

## **Plenaries 4 & 5 Responses**

### ***To bend the church and save the people' what must I do today?***

#### **Get out and meet the people**

- Come out of the comfort zone
- Leave behind the paraphernalia
- Think outside the box and the building
- Notice when someone drops out, touch base sooner, ask how they are not where have you been.

#### **Build a fence**

- Accept them with lots of eating
- Keep prodigal friendliness at the front of our minds
- Different forms of church within one body of people
- Make good links with other churches
- Make liturgy user friendly
- Develop and mature 'belonging' strategies
- Build strong relationships
- Every relationship needs to be treated individually

#### **Changing the Church – while the sun shines/trees bend don't break**

- Thank people for bending already done
- Regain sense of urgency
- Remind ourselves regularly what the core objective is.
- Make connections with those who have the good news and those who need it
- Education, education, education!
- Prayer
- Enthuse
- Love – not just the prodigals but the older bro's too
- Encourage 'ownership' of the vision
- Reassure that it is OK to be 'messy'
- Develop a loving church
- Patiently persist

## ***Why do prodigals fear that we will 'label and condemn' them?***

### **Failure, Guilt, Fear, Rejection**

- Because we often do/have done
- Prodigals feel guilty
- Past prejudices
- Insecurity
- Fear of rejection – they feel they are unacceptable
- We remember sins – not good at forgiving
- When people come back we feel uncomfortable and do not know what to say
- Because they condemn themselves and have to learn to forgive themselves even though we have forgiven them
- Because they now have different values which they know are not church/God's values
- Christians are not often honest about our own failings and need for forgiveness
- The elder brother syndrome
- They assume (rightly or wrongly) that the church hasn't changed
- Our tendency to forgive but not forget
- Unsure about confidentiality
- Have they ever experienced unconditional love?

### **God's Holiness versus Grace**

- Prodigals see the holiness but do not appreciate God's grace
- They think there is a criteria to be fulfilled before being accepted back (a tick list)
- Legalism
- They've never experienced the love of the church
- We are far too quick to judge
- Poor/bad communication
- We are perceived/are good at presenting a 'we've got it all together' attitude rather than 'fellow travellers on a journey'

### **Negative media portrayal**

## ***What do you know now about how we make prodigals and how they feel?***

### **Our Part**

- Find out more about people as individuals
- Bridge the gap between church and life
- Do not be superficial
- Meet people needs and be inviting
- Appoint spotters - to look after part of the congregation
- Failure to disciple our children
- Poor relationship skills
- Didn't do enough to dispel the myth that we have to be good to belong (rather, enforced it)
- Have we misrepresented the Christian experience
- Failed to give responsibility
- Need to pick on people as they go through major life changes
- Need to distinguish between the fundamentals of faith and our own traditions of doing it
- Failed to value people
- Not developed body ministry
- Lack of reality/vulnerability
- Not challenged teens with true commitment

**Their feelings**

- Not rejecting God but church
- Feel guilty, unhappy - need love
- Do not expect them to be the same as when they left
- Blame is not all theirs
- Failure to fully understand properly a relationship with Jesus and what it means
- Bored, uninspired
- Fear of gossip
- Unwanted
- Unloved, lost, isolated, ashamed, desperate
- Let down, angry, hurt, confused
- Misunderstood, helpless,
- Not heard