

# **Journey**



**The continuing story of  
The Church at Carrs Lane  
December 2011 – January 2012**

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## MINISTER'S LETTER

We 'came of age' on Advent Sunday 2011 with the birth of The Church at Carrs Lane. The signing of a covenant means that the United Reformed and Methodist churches have formally committed to partnership for Christian mission and ministry in Birmingham city centre. Both denominations reach this point mindful of their own local heritage of Civic Gospel and Social Holiness, radical agendas that shaped the life of our city at critical moments in its history. It was that shared commitment to social justice and community engagement which brought the Methodist Central Mission and Carrs Lane URC to realise that their future ministry was to be together.

The fact that this historic event occurred on Advent Sunday is significant. The Advent season is not simply about bracing ourselves for the build-up to Christmas, instead it is time to consider the nature of hope. Across the centuries a community of God's people held onto the belief that a life of joy, peace, justice would be shared by the whole of creation when a new Ruler appeared. This Ruler would be both a child of humanity and anointed by God, and they would instigate a new world under God's love. Such belief gave hope to the people, not because they were able to envisage a better life for all, but because they were challenging themselves to live that life as they waited for it to be fulfilled.

Now as a people of God who look to Jesus as the hope fulfilled, we challenge ourselves to live our common life under God's love. The foundation stones that our traditions bring to The Church at Carrs Lane of social justice and community engagement are our guiding principles to Christian mission at the centre of this city. Our hope for Advent, Christmas and the new year before us is that we the people of The Church at Carrs Lane may be a living parable of that new world which Jesus was born to proclaim.

Peace be with you  
Neil  
Rev. Neil Johnson



**Season's Greetings to all our readers from the production team of Journey.**

## Sunday Worship during Dec / Jan 2012

### **Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> December** Advent II

Harold Stuteley (*Methodist Circuit Minister*)

### **Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> December** Advent III

10.30am 'Inside the story...' An all-age nativity from scratch: please bring suitable props with you! Worship led by Neil Riches

*This will be followed by a Church Meeting at noon – all welcome*

2.45pm for 3pm Kidz Aloud: A Children's Church, 'The Mystery of Christmas'.

### **Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> December** Advent IV

10.30am Café-style worship in Lounge, including continental breakfast Worship led by Neil Riches

6.30pm Lessons and Carols by candlelight, including – we hope – contributions from The Choir with No Name Worship led by Neil J and Neil R – Followed by mince pies in Community.

### **Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> December** Christmas Day

9.30am Breakfast for international students – all welcome

10.30am Family Worship for Christmas Day, led by Neil Johnson and Chris Dowd

### **Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> January**

10.30am Morning Worship led by Rev Diana Cullum-Hall

### **Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> January**

10.30am Morning Worship led by Neil Riches. Music and Reflections for Epiphany

*This service will be followed by a Church Meeting at noon – all welcome*

2.45pm for 3pm Kidz Aloud: A Children's Church - The Mystery of Christmas II

### **Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> January**

10.30am Morning Worship led by Neil Johnson

5pm Informal Worship: Healing and Communion, including the laying on of hands, led by Neil Riches

### **Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> January**

10.30am Morning Worship led by Neil Riches

6.00pm Radical Worship – Open Table *Theme: Global Capitalism – Christian Responses*

### **Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> January**

10.30am Morning Worship led by Neil Riches

*At this service, we will welcome a number of musicians from St. John's Church in Harborne*

## **“Kidz Aloud” at Carrs Lane**

A Children’s Church for the Centre of the City, Worship and Activities Aimed At 5 – 11 Years Old. We meet on the Second Sunday of every month. Dates of forthcoming Services are:

Sunday 11 December - Topic – “The Mystery of Christmas – Part 1”  
Sunday 8 January 2012 - Topic – “The Mystery of Christmas – Part 2”  
Sunday 5 February 2012 - Topic – Jericho!

Foyer Activities from 2.45pm. Adults Permitted. Want to know more? Contact Neil Johnson on 0121 616 1800, [centralmission@btconnect.com](mailto:centralmission@btconnect.com).

## **An Invitation....**

### **Open House at the Manse**

Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> December, 2 pm to 7 pm.

Mulled wine and canapés

Drop in at any time – stay for as little or as long as you like

## **The Millennium Development Goals**



### **Goal 8: A global partnership for development**

Develop further an open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system

Address the special needs of the least developed countries

Address the special needs of landlocked developing countries and small island developing States

Deal comprehensively with the debt problems of developing countries.

## Notices

### Carol Concerts

- Dec 5<sup>th</sup> - University Carol Service, 18:15 in the Great Hall of the University of Birmingham
- Dec 10<sup>th</sup> - Carol service at 16:30 in the Square of St Philip's Cathedral
- Dec 13<sup>th</sup> - Evening Carols for the Business Community, 17:45 in St Philip's Cathedral
- Dec 14<sup>th</sup> - Lunchtime Carols for the Business Community, 13:05 in St Philip's Cathedral
- Dec 16<sup>th</sup> - United Christmas Carols at 19:30 in the New Testament Church of God in Lozells
- Dec 17<sup>th</sup> - Carol Singing in the Mall - Sutton Coldfield from 12:00 noon
- Dec 17<sup>th</sup> - Christmas Concert for Human Rights at 11:00 in St Philip's Cathedral
- Dec 19<sup>th</sup> - BBC WM & St Philip's Cathedral Annual Concert, 13:00, St Philip's Cathedral
- Dec 19<sup>th</sup> - Midlands Hospitals' Choir - Christmas Celebration at the Town Hall 15:00 & 19.15
- Dec 24<sup>th</sup> - Birmingham Choral Union - Annual Carol Concert at Symphony Hall at 15:00

### 'Simeon' by Roger Jones

Performed by Christian Music Ministries.

- Dec 4<sup>th</sup> – 18:00 at Christ Church, Burney Lane, Ward End, B8 2AS.
- Dec 11<sup>th</sup> – 18:30 at St Thomas' Church, Aldridge, WS9 8SL
- Jan 29<sup>th</sup> – 18:00 at Lickey Parish Church, B45 8GG

### Sacred Space Invitation

Speakers: Steve Hirst and Immy Kaur  
who are "Faiths Act Fellows"  
"How people of faith can make a difference in the world"

Monday December 5th 2011 at  
The Purple Rooms  
1076 Stratford Rd  
Hall Green  
7.00p.m. for 7.30p.m.  
Cost £8.00

Dec 9<sup>th</sup> – Young Strings Project Christmas Concert, to raise funds for Christian Aid. 19:00 at St Luke's Church Centre, Great Colmore Street, B15 2AT. Tickets: £7 in advance, £10 on the night; concessions: £5 / £7.

Dec 10<sup>th</sup> Faith Encounter Project: The Three Teape Lectures on Hindu/Christian relations, given by Andrew Wingate at the Balaji Temple, Dudley Road East, Tividale, B69 3DU from 10.30am to 4.00pm. Details from Ruth Tetlow - [ruthtetlow@btinternet.com](mailto:ruthtetlow@btinternet.com)

### Jubilee Debt Campaign Meetings

Dec 8<sup>th</sup> Seasonal Get Together 7.30pm. 'Beyond the Presents.' Further details from John Nightingale on 0121 458 6182

Jan 17<sup>th</sup> Birmingham JDC Annual General Meeting. Nick Dearden. Director of National JDC will be speaking on the campaign for an international Debt Court. Details on - [johnnightingale@btinternet.com](mailto:johnnightingale@btinternet.com)

### Dec 15<sup>th</sup> - Carrs Lane Walking Group – Lichfield

Alan Emson will lead a gentle walk of approximately 3 miles in Lichfield in December. The terrain is totally flat on pavements and firm paths. There is a Christmas Farmers Market in the city square but please note that this finishes at 13.00. See Alan for details.



Jan 8<sup>th</sup> – **Christian Aid Sponsored Swim** at the Munrow Sports Centre, University of Birmingham. See Pat Davies and / or visit: [www.christianaid.org.uk/swim](http://www.christianaid.org.uk/swim)

Jan 16<sup>th</sup> – World Religion Day

Jan 27<sup>th</sup> – Holocaust Memorial Day

Jan 29<sup>th</sup> – Feb 6<sup>th</sup> – Poverty and Homelessness Action Week

Jan 30<sup>th</sup> – World Leprosy Day

The Church of England and United Reformed Church are to hold an historic service in Westminster Abbey, marking a significant step forward in the development of a shared relationship. This will take place on Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> February 2012 at 18.15, in the year of the 350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Act of Uniformity and the Great Ejection, as well as the celebration of the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the United Reformed Church. Further details available at

[http://www.urc.org.uk/what\\_we\\_do/ecumenical/WestminsterAbbeyService](http://www.urc.org.uk/what_we_do/ecumenical/WestminsterAbbeyService).

Tickets are available from the United Reformed Church Ecumenical Office, email [ecumenical@urc.org.uk](mailto:ecumenical@urc.org.uk).

## Carrs Lane Players

Fasten your seatbelts for a hair raising journey with Carrs Lane Players on 23, 24 and 25 February 2012 as they endeavour to resolve the mystery of John Buchan's 'THE 39 STEPS'.

This fast moving play uses 10 actors to play more than 30 different parts. What a challenge!

Please look out shortly for more details on the notice board in the foyer about the play, suppers and afternoon teas. In the meantime reserve the dates in your diary and remember to mention it to your friends too. We had record attendances last year – can we beat it again?

Alan Emson

## Vietnamese Craft Goods

Many thanks to all of you who have purchased items from the supply we brought back from our trip to Vietnam recently. More than £200 has been raised which will be donated to Traidcraft Exchange. A few items still remain for sale so you still have the chance to boost the sum further.

Joan Duffield



### Road Works Information:

Bardon Construction are due to commence road works at the entrance of Albert Street on the 9<sup>th</sup> of January 2012. This will take up to eight weeks to complete.

*Derek Cotterill.*

## The following people wish to send Christmas greetings to their friends:

Sheila Apperley, Gill Barfield, Peggy and John Best, Cicely Coleman, Joan Davies, Pat Davies, Wendy Firmin, Julie and Chris Grove, Thelma Justham, Eunice Marston, Murdoch and Ann MacKenzie, Alex Morris, Julia and Peter Redwood, George Richards, Pat and Michael Richer, Fran and David Stackhouse, Priscilla Steele, Anne and Malcolm Veitch, Ann and Ray Yorke.

Donations have been made to various charities, and some people have sponsored our swimmers for Christian Aid.

## Welcome to new members

### Helen Woodall

Helen is married to Peter, lives in Northfield, has two sons Philip (22) who is doing an internship with the National Trust and Aidan (19), doing his A levels. She is a Methodist local preacher and one of the Trustees of the Birmingham Methodist Central Mission. She is one of the group that leads the Kidz Aloud congregation. She works part-time as Community Services Area Manager for MHA - Methodist Homes for the Aged - and her area includes projects in Hull, Huddersfield, Sheffield and Worcester. She is on the Board of Adullum Housing Association, a Christian organisation that offers support and housing for a range of vulnerable people in the West Midlands and NW. She enjoys cooking, gardening and sharing food.

## About People

### Carol Khanahmadi

We send our deepest sympathies to Carol and her family on the death of her sister so soon after her brother. Carol herself has been unwell with shingles and we wish her a speedy recovery.

**Helen Hickman-Morris** and **Hazel Thomas** have both been in hospital and we hope that they will soon regain their strength, and will be able to enjoy Christmas with their families.

### Update from Jill Veitch:

Andrew and I would like to thank everyone for their kind thoughts and prayers and also visits after my accident during the German exchange. It has meant a great deal to us to be so well supported although at times I have felt a bit of a fraud to receive such attention when I have found the experience very interesting.

The whole time I was in Germany I was offered only kindness. The doctor, whom I saw in A & E came in on his day off to check I was OK and my main nurse, who spoke no English, was so efficient and careful in her job, I now understand why people fall in love with their nurses. The ladies of the German Choir took it in turns to visit each day, bringing gifts, offering fresh nightwear and just stroking me if they couldn't speak English and of course our German hosts Ute and Fritz, whom we have known for 35 years, looked after Andrew so well, not fussing but providing meals and teaching him new card games!

The nurse, who, provided by the Insurance company, came out from England to fetch me, was also very efficient. She brought her own stretcher and mattress, explained what would happen and enabled me to completely trust her to get me home safely.

Despite the reputation of Heartlands Hospital, I again received excellent care and lovely food. To begin with I could only talk to the staff because lying flat I couldn't make eye contact with other patients and they couldn't hear me if I said anything. It made me realise how it feels to be ignored. As I am someone who likes routine, I

easily fitted into hospital routine watching for the coffee trolley at 10.30, and it is very nice being washed every morning.

Spiritually, I found at first, that I didn't want to pray but just rest in the love surrounding me. Later on, back in England, I felt the need to make contact with God again and each day, read a little from "The Imitation of Christ" by Thomas Kempis, a favourite book of mine. I think when we are fragile we perhaps need to rely on the words, deeds and prayers of others, remembering that God can use everyone for good. The difficult bit will be when I am fit again. Will I want to swap the attention for looking after others ...after all Andrew has got very good at the hoovering!

## Going Round in Circles, or Encircled by Love?

Some days I've been so confused by all that has to be done now I'm on my own I do feel as though the first phrase is accurate. But then I turn to the pile of cards and letters, and read the thoughtful, uplifting words written by family and friends. Then I look at the beautiful flowers and plants I've been given, also the packet of seeds to plant in my garden from the memorial service organised by the chaplaincy at the hospital where my husband died, and I remember the words of Louis Armstrong which he loved to sing along to – "What a wonderful world."

At the Bereavement Centre I was given a card, with a beautifully mottled pebble, and the following verse;

### *The Heavy Stone*

*My grief was a heavy stone, rough and sharp.  
Grasping to pick it up my hands were cut.*

*Afraid to let it go I carried it.  
While I had my grief you were not lost.*

*The rain of my tears smoothed it.  
The wind of my rage weathered it, making it round and small.*

*The cuts in my hand have healed. Now in my palm it rests, sometimes beautiful,  
sometimes almost you.*

*(By Averil Stedeford)*

To watch the ripples when a stone is dropped into the water as they spread out wider and wider reminds me of the many different circles of friends whose company we have enjoyed over the 42 years of marriage; our families from two of the world's major faiths living alongside in harmony; the forgiving nature of my mother, widowed at the age of 27 with two young daughters – she welcomed my German penfriends into her home and even came with me to visit them and invited them back for a holiday with us – another circle of love reaching out. To her life was spent helping others and I see the traits of her selflessness and caring in my children, and this is

reflected in the African members of the family too. I suspect that they also inherit their sense of humour from my father's family.

Creativity was pivotal to both families – the women both busy sewing on their Singer treadle machines in Kent and Sierra Leone, the men gifted with their hands, and also very interested in education and a good discussion. Above all the importance of relationships between siblings and the wider family have featured throughout our lives, and continue to encircle us all with love.

Pat Davies

## The transformation of the Church Centre's lower ground floor

Where once there was a café and kitchen there is now a new Counselling Centre, replacing in one integrated area the original reception room, office, and counselling room, and the two counselling rooms in Dale House. The old Counselling Centre suite has been opened up to become a meeting room, and two other high quality meeting rooms have been created.



The new Counselling Centre, entered as before from the car park but by a different door, contains a spacious waiting area, a reception and administration office with a small waiting room for counsellors, three purpose-built counselling rooms, and a small meeting room which can also be used as a counselling room. The waiting area can also be used for training sessions. All areas are carpeted, and the office, waiting area and counselling rooms have been refurnished with the aid of an 'Awards for All' grant to the Counselling Centre from the Big Lottery Fund.



Receptionist's desk in the office



Reception hatch and entrance



Waiting and circulation area



Refreshment facilities

*Thanks to Malcolm for these photos of the Counselling Centre*



The new meeting rooms seat 30 (above left), 18, and 15 (above right) people. The largest and smallest have a connecting door, so can be used in combination. This will be useful for meetings of up to 30 requiring ancillary space for breakout groups or catering, and on Sundays for an outside church group needing separate space for youngsters. The rooms are all carpeted and brightly painted; the largest one has been given a much bigger window than before. All have wi-fi transmitters allowing room users to connect their laptop computers to the internet. These rooms have disabled access through the car park entrance, with an intercom to the main office.

Not all the old café area was used for this. The remainder left space for some informal seating, and for new storage cupboards to replace those removed for the Counselling Centre development

Hidden above the suspended ceilings is an extensive ventilation system continually bringing in fresh air. This, the fire detection system, and the new emergency escape routes, all meet the latest more stringent building regulations. All areas have been completely rewired for light and power.

The work was financed from recent legacies. It is part of a long programme of updating the church centre building. One objective is to offer modern facilities on all floors to our hundreds of users, including the Counselling Centre launched by the church at the opening of the new building 40 years ago. Another objective is to facilitate the development of the life and work of the church congregations. We have already provided accommodation for a small resident Christian community; next year we hope to complete updating the building by refurbishing the main church room and improving its facilities.

We are grateful to the staff for putting up with all the noise and disruption, dealing with many unusual demands. Our tenants have also been very understanding.

Michael Richer - Church Centre Management Committee

## Preparation Classes

The three evening 'sessions' held in preparation for the events of 27<sup>th</sup> November were well-supported and generated some animated discussion. During the first two evenings, we looked carefully at current URC 'thinking' and initiatives, focusing on Vision 2020 and the Radical Welcome campaign; we then repeated the exercise with current Methodist thinking, focusing this time on the report, 'Contemporary Methodism'. On the final evening, we tried to draw everything together as we considered how best to respond to all this within the context of, 'The Church at Carrs Lane'. It had already been agreed to leave consideration of the Radical Welcome campaign until the beginning of 2012; much of our time on the third evening was spent looking at the ten key indicators of 'church' identified in Vision 2020 material – examination shaped in part by the key Christian 'qualities' identified in Contemporary Methodism – and reflecting on how they relate to church life at Carrs Lane at present...and how they might challenge and enrich future developments. We acknowledged that this might well lead to the formulation of specific 'mission pledges' (as anticipated by the Vision 2020 programme) in the coming months.

What follows is the list of ten 'indicators'...together with the group's appraisal of how well we are doing at present, with 10 being firing on all cylinders and 1 being lackluster in the extreme!

- Spirituality and Prayer – 5
- Identity – 6
- Christian Ecumenical Partnerships – 9+
- Community Partnerships – 8
- Hospitality and Diversity – 6
- Church Growth – 7
- Global Partnerships – 3
- Justice and Peace – 8
- Integrity of Creation – 3

In a sense, you can draw your own conclusions from this... but the following comments were also made fairly vigorously:

- The low 'score' given to Global Partnerships reflects the fact that our 'Covenant' is focused clearly on our city centre context
- The relatively low 'scores' given to two indicators may be a reflection of their overall importance, as well as how well we are doing at present; nonetheless, there was a strong feeling that we may need to undertake some significant work on respect of the final 'indicator'
- We need to undertake further work on 'Identity'... specifically, what it means to be a truly united church in the centre of a major city
- 'Spirituality and Prayer' emerged as another area where work will be needed in the future

Neil Riches

## ‘Coming of Age...’

I am writing this on the morning of 28<sup>th</sup> November in the hope that it might make it the festive issue of ‘Journey’... no doubt there will be more considered responses at a later date! I have to say that I enjoyed the whole day; the sun shone for our morning pilgrimage... upwards of thirty folk walked around much of the city centre (quite briskly!), reading, praying, singing and reflecting at the various sites used by Methodism during the last two hundred years and more. There was some disagreement over which tune was the most fitting for the Wesley hymn which we sang verse by verse as we moved around (and I am not sure that we had resolved this even by the end of the morning); it was also fascinating to learn quite how many Carrs Lane folk had strong links with the ‘legal’ sector of the city (from an entirely legitimate perspective!). We gathered a few people as we moved around, and folk were ready for a brew by the time we made it back to Carrs Lane.

About 130 people sat down for Sunday lunch, representing every aspect of the life of the church and beyond; it was a happy occasion, though I am not quite sure why we ran out of forks... an inventory taken earlier in the week meant that we had purchased a few more and were confident that we would be able to meet demand! Robinsons always cater fairly generously for us, and by the time that those with robust appetites had enjoyed ‘seconds’, the food – literally – came to an end as they last person returned to their seat. Some folk then looked around the refurbished Level 1, some folk listened to music... and some got stuck into the washing up as we prepared for the Service of Celebration and Commitment at 3pm. Again, the timing seemed to be just right; no sense of dragging, but no undue sense of haste, either.

You will have your own views of the service... words, music, actions which engaged or delighted or challenged. Several things stick in my mind: the sight of so many people moving forward to sign the covenant document, including young children; the gentle buzz coming from the ‘All-Age’ at the back of church, which enriched our worship rather than being a distraction; several sentences from John Marsh’s energetic and appropriate sermon... foremost among them, his observation that this particular ecumenical journey was manifestly not a case of, ‘two corpses in a single coffin!’. He spoke with humour and to good effect. The singing was powerful, the words moving... and the first Advent Candle burned throughout, a reminder of so many of the themes at the heart of worship on this particular day.

Thanks to all who contributed in so many ways.

Neil Riches

## Chaplaincy update

Another year is coming to the end and much has happened in city centre retail chaplaincy. We have welcomed two new chaplains to the team – Dolvis Ferdinand is covering part of the Bullring shopping centre and Alison Whybrow, the Great Western Arcade. Elaine Hutchinson continues to cover another part of the Bullring and also visits the Pallasades and Pavilions. Iain Frew, Linda Cooke and I continue to cover the markets as regularly as we can. Requests for chaplaincy have also come in from M & S and other retailers, but we cannot meet the needs of the present ones so are having to turn them down, which is a great shame.

As you will be aware, we were able to provide some support to retailers who were traumatised by the riots in August, and as a result of that situation, Elaine has been asked to attend the Birmingham City Council Response Team, who had not been aware of our presence. We have also been asked by our 'umbrella body', the Churches Industrial Group Birmingham, (CIGB) to produce our own emergency action plan, much in the same way as Neil is working with the elders to produce an emergency plan for Carrs Lane.

It has been very encouraging to hear of responses to our befriending service, which go beyond a general chat about the weather or who won the last football match! At the CIGB annual chaplains' service in November, the chaplain to the Longbridge construction site gave a very powerful testimony about the work he has done there in the last two years, as was one of the chaplain's to the fire service – so chaplaincy in B'ham is spreading.

We are going to repeat last year's 'mulled wine and mince pie' give away in the markets as the response was so good. It was great fun and much appreciated, so help on the afternoons of Tuesday 20, Wednesday 21 or Thursday 22 of December would be most welcome.

Chaplaincy starts with friendship, which means just meeting, listening and talking to people and explaining that we are there to befriend and give support. But it becomes much more than that as the people you meet get to know that you really do care about them as individuals. If you think you might be able to help – not just giving out mince pies – let us know as one of the ways of finding out is to spend a morning with one of the existing chaplains so you can see what it's like. We could really do with doubling our present numbers to provide better cover, so any help would be most welcome.

Andrew Veitch.

## Lectures in Radical Christian Faith 2011

This year we welcomed two theologians from America to be the “spin doctors” of our Christian faith. The confidence, as expressed in the flyer to the lectures, that our mind would be stretched and our imagination quickened was not misplaced and I would recommend that you order the CDs made from the lectures to better understand what were for many difficult concepts to properly grasp. But it was reassuring to hear from Professor Paul Knitter that no-one has the final answer and that we are all struggling in greater or lesser ways to move on.

*What is atonement?* A question that has troubled radical thinking for some time. Professor Knitter suggested that this concept be looked at in the light of what Jesus did to turn the lives of his early followers around. It meant different things to different groups of people, then as now. But he thought that there was no NT doctrine of atonement, but rather various images seeking to demonstrate what Jesus was about. He thought that Jesus, teacher of wisdom, showed that God’s love for human kind did not need a substitutionary figure, but was given to us anyway. He was also uneasy because the idea of the substitutionary theory of atonement – Jesus as the sacrificial victim of human sin – seemed to condemn other religions at a time when it was particularly important to engage with them. He described the importance for himself of his assimilation of Buddhist teaching, the interconnectedness of everything. It is a fundamental problem that we are all part of this being but fail to realise it. Jesus woke us up to the spirit of the goodness of God. Atonement is a work of discovering that there was never a separation between us and God. We do terrible things because we don’t know this. Jesus is the sacrament of God’s presence. Atonement takes place when people take Jesus seriously as symbol of non-violent love.

The second lecture asked the question: *Is there life after death?* Paul Knitter began by saying that we just don’t know! Whatever we say about what comes next has to be found in present experience. He acknowledged that people have experienced signals of transcendence in this life – Christians and Buddhists – but he thought there had been too much talk by Christians on ideas that were best represented by symbols or poetry rather than talk. He returned several times to the phrase “Cherish the mystery”. He thought that talk of hell was bad theology. Eternal punishment is just not consistent with a God of love. Immortality could not be personal and physical but life could go on in a different form. Again the Buddhist viewpoint was considered: the importance of the “now” and of allowing the future to take care of itself. Professor Knitter emphasised the need for enlightenment not as individuals but as part of the interbeingness of all things. What we do contributes inevitably to what we get: however, the evil we do is never the last word. After death there is rebirth, but in a transformed state. God is a spiritual presence and what we will be after death is in a relationship to this presence. The seed falls into the ground and dies but brings forth much fruit. We have to lose our life before finding it. And we can but trust that afterwards there will be life which is indeed a mystery to cherish.

In the third lecture Professor Roger Haight turned our attention to one of the most hotly contested areas of Christian theology: *Who is Jesus?* He defined the three areas for debate as, firstly, the historical figure of Jesus, secondly, the person of Jesus as a pathway to God when compared to other saviour figures and, thirdly, the question of the divinity of Jesus. Research has been going on for centuries about the historical Jesus and his figure can be pieced together partly from the public role he played as prophet, healer and teacher, and partly from the message he gave. Jesus spoke in the name of God, about the kingdom of God and of a God attentive to peoples' lives. He was a faith healer, a concept difficult to understand today. He was an itinerant teacher whose sayings and parables made him outstanding. His overall message about God was not particularly original in terms of Jewish teaching – God is creator, sovereign lord but also a personal God to be prayed to; a God who actively loves and one who urges universal justice. What made Jesus different was that these ideas about God were concentrated in the person of Jesus.

It has been much discussed in recent years whether Jesus is the absolute mediator, the only saviour. There are three simplified answers to this question. He is the exclusive saviour, a view which compromises a God of love for all people. He is one of many pathways to God none of which is superior but where dialogue between religions is essential. The third position, which Professor Haight described as contentious, is the middle way where Jesus is one among many but also God incarnate and unique.

We were encouraged to think of the divinity of Jesus as not absolute. His disciples called him divine as this is how he appeared to them but this divinity is attributable to other religious figures. The conviction that God is saviour is equally available to all peoples and in all religions.

The fourth lecture asked: *What is the Trinity?* It was a doctrine, said Professor Haight, that did not emerge until the fourth century and which was one stage in a developing narrative as the story of Jesus moved through Jewish and onto Christian experience. The gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke spoke of Jesus as empowered by God's Spirit. The gospel of John, dwelling on Jesus as the Word of God, set the scene for there being two Gods and the seeds of the trinity were sown. The narrative character of the doctrine of the trinity, as well as taking in Jewish and Christian experience was influenced by Greek culture which suffused the Roman Empire. The "little" story of Jesus of Nazareth was swallowed up by the larger story so that Jesus became interpreted by the grand narrative and the trinity. Thus the correct relationship between the two stories was reversed. The grand narrative has now to be interpreted by the little story of Jesus who is its source. The failure of the trinity to communicate led to the problem of how can one be three and three be one. Further, the traditional story is under attack today – creation, fall, redemption, the origin of the church, knowledge of the end of time. We need a new version of the story which the trinity summarises and represents.

Professor Haight pointed a direction for a retelling of this story of how God has been encountered by Christians, listing six elements towards this re-formulation:

- 1) One God, not three. It must be clear that the Christian story is monotheistic.

- 2) God the creator out of nothing. This is what designates the character of God. The religious doctrine must enter into dialogue with the scientific story of the universe.
- 3) God as Spirit is the creative energy of the universe.
- 4) Jesus reveals God to us as personal and loving. God and Jesus are inextricably woven together. There are various terms to express God working through Jesus – besides Spirit and Word, Jesus manifested God's Wisdom and Glory.
- 5) Spirit is at work throughout creation and is the power of God in history.
- 6) God promises a meaningful end to history and hence justice will prevail.

To interpret the trinity as a narrative doctrine can make sense because it makes sense of human existence. It is not a static doctrine but a story to be identified with. Allowing this story to be our story injects hope into the human enterprise.

It has been a challenging lecture series. Swept along in the excitement of the four lectures it was a relief to find that long held doubts and queries could be allowed to blossom, that we could move with the times, that imagination could have a voice. Now a few weeks on, what have we made of it? How will faith develop? How will the communities with which we worship change in the light of new ideas?

It is clearly a mystery!

Gill Barfield

## **Sharing with The Methodist Church in Hong Kong (MCHK) the 160<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebrations of the arrival in Hong Kong of the Rev George Piercy**

As some of you will know part of the current work of the Methodist Central Mission is supporting the Chinese congregation. I was pleased to be asked to represent Birmingham at a Mission Conference to mark the 160<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the arrival of the Rev George Piercy, the first Methodist missionary to work in Hong Kong in 1851.

Now 160 may seem a strange number of years to commemorate but this was a time for a unique telling of the story of the people of God called Methodist in Hong Kong so church leaders in Hong Kong and Britain today could have an actual oral link to their past and be encouraged and challenged in the mission work going forward.

Key participants were missionaries – redoubtable individuals from both Britain and the USA who had served in Hong Kong in the 50's and 60's who along with their Chinese colleagues had built many of the churches that now are at the heart of the Methodist Church in Hong Kong's work. It was to hear their story that it was a 160<sup>th</sup> celebration as they are in their seventies and eighties and their travelling days will soon be done.



Mission Conference members in Central Methodist Church Hong Kong – I'm kneeling down second from left

The entrepreneurial enterprise and energy of the MCHK were an inspiration to learn of. Over three days of visits we went to ten church and social service projects, three graveyards and a divinity school. MCHK has a wide range of outreach work through social service. We visited kindergartens, heard stories of children and youth work, met family support workers, visited a food bank, watched two ti chi classes and learnt of work with elders and

the disabled and heard the testimony of the Head Prefect of Sha Tin Secondary School. We visited Macau, Hong Kong Island, Kowloon and the New Territories. We shared in a commissioning service for missionaries going to Myanmar and Japan (via Macau), heard testimony from missionaries who had served in Hong Kong. We also shared in worship on the Sunday morning throughout the District with ministers from Britain preaching and talked of the work of the Chinese congregations in Britain.

But the experience of the current work was informed by the history of what had gone before – George Piercy's insistence at coming to Hong Kong despite repeatedly being told by the Methodist Missionary Society that they had no money to support him. Or the account of the work of the last Methodist Minister to be ordained in the South China Methodist District before 1949 Rev Fan who faithfully pastored his congregations through the years of the cultural revolution and the experience of the cultural correction camps.

And the visit was about celebrating Methodist interconnectedness. Being in Connexion with not just the local and national church but with the family of Methodist people world-wide is a key part of how many Methodists understand themselves. And for me the connections became personal, visiting the grave of one of the Methodist Missionaries, Rev John Temple, buried in Hong Kong cemetery to know that it was Rev Liz Wills' grandfather who chairs one of my Live at Home Schemes. (My day job is as a Community Services Area Manager for Methodist Homes for the Aged (MHA)) How Stella Jefferies former missionary to China, wife of Rev Jefferies who founded the Divinity School at Hong Kong Chinese University lives at MHA's Southcroft project in Sheffield and is a member of another of my schemes. How Jenny Franklin, who with her husband Michael, was a missionary in Hong Kong in the 1960s, was born in China, interned in a Japanese camp as a child, is the daughter of Rev Harold T Cook and was married at Northfield Methodist Church in 1963 where it is suggested that the Birmingham Chinese Methodist Church move to as the meeting space at Corporation Street is too small for their needs and is no longer fit for purpose as a community space.

It was a privilege to be part of this event in Hong Kong. It was a completely immersive educational experience. A way of learning and linking past, present and future mission, acknowledging how our ancestors shape who we are, the importance of personal oral links to that history and also how we grow on from those formative experiences. I am grateful to the Methodist Church in Hong Kong for their generous hospitality. For enabling me not to hear their story but be part of our joint story and knowing our story be strengthened and inspired as we go on.



As expected the Conference programme was very full but a little time was taken around the side to ride on the trams and the Star Ferry across the harbour, to visit Stanley Market, the Peak and the Giant Buddha on Lantau Island, take many, many pictures and meet up with an old friend from university that I haven't seen in 25 years and to convince me that Hong Kong is a place that I like and will return to.

Helen Woodall

Treasurer, Birmingham Methodist Central Mission and member of the Church at Carrs Lane.

## TO BE NOTED...

...by those of us coming to The Church at Carrs Lane via the URC. If we are to become half Methodist, we need to recognise what is to be expected of us. The following pulls no punches!

### John Wesley's Rules for Singing (*from Select Hymns 1761*)

- **Learn these tunes** before you learn any others; afterwards learn as many as you please.
- **Sing them exactly** as they are printed here, without altering or amending them at all; and if you have learned to sing them otherwise, unlearn it as soon as you can.
- **Sing all.** See that you join with the congregation as frequently as you can. Let not a slight degree of weakness or weariness hinder you. If it is a cross to you, take it up, and you will find a blessing.
- **Sing lustily**, and with good courage. Beware of singing as if you were half dead, or half asleep; but lift up your voice with strength. Be no more afraid of your voice now, nor more ashamed of its being heard, then when you sung the songs of Satan.

- **Sing modestly.** Do not bawl, so as to be heard above or distinct from the rest of the congregation, that you may not destroy the harmony; but strive to unite your voices together, so as to make one clear melodious sound.
- **Sing in time.** Whatever time is sung, be sure to keep with it. Do not run before nor stay behind it; but attend closely to the leading voices, and move therewith as exactly as you can; and take care not to sing too slow. This drawling way naturally steals on all who are lazy; and it is high time to drive it out from among us, and sing all our tunes just as quick as we did at first.
- **Above all, sing spiritually.** Have an eye to God in every word you sing. Aim at pleasing Him more than yourself, or any other creature. In order to do this, attend strictly to the sense of what you sing, and see that your heart is not carried away with the sound, but offered to God continually; so shall your singing be such as the Lord will approve of here, and reward when he cometh in the clouds of heaven.

Please take to heart! You might be tested...

Julie Grove

## STRIKES

It's a good thing God above  
 Has never gone on strike  
 Because he wasn't treated fair or  
 For the things he didn't like  
 If he had only just sat down  
 And said "That's it, I'm through  
 I've had enough of those on earth  
 So this is what I'll do,  
 I'll give my orders to the sun –  
 Cut off your heat supply,  
 Turn off the air and oxygen  
 And run the oceans dry."  
 You know he would be justified  
 If fairness were the game  
 For no-one has been more abused  
 Or treated with disdain  
 Men say they want a better deal  
 And so "on strike" they go  
 And what a deal we've given God  
 To whom everything we owe.  
 We don't care whom we hurt or harm  
 To gain the things we like  
 But what a mess we'd all be in  
 If GOD should go on strike.

- *Anon.*

## Choice – determined by assessment of risk or belief?

The National Centre for Social Research produced a fairly robust report for the Cabinet Office in the wake of last August's riots; the summary document makes for accessible and sometimes disturbing reading. For me, the most interesting section is headed, 'Making choices'; the authors note, 'Although some young people barely made a conscious choice at all, others appeared to have asked themselves one, or both, of two key questions when making their decisions: *What do I think is right or wrong? What do I risk to get involved?*' Interesting. It seems to me that more and more decision making in society can be described as 'reactive' – a decision made in the light of the evaluation of the many risks involved – rather than 'proactive', or decisions made in the light of consistently and sincerely held values. The culture of 'risk assessment' prevails at the moment; I understand this, and embrace many of its key tenets – indeed, I worked through the completion of risk assessment forms with a group of potential BB leaders at a recent training event. No problems at all on this level. In church life, however, we may need to reclaim the first question for centre stage – *What do I think is right or wrong?* – from the second question, which is often perceived to be a determining question for safety-conscious churches and Christians – *What do I risk to get involved?* I am not talking about physical risks here, of course... risk comes in many shapes and forms, and almost invariably takes us outside of our comfort zones.

I read the section in the report relating to the first question with somewhat mixed feelings. There was little evidence of consistency in the views of the young people; to use theological jargon, a variant of 'situation ethics' appeared to emerge. I quote: '*...some targets in the riots were more legitimate than others: 'When they hit local shops they went too far'. Some behaviours were seen as much more wrong than others, with strong disapproval of behaviour which hurt people, put vulnerable people at risk or destroyed small family businesses*'. Some may sympathise with a part of the logic here – particularly at a time when big business and financial institutions are branded as faceless and greedy – but it is disingenuous to claim that small is beautiful and big is evil. Ultimately, every group, every institution, every company is made up of individuals who comprise the whole; from a Christian perspective, nothing and no-one should be nameless, faceless, lost...both because every individual is unique, and also because every individual is answerable for his or her behaviour.

The comments relating to the second question – assessing the risks – were also interesting. '*... the risks of being caught, what it might mean for your future and whether it was 'worth' it were themes that featured heavily in interviews*'. Clearly, many decided that the attractions were great and the risks were low...and, to a degree, the rest is history. Again, it is fascinating to ponder this from a Christian perspective: an element of risk is not necessarily wrong, we have no exemption from decision-making which involves a degree of risk...yet we would argue vigorously that a realistic reflection on the risks involved can take place only after we have achieved a consistent and mature understanding of what our determining beliefs are.

Neil Riches

# What the Gospels really teach about the birth and death of Jesus

This was the title of a conference organised by the Progressive Christianity Network held in Leeds in September 2011. The speaker was John Dominic Crossan, Irish-American religious scholar and former Catholic priest, now eminent theologian and author. I was interested to hear him because I'd read some of his work, particularly about the theology of story, and I wondered whether he would be a prospective speaker for our own lectures in radical Christian faith.

As a key figure in research into the historical Jesus, Crossan says that, to understand what the gospels say, you have to put Jesus back in Jesus' world. Why did Jesus happen, when and where? Crossan's model for doing this, which he calls his MATRIX, is flexible and interactive and covers four elements, presented on pair at either ends of crossing axes: tradition and vision; time and place. He identifies progressive Christianity as the matrix 'poked by questions'.

## Christmas then:

First you have to ask, in creating a narrative for the birth of Jesus, what is Luke imagining? He is thinking of a caravansary, a roadside inn where travellers could rest and recover from the day's journey.



It was a building with a square or rectangular walled exterior, with a single gate wide enough to permit large or heavily laden beasts such as camels to enter. The courtyard was almost always open to the sky, and the inside walls of the enclosure had a number of identical bays to accommodate merchants and their servants, animals, and merchandise. This is where Luke imagines Jesus is born.

Crossan explained Luke uses the title 'Son of God' by which he means 'heir' of God...in Jesus we can see what God is like but we need to decode the metaphor. All the titles given to Jesus were major titles of Caesar used earlier and the story of Jesus' conception and birth mirror that of Caesar Augustus who was believed to have been divinely conceived by Apollo, and also to have a significant lineage. It is crucial to understand the language which is being used: 'Son of God' is metaphorical; it was used to define what was essentially and utterly human, ie: both of the Emperor and then of Jesus. Just as Caesar Augustus brought in the Pax Romana and a programme of civilisation, so Jesus is portrayed as bringing the ideal of living in peace, ie: in a world of non-violence.

The birth stories were written after the Easter narrative and were intended as a pre-ambule to it. Crossan described these stories as 'parabolic overtures'. A parable is a fiction about something that could have happened, but to ask if it's literally true is to seek a diversion from having to hear its powerful message and the questions it raises. A parable should be a 'lure for thought'. Questioning these stories is not the same as doubting them; rather it is to enhance their significance. Matthew's message is that Jesus is the new Moses and he draws out parallels with the Exodus story (Herod = new Pharaoh). The Gospel narrators were not intending historical truth; the authors know these literary devices for what they are and they are using them as effectively as they can.

## The execution of Jesus

The account of the death of Jesus has been appropriated by the Church in what's called the doctrine of 'substitutional sacrificial atonement', which has become synonymous with Christianity, especially in the USA. Crossan deconstructed the phrase, word by word, asking first:

*Sacrifice*: Why did people, cross culturally, come up with the idea of blood sacrifice? The root of the word is 'sacrum facere', meaning to make sacred. Straightforwardly, such an offering was believed to be a gift from humanity to the divine; it was established long before Christianity. Then *atonement*, which means putting right a wrong; the restoration of relationship...harmony in reconciliation.

*Substitution*: a much more difficult word and one wholly without biblical foundation, yet this is the core of traditional Christian doctrine. Anthropologically, in ancient times there were two ways of restoring good relations after a dispute: the gift and the meal and, for the meal, there was a need to kill an animal, so it required the shedding of blood but there is no hint of substitution here. Ancient people also gave gifts. In Celtic traditions, gifts were left in the bog, as a way of preserving them. Gifts were often weapons, but then as a way of increasing their potency, gifts began to take human form, but still without any hint of substitution.

In the scapegoat ritual, the sins of the people were placed on the animal before it was pushed out into the wilderness, but it was never killed. All across the Old Testament, the assumption that sacrifice is substitutional is decried as wrong. Neither is there any use of the idea in the New Testament; it came from Anselm [theologian and philosopher and second Norman Archbishop of Canterbury, 1098]. He was writing during the first Crusade (with which he disagreed). He was made Archbishop by the king and he embraced, as a metaphor for God, the kingly notion of 'God the Judge'. His idea was that God could not be allowed just to dish out forgiveness, so God needed a substitute to permit forgiveness and sent Jesus. This, Crossan asserts, is both bad anthropology and bad theology.

So where now? Think historically, Crossan suggests...Jesus was executed by Pilate. And the reasons? Jesus' activities were dangerous; the authorities were aware he was dangerous. He was aware it was dangerous for him to stay in the city at night, so he left it every evening during that last week. There was zero tolerance of

disturbances at Passover; a cross was placed at the entrance to the city as a warning to visitors to behave. Much as they would have liked to take Jesus early in the week, his popularity would have caused a riot, so they procured an informer to tell them of his whereabouts, well away from the crowd... by Friday there was a tinderbox atmosphere in the city.

Was Jesus' death the meaning of his life...was he destined to die? Crossan asks. Jesus certainly made a great sacrifice. As a non-violent revolutionary, his crucifixion was a poster to deter others from doing the same. Good Friday is the result of the collision between the passion of Jesus and the domination systems of his time.

Jesus died for our sin...but the sin of civilisation is violence: an original and on-going sin; Jesus died after a life of insistent and consistent non-violence. His death is nothing to do with substitution; he is all for giving life to others in '*participatory sacrificial atonement*'. And remembering that, in the Eucharist the believer is acknowledging the place of bread and wine in Jesus' Mediterranean diet whilst pledging one's life to justice and peace...truly participative sacrificial atonement. (And that's what I think of when I hold the little glass between my fingers and watch my pulse register in the ceiling lights' reflections on the surface of the liquid...try it!)

Crossan spoke about the resurrection too (for another time!) and in conclusion, he offered this summary: Jesus is difficult to live with; his life and death are troublesome in the extreme. Over two millennia, the purpose of the Church has been to make Jesus live-able-with but, despite all attempts, it is not possible to domesticate him. In his time, it was possible/acceptable to say someone was divine; Jesus was the incarnation of divine, non-violent justice and peace.

And, for good measure: 'The Bible attempts to domesticate God; the Church attempts to domesticate Jesus'. It was a good day!

Julie Grove

## On this day ...

From the Carrs Lane Missionary Chronicle December 1911

*The editor's assessment of how Carrs Lane was coping with the pastoral vacancy occasioned by Dr. Jowett's departure – in the best Congregationalist tradition*

*From the Editorial*

It is supposed to be an Editor's inalienable and immemorial privilege – if not his right – to indulge in some sort of retrospect and review in sending forth the closing issue of each succeeding volume of his journal. The right is not often claimed in these pages as that of prophesy and forecast usually associated with a first number of the new year. The exceptional twelve months, now drawing to a close, in the history of our Church may be held to justify the exercise of the former right without – may the implied threat be forgiven! – prejudicing the Editorial fulfilment of the latter.

On the whole, no faithful lover of Carrs Lane Church can fail to find cause for much thankfulness in the mixed feelings with which the year 1911 will always be regarded. The Church has had – and has not yet emerged from – a severe and testing time of trial. It is no small tribute to the thoroughness and soundness of Dr. Jowett’s teaching and influence amongst us that the work of the Church is proceeding with the virile earnestness that still happily characterises it as it did in the wealthy days of his pastorate. As far as observation will reveal, no single organisation has allowed its enthusiasm to cool, its efforts to slacken, or its hands “to hang down idle, feeble, and of good works bereft.” The individual Classes and Schools, Missionary workers home and foreign, Digbeth with its multifarious uplifting agencies, the so-called minor sections of the Church – all are resolutely, zealously, and with good heart of faith doing full and laudable service, “not in the way of eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.”

As to those sections of the work of the Church which may be said to be peculiarly the Pastor’s own, on no account must anxiety in the matter be allowed to deepen into apprehensiveness. The strenuous labours of the Pastoral Sub-Committee remove both reason and justification for any gloomy view of our vacant leadership. It would be impossible to do more than is being done, and Carrs Lane Church, possessing this assurance, will calmly and faithfully and patiently fulfil her high calling, strong in the belief that her times are in the Almighty’s hands.

#### **From the Carrs Lane Missionary Chronicle January 1912**

*An historical account of Christmas traditions and music from a time which is history to us, although most of the seasonal entries in Rejoice and Sing were already written*

*From “Christmas Carols” (by H.W.B.)*

Of Church music associated with Christmas none is more interesting than the carol, for its rise and development are closely bound up with the historical events which have led to the present-day observance of Christmas. Among the early Churches there does not appear to have been any uniformity in the period of observing the Nativity, and there is strong evidence against accepting the 25<sup>th</sup> of December as the actual date of the Nativity. Christmas, as we know it to-day, began to take form from the fifth to the eighth centuries, when a number of festivals observed by heathens and Christians towards the end and the beginning of the year became grouped together and surpassed all other holidays in the festal usages.

Heathen nations regarded the winter solstices as the turning point of the year, the beginning of the renewed life and activity of nature, and many of the old beliefs and usages relating to this period passed over from heathenism to Christianity. The Church, seeking to combat the heathen feeling associated with the festivities, introduced dramatic representations of the birth of Christ and the first events of His life. Hence sprang the so-called “Manger-songs,” and a multitude of Christmas carols as well as Christmas dramas, which at certain times and places degenerated into

farces or “Fool’s feasts,” and the custom of reciprocal presents and of special Christmas meats, dishes, etc.

In England the practice of singing carols was widely spread in the 15th century, and many ancient carols – as one would expect from their origin as traced above – preserve curious legends descended from a very remote past. Many are not extant in original manuscript copies, and, as must happen in being handed down traditionally, became greatly corrupted when they found their way into print. In the second half of the 18th century, a Birmingham publisher, T. Bloomer, issued all the carols that came to his notice. The first printed collection of carols came from the press of Wynkyn de Worde in 1521, and a fragment of it is extant containing the famous “Boar’s Head Carol,” which is still sung at Queen’s College, Oxford, on Christmas Day.

Besides the sacred carols sung in the open-air, there were jovial carols sung at Christmas feasts and collections of these latter contain specimens of the songs that were sung by shepherds and ploughmen at Christmas entertainments at farmhouses. The Puritans did their best to discourage carol singing, but the practice revived at the Restoration. Early in the 19th century, a writer, Hone, predicted that in the course of a few years, carol singing would be heard no more, and although his prediction has not been fulfilled, carol singing in the open-air is on the wane, and the quaint carols of old days are in consequence undoubtedly falling out of remembrance.

### **From the Carrs Lane Journal – December 1961**

A piece by Mrs Oxley, apposite for the season because it recognises the status of mothers, who often work particularly hard towards the festive celebrations, and it reminds us about those who are far from home or alone at this time of year.

#### *“Respected Mum”*

*He is tall, broad, dark and handsome and his name is Ravi. When he first came to tea with us a year ago, he brought a magnificent bunch of chrysanthemums for me – it is the custom in India to take a gift when you visit – and a box of perfumed twigs. Within minutes he had lit one and, as the house developed a real oriental atmosphere, he positively glowed with satisfaction.*

*“What can I call you?” he asked. “What do your sons call you?” “Well, Mum,” I replied, but ...” “I shall call you Mum!” he announced, and “Mum” I am – “Respected Mum,” in fact, if he addresses me in a letter. It makes me feel very old and venerable, but somehow pleased. Do I really inspire respect in someone? It was touching that he was so ready to adopt us as his family; not that he has ever imposed on us or visited us uninvited, except to bring us a Christmas card and a little ivory carving of three monkeys.*

*Obviously he regarded us as temporary substitutes for his own family, very poor ones for we have not seen as much of him as we might have done. Should we not remind ourselves that these coloured students are a long way from home, often in*

*unsatisfactory lodgings and homesick? We have heard that the scheme for entertaining Congregational students from other towns is working successfully: could we not extend it to students of other lands? It is still not too late to invite one or two for Christmas.*

*From the Carrs Lane Journal – January 1962*

Do we bother to make any New Year Resolutions nowadays? Do we keep them?!!

*Some New Year Resolutions*

*F.W. Greaves – Democracy in city and nation must be supported by conscious effort. I resolve, therefore, to contribute all I can, as I take advantage of its protection and services*

*E.M. Donovan – I think it is a good thing for a wife to let her husband make some of the major decisions in life. Mine needed no prompting to choose my New Year Resolution. It is – “Cherish your husband.”*

*B. Wright – An obvious resolution for me is to try to sell every copy of the Journal each month. I could buy all the spare copies myself, but there are still many who do not buy it. I need help to contact these – at least two people on the 1st and 2nd Sundays of the month. Offers, please!*

*F. Holdcroft – My resolution is to believe, despite all evidence to the contrary that, “God is too wise to err, and too good to be unkind.”*

*W.J. Haine – I miss so much of the beauty and wonder of this world – I will look a little more closely. I take so little interest in other people’s lives – I will listen more and try to understand. The things I cannot alter have wasted me with anxiety – I will leave these to God.*

**WHAT IS YOURS?**

Contributed by Wendy Firmin

## **Commitment for Life**

*(Extracts from Moving Stories 141 and 143)*

### **Parents Circle-Families Forum (PCFF)**

Israeli and Palestinian members of the Parents Circle-Families Forum are busy in the run-up to International Peace Day on 21<sup>st</sup> September. Working with a top advertising agency, they have planned a bold initiative to mark the event this weekend: Israelis and Palestinians will be donating blood to each other in a symbolic act called ‘Blood Relations’. The bold poster to advertise this initiative asks: ‘Could you hurt someone who has his blood running through your veins?’

The blood donors will be telling their stories and making it clear that too much blood has been spilt already and that the act of donating blood is a symbolic one to try to heal the conflict. The 20 Israeli and Palestinian members of the forum who participated in the project used materials connected with the loved ones they have

lost, like uniforms and newspaper cuttings, to create artwork expressing their thoughts about the conflict, about bereavement and about peace and reconciliation, in a very creative way.

## Hebron: “Vacations” from the Occupation

When a totally unexpected surprise—like a small fragile flower pushing itself through a cement block—meets the eye, I experience a certain sure bliss, an “instant vacation.” For a moment, all is well; my breath stops. I experience a moment of awe, and at times bittersweet feelings.

The following moments speak of such “vacations from the Occupation.”

- A Palestinian hearing the call to prayer, unfolding his prayer rug on the street, kneeling to pray
- An Israeli soldier offering coffee to the Palestinian street cleaner
- A full-grown sheep managing to go successfully through the checkpoint turnstile
- An Israeli soldier requesting a Palestinian man to be kind and purchase bread for his need
- A “flotilla” of kites flying overhead, one of them “dressed” in a Palestinian flag
- A sick camel coming into my neighbourhood to receive medicine
- A day at the checkpoints with no ID checks
- A shopkeeper leaving his shop unattended to take me to another shop to find what I need
- A small child kissing my hand, then raising my hand to his/her forehead as a sign of honour
- Two young men after an hour of detainment coming back to thank us for our presence at the checkpoint
- A shepherd offering hospitality after settlers stole his donkey
- The Palestinian woman pouring perfume on my face (a good tonic for tear gas) when I was choking and crying from tear gas
- Small visiting Jewish children attentively watching the Palestinian potters as they paint their wares
- A Jewish shopkeeper crossing the street to have coffee with his Palestinian neighbour
- Children skipping up and down the stairs which lead onto a violent street
- A Palestinian mother refusing to allow her son, who has just been beaten, to be dragged behind a military gate
- Large groups of internationals coming to see for themselves if all this Occupation “stuff” is true
- Israeli, Palestinian, and International folks working together for peace in this land
- Rain falling in May!! How happy the farmers must be to have rain since their crops must now survive without irrigation pipes which have been cut by the Military
- Four teenage Palestinian youths smiling every morning at me as they have just been stopped once again for an ID check

People's lives must go on even though this part of the world is a war zone. I've learned that beauty and enjoyment of simple things are not taken for granted so easily when checkpoints, humiliations and restrictions meet the person at regular "turns" of the day.

© Paulette Schroeder

## Summer camp in an oasis of peace

A very successful summer camp was organised by Parents Circle Family Forum (PCFF) for Israeli and Palestinian teenagers. The camp provided an opportunity to open hearts and minds on both sides and for everyone to get to know each other as individual human beings. It was a chance to show the young people that there's grief and pain on both sides and that empathy can help to promote reconciliation.

Youngsters were divided into different age groups for a range of activities including get to know you games, a film screening about the conflict and a forest outing. Palestinians and Israelis shared bedrooms and enjoyed a music workshop with a group of Israeli and Palestinian rap and hip hop artists. Everyone left feeling inspired to spread the message of peace and reconciliation. The Israeli and Palestinian youngsters have stayed in touch using e-mail and Facebook.

Here are some of the young people's reflections

- 'The experience was incredible. I'm leaving with a feeling – stronger than ever – that peace is an option, that it is possible...so happy to have the chance to participate in a camp like this. I learned that judging the other will not bring people to justice.'
- *18 year old from Abu Dis, Palestine*
- 'For the first time I heard the plight of the Palestinian people, and I saw things from their point of view. Some of these conversations were very enlightening, but they were very hard from an emotional standpoint.'
- *16 year old from Haifa, Israel*
- 'The personal stories from the Israelis and Palestinians made me realize that everyone is sharing the same pain.'
- *16 year old from Bethlehem, Palestine*
- 'At the camp I saw something I didn't expect – that the relations between us were actually so friendly! I enjoyed the movie and the woods, but I especially enjoyed the sea. I even learned some Hebrew! The Israelis are really very nice, and I enjoyed getting to know them, and now I feel like I can form my own opinion.'
- *14 year old from Nablus, Palestine*
- 'I am leaving feeling great! Despite the language barrier I have managed to connect with the Palestinians and share my life with them, and they have shared their lives with me. It really affected me to hear first-hand accounts about life beyond the Green Line. Now I have a much greater hope that it is possible to have an open conversation with our Arab neighbours.'
- *17 year old from Tel Aviv, Israel*

- 'I left the camp with feelings of love and respect for all the people who participated. I am glad we had the opportunity to express our thoughts and feelings openly. I learned a lot about friendship and brotherhood, about how we do not have to give up hope for peace.'
- *18 year old from Hebron, Palestine*
- 'The camp woke me up to questions about communication and knowledge of the other. I want to talk to anyone who would talk to me, as we all need to talk more and open the doors that remain closed, to allow serious and open dialogue between more teenagers from both peoples.'
- *16 year old from Tel Aviv, Israel*

*Please remember in prayer the bid for the UN to recognise the Palestinian state.  
Pray that God will enable a just and realistic solution to be reached.*

#### A MEDITATION TO WELCOME IN THE 20TH YEAR OF COMMITMENT FOR LIFE

Commitment for life is about the fullness of life for all people  
 Commitment for life is about helping this become a reality for all God's people  
 Commitment for life is about commitment to generous and just stewardship  
 Commitment for life is about commitment of time to fullness of life for all people

*Chosen for Life – Material for Worship 1996, © Revd John Hetherington*

*Contributed by Wendy Firmin*

## Who is my Master?

Is Love my master,  
Or am I master of Love -  
Which could it be?  
Eros, Ophelia, Agape, Suffrage

-  
What kind of Love is this -  
It's all Greek to me!

Is my Dog the Master -  
Who takes who for a walk?  
Or maybe my cat,  
Or any other pet?

Am I Master in my own house?  
Or is it my wife,  
Or the new baby  
Who wants a bath, a bottle  
And does not sleep all night?

Is my job the Master,  
Or maybe my boss?  
Is this the same thing  
I do to pay my bills -  
Do I love my job -  
I do not know.

Who is my Master -  
Does it matter?  
Is God my Master,  
Or Jesus His Son?  
Just because I pray,  
Read my Bible, go to church -  
Does that make God my  
Master?

Surely having God as my  
Master should change me -  
Why do I not feel changed?

David Stackhouse

## I'll Pray for You

I'll pray for you as you're alone  
To comfort you in prayer  
Every ending of a day  
Your friend is always there

I'll pray for you at morning light  
In quietness and grace  
To give you comfort and a care  
A sweet and quiet place

I'll pray to keep you going  
Like flowers seek the light  
His love will keep you knowing  
With darkness out of sight

When we all look together  
To behold the view  
His hand is always guiding  
For the many and the few

Cyril Matthew Clements

## Peace, not of this world, give I unto you

L aurie - widowed so young; lovers from teenage  
R eg - resting in foreign fields; so far away.  
O nly two young girls - and memories - to cherish  
O h! I wish I had known him, planted a kiss on his cheek.  
V ictory in 1945; sadness at home, but faithful till the end  
S ilence in the vast cemetery - what a waste of young lives!  
E mpty arms for her - much love for her girls and community  
E nglish rose on his grave; red as his blood, shed for our peace.

Seeing the picture of red roses in a cemetery in the November edition of Reform inspired me to write this reflection. Last year my children (Reg and Laurie's grandchildren) treated my sister and myself to a holiday in Anzio where my father is buried. There we met two nuns from an order, started in the early 1930's on land bought to set up a convent to pray for world peace. It so happened that the British Legion later took the plot next to it for the British Commonwealth cemetery. Their flock of white doves in the garden are symbols of the daily prayers for the fallen offered by the order, in love - still searching for World Peace.

Pat Davies

*I was sent this by email and thought it would be appropriate to remember those who can't be home for Christmas this year. Ed.*

### THE FINAL INSPECTION

The soldier stood and faced God,  
Which must always come to pass.  
He hoped his shoes were shining,  
Just as brightly as his brass.

'Step forward now, you soldier,  
How shall I deal with you ?  
Have you always turned the other cheek ?  
To My Church have you been true?'

The soldier squared his shoulders and said,  
'No, Lord, I guess I ain't.  
Because those of us who carry guns,  
Can't always be a saint.

I've had to work most Sundays,  
And at times my talk was tough.

And sometimes I've been violent,  
Because the world is awfully rough.

But, I never took a penny,  
That wasn't mine to keep...  
Though I worked a lot of overtime,  
When the bills got just too steep.

And I never passed a cry for help,  
Though at times I shook with fear.  
And sometimes, God, forgive me,  
I've wept unmanly tears.

I know I don't deserve a place,  
Among the people here.  
They never wanted me around,  
Except to calm their fears.

If you've a place for me here, Lord,  
It needn't be so grand.  
I never expected or had too much,  
But if you don't, I'll understand.

There was a silence all around the throne,  
Where the saints had often trod.  
As the soldier waited quietly,  
For the judgment of his God.

'Step forward now, you soldier,  
You've borne your burdens well.  
Walk peacefully on Heaven's streets,  
You've done your time in Hell.'

Author Unknown

## Find the Christmas Hymn

Solve the clues, and the initial letters spell out the first line of a carol celebrating the Prince of Glory (8 words). These clues are all based on references in Christmas songs that you probably know by heart! The doggerel rhyme provides a further clue!

- \_\_\_ A guide that is brightest and best?
- \_\_\_ Stood hard as iron?
- \_\_\_ What sort of light shone in the dark streets of Bethlehem?
- \_\_\_ Wears the crown in the wood?
- \_\_\_ Called upon to ransom a captive people?
- \_\_\_ Away for Christmas or in for Christmas, without a bed?
- \_\_\_ Came down at Christmas?
- \_\_\_ What were those Easterners pursuing over there?
- \_\_\_ Who saw a trio of vessels?
- \_\_\_ The first one went to shepherds?
- \_\_\_ The song that came from the angels at midnight?
- \_\_\_ An adoring animal?
- \_\_\_ A still and quiet time – must need a new song?
- \_\_\_ He's not stupid – he adores too!
- \_\_\_ The little town at Christmas?
- \_\_\_ The snow that lay round about had not drifted!
- \_\_\_ A merry sound in heaven?
- \_\_\_ How we begin the story of a regal city?
- \_\_\_ What the herds were watching?
- \_\_\_ Would he have his feast in boxes?!
- \_\_\_ A number of rulers coming from the East?
- \_\_\_ Don't forget the tidings of comfort and joy?
- \_\_\_ Every one of you, gather together in faith, joy and triumph?
- \_\_\_ Look out for a virtuous ruler?

My first is in Carols but missing from Kings;  
My second's in Angels but not in their Wings;  
My third is Candles, and Lanterns, of course;  
My fourth is in Turkey and Cranberry Sauce;  
My fifth is in Parcels and in Presents seen;  
My sixth is in Broadcast, but isn't in Queen;  
My seventh's in Holly and in Mistletoe;  
My whole is a pretty apt clue, don't you know!  
My origin lies in a story of pain,  
but my topical feel will always remain,  
as I carry the story of Love again.

*Contributed by Wendy Firmin*

## Books of the Bible

*Answers to the quiz in last month's Journey. Here are the books in the order in which they first appear:*

Amos, Mark, Luke, John, Joel, Judges, Job, Hebrews, Esther, Acts, James, Ruth, Romans, Titus, Matthew, Genesis, Philemon, Chronicles, Daniel, Nahum, Hosea, Lamentations, Revelation, Timothy, Samuel, Numbers, Malachi, Peter, Exodus, Kings.

### **S-s-s-Several Sleepy Shepherds...**

.....sitting in sandy scrub, savouring supper and safeguarding snoozing sheep. Suddenly, scores of superbeings shone in sunless sky, singing spiritedly of sanctity and salvation. "Seek a Saviour" sang some songsters - so stunned shepherds stuttered "s.s.s-certainly", setting sights on star-lit shed. Inside, a saintly sister, sired supernaturally, settled in straw, sighed and issued Saviour son. Spouse, shepherds, sheep and sows saw such a special sight, standing silently, not suspecting subsequent shame, scourging and sacrificial slaughter. Sadly, a sadistic suspicious sovereign sent spies, saying "Seek, seize and slay small sons." Some seers, sent by Spirit to satisfy star signs, sidestepped sneaky sortie, supplied several significant symbols of sanctity. So, several centuries since, souls seeking secrets of saintliness or solutions to sadness, suffering, social strife and sinfulness, should scour Scriptures - and seek succour in same sweet Saviour.

From Ideas Forum, Association Church Editors

### **First Christmas Card This Year**

'Twas the Month before Christmas  
When all through our land,  
Not a Christian was praying  
Nor taking a stand.

See the PC Police had taken away  
The reason for Christmas - no one could say.  
The children were told by their schools not to sing  
About Shepherds and Wise Men and Angels and things.

It might hurt people's feelings, the teachers would say  
December 25th is just a ' Holiday'.

Yet the shoppers were ready with cash, checks and credit  
Pushing folks down to the floor just to get it!  
CDs from Madonna, an X BOX, an I-Pod  
Something was changing, something quite odd!  
Retailers promoted Ramadan and Kwanzaa  
In hopes to sell books by Franken & Fonda.

As Targets were hanging their trees upside down  
At Lowe's the word Christmas - was no where to be found.  
At K-Mart and Staples and Penny's and Sears

You won't hear the word Christmas; it won't touch your ears.

Inclusive, sensitive, Di-ver-si-ty  
Are words that were used to intimidate me.  
Now Daschle, Now Darden, Now Sharpton, Wolf Blitzen  
On Boxer, on Rather, on Kerry, on Clinton !

At the top of the Senate, there arose such a clatter  
To eliminate Jesus, in all public matter.

And we spoke not a word, as they took away our faith  
Forbidden to speak of salvation and grace  
The true Gift of Christmas was exchanged and discarded  
The reason for the season, stopped before it started.

So as you celebrate 'Winter Break' under your 'Dream Tree'  
Sipping your Starbucks, listen to me.  
Choose your words carefully, choose what you say

Shout MERRY CHRISTMAS,  
not Happy Holiday !

Please, all Christians join together and  
wish everyone you meet  
MERRY CHRISTMAS

Christ is 'The Reason' for the Christ-mas Season!

*Contributed by Andrew Veitch*

## **Amnesty International Greetings Card Campaign 2011 Send a Message of Hope**

Last month in Journey, I wrote an article about this campaign, inviting people to take part and to send greetings cards to Prisoners of Conscience or their families and supporters, throughout the world, on the first two Sundays in December (4<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>) after the morning service.

Suitable cards (hand made by a member of the congregation), envelopes and names and addresses will all be provided. All you have to do is read about the Prisoner of Conscience, on the information sheet provided, write a suitable message (guidance given), sign the card and give a donation towards postage. Occasionally one is

asked just to sign with a first name but that information is on the sheet provided. I buy the stamps and arrange posting.

The people to whom one is asked to send cards have been detained for their political or religious beliefs and have not advocated or been involved in any kind of violence. Some of the cards are sent to families of people who have been murdered or disappeared.

When writing cards it is important that one does not express any **political or religious views** but simply remind people that they are not forgotten. If you can write the message in the recipients' own language so much the better but English is fine. Just ask me if you are unsure of anything.

I have full details about the people to whom we sent cards last year. Just ask me for the information.

I do hope that people will feel able to take part and 'Send a Message of Hope' and don't forget to let me know if you receive a reply!

Following the 2010 campaign Jenni Williams of WOZA (Women of Zimbabwe Arise) wrote:

*When we get the greetings cards we distribute them to all our members and that helps their families to be aware that the world is watching and the world understands the work we do.*

Eynulla Fatullayev of Azerbaijan wrote:

*It was you, my friends and saviours from Amnesty International that kept alight the flame of hope in my soul. I received messages from you while at the remotest places and desperate situations. These messages gave comfort to my soul, inspired hope in dead-end situations. Your campaign, your letters – they sustained hope in me, helped me in the abyss of despair. Amnesty International has once again proved its inestimable worth, its hope for salvation*

As you see this campaign gives great support to many people and their families.

Thank you to all who took part last year and I hope that you will participate again this year.

Christine Rowntree

December 2011



## Room Hire at Carrs Lane

Carrs Lane Church Centre is in Birmingham city centre and within a few minutes walk of New Street and Moor Street train Stations and the National Express Coach Station. Public car parking and bus stops are also nearby.

The Conference Rooms on offer at Carrs Lane are of several sizes and situated on three floors. We can support most types of events. Rooms can accommodate from 6 up to 350 delegates. You will find that our prices are very competitive. Our staff will be pleased to discuss ideas for your event with you and advise on the suitability of our facilities.

Hot and cold drinks can be supplied in the meeting rooms as often as required. Buffet meals can be pre-ordered. These range from a simple sandwich menu to a full buffet

Full details and prices are available on our website, [www.carrslane.co.uk](http://www.carrslane.co.uk), or you may call the conference team on 0121 643 6151 if you have any questions or email [booking@carrslane.co.uk](mailto:booking@carrslane.co.uk).



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## Carrs Lane Regular Activities

### SUNDAYS

<b>Morning Worship</b>	Every Sunday at 10.30am with Holy Communion on the first Sunday of the month
<b>Afternoon Worship and Healing Service</b>	Third Sunday at 5.00pm
<b>Children's Church</b>	Second Sunday at 2.30pm
<b>Radical Worship</b>	Fourth Sunday at 6.00pm
<b>First Sunday Lunch</b>	First Sunday each month at 12.30pm
<b>Church Meeting</b>	Second Sunday at 12 noon
<b>Singing Group</b>	Third Sunday 9.45 – 10.15am

### WEEK DAYS

<b>Lunchtime Healing Service</b>	Every Wednesday 1.15pm
<b>Prayer Group</b>	First Wednesday at 7.00 pm
<b>Discussion Group</b>	First Thursday at 10.15 am
<b>Carrs Lane Players (drama group)</b>	Fridays at 7.45 pm
<b>Charity Knitting Circle</b>	First Tuesday 10.00 am - 1.00 pm
<b>Carrs Lane Fair Trade Shop</b>	First and Third Sunday after morning worship and Tuesday - Friday 10.30 am - 2.30 pm
<b>Counselling Centre</b>	Monday - Friday 11.00 am - 1.30 pm and Monday to Wednesday evenings 7.00 - 9.00 pm

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