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A FAITHFUL MINISTRY - Report of the Church Society Conference 2004

By David Meager

Church Society held its annual Conference from 29-31 March at High Leigh Conference Centre in Hertfordshire. The Conference was titled, 'A Faithful Ministry – a Conference for Christians committed to serving Christ in days of change and confusion'.

The conference began Monday lunch time after which Mike Ovey of Oak Hill College spoke about being Faithful to the Message in terms of the importance of upholding justification by grace through faith alone and God's Sovereignty in salvation at a time when much of the Anglican church has rejected this doctrine. Later on in the afternoon Peter Naylor gave his first bible exposition (of three) from Ezra and focused on the importance of purity and faithfulness to God, and that the foundation of a faithful ministry today is for God's people to have faithful hearts. In the evening there was a time for group discussion about current issues in the Anglican Communion, and strategy about how to tackle some of the issues. The day was ended by a time of group prayer.

We started Tuesday with a time of prayer and after breakfast Jonathan Fletcher spoke from John 17 about Jesus' prayer for his disciples - how they were to be in the world but not of the world and how this applied to us in terms of the importance and responsibility of evangelism. Afterwards Crawford Gribben spoke about the godly example and faithfulness of Archbishop James Ussher in Ireland in times of difficulty and division in the church. After a break for lunch Peter Naylor gave his second bible exposition, this time on Nehemiah's extreme action in reforming some of the sinful practices which were going on amongst God's people, for example, desecration of the Temple, Sabbath breaking and intermarriage with other peoples (Nehemiah 13). Peter encouraged us to draw lessons from Nehemiah (and also Paul's exhortations in Titus and Jude) about how we deal with false teachers and to contend for the faith. Later on in the afternoon David Holloway spoke about the need to be faithful in challenging a 'harm reduction' culture. In other words, being faithful in a society which seeks to limit or avoid the consequences of sin rather than stopping the sin itself (for example in government policy of attempting to deal with sexually transmitted disease). After dinner there was the second open session discussing strategy for the way forward in the Church of England. The day was again closed by a time of prayer.

On Wednesday after prayer and then breakfast George Curry gave a detailed biography of Selina Countess of Huntingdon and the lessons that we can learn from her faithful Christian life, in particular, her faith, works and legacy. This manifested itself in her perseverance in times of suffering and ill health, concern for the spiritual needs of those around her and practical support for gospel ministry and the Christian legacy which she left to future generations. Later on in the morning Peter Naylor gave his final exposition, this time on Nehemiah 5 - the completion of the walls of Jerusalem amidst formidable discouragements. Peter then focused on the disobedience of some of the Jews who charged small rates of interest to their fellow Jews. This was applied to us in terms of the importance of preaching the whole council of God and not neglecting 'minor truths' even when those around us have. The conference ended in the early afternoon with prayer and then lunch.

Overall the conference was an encouraging time when we could meet together for prayer and encouragement from God's word and to discuss strategy for the way forward in the Church of England at a time when there is much to be discouraged about. If we are faithful to God then he will

be faithful to us. We are holding another conference next year from the 17th to the 19th of May at High Leigh.