

# Christward

The magazine of



September 1<sup>st</sup>–October 27<sup>th</sup>  
2019

## ~ A Happy New Year ~

The beginning of a new year. OK, I know it is not January 1st nor even the start of Advent but when the summer holidays are over and people come back and Second Session, Open Tuesday, etc. all start up again it feels like the start of a new year. Certainly things have changed over the past year. Sunday attendance is very variable sometimes barely reaching double figures and at other times in a more healthy mid twenties. Linton House has gone and we now have a levelled brown field site of broken bricks and tenacious grass and wild flowers. We have put on hold any plans we had for developing our whole site as a social housing project. So what now? What are our plans for the new year?

We have spent the last four or five years discussing, What kind of church we are? What kind of church do we want to be? How do we get bigger? How do we best to serve the community? How much space do we need?

I confess that I can find no no great enthusiasm within me for another extended round of 'Looking Ahead'. We do need, however, some kind of discussion which challenges us but which also enables us to do better what we do best. This is because I don't think it would be a good idea to sit back just because the pressure is off. As far as the challenges are concerned both Andy and Gwyneth, in recent magazines, have challenged us to think more widely than we have been used to. I am now going to quote extensively from their contributions. Not because, as the cynics among you will say, I need to fill the magazine but because I believe that unless points like the ones they made are repeated several times nobody takes any notice. (I give due warning that unless the discussion gets going in the next three months I'll put them in the January issue.)

### ***Andy, Christward May-June 2019:***

*(Is the problem that we) .....are comfortable with maintaining the boundaries of a particular 'us'.*

*Three ways to change our situation (admittedly, with little regard for the legal restrictions on the church as part of the Baptist Union). Perhaps all are possible, to some extent:*

1. *We find a way to tell people (including 'ourselves') the good news of Union Chapel, as it is now. We find a way to open up. We change us, starting now. But we need to work out what that means.*
2. *We commit ourselves spiritually, in an inclusive sense of the word, to a common rule: monthly worship (say), regular prayer, regular projects. And we see where that takes us. We draw other people in. We (progressively larger, more inclusive) seek out resources and share them; we test out ideas, rejecting many; we find some and develop others, and are not surprised to discover that other people are also attracted to a hopeful, dynamic and communal expression of 'life in all its fullness' – as the climate changes, and as pressure on the environment increases.*
3. *We close the church as it is, and play a part in creating a new charitable association which incorporates Christian worship on a weekly basis (perhaps on Sunday mornings), but with a much more inclusive constitution, where becoming an associate does not entail Christian belief, but instead expresses commitment to building community across age groups, faith groups, ethnic groups, political groups. We draw people into this (people with the full range of needs and skills, like us) and put our energy and our efforts into making a vibrant, inclusive place; people commit to it as a place of community, not to church. Anyone who wants to worship is free to do so. Anyone who wants to pursue a progressive Christian theology is free to do so, and to offer the fruits of that to the community.*

*This is all a bit rough and ready, and only meant as a contribution to discussions.'*

### **Gwyneth, Christward July-August 2019:**

*'There are many people out there who have no feeling for Christian practice, and we need to face up to this. A few minor adjustments on a Sunday morning aren't going to make the difference, even for those who may feel a need of God – and many don't. The Sunday service is just one of the things on offer in the building. Introducing craft-based activities during a service doesn't give church the appeal of an art class or a craft workshop if art is your thing rather than religion. Is there a case for keeping Sunday mornings for those already infected with*

*religion and accepting now that bringing in the uninitiated, if indeed it is a priority, has to be in a different setting and time? Several of us were very struck when the chaplains from St Peters visited, that they were concerned with finding opportunities to get alongside people in contexts in which those people were already comfortable rather than wanting to get them into traditional worship settings.*

*There is something very special for us in the teachings of the Bible and the traditions of the Church. The worst thing we could do would be to move away from what is precious to those who make up the core congregation on Sundays in the hope of appealing to others who just don't have much interest in joining us now. We need to be the best Union Chapel that we can be, and that can only be good for us and the people we come into contact with, whether they want to join us or not.'*

So Andy & Gwyneth have laid out some explicit challenges to the way we currently do things.

Are there things which we currently do that we could do better? Well one thing looms pretty large in that category and that concerns the multitude of users of our premises? There are 17 subject groups under the O&A umbrella and 28 independent groups meeting at the Chapel. This equates to several hundred people using our site every week. All those people - and what do they know about us? Yes, they might know there is a religious group meeting on a Sunday but what do they know about how we feel about the things which probably concern them? About climate change, the local environment, the homeless, the care of the elderly, the provision of housing etc. We have the odd leaflet which explains what happens on Sunday or the annual 'getting to know you' social but there is nothing which might remotely be construed as 'opportunities to get alongside people in contexts in which those people were already comfortable'.

We call ourselves the 'Union Chapel Community' but really we are, in the main, just separate groups tucked away in our own little boxes. Indeed 'Open Tuesday' provides more of a forum for people of any faith or no faith to come together than the church does.

One of the challenges facing us is how to put ourselves about a bit to show that we have the same concerns and problems which are faced

by all the Users, in fact by everyone in the wider community. That must surely be high on the 'to do list' when we look to the future. No doubt we will explore, and rightly so, how we can use banners, artists in residence, leaflets, meetings etc. to show that we are a real community and not a church touting for members.

Integral to all this, in my opinion, is a complete rethink about the chapel building. How can we make it a building which projects a community feel and works for all its users us included? How can we do this without losing our identity and just becoming a community centre?

To do this properly we are going to need professional architectural help and we are going to have to spend some money. This might be the touchstone as to how serious we are about the Union Chapel Community.

It would be good if all the members of the congregation would have a say as to how they would hope Union Chapel and its fellow users could develop in the future. The magazine forum is here so that your views can be expressed even if it is just in a paragraph or a sentence which gives your comments. Also this magazine goes to thirty or so people who no longer live in Manchester but want to retain contact with the church. We want to hear your comments and ideas for how we can develop as a community fit for the 21st century.

Finally if you are one of the hundreds of people using our site and happening to pick up a copy of this magazine or reading it on our website we would like to hear your views.

*Alan Redhouse*

## **~ Snippets of Hebrew ~ DINAH AND THE ASS**

When Jacob's only daughter, Dinah, went on an outing with the local girls, Shechem a Hivite living in the land of Canaan, saw her and he could not resist her and forced his attention on her. The story is found in Genesis 34. At the end of the story, in verse 26 it says that Jacob's sons took Dinah from Shechem's house, so it doesn't take much imagination to see what had happened to her.

Jacob and his twelve sons were not exactly happy with the event. They hatched a plot, and then said to Shechem and his father Hamor, that if all their menfolk would be as they were, that is circumcised, they would agree to live together and exchange daughters for wives in both directions.

So Shechem did not hesitate to undergo the operation.

Then it says in Gen 34

19 And the young man deferred not to do the thing, because he had delight in Jacob's daughter: and he was more honourable than all the house of his father.

Might this mean he did not hesitate to be circumcised because he loved Dinah and in this he had more integrity than anyone else because by implication they had far less incentive, and they did hesitate, even though they later went through with it.

It seems that to have forced Dinah in the first place does not qualify his behaviour to be described as honourable. If he was more honourable than anyone else in his father's house, that does not say much for them. Maybe saying he was relatively honourable was a euphemism for he is a scoundrel.

Now the plot hatched by Jacob's sons has a final twist. They went and slaughtered everyone of Hamor and Shechem's males on the third day after their operation while they were sore, Ouch!

I suspect that not only were Dinah's brothers offended by what Shechem had done, but by him taking her captive.

All the women, their children, livestock and all their goods were carried off by Jacob's offspring.

So what else is the narrator trying to convey. Shechem's father was called Hamor, and Hamor's name means Ass. No meaning is given in the lexicons for Shechem, but we think we get the idea from his father's name.

*Geoff Walker*

## ~ In Memoriam ~

*In recent weeks we have been saddened by the deaths of two people who meant so much to Union Chapel and to whom Union Chapel meant so much, Rachel Adebagbo and Gordon Neal. Enid and Michael have written remembering Rachel. Liz Neal wrote the Eulogy for Gordon which was read at his funeral (an edited version is given below).*

### Rachel Adebagbo



Rachel came to Union Chapel with her husband, Solomon, in the early 1960s, the days when landlords were allowed to be discriminatory. In a strange country she found herself managing in a chilly attic with water and bathroom several floors below. They had a calor gas ring for cooking on and inadequate heating. They were the kind of people whose situation inspired Union Chapel to build Linton House. Solomon was undertaking postgraduate work at Manchester University and Rachel decided to undertake midwifery training at St Mary's. She quickly became a valued member of staff, and recalled the bliss of being allowed to use a staff flat when on a certain shift (hot water and the chance to have a bath). The church at that time was linked with the

McLaren Institute in Rusholme, and when the house belonging the institute became vacant Rachel and Solomon were offered the chance to live there. Enid was living in a rather decrepit room in Rusholme at the time, and they became friends. Solomon and Rachel were loyal members of the Union Chapel congregation, and Rachel's devout faith saw her through some difficult times. Her younger daughters, Ade and Kemi, were born in Manchester and Colin, our oldest, enjoyed his times at Auntie Rachel's house, where you could eat with your fingers Nigerian style!

Rachel loved being a midwife, and had many tales to tell of the difficult births that resulted in successful outcomes because of her ability to listen and understand the mother. When the family returned to Nigeria Rachel's proudest achievement was to set up a private maternity hospital which adhered to the standards she had learnt in St Mary's. Her faith was also the energy and inspiration for the clinic, where she on occasions was able to perform miraculous healing, Rachel was greatly valued for her contributions to Christian Ministry, especially among women. It was while returning from a convention that she had a very serious accident when her car overturned, and it was amazing that she survived. Unfortunately the astronomical medical bills were too high for her to pay from what was effectively a non profit making clinic. She returned to England to find work to help her pay the medical bills. Initially she lived in London with her two younger daughters; later she came to Manchester where it was easier to find work and moved in with us.

Rachel was not able to pick up her midwifery, so instead she worked in nursing homes, where she put the same energy into understanding the needs of her patients that she had put into her midwifery work. To her great sorrow, the maternity clinic was vandalised while she was here, so she never felt able to return and rebuild it. She continued to be closely involved with her family in London and was deeply attached to her grandchildren. When staying there she was treated like royalty, which she relished. However she always maintained she wanted to stay in Manchester near her friends. She became an energetic and faithful member of Union Chapel and continued to support the church in whatever ways she could. For me she was the friend who understood better than most what it meant to be a psychotherapist,



and I was lucky for many years to be able to trust and confide in her. She was a great support. She regarded our children as hers, and they



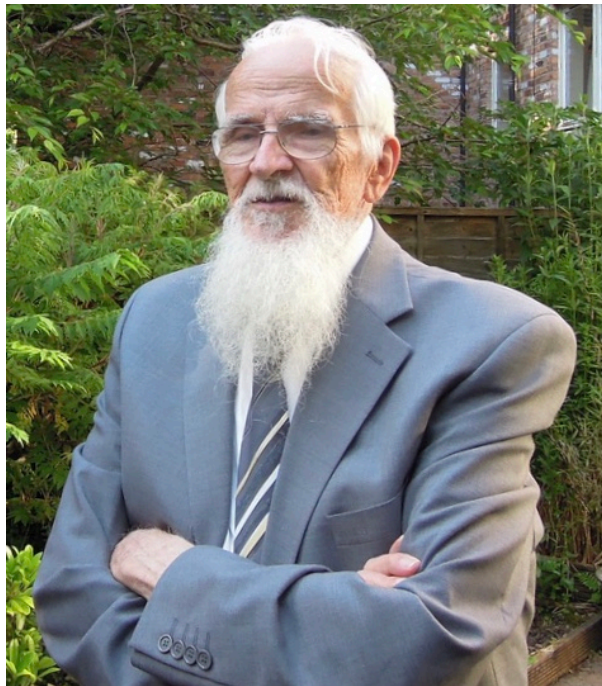
all regard her as one of the family.

Sadly Rachel had a stroke over fifteen years ago that affected her balance, and was never after that totally free from pain. She had other subsequent strokes and numerous other medical problems. She had to stop the work she loved but continued to be an active and engaged member of the church. She continued to have an amazing zest for life despite all her difficulties. She loved going to the theatre (especially ballet) and cinema. She enjoyed parties and dressed with style. She particularly loved church weekends, and only missed the last two years. She continued to exercise Christian Ministry in many ways but as her health deteriorated it was harder to her to do this. It was a great sadness to her when she could no longer get to church, and she continued to enjoy hearing all the news and to offer her opinion. Her determination was both impressive and terrifying. Her daughters filled her freezer with prepared home cooked meals, but she would still force herself to cook complex dishes so that she could have Nigerian food, often in the middle of the night. For many years Michael visited her

most days and did her shopping. Rachel was very blessed that as Michael got too ill to help, her younger daughter came to live with her. Rachel had a very happy six months at the end of her life where she was loved and cared for by her daughter.

*Enid & Michael Welford*

## **Gordon Neal**



“I’ve had a good life”, dad said to me in our penultimate conversation, “and I am not afraid”.

Dad’s life was certainly full. Full of people – he made lasting friendships wherever he went, full of faith, explored constantly in myriad ways, full of fascination about language and how we use it, full of curiosity, full of appreciation of music, cricket, trains, and of course church magazines, but most importantly, full of love.

But, let us begin at the beginning. Gordon was born in 1937 in Edgware, Middx, where he lived with his family throughout his childhood. During the war, he spent time in Edgware and Kilburn. Gordon attended University College School in Hampstead where he shone academically.

From UCS, to Kings College Cambridge where Gordon obtained a first class honours degree in classics and stayed for a further 3 years research, during which time he edited the Inter-Varsity Fellowship magazine. Dad retained a huge fondness for his college, annually watching the boat race (and almost annual mocking as Oxford stormed to multiple wins) and sitting down on Christmas Eve, to listen to the Nine lessons and Carols from Kings.

From Cambridge, Dad moved to Manchester University to take up a post lecturing in the classics, with a specialism in Plato and Aristotle. He joined Moss Side Baptist Church and with friends bought a house in the neighbourhood. It was also at Moss Side Baptist Church that Dad met Mum. As they painted the front door of the church for Mum's induction as a deaconess, their romance blossomed.

Following their marriage in 1970, Gordon and Eileen were wardens at Linton House, a hostel for international students, and they joined Union Chapel. In 1971, I was born, and three and a half years later, Richard completed their family. Not long after Richard was born, Dad was admitted to hospital with fluid on the brain. He recently discovered that his life was probably saved by living in Manchester where the first MRI



scanner was being piloted and was instrumental in his diagnosis and treatment.

Dad continued to work at the university, but as well as language, computing was now becoming a passion. Dad managed to bring the two together, to research the origins of languages using computers, but this led to a rather unsocial set of hours. It wasn't unusual to answer the phone at 8 or 9pm to hear Dad say that he had been locked into the university and would be home "just as soon as he found a porter" to let him out.

Union Chapel played a huge part in Dad's time in Manchester and beyond. He revelled in the mix of the intellectual discussion and practical action and formed close and lasting friendships. He took on a variety of responsibilities including serving on the diaconate, as church magazine editor, as auditor, occasional organist/pianist and, of course, made his dramatic debut as the Latin speaking corpse in the church social and in the sequels as the Latin speaking ghost. Dad's passion for education was now directed to community education. A small group, including Dad, conceived of improving the community education offer in the neighbourhood and successfully launched and ran "Opportunities and Activities", a programme of adult education classes hosted by the church.

From Manchester to Dent, in Cumbria. Dad and mum realised their dream of living in a rural community. They bought the Old Vicarage and turned it into a comfortable and popular Bed and Breakfast. In Dent, they quickly made friends in the village and through the church of St Andrews, CofE.

Sadly it was here that Mum was diagnosed with cancer, and for fifteen months Dad supported her through her treatment and when it became necessary drove her three times a week, the three hour round trip for dialysis. After mum died, Dad mourned her through the seasons in Dent, adjusting to his new reality, before moving on to Worcester to rebuild his life.

Dad was never predictable. Why Worcester we asked? Because it would make travelling to see friends easy and it's proximity to Stratford would ensure plenty of visitors, came the reply. And so it proved. I remember answering the phone to Dad one day. He sounded a little tentative, but also excited. "I think I might have done something unwise" he said, "I've just bought 50, yes five zero, tickets for A Midsummer Night's Dream at Stratford". More predictably, I could only ask, "why?" "Because they are performing it at Midsummer" apparently an irresistible combination. Although the purchase was spontaneous, on the night, sure enough, fifty of us gathered to enjoy the production.

Dad loved trains and some people have admired Dad's great ability to read a railway timetable. However I recall the mystery tour birthday party he organised which almost failed when we were stranded in North Wales because the bus didn't turn up. It turned out Dad had read the *Sunday* timetable, for our *Saturday* trip. We were half an hour late for *Wind in the Willows*, at Chester Theatre, but as we made up more than half the audience, they waited for us!

Research and learning still played a huge role in dad's life in Worcester. I doubt there is a person in the congregation today who hasn't been asked to look out for church magazines and send Dad copies of current, old and ideally ancient magazines. This project grew out of his masters research. He studied the use of language in sermons to see if significant differences in language actually translated into significant differences in theology or served rather to mask similar theologies in a range of linguistic styles.

Dad loved discussion. He loved exploring different views and many friends have written to say how gentle he was in argument, how accepting of a range of views including those different from his own. He also enjoyed taking a position to promote debate. And it wasn't always clear when he held a position just for the fun of it or because he genuinely believed in it! It often seemed he was more interested in ensuring all angles had been covered than in getting to an actual

answer. Mostly it was a useful approach, but just sometimes, one would have appreciated a straight answer!

In my last conversation with Dad, he was brimming with excitement about England's Cricket World Cup win and also intrigued about the burgeoning controversy about the win. It seems a good summation of much of his life.

The messages we have received, have some common themes: his intellectual curiosity, his intelligence, his kindness, his wry sense of humour and his thoughtfulness. You have told us how much he will be missed in small ways and in big. You've noted his eccentricity, and his authenticity. You've mentioned his generosity, his practical help and his faith. So, I want to finish, where I began, with Dad's own words,

"I have had a good life, and I am not afraid".

*Liz Neal*

## **A Personal Remembrance**

Three things I will always remember about Gordon:

One, his ability to put down, so very gently, intellectual arrogance.

Two, his amazing tenacity in all matters financial. When I was treasurer of Union Chapel I laboured long and hard to find how a 2p discrepancy in the annual accounts had occurred. Taking the accounts to Worcester for Gordon to audit I half expected him to say don't worry about the 2p. However Margaret and I were sent off to the cathedral and when we returned he had found the error.

Three, he was the only person I know who would set off on a walk over boggy moorland in a pair of ordinary leather shoes!

*Alan Redhouse*



## ~ News of the Family ~

Congratulations to:

**Jonathan Roberts** who has graduated with a First Class Honours degree from the University of Liverpool.

**Abigail Marks**, Beryl Dykes granddaughter, who achieved very good A-Level results and will be going to the University of Sheffield this autumn to study Psychology.

## ~ Church Meeting held at Union Chapel on Sunday 21st July 2019 ~

§**Present:** Brenda Marston, Carole and Geoff Walker, Enid and Michael Welford, Ted Land, David and Margaret Garner, Margaret Redhouse, Lorna Richardson, Margaret Edmonds, Nicola Hamilton, Beryl Dykes.

1. **Apologies:** Rose Bell, Andy Howes, Leonie Earnshaw.
2. **Minutes of previous meeting** agreed. Item regarding Colin's no longer working with the foodbank has been changed as agreed.
3. **AOB.** An additional item regarding artist in residence will be discussed.

- \$4. **Report of deacons meeting with Phil Jump** given by NH.  
She reported that Phil had preferred to meet with the deacons rather than the whole congregation. At his suggestions the deacons wrote down the issues they saw as important.  
Phil Jump met with the deacons this month.  
Phil is willing to support us in finding a moderator or minister in future if wished. He suggests that first we need to be clear about what we want. He offered to facilitate us in discussing this.

**Motion** agreed, proposed by GW and seconded by MG, that we positively reflect on this offer in September when more members are present.

5. **Recap of current situation with MSV**

- a. Letter sent on behalf of church, drafted by AH and GHR
- b. Response received from MSV, read by NH, accepting of situation and affirming that MSV believed scheme offered value for money
- c. Church have paid half of costs incurred in arranging the proposal.

- 5a. Discussion of what and when to tell the users initiated by CW. Currently groups have been told they can definitely use premises till the end of the current academic year.

**Motion** agreed, proposed EW, seconded by LR, that Lettings group send a letter affirming that there are currently no plans to develop the site and lettings will continue as usual. BM will initiate this.

- 6. **Harvest 29th September.** Special collection for the recent BMS appeal.
- 7. **Autumn Social** 12th October. Discussion about food and who to invite. BM will work with LE on this.
- 8. **Church weekend:** DG asked for ideas for topic for 2020 at Thornleigh 26-28 June  
Church Weekend for 2021, Rydal Hall 18-20 June
- 9. **Membership of Faith Network for Manchester**  
Agreed to look at their newsletter before making any decisions. Ask AH to forward to members, print off copy for BD
- 10. **Artist in residence.** Brief discussion about possibility of asking an artist to find ways to express who we are as a church. Further discussion in September.

**Date of Next Meeting:** Sunday 15th September 2019

§ This minute is subject amendment.

\$. Part of this minute has been redacted. Full information on application to the Church Secretary.



## **Talking to Each Other ~**

*If you would like to comment on any of the articles in this magazine and so start a discussion or if you would care to write an article for us on a topic of your choosing such contributions would be welcome. Please send them by email to [alan.redhouse@virgin.net](mailto:alan.redhouse@virgin.net) or by post to The Editor, Christward, Union Chapel Fallowfield, 2b Wellington Road, Fallowfield, Manchester, M14 6EQ.*

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