he! O.K. O.K.", but still he was in full flow. Oh well! Here goes! (I prayed to the God of heaven.)

"I agree with you completely. People do dreadful things in the name of God, but that doesn't mean that God doesn't exist. And yes, lots of bad things are done in the name of religion, but the Bible is still true."

My new friend was still talking about the misbehaviour of certain priests and so on. I told him that I agreed that people could be dreadful hypocrites but that the Bible was still true and that he was very welcome to come and see the Calvin exhibition if he liked.

"Oh no! Oh no!"

Some minutes later I was on my way through the door of the student centre to get yet more printer cartridges!

"Oh! Hello! You came anyway!" Thinks – do I go back in with him or do I let someone else have a go and see if they get any further than me... I left, saying I'd be back in a few minutes.

And when I got back he was still there. We sat down and talked. He's typical of so many people here. They have been put off Christianity by their experience of religion, but they have never ever heard the gospel.

So he talked again about the badness of religious people. I agreed with him. Everyone is guilty before God. Everyone. But still the Bible is true and Jesus Christ lived and died so that bad people could be forgiven.

But what about... Yes, but the Bible is still true. And then... Yes, but the Bible is still true.

Do you have a Bible? Would you like a Bible ? Are you local ? Do you live nearby?

He was house-sitting for his son, but he has a Bible. Maybe he'll read it. Please pray that he does, and that he finds salvation.

Thank you so much for your prayers! We had a very encouraging joint mission week with UBM (14-21 April), with great weather and a motivated team and students to work with. The day consisted mainly of inviting people to the different events, giving out tracts and gospels and engaging people in conversation. In the mornings we went on the campus near tram stops, cafés and in the halls of residence and in the afternoons we stayed in the area near the student centre encouraging people to come into the John Calvin exhibition which was held there. We were pleasantly surprised to see around 40 people come into the exhibition which became the context for some excellent conversations. Several asked what Calvin stood for, so it was the

perfect opening to present the essence of the gospel. It's so encouraging to think of how many opportunities we had throughout the week to share the gospel for the first time with agnostics, atheists, Catholics, Jews, Jehovah's Witnesses and Muslims. In the evenings we held a conference on Calvin's life and theology (which was well attended including some unbelievers) an evangelistic film night and an English night which were however, less well-attended.

We faced some resistance during the week. A Catholic student who came to the exhibition became enraged by the thought that it was God's plan for Jesus to die on the cross. Rather surprisingly he said that man was the one responsible and guilty for it, at which he tore up

the invitation, threw it on the ground and stormed out. It was impossible to reason with him, even from Scripture. Another interesting feature of the week was getting thrown out of the park adjoining the town hall, just opposite the student centre. We'd had some of the best conversations with people in the park, when we were brusquely told that (unbeknown to us) we had no right to give out publicity there and were obliged to leave immediately. But by that time we had spoken to nearly everyone!

Praise God for the power of His wonderful cross to bring the dead to life. May many who were reached find true life in Christ. Pray for ongoing contacts and that the students and church may be inspired to continue in

evangelism. Praise God that Liz Richards, who was on the team, will be helping me in the student work for seven months from September as part of her language degree year abroad. Another mission week is planned for 2010. So if you have a good level of French and a heart for the lost we would love you to come!

