

"Where we're going"

A talk by Steve Thomas

UK Leaders' Prayer Day, 8 May 2008



Introduction

Steve introduced by explaining the process we are in. We sense God speaking about a new phase: Adding 'mission' to 'family'; a new banner; *inter*dependent not *in*dependent; a fresh commitment.

He briefly reviewed our 10-point plan, as previously communicated in various settings and publications (including *Leader*> magazine spring 2007, available from www.saltlight.org/europe)

God is undoubtedly speaking about a new sense of cohesion. What will this look like? We don't yet know exactly, but it might include ...

- Prioritising time together in prayer and fasting
- Encouraging regional 'Year Team' training initiatives to work together more cohesively?
- Working together better in the training, preparation and support of church-planters?
- Working together better and with coordination in responding to the 'go to Europe' word?
- Strengthening intergenerational connections and leadership?

Recent prophetic

In the recent European Apostolic Team (EAT) meeting, a word was given about a chessboard:

"God has been speaking about a chessboard. He saw God taking pawns and reshaping them into other pieces. They were able to move more powerfully, with more influence and in unorthodox ways. There'll be knights and bishops – those who take ground and fight, and others like the rook, who move in unusual ways to another part of the board to take significant ground. Other pieces would move more slowly.

"God is speaking about changes of roles and purpose; about movement; covenant and dedication. Establishing places of safety – planting and strengthening. Other pieces were redeemed back. God is going to bring change. You won't predict it all. Some new pawns will be added into this grouping." (*Andy Sheppard, Basingstoke*)

Also in the EAT meeting, a simple but profound word was shared: "There is a window in time open *now*! 'Work while it is day; night is coming when no-one can work.' Shape and decide now. God says, 'I can work with imperfections and imperfect people. I do it all the time! Can you?'" (*Francois van Niekerk, South Africa*)

Last night as we prayed there was a flow of prophetic around the themes in Psalm 126. Expressing our gratefulness for what we've seen in the past gives us great hope for the future harvest. Tears speak of crying out to God in prayer.

Human wisdom always says "slow down"; God is saying to us *now* is the time for harvest! (John 4.27-42)

A new European team

We are clear that it's time to develop a new European team. Over the last few years a number of significant leaders and national teams have been starting to emerge across Europe:

- Scandinavia – 23 Swedish churches now gathering, wanting to walk together as a family of churches. A wider family is forming, including churches and leaders in Norway, Finland, Denmark and Germany.
- France – an apostolic team is starting to emerge. It's exciting to see UK sons and daughters having moved to respond to the 'call to Europe'.
- We also have growing connections with churches in Belgium, Poland, Spain, Switzerland and Ukraine, and with other European nations.

Out of the various leaders of these groups we've been gathering for the last 18 months a **European Leaders' Forum (ELF)**, from which we will see a new European Team emerge in due course, that is genuinely European and not overly British-led. (Leadership takes time to emerge and we need to give time to this process – it might take 5 years!)

Why am I sharing this? Firstly, because we're part of Europe and God has called us to work strategically into Europe. Secondly, because it has implications for the UK.

New UK teams

The current EAT is in a bottleneck. We've got lots of vision for lots of things, but we lack clear focus and clear strategy. We're trying to break the bottleneck, and call a lot more players into function over the next year or two.

We believe that God is calling us to develop two new teams for the UK, with immediate effect!

Firstly, a new **UK Apostolic Team (UKAT)** – a core apostolic team that will seek to formulate ongoing vision and strategy for UK. We have been high on vision, weak on strategy and very weak on implementation!

The first role of UKAT will be to develop a strategic plan of mission and growth, including mission, church-planting and growth, by January 2009. We still want anointing and 'following the cloud' – but without strategy the anointing spills onto the ground and is wasted. We need both! Please be assured that the strategic plan needs to be very flexible – we're still cloud-followers!

We recognise that we need a timeline, to overcome our propensity to procrastinate. UKAT will lead the implementation of this – ensuring that it happens.

Steve Thomas will lead UKAT until January 2009, but from then Mark Mumford will take over the leadership of UKAT, with accountability to Steve on behalf of the new European Team. In effect, we're becoming a family of national apostolic teams. Steve and Dave Richards will be apostolic fathers/advisors, but will not routinely meet with UKAT.

Secondly, a new **UK Development Forum (UKDF)** – Mark Mumford and UKAT will lead this team. UKDF will be a much wider dynamic team, including regional representation and other specialist gifts and ministries – to increase connection and implementation.

UKDF will have a strong, missional focus. It will have a clear UK *development* mandate: not just maintenance of what is. It will **not** be a UK parochial team, but developing UK churches to fulfil their mission in UK and Europe.

These UK teams will...

- Develop a **strategic plan** for UK (as above).
- Clarify **vision mandate**: what is the “God-assignment” for our family of churches?
- Develop **values** – we are seeking to clarify the statement of our DNA – our clear core commitments and values. What we don’t want to do it to produce a long document, like a denomination.
- Look for strategic **partnerships**: different gifts/ministries from across the whole to work together fruitfully.
- Develop **financial strategy** – we need honest conversations about money!

Immediate actions

- A ‘**Nehemiah tour**’ of regions: a ‘Nehemiah assessment’ of what is already happening ‘on the ground, what we need to be doing, and building some relationships. We have already initiated this. Mark and other members of the new UKAT will be leading this. Nehemiah toured the walls, assessed and evaluated, and then called people to clear vision, strategically organising people to complete the task.
- **UKAT** will be meeting with increased frequency to further continuity and momentum.
- **Ultimate Intention** and **Youth** teams being developed already
- A new sense of co-ordination of **Year Team** training across our family of churches
- At European Leaders’ Conference February 2009 we will recognise the changes we have made and **commission** the new teams.

Questions

The following questions we asked:

- *Any news on the proposed ‘rebranding’?*
No, we haven’t got that far yet!
- *Would you care to elaborate on values?*
As a team, we have made enormous progress forward relationally, and are clear on 95% of the values and are working on the rest – so we’re not quite ready to publish! We will be concentrating on this at ELC09, including God’s call on our lives, our vision and values.
- *You’re talking a lot about regions. How do you see current apostolic oversight working with that?*
That needs to develop as God leads us! Nobody is holding on to anything – if there are changes of apostolic oversight that need to happen, we are open to that. But neither are we abandoning relationships. Barney always says to us, “Don’t rip up the old tracks until we have the new ones in place.”

- *Will UKDF have women and younger leaders on it?*
Potentially, yes! It’s all very fresh and we haven’t worked out how we want to play it with UKDF yet. But UKDF is about vision and development, connecting with regions and with different ministries, including those working with different generations. Anything to do with development has to include younger generations! We want to keep that team dynamic.
- *What about the development of Christian Education?*
We have, and want, a vision for Christian Education and we want to make sure that David Freeman finds a place, probably within UKDF.
- *What is your dream for clusters and regions?*
The primary push for us is to do with mission and relationship, therefore the whole idea of gathering in regions is for purpose! Some groupings are natural; others less natural – we want to see what God brings out. We want to see whole new regions emerge.
- *How does Church Relief International fit in?*
A good question! CRI is very important and part of our heart for the poor. We’ll have to decide where that fits. At the moment, responsibility for CRI rests with the S&L Trustees (UK).
- *To what extent do you see UKAT/UKDF as a scaffold towards a single team?*
We may see changes in the future, but for the time being we see two teams. The priority is to develop more connections, which is why we are establishing the UKDF.
- *How do UKAT and UKDF relate?*
We don’t know yet, we’re working on it! It’s a smaller core, apostolic team focused on vision, faith and strategy. They’re two concentric circles, working together closely, with a two-way flow of communication.
- *For some of us, 80% of our external work is outside Europe. And we also have strong links within our town. How does this fit in with the overall plan?*
The Europe vision is not exclusive. We are also engaged in many other nations. When God spoke to us about Europe it was to refocus us to not to bypass the spiritual desert that is right in front of us.

Secondly, we need to partner with other churches locally for the sake of the gospel. But what we can sow into those settings comes out of who we are as a family, our vision and values.

By talking about cohesion, we’re in large part saying are there ways that we can strengthen you to be what God has called you to be, in your settings.

- *Will you support us in planting a church with other churches in our town?*
Primarily, God has joined us to this family. And secondly, we want to be robustly part of our local cities. Most of the time those things are not in conflict. If you want to talk about planting a church together with others, we can help with that, but we also need to ask some questions about under whose authority that is done, whose DNA will go in, etc.

