

# Mobilising men for

By Marie Antieich

The IRA bomb exploded a metre behind me as 15lbs of high explosive lifted me and flung me out through the plate glass windows of the shop and into the street."

This is the experience of former RAF Regiment platoon commander Brian France in Londonderry, Northern Ireland, in the 1970s. The bomb blast shattered his ear drums and filled his body with metal. "The medics said, 'You are now profoundly deaf and will be for the rest of your life,'" recalls Mr France.

Larger pieces of metal were surgically removed from the back of his head, buttocks and legs, but tiny pieces remained embedded in his leg muscles, ligaments and knee and ankle joints, making walking painful. "I was invalidated out of the RAF, deaf and lame, but grateful to be alive."

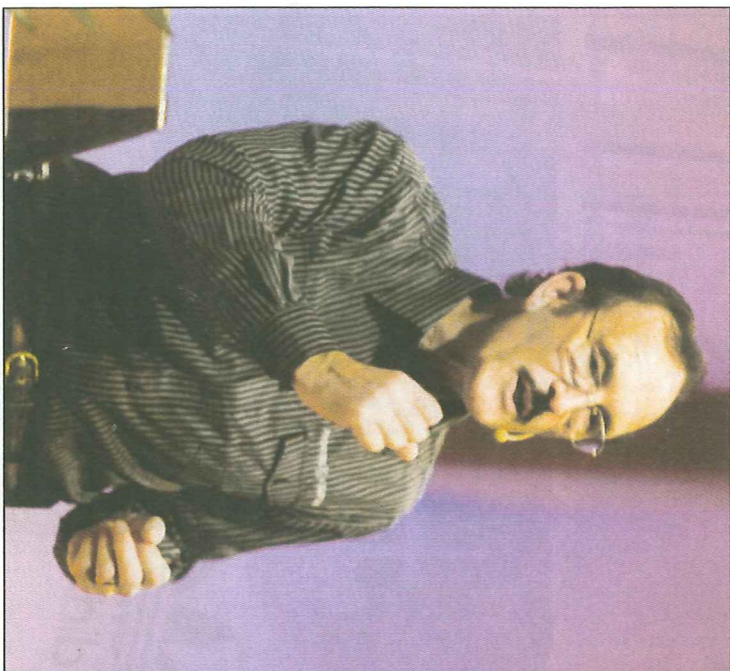
Born in London in the middle of World War II, Mr France joined an Anglican Church choir at eight. There

for six years, he never came to an understanding of faith in Christ. "I kept two toffees in my pocket to get me through the sermon," he says.

Leaving school at 16, he signed up for an engineering apprenticeship with the Royal Air Force. During his 15-year career in the military he rose through the ranks to become a platoon commander in the RAF Regiment, an elite fighting force which was sent on assignments to international trouble spots.

In the 1970s, he served in Northern Ireland and in Germany for two years while the Baader Meinhof terrorists were active. He was also in Hong Kong when the Chinese communist insurgents were threatening British installations. It was on his third tour of duty in Northern Ireland that he was badly injured in the bomb blast.

"It was Saturday morning and 15 bombs exploded that day in my sector of Londonderry. I was moving around to ensure my men were securing these areas, dealing with unexploded



**ON FIRE:** Brian France speaking at a Promise Keepers Event.

bombs and cordoning off collapsed buildings."

The radio in his car told him another bomb had been discovered. He took a shortcut through the back door of a shop and the bomb went off. Wearing a flak jacket

to go to New Zealand. The family emigrated in 1975 and settled in Greendale in the South Island.

There he started thinking about a former RAF colleague who had often talked about Christ.

"I wasn't keen to become a 'God botherer' but this man's honesty and integrity had spoken to me deeply," he says.

Mr France started attending church and fired questions at the local Methodist minister.

"One night I had an 'Aha' moment. I'd gone outside to put the car away and the stars shone so brightly overhead I realised there had to be a creator. So I said, 'Lord

Jesus, if you exist I want you to come into my life.' There was no lightning flash from heaven, but from that moment my heart and life began to change." One Saturday morning he was shopping in Darfield and met a group of Christians doing street evangelism. "They offered to pray

for my hearing and I agreed, so they took me to someone's home, sat me down, asked Christ to heal me, and abso-

lutely nothing happened. They were very disappointed."

The following morning he was woken by the ticking of his bedside clock.

The next week he returned to Darfield and thanked the Christians for his healing. "I said, 'How about praying for the pain in my legs?' They took me to the same house, sat me in the same chair and prayed. Instantly the pain drained out of my legs and I haven't experienced any pain since. I went from having a restricted life — being deaf and lame — to having hearing and mobility." While in the Methodist church on Sunday morning, Mr France

felt God's presence. "I looked at the preacher in the pulpit and heard God say, 'That's where I want you.' I told none, but not long afterwards the minister asked me to run the parish for a year because he was leaving and didn't have a replacement minister."

Mr France went on to study at St John's Theological College in Auckland. After two years of study, he was appointed minister of the

# Christ

Tokomairiro Co-operating Parish in Milton.

After completing a Licence in Theology through Knox College in Dunedin, he was ordained in 1982. He received the baptism of the Holy Spirit through the ministry of evangelist Steve Rider. In 1989 Mr France and his wife Maria spent two

life-changing months ministering to drug addicts in the Walled City of Hong Kong with Englishwoman Jackie Pullinger's ministry. "This rat-infested enclave with open sewers had never been ceded to the British crown and was

run by the Triad gangs," says Mr France. "The police had no jurisdiction within its walls and thousands of people lived in 'jerry built' buildings, some 14 storeys high, and it was filled with criminals and drug addicts. In a room called 'The Well' Christian volunteers prayed for heroin addicts."

Mr France says it was amazing to see former addicts who had been Triad gang members released into ministry. Back in New Zealand,

Mr France was minister of Mt Roskill Methodist Church in Auckland for six years, and

director of Baptist Action Family Services in South Auckland for seven years. In 2010 he was appointed national coaching director for Promise Keepers New Zealand. He has spoken at

the five Promise Keepers men's events in the main centres, and in his 'spare' time heads up Charisma Christian Ministries, which he started last year with the support of Bill Subritzky of Dove Ministries.

Over the last 12 months he has taken Charisma teams to Borneo, Samoa and Papua New Guinea to minister at Subritzky's meetings there. "We've seen thousands healed of sicknesses, delivered," says Mr France. He has published *Against the Gates of Hell*, and his second book, *The Gates of Hell Wide Open* will be published next year.

"I'm still mobilising and motivating men but now I'm doing it in the service of Christ," says Mr France. ■

## Coaches help grow men's ministry

### Promise Keepers coaching director Brian France talks about the groundswell of men's ministries in NZ churches

"If you grow your men's ministry you will grow your church," says Brian France, national Ministry with Men coaching director for Promise Keepers New Zealand.

Mr France travels around New Zealand helping local pastors start or increase the effectiveness of men's ministry in their church. "Succeeding with men equals success in many other areas of church life," said the former Methodist minister, who is based at Promise Keepers head office in Lynfield, Auckland.

Traditionally, churches have focussed on ministering to women, children and youth, but statistics showed men had the greatest influence in the family when it came to salvation, he said. "If a man comes to Christ first, statistics show that a

staggering 93 per cent of families will follow. If a woman comes to Christ first 17 per cent of families will follow, and if a child came

to Christ first 3.5 per cent of families will follow."

Realising that men need more than one major PK event a year to sustain them, PK set up Ministry with Men coaching several years ago to help establish men's ministries in local churches.

Mr France said men's ministries were gaining momentum across the denominations as more and more churches became aware of the importance of ministering to men. "Just as a coach encourages his athletes to stay

focused and motivated to reach their goals, we apply the same principles to the local church. We help leaders establish a team, a vision and strategies to reach their goal to run the best possible men's ministry in their church," says Mr France. Churches can receive

one-off coaching consultations or sign a PKs coaching contract which provides ongoing support and access to PKs' experience and



**COACHING SESSION:** From left, Brian France, Charlie Hughes, St Michael's Anglican Church, Henderson and Philip Sampson, PK field rep.

resources. "When churches sign a coaching contract, they are sent a survey form which every man in the church is asked to fill out anonymously. These survey results are fed into a Promise Keepers database which produces 50 pie charts and graphs showing

the age and marital status of men in the church, their prayer and Bible-reading habits, and what they want out of men's ministry," explained Mr France. "The survey invariably reveals a deep hunger for spiritual growth."

A coach helps men's ministry leaders formulate a strategy to progress men's ministry in their particular church.

"But the real key to success," said Mr France "is getting men into small groups...Trust develops as men begin to share their lives at a deeper level...My greatest joy is seeing men's small group ministry develop in local churches."

Mr France emphasised that rather than just being random events, providing fun and fellowship men's events should have a defined purpose. "You need to keep momentum going so that one event builds on another."

The final PKs event will be held at Telstra Pacific Stadium in Auckland on October 7 and 8. The theme of 'Game On' is in keeping with the *World Cup*. ■