A Profile of Aldersgate Renewal Ministries

DAVID WINSTANLEY

David Winstanley, Methodist Minister and CEO of Aldersgate Renewal Ministries-UK (ARM), reflects on the powerful, renewing work of the Holy Spirit as he shares an overview of the work of Aldersgate Renewal Ministries.



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Aldersgate Renewal Ministries began in the United Methodist Church, USA in the late 1970s with one man, Gary Moore, asking the question, ‘Is this all there is to being a Christian?’ He had grown up in the Methodist Church; his grandfather was a minister; he had served in various roles within the church, and had always been active and committed. Yet he was still left asking that same question. You might have asked the same question yourself and, if you have, I suspect you’re not alone. From that question came a journey of discovery that said, ‘Yes, there is more – so much more!’ That led to Aldersgate Renewal Ministries being formed.

Within our churches, probably across all denominations, there are many people who love Jesus and want to follow him and serve him as best they can; yet they do not know the Holy Spirit and have very little experience of him. Our hope at ARM is that through our weekend renewal events – Life in the Spirit Experience (LISE) – we can be a part of bringing about a change in that situation.

Some years ago, I was preaching in one of the churches of which I had pastoral charge, speaking about the difference between ‘receiving’ and ‘being filled’ with the Holy Spirit. When Jesus greeted his disciples in the Upper Room, he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’ (John 20:22). However, he also told his followers that they needed to wait and be ‘clothed with power from on high’ (Luke 24:49). All who know Jesus as Saviour have received the Holy Spirit, but there is more to being a Christian: being clothed with power from on high. That is what it means to be filled with, anointed by or baptised in the Holy Spirit.

I ended the sermon by saying we were going to sing a song, and that, during the last verse, anyone who wanted to pray to receive that power from on high should come and stand with me at the front of the church, where I would pray. There were about 60 people in church that day and probably 40 came to stand with me! That was the first surprise. The second was that, when I prayed, nothing happened. There was no great rushing wind, no tongues of fire, no-one rested in the Spirit, nothing.

After the service, a very dear, faithful couple came to me: Frank and Margaret. They had led Bible studies and had been mainstays of the church for years, and were now well into their 80s. Margaret was shaking and crying and saying, ‘I don’t know what’s happening.’ She had asked God to fill her with his Holy Spirit, and the Spirit was moving. It was Margaret’s next words that have stayed with me: ‘Nothing like this has ever happened to me before.’ She had been a devout Christian all her life, faithful in prayer and service, yet had never experienced the anointing of the Holy Spirit. I felt that was incredibly sad.

The ‘Life in the Spirit Experience’ is a team-led renewal weekend event in which biblical teaching is given about the various ministries of the Holy Spirit, personal experiences shared, and everyone is invited to receive prayer ministry. Times of worship are integral to the whole weekend. Our team members are drawn from churches we have previously visited and, having had such a deep experience of the anointing and movement of the Holy Spirit, they want to share that experience with others. Very few team members are ordained ministers, Local Preachers, or worship leaders; they are regular people from regular churches. This is important to us at ARM and is one of the strengths of the ministry we seek to share.

When we lead a LISE weekend, we fully expect to see the Holy Spirit move in the lives of the people of the church we are visiting (and the team members!). We ourselves have experienced the anointing power when the Spirit moves and we know that is something God wants for all his people and indeed promises to us (Joel 2:28). Peter declared that promise had been realised on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:16) and that is what we regularly see during a LISE weekend.

The Life in the Spirit Experience is more than a programme that might bring a little bit extra to a church for a season. It can be a springboard for a church, bringing new life to its worship, ministry and witness. In 2011, Hucknall Central Methodist Church hosted a LISE weekend, and it had a profound effect on many people. One couple, Kim and Dave, who lived close to a sister church (Eastside), decided to start an after-school club for children living on an estate with significant levels of deprivation. The idea of the club was simple: to love these children as Jesus loves them. Over many months, they ministered to children who were struggling to look after an alcoholic parent, had a parent serving a prison sentence, were not coping with everyday things such as going to school, or had no food in the house. They decided to hold a Sunday School session once a month, and very soon the children asked if they could have it every week. Only the Holy Spirit has the ability to empower such a ministry.

Our approach to ministry at ARM is very gentle, perhaps even understated, because the Holy Spirit does not need us to shout or whip up a storm to do the amazing things that he does. Over the years that we have been leading LISE weekends, we have seen people come to faith, others rest in the Spirit, many people healed (physically, emotionally, spiritually) and people released from chains of oppression. There have been tongues spoken and an interpretation given, words of knowledge and prophetic understanding received and shared, and times of worship where we inhabited a very thin space.

Throughout it all, we can truly say that we have seen the promise of God pouring out his Spirit, and the renewing power that this has brought to the lives of individuals and their churches.

Although ARM is largely based within the Methodist Church, we will go to any church, of any denomination (or none) that invites us, and we have team members from both the Methodist Church and other churches. No matter what church we go to – big or small, lively or struggling, already moving in the Spirit or not sure who he is – that same promise of God that Peter spoke about holds firm. God is true to his promises, and this is what we all need to claim for ourselves, for the building up of God’s church, and for the growth of his kingdom where we are.

If you would like to know more about the work of Aldersgate Renewal Ministries-UK, please go to our website www.aldersgaterenewal.org.uk. To begin exploring an invitation for us to come and share a Life in the Spirit Experience weekend with you at your church, email contact@aldersgaterenewal.org.uk

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David is a Methodist Minister and has been CEO of Aldersgate Renewal Ministries-UK (ARM) since its inception in the UK in 2012. ARM has ministered alongside churches throughout the UK, and has also partnered with churches overseas.

