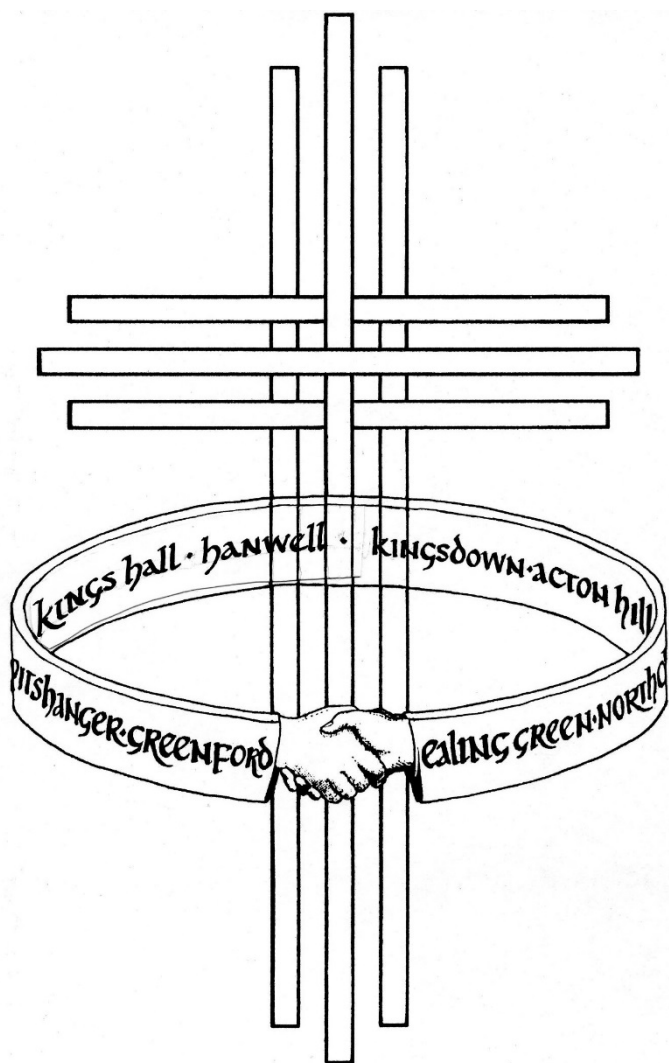


In-touch

No 75

March - May 2016



The magazine for *all* the Ealing Trinity Circuit.

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Circuit website
www.ealingtrinity.org.uk

Front Cover designed by Marion Narain

From the Superintendent

Dear Friends,

Welcome to the March - May edition of In Touch! This early spring season finds our Circuit in a ploughing and planting phase of work. Having taken decisions about forward direction, we are now engaged in preparing the ground and carrying them out. We have invited Sanya Strachan, Youth Coordinator for the Newham Circuit, to lead worship at Pitshanger on 13th March: by all means if you would like to see what someone like her does, go along and worship with Pitshanger that day – all of our churches in their different ways have ministry to children and young people on their agendas. In addition to Sanya, we have some very interesting guest ministers leading worship this quarter: it might be just the time to step out of habit for a week and go to a less familiar church. See what it is like to be new, how others do things, support each other's initiative, and reflect on what you might do in your home fellowship, to communicate with preachers and own what happens more.

The temptation in a time when there is much business going on with our property and partner outreach organisations (Live at Home, Southall Schools Project, etc) is to focus on the practical. Certainly admin, fundraising, HR and personnel development, and property strategy need careful stewardship. But I want to suggest something slightly counterintuitive. Just now, it seems to me the most important thing we can do as a Circuit is to deepen our discipleship, feed our faith lives and re-focus on the person of Jesus and his ministry for us. I mean things like trying the Circuit Lent course on the Psalms, or reading and getting to grips with Oxfam's most recent report on global wealth distribution, or seeing what we can do to prepare ourselves individually for worship each week. I am certain that we will have more energy and kindness, less anxiety, and far more clarity about direction for the institutional parts of our church life as we feed ourselves. To quote the Igbo proverb, *'Why should the ones who live by the side of a river wash their hands with spittle?'* Another one I like, which is instructive for churches: *'The family who pounds yams noisily should not assume that the family who pounds yams quietly is starving.'* Of course the reverse is also true if you pause and think about it. Look after each other, pray for each other, and see what we can do to bless each other.

So in the spirit of deepening discipleship, here is a question: what scriptural text or texts seem most important to you, right now? I know the Editor of In-touch would love to receive some from you for the next edition.

Amidst this time of preparation, go well and safely friends, and stay in touch.

Every Blessing,



New Presbyters to Join the Circuit

Subject to final approval at Methodist Conference in June/July, two new presbyters, **Rev Shirlyn Toppin** and **Rev Yemi Jaiyesimi** will be joining the Circuit in August 2016. They will replace Rev Peter Catford and Rev Suva Catford who are leaving the Circuit at the end of July.

Rev Shirlyn Toppin is currently in the New River Circuit in North London and will have charge of Hanwell and Pitshanger churches. Rev Yemi Jaiyesimi is currently in the Barnsley Circuit in Yorkshire and will have charge of Greenford and Northolt churches.

Methodist Conference 2016

The annual Methodist Conference will take place at Central Hall Westminster from Thursday 30th June to Friday 1st July 2016. Volunteers from the London District are needed to act as stewards and drivers, man the Help Desk, collate Conference papers, and work in the crèche. If you'd like to volunteer to be part of the team that supports the Conference, please contact Carole Booth – e-mail carolebooth@hotmail.com. She will be very pleased to hear from you!

Southall Interfaith Educator

Karen Greenidge was appointed to start as the Educator for our Schools Project in Southall, beginning on 11th January. Karen is employed by the Circuit in a partnership with the Southall Group of the Church of England. The Circuit Meeting decided to support the Schools Project with a grant from Circuit funds last March along with the London District and the All Saints Educational Trust. As things currently stand, the total funding is sufficient for us not to need to touch the Circuit grant for the first year.

Far more important, though, Karen has hit the ground running: her remit is to engage our congregations in Southall with the life of the secondary schools in the area, being alongside R.E. provision and working against radicalisation of all kinds. Look out for her reports and opportunities to support her work, standing alongside the young people of Southall. Karen was welcomed at a special ecumenical Circuit Service held at Emmanuel Church, Southall on 17th January

New Circuit Safeguarding Co-ordinator

Cathy Snow from Northolt has taken over from Christina Tom-Johnson as Circuit Safeguarding Co-ordinator.

Rev Jen Smith with Methodist Church, Sierra Leone

From 4th – 14th March Jen will be visiting Freetown and Kenema in Sierra Leone. Jen will be working with groups of lay and ordained church leaders on themes of scripture and leadership, change management, women's development, and empowering the margins. This is part of a two year certificate in 'applied evangelism,' offered in partnership with local tutors by the Cliff College International Training Group, and funded by the UK Methodist SALT (scholarship and leadership training) fund in world mission.

This visit was meant to have taken place in October 2014, but was delayed because of the Ebola outbreak. It has been a dreadful time in Sierra Leone, especially for rural communities and those already in economic hardship.

While she is there, Jen is very much hoping to visit the home churches of some of our church members. So, if you have links to churches in Sierra Leone, please be in touch let her know whom she should greet and look out for!

Ealing Live at Home

The Circuit Live at Home scheme in conjunction with MHA is now offering Strength and Balance classes at two of our churches – at Pitshanger on Tuesdays from 11.00am - 12.00pm and at Northolt on Fridays from 12.15pm – 1.00pm. All are welcome and there is no charge for either class. At Northolt a light lunch is available for a donation of £2.00.

Secondly, a regular Wednesday Coffee Morning from 10.30am to 12.00pm started at Greenford in January. A donation of £1.00 is requested.

To use the Live at Home scheme's activities you need to become a member. To join, all you need to do is go along to one of the activities run by Ealing Live at Home where you will be asked to fill in a short application form. Alternatively, contact the Ealing Live at Home Manager who will arrange a home visit to talk through the activities on offer and complete the application form. Currently, membership is free of charge.

For further information about the Live at Home scheme, please contact the Scheme Manager, Sonia Dhami on 020 8813 0519 or e-mail at ealing.liveathome@mha.org.uk.

Methodist Church Marriage Consultation

Gerald Barton, Editor

The Methodist Church has been carrying out a consultation on its teaching on marriage. Although it sounds arcane, the question that we have been asked to consider is not about what that teaching should be, nor whether it should be changed, but whether the Methodist Church should re-consider its current teaching, or not. I hope you follow!

The issues behind the question reflect not only the change in the law to permit same sex marriage, but also wider issues such as the increase in cohabitation since the early 1990's when the church last reviewed its teaching on marriage and how this affects the way we think about marriage and the family.

Our Circuit held a consultation meeting at Ealing Green on Tuesday 26th January. Rev Dr Keith Riglin gave an interesting and engaging talk on how the church has thought about marriage historically, enlivened with contributions from Rowan Atkinson and Monty Python. This was followed by a discussion.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the view of the meeting was that the church should take another look at its teaching on marriage. Whatever one's views on the issues surrounding marriage, changes in society and the change in the law regarding same sex marriage make it imperative for the Methodist Church to think through its position again. Whether it concludes that it should change its teaching, or not, remains to be seen.

A Note of Thanks from Esther Ackah

I would like to thank everyone who attended and contributed to the launch of my book *'Mame Nwia-Amah: Ghana's Undiscovered Divine Healer, Prophetess and Carer'* at Ealing Central Library on 8th October 2015 as part of Black History Season. Hosted by the Writing, Acting & Publishing Project for Youngsters (WAPPY) in partnership with CCS Libraries for Ealing Council, attendees were treated to a tribute Christian hymn sung by WAPPY member, Ivy Oppong, followed by an interview with me, conducted by WAPPY members, Maisa and Sara Abed, then performance artiste, Akuba, (*my daughter*) read her published poem, *Africa's Undiscovered Prophetess*, before I read one of my favourite extracts from the book. The Green Room was packed and I am also appreciative to Julie Mgbado (who made the tribute cake), and Ibi Showunmi, Luul Omar and Marian Wadworth for their catering support.

I am particularly grateful to the contributions of all those mentioned above, plus the Mayor of Ealing, Harbhajan Kaur Dheer, our Superintendent Minister Rev Dr

Jennifer Smith, Rt Hon Rupa Huq, MP (Central Ealing and Acton), Eric Huntley, co-founder of *Bogle L'Ouverture Publications*, Karen Henry, Ealing Central Library Hub Manager, who also made brief presentations at the launch. I also appreciate the attendance of Mr. William M. Osafo, Minister/Head and Mrs. Grace Boakye-Dankwa, both from the Education & Recruitment Section of the Ghana High Commission.

Finally I am also extending my gratitude to Michelle Yaa Asantewa of Way Wive Wordz for helping me self-publish my book and to Khesumaba Jess, Yengo Sergeo and John Durston for their photographic support.

If you would like to obtain a copy of my book please contact me via my email address esther.ama@hotmail.co.uk. A kindle version of the book is available at this link: <http://www.amazon.com/dp/B017HSUS90>.

Christian Aid

Ruby Warne, Kingsdown

Christian Aid Week this year is 15th – 24th May and many of us in the Circuit will be taking part. Christian Aid Sunday throughout the UK will be on 15th May (Pentecost Sunday) and will be followed by house-to-house collecting. Flag Day in the London area is 21st May and the 'Circle the City' sponsored walk on Sunday 22nd May.



Who is My Neighbour?

The focus this year is on Bangladesh and Morsheda, a woman who lives in Bangladesh. Morsheda may live in Bangladesh but she's still our neighbour. Our churches can be part of an outpouring of love for our neighbours like Morsheda in Christian Aid Week.

For Morsheda's family and 2 million others living on low-lying islands in the Brahmaputra River floods are a terrifying part of everyday life. The single-room, corrugated iron shack she shares with her four children has been flooded four times. However, Christian Aid and partner GUK can help and Morsheda wants *us* to ring doorbells. Christian Aid has a Home Safety Package which costs just £250. That's enough to flood-proof our neighbour Morsheda's home, raising it by 6 – 8ft on an earth plinth so that she has a safe place to rebuild, keep livestock and grow crops. It could also buy a goat and seeds which will give her a long-term income and a solid foundation for a new life.

Resource materials are now available. These include a 7-day devotional guide for Christian Aid Week "Who is My Neighbour" (a short Bible reading each day, a

reflection, a prayer and our own response); DVDs with a main film showing the conditions people live in plus films for young people and children; and additional resources for children. Your church co-ordinator will be able to take your orders, but if you have any difficulties, please contact Ruby Warne on 020 8567 2473.

Last year, churches in our Circuit participated in the house-to-house collections, Flag Day and sponsored walks. The amounts collected including Gift Aid were –

Acton Hill	£982.25
Ealing Green	£2,023.94
Greenford	£291.68
Hanwell	£1,752.86
Kingsdown	£3,899.57
Pitshanger	£1,029.25
Total	£9,979.55

The 2016 Order of Service for Christian Aid Week concludes with a prayer for Bangladesh –

O Saviour Christ,
in whose way of life lies the secret of all help and the hopes of the people,
we pray for quiet courage to meet this hour.
We did not choose to be born or to live in such an age,
its injustice anger us,
its possibilities inspire us,
and its vigour renew us.
For your Kingdom's sake. Amen

*From Bangladesh: A Procession of Prayers: Meditations and Prayers from around the World
compiled by John Carden, WCC and Cassell, London 1998, p179*

Personal Data

Gerald Barton, Circuit Administrator

The other day I received a letter at home from Premier Christian Radio. "Interesting," I thought as I have never given them my address and always tick the boxes to say '*don't send me information and don't share my details*'. So, someone probably gave them my details without me knowing and, as it's 'Christian' radio, I suspect possibly from within the Circuit. This leads me on to remind you all of a general point. Such publications as the Circuit Directory are intended to facilitate communication within the Circuit. Details should not be passed to other parties however charitable or worthy, without the individual's consent. Similarly, you may rest assured that the contact details I hold in the Circuit Office are used only for Circuit business and in connection with the offices people hold within their churches.

I Was a Stranger..... A Personal Reflection

Donald Burling, Acton Hill

How do you feel when you see a homeless person sitting on the pavement? Some people feel positively hostile, particularly if the person has a can of beer in their hand. Many would just look the other way. Others have a sense of helpless pity, even of guilt that we cannot do more to help such people. Whether we should, or should not give them money is a much-debated point.

Very few people choose to be homeless. Loss of employment can lead to inability to pay rent or mortgage repayments resulting in eviction. Other causes include discharge from the armed forces or prison or family break-up. Mental health problems are often a factor, as are drugs and alcohol – though these may be a consequence rather than a cause of the situation. Nowadays the number of homeless is swollen by immigrants who have failed to find a better life here. Personal fecklessness and irresponsibility also often contribute to homelessness, but they are not the main cause. When people have been homeless for a few months some become cynical about attempts to help them and may give the impression that they prefer to live on the streets.

The number of homeless people on our streets is a disgrace to our nation. There is much that the government could and should do about it. That, however, would cost money which would have to be raised from taxpayers who are also voters. There is a strong case for lobbying MPs and others on the subject.

Meanwhile what should we Christians be doing? Should we welcome these people into our homes? Most of us would regard that as a step too far. At the same time, if any find their way into our churches let us make sure they are not made to feel unwelcome. The Winter Night Shelter service in which some of us are involved provides valuable relief to a few of them, as does the Saturday Community Meal at Acton Hill Church. We can and should give financial support to organisations such as St Mungos and the Salvation Army who focus on homelessness.

What if members of our own churches find themselves homeless? This situation arose recently at Acton Hill Church where a family with two young children were evicted from what turned out to be an illegal sub-let. In this case Ealing Council has a legal duty to find them housing, but what if it was someone who could not get help from the local authority, a single person for example? Would any of us be prepared to offer such a person a home whether permanent or temporary?

Paul's epistle to the Romans tells us that we are justified by faith and not by works, but then we know that 'faith without works is dead' (James 2 v 26). In the final sorting out described in the Matthew 25 vv 31 – 46, it appears that we shall be judged for our behaviour towards, among others, the hungry, thirsty and strangers. Could it be that our attitude to the homeless puts us in danger of being counted among the goats rather than the sheep? It's a disturbing thought, but worth reflecting on.

Methodist Modern Art Collection

Visions of the Sacred

Ealing Green Church

9th April to 2nd May 2016

From 9th April – 22nd May, Ealing Green will host an exhibition of the Methodist Modern Art Collection. Remember the £5,000 'Talents' mission grants churches had back in 2014/3? This is what Ealing Green decided to do with its 'Talents' money on behalf of the whole Circuit.

The Sacred in Hospitality



The Dalit Madonna
Jyoti Sahi

The Supper at Emmaus
Ceri Richards



The Sacred in Healing



The Healing of the Lunatic boy
John Reilly

The Sacred in Struggles



Crucifixion Polyptych
Francis Hoyland

Storm Over the Lake
Eularia Clarke



There is a core team for the exhibition, but could you spend two hours for one afternoon simply attending and keeping the doors open? The aim is to have the exhibit open at least 4 afternoons and one evening per week (in addition to scheduled group visits) for drop-in visitors.

The mission is not the exhibition itself, but the ways in which people of all faiths and none respond to it. Do you want to bring a group of friends, a house or prayer group, or other group in which you are involved? How might we use it to provoke, deepen, nourish our own thinking about the sacred, in the reality of the world as we know it?

Twenty-four works of art take the visitor through a journey of reflection about what it is to claim the sacred in struggle, in healing, and in hospitality. If you are interested, email Rev Jen Smith - jennifer.methodist@yahoo.co.uk

There will be a volunteer orientation and private view from 10.00am – 12.00pm on Saturday 9th April. Doors will be open to the public from 12.00pm with a public reception at 6.00pm. Groups can visit the exhibition by arrangement, for public opening times go to the Ealing Green Church website.
www.ealinggreenchurch.org.uk

There will be a Circuit service at Ealing Green on 10th April at 6.30pm.

London Citizens

Deacon Richard Goldstraw

As a Circuit we are very proud to be members of London Citizens as are other circuits in the London District.

At an event on 25th January held outside London City Hall, London Citizens launched its 'Housing Manifesto' in order to get media coverage for its campaign for 50% affordable housing in the proposed development of former railway lands at Old Oak Common and to meet and get a reaction from the Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation. The scheme, known as Old Oak Park would see 7,000 new homes built on about 15% of the Old Oak Common site. This, in turn makes up less than half the land covered by the Development Corporation which stretches from Wormwood Scrubs to the A406 North Circular Road.

Children and adults alike gathered for the launch, using children's toy houses, balloons and placards to stress the importance of affordable housing being made integral to developments using public land, which would benefit local people.

London Citizens wants all developments on public land to be 50% affordable housing, prioritising local people. It also wants the next mayor to back a London Living Rent which would be linked to local income, and never be more than a third of pay, and deliver 10,000 homes in this bracket within four years.

At the event, Acton Hill member Charles Wiredu spoke movingly and powerfully about his housing situation. Charles also leads the Acton Hill community meal on a Saturday for the homeless.



Charles Wiredu from Acton Hill speaking about his housing situation

The London Citizens Housing Manifesto will be put to London Mayoral candidates Zac Goldsmith and Sadiq Khan at a London Citizens Assembly on 28th April at The Copper Box Arena at the Olympic Park. Citizens UK has previously hosted London Mayoral assemblies and national General Election assemblies attracting Prime Ministerial candidates from the main political parties.

You can find out more at <http://londoncitizens.com>

Festival of Nativities at Kingsdown

For several years in the run-up to Christmas, Kingsdown has organised a 'Festival of Nativities' in their worship area. Nativity sets from around the world are set up along with displays of greetings cards and photographs along the walls showing nativity scenes. The opening of the

Festival coincides with a 'Winter Wonderland' event organised by the Northfield Traders Association when many of the shops along Northfield Avenue open late into the evening and set up stalls in the street to attract passers-by.



As the church fronts onto Northfield Avenue and with so many people out for the 'Winter Wonderland', it's too good an opportunity to miss. So, the church was opened up, tea, coffee and mince pies were on offer and this time there was the added incentive of children's crafts in the foyer. With music playing to attract attention and people outside and up and down the street handing out leaflets, people were invited in to see the

Festival and join in the crafts. Interestingly, when people were handed a leaflet with a few words of explanation, the response was almost always positive – "That's interesting, we'll be along shortly," "I remember that from last year, we'll drop in later;" and even, "We're on our way there now."

It's difficult to know exactly how many people dropped by, but at times it seemed like a fairly constant stream of people going in and at one point there were 15 children in the foyer all making 'stained glass' windows.

Following on from this, local schools are invited to come and view the nativities. Children from Little Ealing School visited on 3rd December and from Fielding School the day after. Splash & Dash, the pre-school that meets at Kingsdown also visited as did the church's Babies & Toddlers group. In all over 350 children came to see the Festival. It's good to see the church awash with children!

At the front of the church was a 'prayer station' where people could write a short prayer request if they wished. Nothing was said, but a number of children asked if they could leave their requests.

The Festival stayed open through to Epiphany so that everyone who came to worship and to the regular Friday and Saturday coffee mornings could have a chance to see the Nativities.

A Reflection

Kathleen Loveridge, Kingsdown

It was one of the youngest worshippers on 15th November who first suggested that in our intercessions we should pray for the people of Paris.

As I listened I remembered some of the primary school children whom I'd met in the previous fortnight. Many of them had written prayers or questions for God which revealed that they were not, as we sometimes pretend, too young to understand the horror of what is going on around the world.

'Why, God, did you make Christians and Jews and Muslims . . .?' because He must have known how some of them would fight each other.

'I want to remember one of my grandmas who is in Syria, and the other in who lives in Palestine.' Can I begin to imagine what each member of her family goes through every evening as they watch the news reports?

'One day, when the fighting has stopped, I want to go back to my own country.' The expression on her face turned from longing to pleasure when I told her that I too had been to Yemen once and knew it was a beautiful country.

The privilege of hearing or reading these thoughts came as I helped out at the most recent Quiet Zones – the opportunities for spiritual expression provided, on behalf of all of us in the Circuit, through the imagination and creativity of Suva and Peter Catford and the resources supplied by Pitshanger Methodists. You may not have taken the opportunity to explore the Zones - perhaps you thought they were nothing special, or that you'd be embarrassed and wouldn't know what to do, or that they were only for children. If that's the case, please try to find an opportunity when they are displayed next time to visit and see for yourself.

You will have your own response to, 'What question do you want to ask God?' And you could write your own ending to one of these sentences: 'I wish I hadn't . . .' or, 'I'm sorry I didn't . . .', and having looked thoughtfully at the words, wipe them out and know that your wrong doings can be just as easily forgiven. Or you might look carefully at your reflection in a mirror and be reminded that you are unique and precious, made in God's image. Or trace on the world map the different countries where you have friends or family, and send them a message or write a prayer for them. I lost count of the number of places that were 'home' to the children of the two schools that visited the Zones in the first two weeks of November – Syria, Palestine, India, Latvia, France, Japan, the Philippines, Korea, Yemen, Somalia, South Africa . . .and many, many others.

After our 15th November service at Kingsdown, Rekha Cheriyan and I shared our experiences as volunteers in the Zones during those two weeks. How profound were many of the children's questions; how responsive they were to the silence and stillness of the Zones (even when they'd been excited at being dressed up as

super-heroes for 'Children in Need' day); how often staff and pupils said 'thank-you' for the experience and hoped they'd be able to come again next year.

There were happy, sad, sometimes disturbing, recollections of what the children said or wrote.

'I wish people didn't keep calling me bad names';

'I hope I can get into a good secondary school';

'God, did you make any other worlds like this one?';

'I wish I didn't keep doing things that upset my mum';

'Please God, look after my grandma now she's with you in heaven';

'God, would I have a better life if I was a boy?';

'God, I wish my parents would get back together again';

'God, please punish my father';

'It was a good feeling to sit quietly and just think.'

Comments from the adults included, 'this is such a wonderful experience for the children' and 'I need this today as much as they do'. And, talking of a boy at the extreme end of the autistic spectrum, 'we've never seen him so quiet for so long'. (And yet none of the classes was in the Quiet Zones for more than 20 minutes.) Over 1,400 primary school pupils visited the Zones in that fortnight, as well as children and young people from Pitshanger church organisations, and a few adults. For many of the pupils it is likely to be the only time in the year when an adult has asked them to respond to serious spiritual questions and experiences.

And it matters so much! If the churches are not providing those opportunities, who will do it? And next year, when Suva and Peter have moved on, who will follow up and continue the work? When the question is asked, 'can we come next year?' who will respond? Or will the resources be left to moulder in a cupboard? And the children left to find their own answers to their big questions?

Making the Quiet Zones available needs lay volunteers. Only a little training and preparation is needed, but there are few church activities in which I have felt so privileged to be involved.

Is Going to Church Like Going to the Theatre?

Alan N Smith, Kingsdown

In many ways it is – the church is like an auditorium with the chancel the stage. Cathedrals like opera houses, and local chapels like fringe performance spaces. We have music from organ or band and worship leaders who, like performers, follow a script set for the day or one specially written for the occasion, or interact with the congregation as stand up performers do with their audiences.

If a service was treated like a performance then afterwards the critics would write up their review evaluating the set, costume, script, performances and rating or slating the 'show'. Imagine the anxious moments there would be waiting to see the review if this happened after Sunday church.

What makes you go to a particular theatrical performance, the theatre, the play, the performer, habit or some other reason? What would happen to your church attendances if you followed the same guidelines – would it be the same church every week, or a particular worship presenter, or maybe a comfortable pew?

Some churches have regular large congregations while others in the same area may have much smaller attendances. If those with smaller attendances were to copy the style of those with large congregations would their congregations grow, or would those who chose the smaller church leave to find another smaller church?

Fringe theatres grew up to present performances that the more traditional theatres did not consider suitable for their audiences. Some of the most successful musical productions in recent years to reach the West End started out at the National Theatre or the Royal Shakespeare as totally different in all ways to their normal productions.

In this maze of differing ideas should church authorities, be it councils or synods, give more attention to why we go to a particular church each week and what would guarantee our regular attendance? Unless the views of the 'audience' are regularly considered it may be that some churches will close perhaps with the majority of their 'audience' ceasing to be regular attendees at any church.

What does make you want to go to church every Sunday? Those theatrical productions that are successful and have rave reviews are the ones where the entire team responsible have all pulled together and gone in the same direction with a single purpose to make it a rewarding and inspiring experience.

May the Force Go with You

Gerald Barton. Editor

Listening to the radio a while before Christmas I heard a piece on the then forthcoming new Star Wars film 'The Force Awakens'. Having never seen any of the other Star Wars films, I was only half listening but picked up on a reference to people following the 'Jedi' religion. Was this a case of 'some people will believe anything' or what? After all, Star Wars is a work of fiction, so how could some people, any people in fact come to follow a purely fictitious religion?

This reminded of a conversation I heard at a dinner party in about 1990. Two of the people there were talking a little about their religious beliefs. One said to the other, "I don't believe in God, but I believe there's a Force." The 'Force' is, of course something that is important in the Star Wars saga and I suspected the two were connected. How the dinner guests would have differentiated between 'God' and the 'Force' I wasn't sure, but suspected they might have some difficulty.

This all prompted me to take a closer look at what was going on here. Part of so-called 'Jediism' goes back to following a worldwide email campaign in 2001 urging people to write "Jedi" as their answer to the religion classification question in their country's census. This was all a bit of a joke, but nonetheless there's more to Jediism than that – some people do actually follow it.

For those of you who don't know, in the Star Wars universe, the Jedi are an ancient monastic and academic order consisting of polymaths - teachers, philosophers, scientists, physicians, diplomats and warriors, who value knowledge and wisdom above nationality. By serving others, the Jedi give of themselves through acts of charity, citizenship, volunteerism and good deeds. Their traditional weapon is the lightsabre, a device which generates a blade-like controlled plasma flow. I am indebted to Wikipedia for that description.

When George Lucas conceived Star Wars he did quite a bit of research before creating the Jedi amongst his other characters. Rather than just concocting a few beliefs 'off the wall' as it were, for the Jedi he took strands from a number of religions and put them together to form something rather more plausible. Jediism may be a bit of a mish-mash, but its basis is more than just fiction. What, then do followers of Jediism believe? The following is a summary in, I hope not too large a nutshell.

Followers of Jediism believe in a 'Living Force' which flows through the entire universe. They aspire to be in touch with this Force as well as being spiritually sensitive to it. Through meditation and contemplation, they seek to maintain clear minds, focussing on the positive and keeping themselves in the 'present moment' and avoiding negative thoughts and emotions (fear, anger, aggression and hate). This leads to heightened intuition which allows them to become more spiritually evolved as their minds become more harmonious with the Force and its influences.

Jedi must let go of obsessive attachment, both material and personal. The obsession over possessions creates the fear of losing those possessions, which can lead them to the 'Dark Side'.

Jedi believe that love and compassion are central to their lives - 'love each other as you love yourselves'. They therefore try to protect the peace. They think of themselves as 'warriors of peace' using peace, understanding and harmony to resolve conflicts. They also embrace justice, protecting and preserving the fundamental rights of all living creatures.

Jedi believe in destiny and trust in the will of the Living Force. In short everything that happens, both positive and negative conforms to the 'will' of the Force. Jedi also believe in eternal life.

Jedi understand that physical training is as important as training the mind and the spirit. Thus, if you browse around the web you'll find pictures of 'Jedi Knights' training with their 'lightsabres'.

Finally, Jedi make a commitment to, and are loyal to the Jedi cause. The ideals, philosophies, and practices of the Jedi define the belief of Jediism, and they take action on this path for self-improvement, and to help others. They are both the witnesses and protectors of the Jedi way by the practice of their faith.

Some of this may be a bit fanciful – for me the idea of being a 'warrior for peace', apart from being a bit of a contradiction in terms conjures up images of some kind of quasi-monastic mediaeval chivalric order. That said, as Christians we could hardly object to the idea of resolving conflict by peaceful means. Equally, emphasising justice for all is something we could easily embrace. Certainly 'love each other as you love yourselves' can easily be equated with Christ's injunction 'Love one another as I have loved you.'

Without probing too far into George Lucas's sources, some of the influences on his thinking are pretty clear. The notion of the 'Living Force' flowing through the universe is akin to 'panentheism' (not to be confused with 'pantheism'), the idea that the divine interpenetrates every part of the universe and extends, timelessly (and, presumably, spacelessly) beyond it. In panentheism, God is viewed as the soul of the universe, the universal spirit present everywhere, in everything and everyone, at all times. However, panetheism, unlike 'pantheism' does not view God as being identical with the universe – the divine remains distinct from creation.

The idea that everything that happens conforms to the will of the Force is also not unusual. The belief that everything follows God's plan, that 'God is working His purposes out' as it were, is fairly common. Personally, I always have difficulty with that as I can never reconcile such events as the Holocaust to a plan devised by a good God.

Meditation and contemplation form part of many religious traditions. The idea of letting go of obsessive attachments looks to be founded on the Four Noble Truths

of Buddhism. In short, these tell us that clinging to things we believe will make us happy or keep us safe will eventually lead to disappointment and suffering, because everything is impermanent. Grasping for one ephemeral thing after another can never satisfy us for long. It is only when we see this for ourselves that we can stop clinging. But when we see it, the letting go is easy. The craving will seem to disappear of its own accord.

Focussing on positive thoughts can have a touch of the Norman Vincent Peale's 'The Power of Positive Thinking' about it, but it's not entirely daft. Taken to extremes, 'positive thinking' can be delusory – it simply doesn't make sense to bounce around seeing everything in a positive light. That said, the converse, negative thinking can be damaging. Indeed, some forms of 'talking therapy' seek to move people away from habits of mind that focus on the negative and difficult to a more positive approach.

Overall, the set of beliefs underlying Jediism can be regarded as having a degree of credibility given that they are derived from long-standing religions and systems of thought. Certainly, there are far worse paths to follow – think of the death cult of so-called Islamic State for one. However, one might ask why people should want to adhere to a system that has been concocted as part of a work of fiction rather than a 'real' one? Good question.

Maybe one of the attractions of Jediism is that it is not an 'organised' religion. It has no hierarchy, no priesthood and is completely decentralised. Some followers of Jediism do meet together, but the vast majority follow it by themselves networking with others via the internet. Followers can go to a number of internet sites – the Temple of the Jedi Force, the Temple of the Jedi, the Order of the Jedi, the Jedi Church or even just the Jedi Website. To a large extent, followers can 'do their own thing' in true individualist fashion untrammelled by authorities if they so wish. Sometimes Jediism might be used as a way of protest - in April 2015, the students of Dokuz Eylül University in Turkey started a petition demanding a Jedi temple be built on the campus. The petition was in response to a previous petition which had demanded a mosque on campus of Istanbul Technical University.

It's difficult to know how many 'genuine' followers of Jediism there are. A figure of around 175,000 in England has been quoted, but most of these are probably not 'genuine'. A figure of about 5,000 'real Jedi' has been quoted for the United States, while there are said to be 15,000 in the Czech Republic, 9,000 in Canada and 65,000 in Australia.

Whatever the true figures might be, I imagine that the 'genuine' or 'real' Jedi are all seeking a way to follow, a set of beliefs that will guide their lives. In its way, that is a positive thing, but it is also a challenge to long-established religions such as Christianity. Why is it that some people are attracted to a religion that has grown out of a work of fiction rather than turn to one that has grown out of divine inspiration or long tradition?

Remember in Spring

Compiled by Mary Newman, Pitshanger

Harmony

I saw a bird upon a wire
How artfully it sang
It then, with others, formed a choir
And great the praises rang.

Alone our solo may be bold
And make the Saviour sigh,
But unified our madrigals
Would throng the Heavens high.

*Carol Plunkett
August 2015, Romsey Diocese*

The above poem and the following prayer were sent to me by my friend Valerie, who lives near Romsey, and were printed in the recent church magazine 'Parish Pump'.

Prayer for heart-peace

Dear Lord, sometimes the world is a worrying place, so many problems, so much pain for so many. We feel overwhelmed and don't know which way to turn. Help us to turn the right way – to you Lord. Help us to hand over to you our worries, to exchange them for your peace in our hearts no matter what's going on all around, knowing that you walk with us through it all, today, tomorrow and forever.
In Jesus' name, Amen.

Daphne Kitching, Parish Pump

I was listening to some relaxing music on "Magic" before midnight when the DJ announced that the next record had been requested by Charles of Sutton, who had just split from his wife of 17 years. "She says it's amicable but I'm not feeling that." The record that Charles had requested was 'What becomes of the broken hearted?'

As I turned off the light I couldn't stop thinking about Charles and I said a little prayer that wherever he was, that he would be OK. Then something made me think about the verse from King James Version of Luke Ch. 4 v 18.

"He hath sent me to heal the broken hearted."

Mother Teresa

Just before Christmas the Vatican confirmed that Mother Teresa will be made a saint by Pope Francis, possibly this year in September, during Francis' "Holy Year of Mercy". Known as the "Saint of the Gutters" the nun, who died in 1997, aged 87, became synonymous with charitable work for the poor. A spokesman for Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity said the nuns were over the moon about the decision.

I was amazed to read that the head of the Hindu nationalist group was not impressed. Mohan Bhagwat said, "It's good to work for a cause with selfless intentions. But Mother Teresa's work had an ulterior motive, which was to convert the person who was being served to Christianity."

Reading this left me wondering how Christians missionaries over many years would have been able to go to remote, often dangerous corners of the world; risking their health and even their lives in healing the sick and teaching the people they served without telling the Good News of the Gospel.

A quote from Mother Teresa

"For love to be real it must hurt; it must cost. It must empty one of self."

Love your enemies

I am sure that all of us have got stories they could tell from their childhood. I thought I'd tell you one of mine.

During the Second World War my brother and I spent 5 years living with an aunt and uncle, devout Baptists, in a remote part of Herefordshire, where our uncle had a farm.

When Italy surrendered to the Allies we had an Italian prisoner, called Mario, working for our uncle. Looking back I think Mario was happy to have been captured and to be safe from the fighting. He was always singing and loved to spend his lunch break making corn dollies for us children. We certainly didn't look on him as an enemy or bear any animosity towards him.

Towards the end of the war we had a German prisoner, Hans, brought everyday in a van from a local P.O.W. camp and taken back in the evening. He, too, spent his day working on the farm.

By this time it was not uncommon for marriages in the UK to have broken down. With the men, being away in the services for long periods, relationships often failed and in some cases children were taken into care. My aunt and uncle were asked to foster children and one of these was Derrick. One day Derrick was teasing Hans about Hitler, saying he was "no good". Hans got very angry and picking Derrick up

he put him upside-down in the water butt. Of course, we went to complain about Hans to our aunt and we thought she would be very angry with him. However, Aunt Marion took the opposite point of view, telling Derrick it was his own fault for teasing Hans.

I am happy to remember that none of the prisoners we saw looked thin or ill. Each one came from the P.O.W. camp with his own packed lunch, which I expect was adequate. However, my aunt always gave Hans some extra food with strict instructions, "You mustn't tell anyone I'm doing this."

A prayer at evening

Father into your hands I commend my spirit
As a child gives, into the hands
Of one he loves,
His most treasured possession,
And falls asleep,
Secure in the certainty that it is safe
Until he wakes again.

Anon

Readings for Spring 2016

Love for enemies	Luke Ch 6 vv 27-36 Matthew Ch 5 vv 43-48
Teaching about revenge	Matthew Ch 5 vv 38-42
Jesus preaches in the synagogue	Luke Ch 4 vv 16-end



*Fresco of the Virgin Mary, Christ and John the Baptist
in the Cathedral of the Nativity of the Virgin, Suzdal, Russia*

Circuit Directory Update

Forthcoming Events around the Circuit

[as notified to, or discovered by, the Editor]

March

5th Sat 10.30 **Ealing Animal Welfare Bazaar at Hanwell**
16.00 *Many participating societies. Admission FREE.*
For details call 020 8567 6739 www.animalwelfarebazaar.info

8th Tues 20.00 **Circuit Meeting at Northolt**

12th Sat 10.00 **Kingsdown Book Fair with stalls**
12.30 *Proceeds to Kingsdown Church*

April

9th Sat **Methodist Modern Art Exhibition at Ealing Green opens**
See pp 10 - 11 for further details

10th Sun 18.30 **Circuit Service at Ealing Green**

16th Sat **'Come and Sing' Messiah at Ealing Green**
See p23 for details

May

7th Sat 10.00 **Kingsdown Book Fair with stalls**
12.30 *Proceeds to Action for Children*

14th Sat 10.00 **Healing Conference at Westminster Central Hall**
14.30 *for details and to participate contact Elizabeth Burke at eburke54@o2.co.uk by Saturday 16th April 2016*

Articles for '**In-touch**' **Issue No 76 (June - August)** should be sent by e-mail headed '**In-touch**' to the Editor, **Gerald Barton**, or as hard copy to the Circuit Office.

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