

# Simple Church weekend

by Asha Wije

What sort of church did Jesus dream of? Would our local church survive if we lost the building? Is church becoming an indoor spectator sport? Is church characterised by consumerism, for example, if you don't like the preaching you switch church? Have we stopped asking what it means for every member to be a minister?

These were some of the uncomfortable questions that were asked at the Simple Church weekend on 23-25 April. Held at the De Vere Conference Centre in Berkshire, 150 people attended from over fifty churches across the SEC and four from the Scottish Mission, including their president, Pastor B. Holford. It was organised by Pastor Aris and Mrs Sophia Vontzalidis of the Church Growth department of the SEC, and on Friday evening the SEC president, Pastor Sam Davis, gave an inspired and challenging keynote address.

There were two parts to the weekend. The first focused on Growth Groups, which are mission-oriented small groups that are linked to a church, and the second part was an introduction to the Simple Church, which is a lay-led Simple/House Church focusing on reaching secular people.

Much of the teaching at the weekend was carried out by Dr Milton Adams and a lay member, Darren Yates, both from the Florida Conference, who highlighted the fact that God ordains the ordinary and constantly seeks to break us free from whatever holds us back to lead us in missionary work. 'I'm on fire,'

and 'I can't wait to start,' were some of the comments from the weekend that had at its core the simple words of Jesus to 'Go' and make disciples of all nations.

So what is 'Simple Church'? Well, Simple Church, we learned, is not, as the name could suggest, simplistic or easy. Nor is it just a smaller version of conventional churches. Rather, Simple Church is a whole new way of being church, a way of living that is focused on loving relationships, outreach, lifestyle and fundamentally being connected to God, each other and everyone else. Simple Churches meet in the home, eat together, study together, pray together, worship together, serve together and they ensure that everyone is involved – like members of a choir, so that no one goes to their grave without having sung their song. They require commitment, are lay-led and focused on front-line missionary work. Their members believe that there is no longer an excuse just to sit in seminars to learn about what they should be doing. It's time to get active as there is an urgent mission to be accomplished before Jesus returns.

It was very moving to see how the Spirit of God worked on the hearts of those attending. When Pastor A. Vontzalidis made an appeal for those who wanted to start or be a part of Growth Groups or Simple Churches to come forward, almost 100 lay members responded, and the Conference closed with a moving prayer session offered for

## Weston outreach

February 13 was a happy day at Weston-super-Mare. Our Sabbath morning speaker was Pastor Terry Messenger, SEC Sabbath School director. After a delicious fellowship lunch there was an afternoon where ideas were presented and discussed on how to make Sabbath School more appealing to the public as well as to members who, for various reasons, choose not to attend. The evening saw everyone back in the church hall enjoying a fun social and pancake evening. This event was used as an opportunity for members to invite friends, and also an invitation was given to everyone who comes along to Weston's successful cookery club, which is now running well into its second year. Invitations were accepted, and we were pleased to welcome and spend social time with seventeen visitors. Our minister, Pastor Wayne Erasmus – a great cook himself – made the batter, and helpers were kept busy cooking piles of pancakes. A collection for the ADRA-UK Haiti earthquake disaster appeal had already been taken up at church, but our children decided that they, too, would like to do something to help. They drew some lovely pictures to give as a thank-you for donations and also during the evening sold cakes, resulting in £62 more for the needy people of Haiti.

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God's enabling and leading so that we would all be used to extend his Kingdom across the SEC and beyond.

Dr Adams stated that, in the US, 60% of Americans under the age of 40 have not walked into a church building. UK figures are likely to be much worse. With a population of over 60 million but poor church attendance across many

denominations, perhaps Simple Church is a way forward?

Attendees were helpfully provided with resources and did exercises on how to start Growth Groups which is the first phase of the Simple Church training. If you would like more information, please get in touch with the Church Growth department through the SEC website [www.secadventist.org.uk](http://www.secadventist.org.uk).

