

Christward

The magazine of



July 5th–August 30th
2015

~ From the Minister's Desk ~

I really enjoyed our AGM. I suspect it is fairly unusual to come across that five word sentence in any context, let alone in church – but it is true. To be fair, our AGM's are often pretty good, but weaving our worship and business into a morning where the edges of both were blurred made it extra special this year. Hearing so many other voices bring our shared life to God in prayer was also a particular highlight.

It also struck me that although a principle aim of any AGM is to mark and celebrate the achievements of the previous year, it should also provide a foundation and momentum for the next. In a year which will undoubtedly contain some big decisions about our future, it is useful to be mindful of the big decisions of the past. At Union Chapel, these decisions have perhaps been most obviously manifest in bricks and mortar, but it is always worth remembering that the building changes were merely the end result of other more significant things. I wasn't there, but I can imagine. Behind the construction and renovation lay hours of deep exploration; issues of identity formed and reformed, shared vision emerging from open conversation, complex practicalities married with impractical dreams. Debate and silence, frustration and patience, procrastination and decisiveness – and a journey where the travelling is as important as the destination. We might even use the shorthand from our tradition; the mind of Christ was discerned within community under the guidance of God's Spirit.

It seems that we are once again being invited into that process. Not through prophetic visions or the audible voice of God, but through a lease buyout and the recognition of our own limited resources of energy. But the practical nature of the catalysts do not make this only a practical issue, and the building-related questions should not limit our exploration to building-related answers – at least not yet.

This is what I said towards the end of our AGM, when at the end we returned to look at our Aims:

‘The past has shaped our Aims, the present hopefully manifests them, but our future will also be formed by them. Thirty odd years ago this building changed radically, but that was only possible because the people in it had been changing beforehand, perhaps for quite some time. And those people, us, have continued to change ever since. We continue to respond and adapt and grow, and so whatever happens us as church, it is a reflection of that dynamic movement.’

If that is true, then it might help us to begin by being mindful of change. How has this church community developed over recent years? How has our world and neighbourhood transformed and how will we play our part now? What are we passionate about, or challenged by? What is God saying through the lives and wisdom of one another? It is unlikely that we will reach firm conclusions to these kinds of questions, and that is not really the point, but it might be worth holding on to them as we consider how our faith will manifest in buildings.

This thought process can begin right now. It might start by all of us attempting to answer the kinds of questions I’ve just mentioned, but also as we sensitise ourselves to things we encounter that might feed in to this conversation. Perhaps a thought, an idea, a word, an experience; anything which might enrich our decision-making journey together. What on earth might that look like? Well perhaps I might start by offering a couple of thoughts that have been percolating in my mind, one or both of which might be pertinent or nonsense!

Regarding the area of newness and significant change, I’ve been mulling over some ideas from Glen Marshall, one of the Co-Principles at Northern Baptist College. He has talked a lot recently

about his love for Jazz and is particularly keen on the significance of improvisation, both in music and in following Jesus. Contrary to popular belief (or at least mine) improvisation is not just making stuff up! Glen quotes; 'Memory is so much more significant than originality. The originator does not set out to create the future but responds to the past, reincorporating it in to a new story'. And so new things, however radical and different, are not an abandonment of the past, but taking what you've been given and reforming it anew. Not that this reforming is comfortable or without risk. Steve Lacy (a saxophonist) comments that; 'Improvisation sits on the edge, in between the known and the unknown, and you have to keep pushing it towards the unknown, otherwise it, and you, die'. God calls us to improvise. It strikes me that Union Chapel has followed this call in the past, and I'm sure we continue to do so.

The other thought is one that has sprung out of recent conversations in the Book Group. We recently read a book chapter written by Justin Welby in which he talked about 'common good' in our country. What struck me amidst the useful social commentary and the terrible theology was the concept of *solidarity*. He claims that the church is capable of inspiring solidarity in our society, that indeed the incarnation of Christ is the ultimate solidarity, God's commitment to humanity even to death on a cross. He says that 'solidarity in Jesus looks like generosity, forgiveness and reconciliation. It looks like being friends with the poor and standing up to power for the sake of those on the margins of society.' Mostly though, I just like the concept of solidarity. Defined in various ways, I warm to them all; 'union or fellowship arising from common responsibilities and interests', 'community of feelings and purposes', 'the ties in a society that bind people together as one'. It is not doing things *for* people, it is standing *with* them. It is not about static beliefs but about common purpose, not about individualism but

about togetherness. It feels to me like a good word to have lodged in my mind.

I look forward to hearing your thoughts, either naturally as we continue to share our lives with one another, or more deliberately when we make extra space to explore Linton House issues on the afternoon of Sunday 19th July. Bring a packed lunch and let's blur the lines of worship and business once more.

Ian Geere

~ Why be a Christian?

A Response: Nicodemus - The future of the church? ~

In leading a service last month I was brought to look again at Nicodemus, the candid friend of Jesus who debated with and defended Jesus despite never (as far as we know) becoming a disciple. Nicodemus who at the end played a crucial role in the Jesus story.

We, in our protestant church tradition, have a very black and white view of what we call "belief" or "being a Christian" You are either in or out. Committed to Christ or not. Born again or not. Saved or Damned. Other parts of the church are maybe more flexible, but not ours. We demand that any commitment to Christianity is the primary commitment of our lives. Christ first and everything else afterwards.

Speaking personally, I struggle with this. I aspire to values which go deeper than the religion I find myself part of, humanitarian values by which I judge and sift the Christian heritage and decide what is of

value and what is not. Where Christians express beliefs or do things that conflict with what is true, with human decency, justice, peace then truth and justice has to prevail. My primary commitment, is humanist – truth, justice, peace, valuing others – and to me any religion is only of value in as much as it helps promote these values – and of course the fact that I am still here today despite my lack of a belief in anything supernatural must mean that at some level the religion offered at Union Chapel does help me in some way to get closer to those values I aspire to.

More generally, I think there is a problem here for all those of faith. For most of history the world view was that there were powers – we called them God or gods – outside the physical world that were in some way or other in control. Powers that controlled not only our destiny in this life but who were able to reward and punish in worlds beyond this. In the Christian tradition this crystallised in a belief of heaven and hell with a day of judgement after our death. Getting it right with God mattered not just for this life but for “eternity”. In our particular protestant tradition this distinction became even sharper, with our eternal fate depending on whether or not we had made an explicit commitment to Christ. Abusing the words of Jesus to Nicodemus we had to be “born again”. The trouble is that for most people this doesn’t wash any more. This is not consistent with what we know of the world. It doesn’t have any traction. Although there are still many Christians who do find value in talk of salvation, and some parts of the church try very hard to maintain the eternal importance of a commitment to Christ, I see very few people inside the church who are actually motivated by thoughts of their eternal fate, never mind outside. If this is so, it becomes very difficult to say that a *primary* commitment to any religion is crucial. Religious faith and practice may of course still be of enormous benefit to ourselves and to others (and I want to stress the others here lest we drift into selfish indulgence of personal spirituality). But we have largely lost

the life-or-death element. Religion can, quite reasonably, be an adjunct to our lives rather than the centre.

There is a challenge to the church here. How do we organise ourselves if we cannot expect all who might be members of our community to commit their lives exclusively to Christianity? Do we embrace it or do we fight a rear-guard action to try to maintain the centrality of what we do? So much of our language and ritual assumes that the Christ commitment is central and that without that primary focus everything else in life is irrelevant. Can we find a way of relating to those for whom religion is not unimportant or irrelevant, but is secondary?

So the question I want to ask is do we have a place in the Church for Nicodemus? Do we want there to be a place for those who have a strong commitment to living a better life, to making the world a better place, to the values that Jesus proclaimed but who do not want to make Church or Christ the centre of their lives? Do we want to welcome those like Nicodemus who want to share our stories, learn from us - and share their stories and teach us?

Nicodemus, meeting, sharing and debating with Jesus: this is the spirit of much of what we do. Listening together to the stories of Jesus. Sharing stories of the world. Celebrating good and naming evil. Allowing ourselves to be inspired. Reflecting, arguing, and debating together. Supporting each other. Doing for each other what Jesus did for Nicodemus. There is a real value in what we do together, the sharing of our stories, taking time out to reflect, travelling together, struggling together, dreaming together... There are resources that our faith bring which can be of value to all of good will. That's why I am still here - just about - but still here.

Steve Roberts.

The lectionary readings for Sunday 21st June included Psalm 133, verses from 2 Corinthians 6 and the story of Jesus quelling the storm (St Mark 4). Andy led our service and we print below his reflections on the readings.

~ Two-handed people ~

How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity! (Psalm 133)

We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. As a fair exchange—I speak as to my children—open wide your hearts also. (2 Corinthians 6)

Ah, the perplexities of communal living. The misunderstandings. The partialities. The unfairnesses. The lack of appreciation. The superficialities, the lack of communication. The lack of vision, the boredom. Anger, rising up and dominating everything.

That's my experience of family life. That was part of how it was between my wife Vic and myself. Me late home from church and Vic seeing a lack of appreciation. Vic late home from work and me storing up resentment. That's part of how it is now, with a 12-year old daughter: her not washing up properly, and me getting fed up. Me late home from work, and Jess not starting her homework, and me getting fed up, and Jess feeling like a failure, and me feeling like a failure.

But communal life is not all perplexities. With Vic, there was the smell of peonies, coastal breezes, and story on story on story. With Jess, a text message from her Scout camp on Father's Day morning: 'treats under the bed Dad' – a messy tin of grapes,

chocolate brownies and watermelon that had been there for 24 hours

For a communal life to survive and flourish, we acknowledge the unfairnesses, the lack of appreciation, the partial perspectives – and what? Open wide our hearts. Smell the peonies. Prepare a tin of mushy cake and watermelon and smile.

So much for my family life. What about us as a church community, and our communal life. What are we up to? On the one hand, rationality: strategies, intentions, goals, direction, a head for business, expertise. On the other hand, flow: desire, meaning, the smell of peonies. On the one hand, thought, prudence, explanations, due diligence. On the other hand, impulse, generosity, comradeship, friendship, expansive gestures. On the one hand, reports, accounts, numbers, evidence. On the other hand, a warm hug, a phone call.

Really? And yet to my best knowledge of the people in this church, we are each two-handed. **In each person**, to my best knowledge: rationality, argument, goals, directions – **and** desire, flow, the smell of peonies, a tin of mushy cake.

On the one hand, worship. On the other hand, sorting food. On the one hand, sorting out the drains. On the other hand, a warm welcome. On the one hand, loading the dishwasher. On the other hand, a shoulder on which to cry.

On the one hand, be still and know that I am God.
On the other hand, be still, and the wind and waves obey.

On the one hand, sit as part of nature and be astonished.
On the other hand, organize, sort things out and make a comfortable place for people to come.

On the one hand, sleep on a cushion in a boat, pour oil over someone's head or foot.

On the other hand, put the cushions back where they should be, clean up the oil, and make plans for tomorrow.

Two-handed people in two-handed community.

Andy Howes

~ Fallowfield & Withington Food Bank ~

Our summer Tesco collection will take place at Tesco Burnage on Thursday 2nd July 8am-10pm and Friday 3rd July 8am-12 noon.

Helpers are still most welcome for the many and varied tasks we need to do. Please contact Colin on 07739571991 if you are able to help.

On Sunday 12th July we will meet at Withington Methodist at 12.30 to start the weighing, sorting and dating of the food collected. Lunch will be provided. Its usually good fun as well as hard work.

An additional Food bank session will commence at Saturday 10am-12 noon starting on July 11th at Holy Innocents Church. This will enable clients who are in crisis over the weekend to access food and will enable us to assist a number of our referrers who find it almost impossible to respond to sudden hospital discharges and emergency situations.

If you are able to help as volunteers on a Saturday you will be most welcome. Please have a word with Colin to discuss it further.

Colin

~ News of the Family ~

Congratulations to Nicola and Martin Hamilton on the birth of Rory Lennon on Tuesday 16th June at 9.17am weighing in at 7lbs 4oz. Judging from the photograph he realises already that he is Quinn's little brother.



~ Minutes of the Church Meeting of Union Chapel Fallowfield (Baptist) held on Sunday 26th April 2015 at 11.20am.~

Meeting was quorate but no attendance sheet was completed in view of the informal layout .

The Meeting approved payment of the following sums out of our general income for the year 2013/14:

£650 each to Christian Aid, BMS World Mission, Home Mission and Northern Baptist Learning Community, and £186 to Greater Manchester Industrial Mission.

There was one abstention, all votes otherwise being in favour.

There followed a thoughtful and creative discussion on the future of Linton House

**~ Minutes of the Church Meeting
of Union Chapel Fallowfield (Baptist)
held on Sunday 17th May 2015
at 11.20am.~**

Present: Andy Howes (chair), Gwyneth Heritage Roberts, David Garner, Ian Geere, Sarah Geere, Harry Fleming, Rachel Scott, Margaret Edmonds, Irene Roberts, Eileen Land, Ted Land, Geoff Walker, Carole Walker, Owen Roberts, Owen Jones, Gwen Mattock, Nicola Hamilton, Michael Welford, Leonie Earnshaw, Julie Bryce, Rachel Adebago, Steve Roberts, Paola Braglia

Andy H opened the meeting with a welcome and a reminder of our mutual commitment to listen well to one another and give each other space so that we can exercise our authority together as a congregation.

Apologies: Margaret Garner; and Enid Welford and Carmen Bowman (with children)

The Minutes of the March 2015 meeting (in current magazine) were approved. No written minutes of the April meeting have yet been published and will come for approval to the July meeting.

Matters Arising and Notification of AOB for this meeting: None.

Fabric

Michael W made the point that the discussion begun last July on the relationship between the Fabric Committee, the Deacons and the Church Meeting had never been concluded. Gwyneth HR said that the issue will be on the next Deacons' Agenda.

Other Fabric Issues

1. **Central Heating Boiler replacement** – the March meeting voted in favour of replacing the defunct oil boiler with a gas boiler, including the installation of a new supply pipe. However, the actual quote for a gas supply, boiler and system adjustments has come in significantly higher than the previous estimate, and is now some three times higher than the cost of a replacement oil-fired boiler. After detailed and thoughtful consideration the Meeting decided to reverse the previous decision and to approve the purchase of a replacement oil boiler. The Fabric Committee was asked to progress this. Those present all gave a gracious commitment not to use this decision as a factor in future discussions about any plans for alterations to the buildings.

2. **Drains** - there is a problem with the underground drains by the front door. The drain pipe has been cracked by the car park concrete. Michael W has contacted the church's insurers and an assessor has been to look at it. It seems likely that the insurers will accept the claim. The Meeting thanked Michael for his efforts and authorised him to continue to pursue the insurance claim.

Future Event

David Kerrigan the Director of BMS World Mission is coming to have a conversation with us on Wednesday 15th July. All members

of the congregation are invited to attend. The meeting will begin at 6.30pm and a simple meal will be provided.

The Church AGM will be held on Sunday 14th June 2015

Date of Next Ordinary Meeting: 19th July 2015

The Meeting closed with the Grace at 12.14pm

~ Annual General Meeting 2015 ~

Following the precedent set last year the church has published an Annual Report which includes Minister's, Secretary's and Treasurer's Reports together with a Statement of Accounts. It also includes Reports on Life in Union Chapel together with a Review of Safeguarding Activities. An electronic copy of the report can be obtained on request from the Church Secretary.

The Business Minutes of the Meeting held on Sunday 14th June 2015 are set out below:

Present: *Please see below

Deacons

Carole Walker was elected to the Diaconate. Gwyneth HR was re-elected, being eligible to serve a further 3 years as Secretary.

Thanks and gratitude were recorded to the retiring Deacons, Beryl Dykes and Enid Welford.

Accounts

The Auditor has accepted the Accounts. These were accepted unanimously by the Meeting, and thanks recorded to our Treasurer Nicola Hamilton

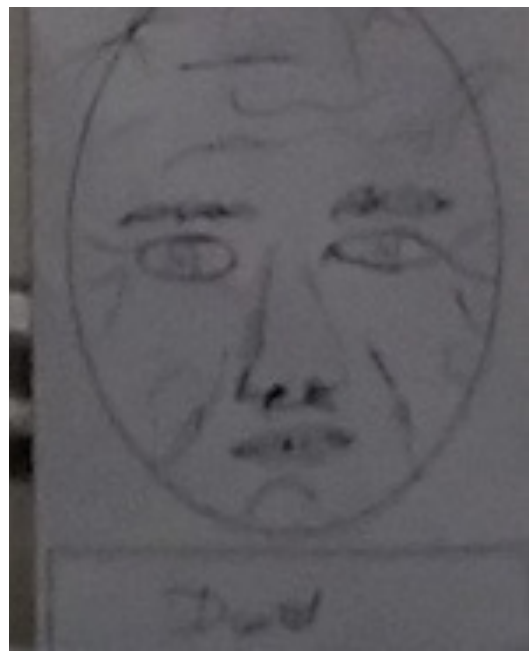
Thanks also recorded to our Minister for everything he brings to the life of the Church.

Date of Next AGM: Second Sunday in June 2016

*A novel attendance list was compiled when people were given a piece of paper with an oval drawn on it and asked to draw themselves on it. The representations were then blu-tacked to the wall. The photograph supplied to the magazine had too many drawings on it to reproduce clearly. I have chosen my personal favourites:



I love the glasses



'this world so full of care'



As usual the Secretary in tune with the feelings of the Meeting

~ Christian Aid News ~

Christian Aid has produced a new film about their work in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory(IoPt)

After more than 60 years of conflict, many people in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory are living in fear and poverty.

In our churches and communities, our support for IoPt is often a topic that is difficult to discuss; it polarises and divides people.

Along with our partners, we are deeply committed to, and engaged in, the pursuit of a just peace – for all people – regardless of who they are.

This film seeks to inform, engage, inspire and challenge. Featuring our partners' work in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza, you'll learn more about our work to protect human rights, support the poor, and help build a viable peace based on justice for all. To download the film go to the Christian Aid *Website Home Page*

(www.christianaid.org.uk) and follow the link ' Our new IoPt film'.

Ways to get involved

If, after watching this film, you would like to find out about ways to act for justice and peace in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory, visit our partner, (www.quaker.org.uk/eappi) which lists ways to get involved.

More on our partners' work featured in the film:

- YMCA Women's Training Programme (coming soon)
- Our partner, B'TSelem (christianaid.org.uk/whatwedo/in-focus/life-through-the-lens/index.aspx) worked with young people to tell their stories through film.
- Find out about our emergency response in Gaza and our work with CFTA go to the Christian Aid website and follow the Emergencies link

~ 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 or by post to The Editor, Christward, Union Chapel Fallowfield, 2b Wellington Road, Fallowfield, Manchester, M14 6EQ.

Alan Redhouse

Christward Number 477. Published 28th June 2015

The magazine of Union Chapel Fallowfield(Baptist),

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