

Paul Bennison's Summer News 2010

A much-delayed newsletter – apologies for that – but what an astonishing year it has been so far! I've never been one to get involved in 'end-time' debates, my reasoning being that if Jesus doesn't know when he's coming back, how can I? But world events do seem to be pointing towards something very different.... so many earthquakes (Haiti – devastating, tragic: Concepcion, Chile – the whole city moved many centimetres according to satellite information, Turkey, China, Indonesia...): mud slides in Rio de Janeiro killing hundreds and rendering thousands homeless: famines in Africa again: flooding in the USA, France, and more: massacres of children in China: mass murders in England (2 in four weeks, when there had only been two in the previous 25 years): financial meltdown in Greece, Portugal, Spain, maybe the Republic of Ireland: the 'ash' cloud from the volcano in Iceland: airline crashes, including the one with the Polish government on board, and the very recent one in Pakistan: in many countries, the effect of the financial crash 2-3 years ago is only now really beginning to bite.... the oil disaster in the Gulf of Mexico: unprecedented rioting in Thailand, Kyrgyzstan: the Togo soccer team's terrible terrorist ambush: North Korea's act of aggression on the South Korean warship... and then the 'Koran' pastor....wow. There seems to be an increase of terminal/fatal diseases....so many troops being killed in Afghanistan, fatal train crashes.

It would be so, so easy to give up hope, assume God has turned his back on the world, and panic..... and we're only just past halfway in the year.....but there is a word higher than every other word, be it illness, earthquake, flood, murder.... the word is Jesus, and, as Paul so reassuringly reminds us, in Romans 5:20, that where there is an increase of evil, THERE GRACE WILL ABOUND EVEN MORE.... God has put so many promises in place, hasn't he? And every one of them relates to you, to me, and everyone who chooses to believe in Him. So in the middle of bad news everywhere, there's the best news we can know: that God's Grace is being poured out more and more, and that His grace is greater than any problems, disease, issues, or evil, that the enemy chooses to assault us with.

CRISIS = RISK + OPPORTUNITY: what an opportunity we have now to SHOW Jesus to the world!

WHAT A YEAR SO FAR....

It's been great to be 'at home' in Northern Ireland – I'm loving it. I'm renting a small house close to the town centre of Bangor, which very quickly became my 'haven' after the 7-8 months of living out of bags lugged around in my car, in the homes of countless lovely friends. I've discovered that (and maybe this is just me) I only really relax in my own place, and it's been a delight to get to know more and more people here, and be involved more in Ireland. I was just in Australia, and a long-time friend in Melbourne said to me 'Are you prepared for the cold?' I found out it was about 15C and raining – I laughed and told him 'That's an Irish summer!'

So far this year, too, there's been the immense sadness of mum dying: it wasn't totally unexpected, as she'd been in dementia care for about 5 years, but when the end came, it came suddenly, and whilst I thought I was prepared for it, it was still a shock. It was strange, too, because mum dying made me miss my dad even more, even though he's been with the Lord for almost 45 years. Mum was an amazing lady, to whom I owe so much, and my sister, brother in law, and I miss her mischievous, 'wicked' sense of humour!

The year has taken me to a good number of places – England, of course, Scotland, Mexico, Colombia (of course!), Romania, and Australia. I'll cover those things a bit more as the newsletter unfolds! Coming up in the months ahead are Sweden, Colombia and Mexico again, possibly Pakistan (which had to be postponed as it was at the time of mum's death), maybe Peru, Ecuador, Kenya, Sierra Leone.... again, places that were 'pencilled in' for the first part of this year, but got shunted into the future....

It has been a real privilege to begin to get involved with a great ministry here in Northern Ireland, Divine Healing ministries, headed up by a wonderful Franciscan monk, Brother David Jardine. David's ministry and influence is tremendous here, and to be moving closer alongside his ministry is tremendous. I'm also looking to link in with the Washington International Network more and more (USA – THAT saga later on too!), a network of churches in a number of countries, but with a particular heart for Colombia, and, more specifically, Cali. David Baird, who heads it up, is often in Colombia when I'm there. So, good connections in the pipeline: and, as someone with a real heart for networking, it blesses me a great deal to work alongside an increasing number – and variety – of ministries and churches.

THE HOME FRONT.....

*It's been a real privilege again to be involved in the lives of churches all over the UK. January's incredible snow ended the possibility of going to River Church, Worcester, and a celebration meeting at the House of the Open Door Community in Childswickham. Back at HOD in September, though. A great weekend again at **Loose Baptist in Maidstone**: what a fantastic church. **Towerview Free Methodist in Bangor** is always good to go back to, so too is **Southside Christian Fellowship in Ayr**. Always plenty of people to pray for at all three, and some lovely stories from each of God healing and touching people. It was great, too, to return to **Voice of Comfort International Church, in Greenwich, London**: I really felt the bond with Mike Edwards, the pastor, grew, and it was a terrific couple of days to share during their conference. Food often features in meetings (!), and a men's breakfast at **West Church, Bangor**, and an 'older' people's lunch at **St Hilda's, Lisburn**, were both lovely occasions.*

*A date that will stay with me for a long time was that at **St. Anne's Cathedral, Belfast**, as it was my first time alongside Divine Healing Ministries, and also the day that mum died.... I really felt I should speak – on healing – despite mum's death, and it was a really quite wonderful evening. I was convicted that death had no sting, and the grave no victory, and it was a joy to pray with so many people after the meeting.*

*A lovely return trip to **Brownhill Road Baptist Church, in Catford**, where my long-time friends Dave & Pat Bridle are leaders was a time of real blessing.*

Back in 1994, a friend & I were saved from certain death in a car crash by an angel (if you want to know the story, ask me!). A few years later, a similar occurrence with another friend in Mozambique... this year, a different sort of 'transport' miracle...

Ever since visiting China back in the late 1980's, and spending time with pastors there, notably Samuel Lamb, God convicted me through them that really, genuinely, totally – nothing is impossible. That's easier said than done when you need to put it into practice! Samuel, many times, held his Bible right in my face, and said 'If it's in here, it WILL happen!'... Over the years, I've tried to learn to do what Jesus did, and I know that in the area of healing, so many astonishing things have happened.

Then, in Colombia in May, something else happened... if I'd been on my own, I'd have been loathe to report this, but there were 4 of us from the UK, and two very dear friend Colombian pastors, and a car... Walter's Ford Explorer, one of the pastors. We'd been ministering in Buenaventura, on the coast: on a good day, in daylight, it's a 3 hour journey across an 'interesting' Andes mountain pass (!): two lanes, incredible bends and steep drops, many trucks and buses... not a road you want to drive at night! Which is exactly what we found ourselves doing on the return to Cali! Not only that, as we were about to leave at 10.30pm, an Andean thunder storm, with typical tropical rains, began. We were already looking at a 4 hour journey: now, more likely to be 5+ hours. You could hardly see out of the windscreen/windshield, even with the lights on high beam and the wipers flat out. The roads become like rivers in an instant in such rain. It took an hour to reach the toll, which signals the split in the road for the mountain pass or the really long haul road via Buga, to Cali.

I sat in the back, beating myself up over why I have no problem in saying to sickness 'Get out!' or 'Be healed in the Name of Jesus!', but had a problem with saying 'Peace be still!'.... so I decided to try and beat my mental battle by saying just that.... within moments the storm seemed to move away from the car: we could still see it, hear it, and see the rain, but it had moved away from us....

At 12.20am, we were getting out of the car at our apartment block in Cali.... 50 minutes, to drive what should have taken over 4 hours! It took some time to sink in: not only did God quieten the storm around us, but we know we missed large 'chunks' of the journey home, or reaching landmarks much, much quicker than we should have done. Maybe this is nothing unusual for you: perhaps being transported, which we were, is more common than I know, but I have to confess it is the first time I recall it ever happening to me.... More, the rain began again with its relentless hostility within 10 minutes of our getting back into Cali. I'm now looking forward to missing out on some long haul airline flights, and just arriving in different countries! It does happen: I just would like the air miles, too!!!

You can contact me at:

61 Belfast Road, Bangor, Down, BT20 3PW, Northern Ireland

paul@paulbennison.com

www.paulbennison.com

Telephone: +44 (0) 2891 456947

Support information on the website, or email me, if you can help!

COLOMBIA

Hmmm.... the record is stuck again, on repeat.... Colombia once again was a trip to outdo all others! The 'car' miracle you know about.... this time, a few other things happened that have never happened before! There were some astonishing meetings, particularly in the Agua Blanca district of Cali, a great meeting in Buenaventura, and a mind-blowing visit to the hospital there. It's hard to always remember the names of churches – sometimes we never get to know them! – two nights at one church, pastored by a lovely man, David, and perhaps the best 'hospitality' of any church I've been to in Colombia. It is an open air church, the meetings organised at the last minute: over 400 came the first night, and it was such a thrill to preach and see 125+ give their lives to the Lord. Then a vast number responded for healing: so many miracles that night. Quite early on, I was asked to pray for a lovely girl, about 6 years old, carried to the front by her mum. She had been born with no arches in her feet, was never able to walk. About 20 minutes later, mum came back, with the little girl walking next to her: they'd gone home, and the daughter said as she was prayed for, she saw a brilliant light, felt incredibly hot, and saw Jesus... by which time her arches had formed, and she was walking!!! I asked them to testify from the platform – which released an astonishing gift of faith, with many receiving healing.

Often, my little team – Dave & Clare from England, and Ian – first time there for him – from Newtownards, Northern Ireland, was split up because of the number of churches wanting us... I went with my dear friend Diego, one evening, to a church in an area named Mohica. Dave and Clare were elsewhere, Ian was at the children's foundation run by long-time close friend Hendrik Hoere's church. As we arrived in Mohica, Diego mentioned that the meeting was in a gazebo in a park... that often happens in Cali, but there were fully-armed (pump action shot guns & machine guns!) police at the end of every road having access to the park. I asked why they were there... to be told that the pastor had asked for their protection as it's an area (very!!) not safe for 'gringos'....! That sort of info certainly helps with knowing what to pray, and adrenaline! Great evening – within minutes, the Pastor, Raul, was healed... many more were healed – and 30% or more of the 200 or so attending gave their lives to the Lord. Went, with Ian, to preach in a town south of Cali: our driver got lost, and whenever we asked for directions, we were told 'Don't go down that road, it'd be far too dangerous'.... life is never dull!

In Buenaventura, in a couple of hours of visiting the hospital (which Ian, having never been in a poor Colombian hospital before thought was a deserted dilapidated building!), just going from room to room, over 20 people were healed, and more than a dozen gave their lives to the Lord.... I could write reams more about this trip, but space is running out, and you get the drift of how great a trip it was, I'm sure!

AUSTRALIA

It was so good to go back to Australia again: it's been a few years since I was there, and I'd never been to Melbourne. Had a fantastic time in some meetings organised by my friend Jase, who was a student on a YWAM school I spoke at in Buenos Aires, Argentina, 9-10 years ago. Ended up on a 'merry-go-round' of praying for people in homes, hospitals.... saw God do some really lovely things in people's lives, prayed for dozens, saw some healings, but – and I never want to be only 'triumphalistic' in newsletters – had the sadness of praying for a guy named Wayne, in his home, with John, one of the full time staff of a great Baptist Church. Wayne was very ill with cancer, 51 years old if I recall, 2 sons, & grandchildren. Sadly, Wayne didn't WANT to live: it's virtually impossible to pray for someone like that for healing. We talked for about an hour and a half, and as John and I left his house, gave him a hug, told him that Jesus loved him. We heard within 24-hours that a friend who shared his home discovered that he'd committed suicide in his back yard that same afternoon. At least he died having been hugged, and knowing that Jesus loved him...The other side of the coin was going to pray for a lovely young lady Bethany, daughter of Wycliffe missionaries, seriously ill with a brain tumour, and being impacted by her faith in God who is going to heal her. It was a delight to be with her and her dad and their pastor. I also got to fly in the massive Airbus A 380 between London and Singapore, which was a real treat for me. And an upgrade to business class Singapore-Melbourne! Yeah!!!!

MEXICO A trip to my dear friends the Osorios' church in Mexico City was cut short by my mum's death and funeral, so I got just a few days there, but it was good to see what God is doing in the church there, and to be involved in a number of meetings, and pray for the sick. I am back in Mexico in September, this time for a couple of weeks, and look forward to being involved in more churches and with more people.

DIARY/AGENDA

SEPTEMBER

3 – Celebration Meeting –
Childswickham, Worcester,
House of the Open Door
Community

7 – Home, Ireland

14 – Fly to England, to fly next
day to

15-29 MEXICO – preach/teach

30 – Home, Ireland

OCTOBER

10 – West Church, Bangor, pm

18 – England

19-21 – Rhinos

24 – City Church, Plymouth am

Maranatha Church, Exeter pm

26 – Nov 24 – COLOMBIA

NOVEMBER

1-24 – COLOMBIA

25 – Home, Ireland

DECEMBER

3-13 – SWEDEN -, Gothenburg,
Orebro, and more!

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JANUARY

2 – Brownhill Rd Baptist, Catford,
London am

Green Street Green Baptist,
Orpington pm

Possibly Zimbabwe, Sri Lanka

FEBRUARY

15-17 Rhinos

26 – Towerview Free Methodist
Men's Breakfast 9.30 am

THE US IMMIGRATION SAGA

This newsletter is rather late because I have been waiting to see if there is any more news from US Immigration. As many of you know, my permanent residency application was denied in June. My terrific Christian immigration lawyer in the USA, Gunnar Armstrong, was astonished, as were most of us, when the reason given by immigration was that being a missionary, and also director of foreign missions for a church, did not constitute a religious position! It is rare for a petition to be denied so quickly without any requests for further information. Under US immigration guidelines, we had to appeal within 28 days, but during that time Gunnar discovered in their denial document that there were discrepancies in Immigration's application of their own laws, so in sending in the appeal a statement was made to them that they had misused laws in making the decision. As a result, instead of appealing my petition, US immigration wrote to Gunnar to say that they would completely reconsider the case, which rarely happens. An appeal can take many years, and there is no way that I could have pursued a long drawn out appeal. The current situation could hopefully be resolved very quickly, so I value your prayers as immigration reconsider my case, that their initial denial would be overturned and that I can return to the USA. It has been difficult not being able to transit the USA en route to Latin America: the only alternatives being via Spain or Canada, both options effectively doubling the ticket cost to get to anywhere. It also makes the journey much, much longer!

During the past two or three months, there has also been an additional crisis in the USA for me! Sometime in June, a main water pipe burst in the house, and for various reasons it was not possible for anyone to check the house for some 2 to 3 weeks. Tens of thousands of gallons... During that particular period, the heat-wave that the east coast of America has experienced, was at its peak, and the temperature never dropped below 95°F, 35°C: often reaching 110°F, 41°C! So, the house was like a sauna, and when my friend John went to check the house, the carpets were destroyed, the walls covered in thick black mould, even doorframes and doors destroyed, along with other furniture. The rebuilding work is now almost finished, with some large sections of the wall having to be taken down and replaced! As and when I do get back to the USA, and I am believing that I will, it looks as though I'll have to completely re-organise the house, as that is something the builders and the insurance will not do! Joy oh joy!

The past 17 months have been both hard emotionally and physically, and financially. I have been grateful for the very generous help of many people over these months. I have learned so much in this time, especially when it comes to helping people experiencing traumatic circumstances. In a Christian magazine in the UK, a recent article by somebody made redundant had many relevant comments for me. The person writing the article listed some things to avoid saying somebody recently unemployed, some of these very pertinent to my situation. 'The Lord will provide' is true of course, but when you're waiting for God to provide a 'what' or 'when' are the words that come to mind. 'A day is as 1000 years' is also very true – if you happen to be God! To me, 17 months has the same number of days as for anybody else! 'All things work together for good' – yes, they do, but when you're in a particular time where that doesn't seem to be happening, I've learned that it's actually best to just pray for the person concerned! Rob Bell says they are 'slick biblical solutions', but in truth the reality is messy & hard.

A couple of months ago, my great friend Alan, asked me, 'what's the difference between your story of the past 10 years, and Job?'. For those of you who know me well you know much of the story; I'm certainly not equating myself with that giant of the old Testament, but as well as the loss of home, possessions, goods, and much more, these recent months have had quite an effect on me physically. People say to me that I shouldn't be ill or suffer pain as I pray for so many sick people; truth is, I'm not good at praying for myself, and just because I pray for the sick doesn't make me immune from physical attacks on my body. Please pray for health, strength, energy, and provision; as you can see from the diary, the next few months are busy and demanding, and expensive. I'm grateful for the sacrifice of many dear friends. I do still need your help both in prayer and in finance, over the months ahead. I am so grateful to God without whom I could not pay the bills on the house in America, and the house here in Ireland. Thank you for your love, prayers, and support. I covet all three for the months ahead.

