

Luis Palau Highland Festival in Caithness - June 2009

a report by Kenny Cormack (Wick Baptist Church)

Earlier this year I was part of the team involved in helping to organise some of the local events in Caithness for the **Luis Palau Highland Festival from the 9th to the 14th of June.**

Planning only started about 8 weeks earlier which made it a hectic few weeks for the team which was made up of evangelical Christians from across the denominations in Caithness.



John Grant

Thurso Baptist Church was 'the hub' for the organising and the team liaised initially with Nigel Gordon, then **John Grant** from the Luis Palau Association.

There were two meal outreach events in Wick and Thurso with

international evangelist Jose Zayas as the 'after-dinner' speaker with over 120 people in total attendance.

Jose is certainly a gifted communicator and showed considerable insight into the Highland mentality concerning spiritual issues. He explained the Good News message in a very 'non-religious' way that was interesting, relevant and **he stripped away much of the negative image of 'Churchianity' in the UK in order to concentrate on Jesus Christ.**

There were quite a few who rededicated their lives to the Lord at these events and there were some who made first time commitments to the Lord. **One woman, who had been praying for husband for over thirty years, saw him put his trust in Christ for salvation** as a result of the event. The meal events were considered very successful and enjoyable by all who attended. This is something we are planning to do again in the future.

The BMX bike stunt team - Vic Murphy and John Andrus - performed some stunt displays in local schools and Jose got to speak about 'making positive life choices' to over 100 1st-year pupils at **Wick High School** and about 250 pupils at **Miller Academy Primary school in Thurso.**

The mini festival in Thurso on Saturday June 13th consisted of a football tournament, various free children's activities including bouncy castles etc, a BMX bike & skateboard stunt display and **The Band With No Name** playing at the end of the day. Skateboarder **Mikie Santillian** had to rush up from one of the other events in the Highlands to take the place of BMX biker **John Andrus** who was unwell on the day.

The stunt display helped to gather the crowd together that had attended the various activities. BMX biker **Vic Murphy** then gave his testimony and Jose spoke to a crowd of over 400 that had gathered round with another 200 around the park within listening distance.

One of the highlights was to watch those in the crowd who normally have no time for 'church' stand and listen intently to Vic's testimony. A number of mainly young people responded to the call to receive Christ, some older people responded also. 'Follow-up' to those who responded is on-going in

various forms, but this has its challenges especially with teenagers with no church connections. We trust that the Holy Spirit will continue to work within the hearts of all those who responded.



The Band With No Name played in the early evening and this talented band were an ideal choice for attracting the attention of a younger generation. It is

hoped we can get them back up north for a future event.

The weather had been dull in Thurso all day, but kept dry. The programme finished a little earlier

than originally planned and only then started to rain. It had been raining heavily throughout the day all over Caithness, but it stopped short within 5 miles of Thurso. I know because during that day I twice drove back and forth from the other side of the county.

On the Sunday morning international evangelist Jose Zayas preached at a celebration service in **Wick Baptist Church**. Jose spoke on the need for Christians to 'move' in order to reach the lost for Christ. 'The Band With No Name' shared their testimonies and everyone was impressed by their commitment and passion to serve Jesus. At the end of the service all the kids and adults joined in when they sang '**The 4 point song**'. Some people afterwards commented that they thought it was one of the best Sunday services they'd ever been to in Caithness. It was a great way to finish off the week.



One benefit from the events in Caithness was that it **brought together evangelical Christians** from different churches to work together in response to the Great Commission. There is always a blessing from God when Christians do his work in unity (Psalm 133). C.H. Spurgeon preached a sermon on that very subject once and also mentioned the negative side, that when a church's united energy is not rightly channelled into evangelism, it so often gets channelled in a wrong way that leads to disunity and strife. <http://www.spurgeongems.org/vols19-21/chs1170.pdf>

Various local people had commented that they were delighted and impressed that local churches had put on all these free events for their children, especially those who had come over from the local sideshows after spending a small fortune. It was felt that the event helped dispel something of a perceived negative image that many have of 'the Church' and Christianity in the Highlands. We would have loved to have seen many more respond to Christ for salvation, but **these events have opened up many doors of opportunity** through the new contacts made and the on going conversations about the Gospel with those who would not normally cross the threshold of a church.

Looking back on the main festival event, things didn't always go exactly as originally planned, as Robbie Burns once said 'The best laid schemes of

mice and men go often askew' (modern translation). The amazing thing is that God was still able to work through all our human weaknesses and flaws. God's sovereign power working through Christians responding in obedience to the Great Commission

brings results and glory to his name. Like 'flawed' Peter, **God is often waiting for someone to trust him and step out of the boat into the unknown** before he works a miracle. Too often we stay safe within the boat, talking rather than acting.

There were lessons learnt from this experience and it was thought that some small adjustments to a future event

would help to make it even better. Leading up to the festival events, communication between the churches throughout the county proved difficult mainly due to a lack of pastors, especially on the Wick side. **It was also an 'eye opener' to the spiritual state in the county as it highlighted how far things have fallen away in the past few years.**

If I were to use these outreach events as a 'temperature gauge' for the spiritual state of the churches in the county, for many I'd have to say it was far from red hot, more on the cool to cold side. The encouraging thing for me about the Highland Festival is that **God has obviously not given up on this remote part of his vineyard**, as he sent Luis Palau, a team of international evangelists, top Christian worship bands and a talented stunt team who were able to **reach many people with their**



preaching and testimonies of Jesus Christ.

Hopefully churches around the Highlands will be inspired and encouraged by the fact that people today will still respond to the Gospel message when it is delivered in a contemporary way to which people living in the 21st century can relate.