

## Be Courageous

"In the 1980s, my wife Sue and I had become involved in organising the Catholic Charismatic Conference in Southampton with a small team of helpers. It was an excellent and popular event but did not cater for anyone under the age of 15 or 16 years, and in 1990 we began to sense that the Lord was prompting us to set up a conference for the whole family, including teenagers and younger children. Encouraged by a prophetic word about "extending the space of your tents", we held a weekend of discernment about the future with a group of friends whose wisdom we trusted, at which it became clear that we needed to step out in faith and organise a larger conference to include every member of the family.

So I wrote to all the holiday camps in the country, asking if we could hold a week-long Christian Family Conference there starting on Easter Sunday. Every answer I received said "no" except for the one from the manager of the John Fowler Holiday Parc in Ilfracombe, which began with the words "For some time the Lord has been prompting me to offer our site for a Christian conference.....". You will not be surprised to know that within a few days we travelled to Ilfracombe to inspect the site and to discern what to do next.

The John Fowler site was very suitable, self-catering chalet bungalows of various sizes, and the manager had already established that we could use Ilfracombe College (600 yards away) for our main meeting and for all the streams for young people and children. But there was one big challenge - we had to guarantee an income to John Fowler for the whole site of £45,000 and all we had in the kitty was less than £500 to pay all the costs of launching the entire event! However, we were convinced that the Lord had shown us he wanted us to hold this family conference, so what were we going to do? We took a step in faith and guaranteed the £45,000 using our home as security for John Fowler if we did not reach this amount. This required courage, but we trusted in the Lord and in what we felt he had said to us.

We worked out our budgets very carefully based on 700 people booking into the conference, and the Lord honoured our courageous step of faith by sending 900 people! So in 1994 "CELEBRATE - the Holiday Conference" was born and is still running today from Easter Sunday evening to the following Saturday afternoon, with between 1,400 and 1,500 people attending each time, almost half of them young adults, teenagers and children, all under the age of 25. It really is an event for the whole family! We've faced a number of challenges over the years, but we know that the Lord is faithful when we put our trust in him.

Why not join us? You won't regret it! Have a look at the website".

*- Charles Whitehead*