

End of an era - 2010 to be last year of Leading Edge

Written by Administrator

Wednesday, 14 July 2010 00:00 - Last Updated Thursday, 16 September 2010 11:49



Courtesy of the Baptist Times

This year's Leading Edge will be the last, organisers announced this week.

A combination of factors has caused a gradual drop in numbers and led to the decision to call time on the Baptist summer festival, they said.

The final Leading Edge, which is organised jointly by the Baptist Union of Great Britain (BUGB) and Viz A Viz Ministries, will therefore take place at Warwick School from August 9 to 15.

'It promises to be a wonderful week, although we're really sad that the event is coming to an end,' said the Revd Paul Hills, chair of Leading Edge directors.

'Over the years Leading Edge has been a real blessing to those who have attended.

'People from our churches of all ages have come together for a week in August to worship God, learn, pray together, play and have a great time.

'In 2006 Jonathan Edwards was commissioned as our new general secretary and we know others have made commitments of faith, gone home seeking baptism and even heard the call to ministry.'

This Baptist family festival, which became the second largest gathering of Baptist Christians in the UK after the Assembly, has been held every summer since 1996, apart from 2005 when the

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Baptist World Congress too place in Birmingham.

The numbers of campers and guests peaked at 1,167 in 2004, but the return of Leading Edge in 2006 following the Baptist World Congress coincided with a string of very wet summers. Although there has been a slight upturn this year, the event declined to a low of 631 in 2009.

In their statement organisers said it is closing due to a decline in numbers over the last four years, which has in turn impacted on the finances.

'The combination of a saturated summer Christian festival market, the recession, the fact that camping is not everyone's preferred holiday style and several wet summers have all taken their toll on people's choice whether to attend Leading Edge or not,' the statement said.

The Revd Jonathan Edwards, BUGB general secretary, said challenging financial circumstances had caught up with an event that has played an important role in Baptist life over the years.

'It is no secret that these are very challenging days financially,' he said.

'We have needed to take a hard look at all that we do and the Trustees took the decision that it was no longer possible to put such extensive staff resources into the event in view of the losses that have been experienced.

'I have loved the event. It has been an exceptionally happy and fruitful part of our Baptist life.

'Baptists will continue to be a part of many summer activities and if I know the creativity of our churches, other events will come into existence in the years to come.'

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Leading Edge began as an initiative of two ministers in the then Eastern Area of the BUGB 14 years ago.

In its initial form it used school playing fields as its camping area and moved each year. Numbers were limited to around 450.

Speakers were largely from within the organising group, apart from usually one headline speaker each year.

Tony Campolo and Philip Yancey were among those to have addressed the event. This year the Revd Joel Edwards, international director of Micah Challenge International, has been booked.

The children's work was partly done by a church bringing, in effect, their summer holiday club to the event.

Viz A Viz Ministries, as a local Christian charity in the area, provided the youth work.

In their statement organisers paid tribute to the hundreds of volunteers who have made Leading Edge possible over the years.

'Time and energy has been given at all points in the event by a host of people to support children's and young people's work, to care for speakers, to provide entertainment, to run the site and generally to keep everyone safe and in a place where they might encounter God.

'The directors are especially grateful to them.'

To commemorate Leading Edge, stories of how God has blessed people over the years are

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being collected.