

# Dreaming Dreams

## A Tool for Re-Invigorating a Church Café

*Ministry Today 40: July 2007*

By Paul Beasley-Murray  
Chair of Ministry Today

*For a number of years we have been running a small café at the front of our church premises, four days a week, selling soups and sandwiches, pizzas and jacket potatoes, and a range of desserts, together with a variety of drinks. Staffed by volunteers, it's well patronised by students and seniors alike. In spite of rock-bottom prices, we make a healthy profit.*

*The cafe does not have its own dedicated premises. Instead we run it in our church's 'Friendship Centre'. This has disadvantages, but one advantage is that by coming into the cafe, people are actually coming into the church itself.*

*This summer we put on a really nice three-course 'thank-you' lunch for the cafe staff, with wine as well. At the end of the meal I gave a speech. After thanking everybody most warmly for all their dedication and hard work, I made the following speech:*

"I love that quotation from Joel which Peter used on the Day of Pentecost: "I will pour out my Spirit on everyone: your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams". Dreams are not just for young people - they are also for older people too. Let's spend a few minutes dreaming together.

Over the years, the work which we now call Oasis has changed amazingly. When I first came, there was 'Open Door'; then it became 'The Big Munch'; and now it is 'Oasis'. What will Oasis become, I wonder? One thing for certain, Oasis won't remain the same, for if it does, then it will die. Living things always change.

Will, for instance, the day come when Oasis has a paid cook or a paid manager? I know that this has been suggested before and been dismissed, but the fact is that there are churches which find it useful to go this way. Just the other week I was at a Baptist Church in Shoeburyness, and to my amazement I discovered that they employ a professional chef.

We only operate four days a week, from 10.30 a.m. to 1 pm. But some churches operate their coffee shops all day. The Oasis Coffee Shop which is part of the Baptist Church at Leigh Road is open from 9.00am until 5.00pm, five days a week.

Or do we want to be more adventurous in the things we serve? Baguettes, for instance, are becoming increasingly popular. At a time when more and more people are drinking

bottled water, might we want to have an Aqua Aid fountain. The fact is that people's tastes are changing.

Many Christian coffee shops are actually Christian book-shops: should we consider selling books? Or if that is beyond us, what about having a book of the month which we sell?

But before we get into the detail of the future, maybe we need to ask ourselves what the purpose of the Oasis Cafe is? The other month, I talked about Oasis as being an expression of corporate hospitality. This is a place where we welcome people - especially, perhaps, lonely people, single people, elderly people. Yet at the same time I often see young people, and young families. Not everybody is lonely.

At one stage the Open Door was perceived as offering a listening service - being there for people with problems. There were those who argued that the cafe should be part of the church's social action. However, in the end what we now call 'Oasis' was seen as part of the church's outreach. In our church handbook it is listed under evangelism. In this respect I find the name 'Oasis' is suggestive. In the desert an Oasis is more than a place of refreshment - it is a place of survival. Travellers in the desert who fail to find an Oasis die.

But in what sense is Oasis evangelistic? I looked up one Christian coffee shop on the web. There one lady said: "People come in here every day and see the love of Jesus on our faces and taste it in our coffee and pastries. We may not be shoving it in anyone's face, but they can see our faith in every cup we serve, and you can't tell me that's not planting seeds".

But is that sufficient? I was speaking to one lady who has just started attending our morning service, and she told me that the first time she had a drink in Oasis, she had no idea we were a church. That may seem hard to believe, but it's true. Clearly she hadn't looked closely at the menu card. But is there more we should do to indicate to people that this is a church?

*Having sown the seed of change, I then distributed to our lunch guests a questionnaire, with the request that they fill it there and then.*

1. What is your dream for Oasis? How would you like to see Oasis develop over the next five years?
2. What are the present strengths of Oasis?
3. What are the present weaknesses of Oasis?
4. What one change would you like to see made in the next twelve months?

*To my amazement and delight, I discovered that this simple questionnaire proved most effective. Although many of our helpers are of a somewhat conservative disposition, we received a host of ideas for moving forward. I commend the questionnaire as a non-threatening tool for vision-building.*