

# Christward

The magazine of



January – February  
2022

## **~ From the Editor's Desk ~**

*O frabjous day ! Calloo! Callay!  
He chortled in his joy.*

And chortling and full of joy I am. Friday evening before Christward publication weekend and still the copy comes rolling in. Having just watched 'The Sound of Music' on BBC 4 I feel that 'somewhere in my youth and childhood I must have done something good.'

In this the first issue of Christward in 2022 Lorna has sent a poem by the fourteenth century Persian lyric poet Hajiz as well as an article on Pastoral Support, Jonathan details the amazing reach of Extinction Studies, Geoff muses on the difficulty in interpreting to whom God is speaking to when we read some stories in the Bible, there is News of the Family, Church Meeting Minutes, photos for twitchers and two articles from Steve.

The articles from Steve open and close the magazine. It is the latter article, 'A time to live and a time to die' that I want to draw to your attention. It addresses the topic of 'when does the useful life of a church come to an end'. There is nothing new about this topic, it must be fifty years since Michael and I talked about it with relation to Union Chapel. At that stage Michael gave us ten years unless we were prepared for change. Of course then the congregation was bigger and Lettings were non-existent and significant changes did occur. It is a question that should keep coming up in the life of any church. It is one that every church member should always have in mind and have a view on.

I have placed the article at the end of the magazine because I want it to stay in the mind when you put the magazine down and not simply be forgotten or dismissed as someone sounding off. When does the useful life of a church come to an end? Something to talk to each other about. Perhaps some people might set their thoughts down on paper. If so who knows, the March - April Christward could be another great issue. O frabjous day!

***A Happy New Year to all our readers!***

## ~ There is no 'they' only 'us' ~

Most churches I have known are constructed like an onion. There is a core of members who take most of the responsibility and do most of the thinking – **they** can be relied on to keep the institutional show on the road. Outside this is a larger number of people who do lots of other useful things, but rely on the core to hold it together. Then there are layers who support or just attend regularly, out to those who only turn up for special occasions. I have had a number of conversations with people who do a lot to keep Union Chapel going as an institution and a common theme seems to be that we all feel we are not part of the core group but we are (usually!) happy to make our contributions – we all seem to feel we are part of those layers just outside the core. It seems to me that we are all doing our bit as if there is a “they” who really have things under control whilst actually this core group does not exist – there is no “them”, only us. We are a doughnut not an onion.

I actually think this is healthy but we have to adjust our mindset – here are some examples:

- If someone asks for feedback on a suggestion or proposal, we cannot assume that “they” will respond and refine the ideas and work out the details. There is no “they” There is only us. We **all** need to read what we are sent, think and respond.
- If one of us is the one who is taking things on we need to keep in mind that many of the usual checks and balances are not there any more. We have to work harder at making sure that we are doing what others really want in the way that the whole group wants things doing. Much harder when things are ones and twos, not larger groups. And when feedback is more often gratitude that somebody is doing something, rather than constructive engagement.
- When a proposal comes to a Church Meeting we still seem to assume that “they” have thought it through and all we have to do is say yes. But in all likelihood what is being proposed has

been thought up by one or two members, without the benefit of debate and other perspectives. We cannot assume that “they” have a well thought out plan. It is up to all of us to take responsibility, to ask questions, to give proposals proper discussion and scrutiny.

- And if it is one of us who is making the suggestion we have to struggle to discern polite niceness from real enthusiasm.
- In discussions about the future of the Church we all have to think for ourselves. We seem to all be looking around to see what others think – as if there is some “they” who will have thought things through and we just have to go along with. There is no “they”, only us. If we are to move forward we need everyone to think and say what they think, not to wait for others. We need all of our ideas and voices.
- Even if the proposal comes from the Deacons, we now have a smaller Diaconate and inevitably this means it has a smaller set of skills and experience than we had in more numerous times. So these proposals too need careful scrutiny and testing.
- If we say we want to do something as a Church, we cannot assume that all we have to do is agree it would be a good thing to do and “they” will go away and implement it. There is no “they” - only us. We can think of many things it would be good to do and we would like to do. Many things that we would like to be part of the mission of Union Chapel. We have a lot of good ideas. But just because something sounds a nice thing to do, it doesn’t mean that we are the right people to do it. Everything we do means there is something else that is not getting done. If the resource to implement any idea is not in the room, then we can’t say we will do it! There is nobody else. If we can’t identify who will actually do whatever it is, then we simply have to say we can’t do it – we can’t expect that “they” will make it happen.

We are a Baptist church. Everything we want to do, we have to do.  
We have no bigger organisation who can tell us what to do and no  
bigger organisation to do things for us

When we meet we sit in a circle around the communion table.  
Sometimes we have a back row. But we never have anyone in the  
centre, just that symbol of our shared faith. Those sitting in that  
circle is all we have. No they. Only us.

## **~ I sometimes forget... ~**

I sometimes forget  
that I was created for Joy.

My mind is too busy.  
My Heart is too heavy  
for me to remember  
that I have been  
called to dance  
the Sacred dance of life.

I was created to smile  
To Love  
To be lifted up  
And to lift others up.

O' Sacred One  
Untangle my feet  
from all that ensnares.  
Free my soul.  
That we might  
Dance  
and that our dancing  
might be contagious.

*~Hafiz*

*Shams-ud-din Muhammad Hafiz (c. 1320-1389) is one of the most beloved poets of the Persians, and is considered by many – from different cultures – to be one of the seven literary wonders of the world. Ralph Waldo Emerson and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe both agreed. As Emerson said of Hafiz: "He fears nothing. He sees too far, he sees throughout; such is the only man I wish to see or be."*

Daniel Ladinsky



The tomb of the poet in the Iranian city of Shiraz.

## **~ Looking Forward to Extinction (Studies) ~**

As I'm sure many of you are aware, I've just moved to Leeds this autumn to start a PhD with the new Extinction Studies Doctoral Training Programme at the University of Leeds. Extinction Studies is a fairly new field, and a determinedly interdisciplinary one. People often assume extinction is only the loss of species – the dinosaurs and dodos – but there are many different kinds of extinction. On a biological level there are, for example, local extinctions, subspecies

extinctions, mass extinctions and hidden extinctions. One of my friends is exploring how the extinction of trees impacts on and causes the extinction of organisms that live in, on and with trees.

But extinction is not solely biological – several of my colleagues are looking at extinctions of words, languages, knowledge and institutions. Nor is extinction a one-sided process; rather, it is something people and organisms respond to. One of my friends is studying indigenous resistance to the cultural genocide of land dispossession in Mexico and Panama; another is studying community resilience and the role of religion in climate activism. All of us are keenly interested in what we tend to call *agency*, and how different actors, whether human or nonhuman, interact to shape the processes of extinction. We are not trying to create a Grand Unified Theory of Extinction – too many of us have humanities backgrounds for that! – but to explore extinction from different angles, and learn from and create different understandings of one of the defining phenomena of the Anthropocene.\*

My own approach is, as ever, historical and biological. I am studying the eradication – the extinction – of infectious diseases, to see what kind of insights that can offer about extinction in general.

Diseases are where the social, cultural and biological collide. A disease is both a biological process – a pathology – and a cultural one. Clinically, a disease is a set of symptoms, usually in conjunction with a specific causative agent. But what these symptoms are and what the cause is are continually defined, refined and redefined by doctors, scientists and clinical bodies. Diseases are not timeless, but historical – each generation of doctors defines them as a subtly or radically different set of symptoms, signs and diagnostics, so the cultural nature of a disease evolves over time. The nature of many infectious diseases (e.g. cholera and plague) was changed by bacteriology from being a loose set of symptoms of uncertain cause to being entirely defined by the presence of the causative bacterium. Nowadays, there are many diseases which cannot be diagnosed without a bacteriological test! At the same time, as we know all too well, the

disease is locked into an evolutionary arms race with its host, and is changing biologically. It has its own history, distinct from but related to the history of how humans understand it.

Covid-19 (SARS-CoV-2) provides a perfect example of how biological and social histories interact: we defined (constructed) a disease in response to the emergence of a novel virus with a novel pathology and symptomatology. This resulted in the creation of new social rituals (social distancing, masking, Zoom services), political actions (quarantines are hardly novel, but had long been unfashionable) and medical technologies (vaccines, antiviral drugs) to thwart the disease – to which the virus responded, evolving in new directions to survive in a more hostile ecosystem. This wasn't inevitable: a better response from world leaders (in particular our own government!) could have suppressed the virus to the point where its evolutionary room for manoeuvre was limited enough to prevent the emergence of Delta and Omicron. The pandemic has been shaped by both human and viral agency.

How medical practitioners and laypeople define diseases is rooted in the evolving biology of the disease, but is not confined to it. Human beings are enormously creative, and very good at coming up with all kinds of different ways of understanding phenomena. Older understandings of disease are not steps on the road to the right answer, but models that were useful to the people who used them. They helped people make sense of what they were seeing, and are therefore products of observation on the one hand and the observer's wider worldview, knowledge, preconceptions and beliefs on the other (and what the observer sees or doesn't see is also a product of their culture, training and tradition). Our understandings of disease are, like our understandings of anything else, products of their time and place, but they also shape the biological nature of the disease, which is also a product of its time (evolutionary history) and place (ecosystem).\*\*



My project aims to approach extinction as a process of interaction between disease and culture, parasite and human. I want to know how eradication impacts the disease biologically – how parasites and pathogens respond to eradication. I want to know how the attempts at eradication shape the social construction of a disease, what people think it is, what it means to them, and how they view it. A huge part of this is understanding how eradication is justified: why do people want to get rid of it? How are different people persuaded that an organism is so awful that it needs to be completely eliminated? How is this shaped by the biology and ecology of the organism?

While only smallpox and rinderpest have been globally eradicated, health scientists are cautiously optimistic that polio and guinea worm (which I wrote my MSc dissertation on; allegedly the ‘fiery serpents’ of Numbers 21:5-9)<sup>\*\*\*</sup>, both now down to a handful of human cases each year, will follow. Malaria has been eradicated from many rich countries, but the worldwide eradication programme was infamously thwarted by inflexible management, medical dogmatism and insecticide-resistant mosquitoes. Many other diseases (e.g. yellow fever, river blindness, sleeping sickness, yaws) have been eradicated in some countries but remain at large in others. The reason for this is often that eternal torment of the public health worker – the technology exists, but not the money or the political will!

At this stage, I am focusing on hookworm which, though eradicated in relatively few places, was the target of some of the first single-disease eradication programmes, principally in the USA, UK and their respective empires (but also in independent countries such as Thailand) over the first half of the twentieth century. These, usually Rockefeller-sponsored, campaigns in many ways set the template for global health interventions for the rest of the century, spinning out from the American South to cover much of the tropical world, and therefore providing case studies from a wide variety of political, social and cultural contexts.

Similarly, hookworm, an intestinal parasitic worm similar to those your cats and dogs get, was a relatively new discovery, and many of the people being treated had not previously known the animal even existed. This gives us the chance to see how a disease was created in people's minds, and which aspects of the organism's biology were emphasised and deployed to persuade people that they were either ill or at risk of illness from something they couldn't see. On the biological side, I'll be combing the records for data relating to how many cases, where they were, which species of hookworm were implicated, how severe the disease was, in order to try and get a picture of how the worm responded to attempts to eradicate it. It's early days, and I'm still in the process of selecting case studies, but I am confident that an interdisciplinary historical/biological approach will yield some interesting results, if not necessarily the ones I was expecting!

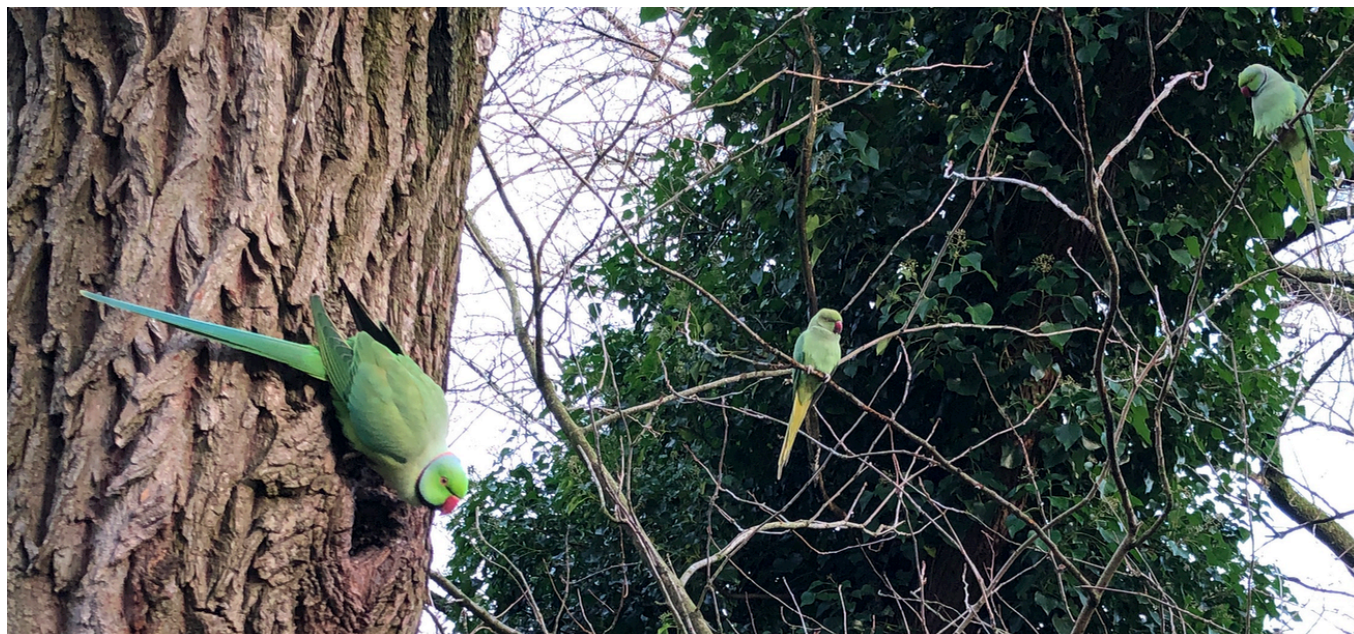
*Jonathan Roberts*

*\*The Anthropocene is a proposed geological epoch dating from the commencement of significant human impact on Earth's geology and ecosystems.*

*\*\*This is complicated by the fact that science aims to create knowledge which is universal, and therefore exists outside of time and space, but scientists – the people creating (discovering, if you prefer) the knowledge – exist within societies, and particularly within the culture and knowledge system of their institution and discipline.*

*\*\*\*The most sophisticated version of this claim can be found in Frederick Küchenmeister, Animal and Vegetable Parasites of the Human Body tr. E. Lankester (London, 1857) pp.391-398, public domain and available online from HathiTrust if anyone with a knowledge of Hebrew would like to enquire further – it's completely outside my area of expertise!*

*.....and deep in the heart of the Fog Lane Rain Forest these parakeets are any thing but extinct.*





# **Snippets of Hebrew ~**

## **God Answers**

Jewish history as written in Exodus, records a number of events which turn out to be pivotal moments for the nation. The most significant event by far, was being brought out of Egypt. God brought them out, and from a Christian perspective this implies that anyone who comes out of the metaphorical Egypt of sin, into salvation, was brought out by God. Christian theology calls this “prevenient grace”, otherwise described as “enabling grace”, and first came from Armenian theology, where God was said to act unilaterally upon the believer to be.

Another event was when Moses went up Mount Sinai, and God gave him the Decalogue, or Ten Commandments, along with other laws and teachings. But just prior to Moses’ ascent of the mountain, a ram’s horn was sounded. (This is usually translated as a trumpet, but it was anything but a trumpet because it is anachronistic!) Then after the ram’s horn sounded, Moses spoke to God, and God answered, but to whom did God answer? That would be revealed by examining the syntax of the verb.

Hebrew verbs can have the appropriate pronoun for: person, gender and number, plural or singular, attached to them. That gives a very good clue in cases where there may be ambiguity, usually! But the ending of this verb, to “answer”, is ambiguous. It could mean “him” or “us”. The “him” being Moses, and the “us” being the Israelites. Naturally, the translators use the importance of context to say “him”, since “us” doesn’t seem to fit.

Another interesting linguistic element worthy of note is found in the same verse. It appears in the reversal of the usual grammatical format, where it says: “And Moses, he spoke” instead of the usual

order: “And he spoke, Moses”. It seems that this reversal could just be a signal that something else is being hinted at.

If the original author’s intention was to indicate that God answered us (meaning the Israelites), it is different to God answering Moses! The implication is that God bypassed, and is willing to bypass, his anointed intermediary, Moses, and speak to the people directly. And God’s speaking does not have to be literal. God’s speaking could be guiding, as is generally understood by prevenient grace.

Some things are not handed to us on a plate. Like the use of one Hebrew word used twice in the temptation of Adam and Eve. The word is “arum”, and it applies to the snake as well as what Adam and Eve first saw. The snake is called arum (subtle), and Adam and Eve are called arum (naked). Being naked for a snake is difficult to imagine, and being subtle for Adam and Eve is difficult to justify, given they yielded to temptation. But regardless of the actual meaning, it seems to be the fact that the same word is used, presumably to make us think.

Perhaps the best that can be said is that the snake wanted Adam and Eve to end up the same as him. If one imagines that the snake was a manifestation of the angel cast out of heaven, then Adam and Eve were cast out of the garden. Of course this imaginative thinking could go on forever. So, understandable though it was, the translators translated out this particular conundrum. Were they right? Answers on a postcard, please!

However in the Sinai episode, did the author intend to say “God spoke to Moses”, or “God spoke to us”?  
For the sake of economy, answer on the same postcard as before.

*Geoff Walker*

## ~ News of the Family ~

**Ted Land** fell and broke his right upper arm just before Christmas. He is finding things difficult because he is right handed, but sends greetings to all.

**Beryl Dykes** sends her greetings. She is looking forward to warmer weather and the opportunity to see people at church again- when it is safe.....

**Joshua Eeckelaers** has enjoyed his first Christmas and New Year. In this photo he is sharing the ball pool with a friend:



**Carmen Bowman:** We have a photo of her completed grave and headstone to share, thanks to her son Chris. He also updated us about Carmen's son Roger, who caught Covid and sadly died in March 2021. They are buried together.



## ~ Pastoral Support ~

### Supporting Each Other at Union Chapel What do you think?

**John 13:34-35 :** A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

As a church, what do we mean by Pastoral Support? How do we provide Pastoral support? Wikipedia defines Pastoral Care as “an ancient model of emotional, social and spiritual support that can be found in all cultures and traditions.”

Do the words pastoral support based on the shepherd and sheep analogy imply the wrong power dynamic? Do we want to think more of equal sharing relationships?

According to Thirty-one eight, a Christian safeguarding charity, pastoral care may involve:

- *Sustaining others through prolonged difficulty or immediate need*
- *Enabling a persons' journey of healing and wholeness*
- *Supporting someone through the process of reconciliation with God, self and others*
- *Offering guidance about resources*
- *Bringing different perspectives*

<https://thirtyoneeight.org/news-and-events/publications/together-magazine/2019-winter/winter-2019/pastoral-care/> )

What are your thoughts on pastoral care or support? Are these the right words to describe what we might want and expect from others in our congregation?

Pastoral care and support has traditionally been the role of the minister but over the years this has not always been the case in Union Chapel. We have had many models which appear to be common with other congregations as Thirty-one eight also states:

*Churches of all denominations are increasingly developing an 'every member ministry' model of pastoral care where church members are encouraged to care for one another through small groups and the organic development of Christian friendship. This is an appropriate model which works well much of the time. However, problems can arise when people fall through the gaps because they are not in small groups or especially in larger churches, where they may go unnoticed.*

*Another challenge can be the blurring of boundaries between friendship and pastoral care. People do not always recognise when others have more complex pastoral needs and fail to refer them to those who have specialist skills.*

The Deacons have been made aware of possible gaps in our support of each other. We have recently discussed this and think our past models have been mixed in their effectiveness. Importantly, we acknowledge that members of the congregation may differ in what and when they require support. As we are a small group, it may be that we are looking at a way to feel more connected, where the special gifts we all possess are shared as needed. How can we do this?

We will be discussing this at the next church meeting and would appreciate your thoughts and feelings on this matter. It might help the discussion if you feel able to write something beforehand and send to Nicola or myself. Everyone's response is valuable either written or spoken.

Lorna Richardson ( [lrichardson3.lr@googlemail.com](mailto:lrichardson3.lr@googlemail.com) )



# **~ Minutes of the Church Meeting held on Zoom on 21st November 2021~**

**Present:** Brenda M, David G, Carole W, Geoff W, Lorna R, Gwen M, Nicola H, Margaret E, Steve R, Gwyneth HR

**Apologies:** Andy H, Enid W, Alan R, Margaret R, Margaret G

**The Minutes** of the October Church Meeting (circulated by email) were approved.

**Matters arising:** Work on the lean-to at the Manse – Lorna R has been unable to obtain a second quote. Contractors are not interested in the job. David G felt that the work could not be deferred for long, and we have a known contractor who is willing to do it soon. Agreed that while it's not ideal, we have done what we can in governance terms. Decided unanimously to proceed with the work as outlined at the last Meeting, David G to instruct the contractor (Bogdan).

**Any Other Business:** none notified.

## **1. Update of the Membership Roll.**

Barry Litherland has died and his name should be removed. Agreed also to remove the following names: Hannah Jones, Heather Litherland, Charles Forbes, Mike Garnham, Anne Thistleton, Godwin Venkatesh, Lince Venkatesh. Hannah Jones has joined another church and is happy for her name to be removed. The others either did not respond to letters sent by Gwyneth HR when she was Secretary, or we have no known address for them. Agreed unanimously. Nicola H to update the Roll.

## **2. Lettings Issues.**

Nicola H reported that the Deacons did not feel that we were at the point yet when we can advertise for a Lettings Manager. We need to build a lettings team and decide a management structure. Work on this is ongoing. We are looking to have a recommendation and

proposals to put to the January Church Meeting. Anyone who is interested in being involved in formulating lettings policies and procedures should let Nicola H know, and she will add them to the circulation list. Lorna R expressed the hope that the Lettings Team will be able to take a more strategic long-term view. There was general agreement that we need to consider options around long-term sustainability. Gwyneth HR was concerned that the Church should not subsidise the lettings generally. David G said this was not the intention, and Steve R agreed that the position is still outstanding but solvable. Margaret E noted that we need to think and work more as a group and consider what is best for the Church as a whole.

### **3. Communication between the Deacons & the congregation.**

Lorna R said that the Deacons are aware that some members of the congregation feel out of the loop, and as a separate matter that as the Church has become smaller, individual differences seem to be more pronounced. We need to consider how we can communicate more effectively. It was noted that the group dynamic has been changed by the loss of significant people – Michael W, Eileen L, Irene R, Rachel A. Steve R commented that now the Diaconate is smaller, it doesn't have the range of expertise that it did in the past and Church Meeting scrutiny of proposals is important. Agreed that Nicola H should publicise the agenda items for Deacons' Meetings in advance and also circulate to Church members by email a brief summary of each meeting afterwards.

Gwyneth HR urged people to respond to emails where appropriate, as we are poor as a group at reacting to email requests for input.

### **4. Interest of GM Commoners in the Linton House land.**

Lorna R, Andy H and David G had a meeting earlier in the week with representatives of GM Commoners for a general talk. They have not progressed very far with their plans, mainly because the composition of their group seems to have changed quite a lot since they first expressed interest, but they are very enthusiastic. They have possible financial streams, and architect and a preliminary drawing, and a bit of money for surveys. In order to raise funds they would like to make their group larger and would like us to

support them in advertising themselves, which we agreed to do. Andy H is writing a statement of support to assist with their funding applications. One member of the group is interested in working with us on community/lettings issues, and another is interested in setting up a library. We have agreed to continue to meet every 2 months or so, next meeting in February. It would be best to have a regular group from the Church to attend these meetings. Anyone who is interested in joining the liaison group should let the Deacons know, with a view to settling names at the January Church Meeting.

## **5. Christmas Eve Service**

David G said there had not been much interest in having a Christmas Eve service at the Chapel. Anyone who is interested and has not yet told Margaret G should do so.

**Date of Next Meeting:** Sunday 16th January 2022, on Zoom.

**The Meeting closed at 12.30 pm**

## **~Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2022~**



Original photo of Nablus (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0): Dr. Michael Loadenthal

**‘We Saw His Star in the East’.**

## 18th to the 25th January 2022

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in 2022 has been prepared by the churches of the Middle East, the history of which was, and still is, characterised by conflict and strife, tainted with blood and darkened by injustice and oppression. The Christians of the Middle East offer these resources conscious that the world shares many of the travails and much of the difficulties that it experiences, and yearns for a light to lead the way to the Saviour who is the light that overcomes darkness.

Serving the Gospel today requires a commitment to the human being, especially the poorest, the weakest and those marginalised. It requires from the churches transparency and accountability in dealing with the world, and with each other. This means churches need to cooperate to provide relief to the afflicted, to welcome the displaced, to relieve the burdened, and to build a just and honest society. This is a call for churches to work together so that young people can build a good future according to God's heart, a future in which all human beings can experience life, peace, justice, and love.

Resources are available if you go to:

<https://ctbi.org.uk/week-of-prayer-for-christian-unity-2022/>

### **~ A Time To Live And A Time To Die ~**

Over my life I have seen churches come and go. Old, long-established, churches whose numbers have dwindled to a handful. Churches with buildings that take more time and money to maintain than the congregation can manage. Preachers trying to maintain a worship style evolved for hundreds with a congregation of a dozen. The common theme is that it has been clear that the point of no return had passed long before the actual closure, and the

congregation struggled on for far too long trying to maintain an institution or building or worship that had long-since ceased to be viable. And that futile struggle consumed so much of people's efforts that could have been much better deployed elsewhere.

Of course it is always easier to identify the point of no return in retrospect. At the time there was always hope – maybe a few new members, a successful fundraiser, a few “modern” hymns... I offer three critical points where I would say I should be able to recognise it is time to bail out.

Firstly there is that point when the church tries to persuade me to take something on and uses the argument that if I don't, then there is no-one else.

Secondly the time when a congregation becomes dependent on only a single person for some critical role (I well remember the very bad organist who threatened to leave every time he didn't get his own way!) – whether they do it well or badly, whether they seek to serve or to push their own agendas is actually irrelevant, once there is only one person able to do it, the organisation is unsustainable.

Thirdly there is that point at which the preferred form of worship just doesn't work and the people are not willing to develop forms which can be done well – and by well I mean both with a quality in itself and a quality which would appear to be good and worthwhile to an unfamiliar visitor.

On my criteria for bailing out, I have to face up to the fact that Union Chapel must be close, if not already over the boundary. But over the past 2 or 3 years we have started to find ways of gathering which allow a very meaningful reflection on life and faith, and which have proved valuable to a wider group through the pandemic. When we let go of the shackles of the hymn-prayer sandwich these gatherings look like they could be sustainable for a small group and have a wider appeal. If we could manage to free ourselves from the burdens of running a large suite of buildings and focus on our worship gatherings there could be a future for more years yet. Or am I falling for that false hope?

Two more things: Firstly we should not feel bad if ours is the generation where Union Chapel closes. It is not our failure to live in the generation where the demographic forces that all the mainstream and liberal churches are experiencing finally catch up with us. Our way of doing things, the people we are and can't help being, have been formed by a certain sort of Christianity. We are steeped in it, most of us for all our lives. There are not many of us left. The next generation have had very different experiences and need something different that we cannot provide. There will come a time when we have to say "it was good, but its time has passed, time to move on".

Secondly, For many years I thought that the purpose of churches such as ours was to keep the liberal/progressive/whatever flame alive against the rising tide of fundamentalism. And maybe for a while that was right. But now I can see the next generation and they don't want to run churches. And they don't need us to show them how to develop and maintain their own version of post-Christendom faith. They need lightweight institutions that free them for the important things of life and faith, not churches and buildings to run. Maybe instead of hoping they will join us we need to seek them out and join them?


So when do I bail out? When do we collectively give up with this particular form of institution and move on? Is that moment approaching? Or can we free ourselves and evolve into something that is sustainable for a group not much larger than that group which first met in that upper room on Easter Sunday 32AD?

*Steve Roberts*

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