

Christward

The magazine of



May 1st–June 26th
2016

~ From the Minister's Desk ~

During the recent developments in Baptist circles regarding how to respond to current legislation surrounding same sex marriages, I was fascinated to receive from Owen a document produced by the Quakers back in 2009, prior to the changes in law. This publication, entitled *We are but witnesses* (Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations, Sept 2009), is offered to all faith groups of *Churches Together in Britain and Northern Ireland* and *Inter Faith Network UK*. It describes the events in the summer of that year when 1700 Friends gathered for a week in the University of York and, amongst other things, sought leading on their national response to the recognition of same sex marriages.

They held four sessions, each of which was attended by over 1000 people, during which they participated in a process of 'threshing' - looking deeply into their understanding of an issue. During these sessions they looked at the history and current issues surrounding same sex marriage, heard personal stories of Friends' experiences, considered lessons learned from current practice and Biblical writings, and finally gathered to seek corporate discernment. This process itself sounds deeply impressive to me, although I have many logistical questions relating to engaging with so many people! The result of this was a true sense of leading, summarised by a small section of minutes:

'...we are being led to treat same sex committed relationships in the same way as opposite sex marriages, reaffirming our central insight that marriage is the Lord's work and we are but witnesses. The question of legal recognition by the state is secondary.'

The final sentence poses all kinds of interesting questions about our relationship with the state, some of which we have touched upon before at Union Chapel. The point which caused me to reflect however is the assertion that gave the document its title; that we are but witnesses to what God is already doing. In the Quaker tradition this idea has been around for a significant time. Right back

in 1669, one of the most influential early Friends, George Fox, described the Quaker understanding of marriage:

'For the right joining in marriage is the work of the Lord only, and not the priests or magistrates; for it is God's ordinance and not man's and therefore Friends cannot consent that they should join them together: for we marry none; it is the Lord's work, and we are but witnesses.'

This is a potent reminder that when two people marry each other, they are making promises and commitments to each other and before God. They are publically affirming a private bond which has been formed between them, and in which God has always been involved. This places us as friends, family, and church, in the role of witnesses. There is no place for an intermediary who must perform the ceremony or pronounce the couple to be married, instead a marriage is a significant rite which enables a larger group to participate and celebrate in the union. In other words, if the process of becoming 'one flesh' is something of God, then we can neither create nor prevent it, we simply witness it.

I am sure that the reality of the principle is not quite as clear as it might sound. None of us exists in isolation from each other, or God, and therefore depend on the wisdom and guidance of others. Many marriages are formed in the midst of friends and family, and in some cases a wider community, all of whom play a part in the bond formed between the two people dear to them. So, this is not a case of 'hands off, leave them to it', but remains a pertinent reminder regarding the limits of our involvement in a covenant which does not require our inclusion.

This discussion also reminds me of the broader concept of *Missio Dei*. It is most often used in conversations surrounding the mission of church, but has potentially broader implications. It describes God as already at work in the world, and our role being one of discovering where and how this is happening, and then considering how we might enrich it. It removes our role as instigators, loosens our sense of ownership and control, and emphasises the need for what Christians would call our discernment and sensitivity for God's wider redeeming work. The Celtic saints had a simpler way of

putting it, searching out ways 'for the Christ in me to meet the Christ in you.'

Stuart Murray Williams, whom many of us have spent time with, says that 'mission is defined, directed, energized and accomplished by God.' For many, this is a humbling recognition. That is not to say that we are passive observers, or that we are disempowered from taking any initiative, but it does seem to emphasise our role as witnesses to something of God, which we can neither create nor prevent. If the first response is humility, then hopefully subsequent ones might include relief, excitement, and optimism. There are so many good things happening in our world. So many already fighting for justice and giving generously, so much love and commitment, so many places that we might see God at work. We do not have to reinvent the wheel; we just have to become wise witnesses.

Perhaps this might also be a helpful train of thought as we progress through the Looking Ahead process. It is right that we look at ourselves and consider what kind of gathered church we want to be. It is important that we weigh up the practicalities of our situation and couple those with our sense of vision and aspiration. But it is also vital that we spend time discerning what we might be being called to witness, and join in with. Perhaps there are also valuable lessons to be learned from the Quakers' traditional use of silence and listening for the leadings of the spirit; anyone up for some threshing?

Ian Geere

**~ Christian Aid week
this year is 15th to 21st May ~**

Christian Aid week will soon be upon us! It's now only three weeks until the 15th May.

Soon some informative posters will be brightening our walls whilst educating us about how many people in Bangladesh, especially the poor, struggle to survive on a daily basis.

Bangladesh is one of the world's most densely populated countries, with its people crammed into a delta of rivers that empties into the Bay of Bengal. The low-lying country is vulnerable to flooding and cyclones, and is badly affected by any rises in sea levels. It is suffering the effects of climate change.

This year we are fundraising for the work Christian Aid are committed to in Bangladesh.

We are hoping to provide slices of cake for people to enjoy whilst putting their donations into a box provided in the kitchen. So far we have enough cakes promised by volunteer bakers to cater for Sunday 15th, and thank you to all those who have offered to bake. Any offers to bake (or donate a shop-bought cake) for other days in the week would be gratefully received. This request is going out to all who come to Union Chapel, whether to attend our services or one of the many activities that happen on the premises. It certainly is a busy place!

If you can bake, or would like to provide a bought cake for this fundraising event, please do let me know, and I'll add you to my list.

Email cgwalker100@gmail.com or leave a note in the Office so I can contact you.

Many thanks, Carole Walker

~ Possible directions for Union Chapel ~

My feeling is that it would be useful to share some ideas, however wobbly, through Christward, in order to stimulate others towards clearer possibilities and options. So in that spirit:

A centre for justice and wholeness

A centre for justice and wholeness located on our site is about building on what we inherit: essentially a flourishing set of adult education and related classes, and a viable going concern as a

worshipping community. The idea would be to create a centre which explicitly sets out to accommodate and connect with people of all ages and all backgrounds in activity which promotes justice and wholeness. There is very little that goes on at the church at the moment, or with which the church is involved, which does not align with this aspiration. Church, food bank, dance class, studying history, art classes, promoting mental health, the 12 step groups, languages, etc, etc. But some of what already goes on would be more visible within a centre which had this more explicit focus.

The church would continue to sit in the middle of this, very much aligned with this activity, more so than at present in that the weekly focus of the congregation would be more visibly linked in.

Management is a key issue: the locus of control would sit with the church as the long term committed partner. But the centre management would combine resources from different bodies and seek to link with many others, so that the centre is visibly constructed not as an extension of the church, or a church project, but as a body to which the church commits itself as a partner.

Such a shift is arguably crucial, because there is a boundary around 'church' for many people and many institutions, which unintentionally excludes them. A great number of people who would call themselves atheists, and people of other faiths, find it difficult or impossible to be connected with an institution which is centred on church. This is an issue which would need careful thought and research to find and develop an effective model. But get it right and the centre could be a catalyst and resource for activity involving many people.

What would the centre actually do? Initially, it would be business as usual. It would do what Union Chapel currently does. The groups and people involved at the moment would continue to do what they do. There would be three differences:

- 1) Each separate activity would be more or less part of a larger overall purpose, to contribute to greater justice locally and

globally, and to promote greater wholeness in the local community.

- 2) There is the opportunity to construct or use buildings or other resources to do something new from start of such a centre. This might involve the use of Linton House for a while, in something close to its current form.
- 3) The centre would actively seek out and build partnerships and connections with other institutions and groups locally to contribute actively within a network that crosses boundaries of faith, politics, age, ethnicity. Over time, that may lead to new forms of activity, new groups, using 'Union Chapel' resources of community space.

In other words, the effect of a centre like this over time would be a strengthening of purpose and energy, and the development of new possibilities of relevance both locally and globally.

Andy Howes

~ Snippets of Hebrew: Womb and Mercy ~

One of the features of Hebrew, although other languages have a similar way of working, is that the root word can be modified to have other meanings. In Hebrew, although a word may appear to have a different meaning from its root, none the less the root meaning permeates the alternative meaning. Again, this does happen in other languages. For example, the word for mountain is HAR. The word for pregnant is HARA. I leave it to your rich imagination to make the connection. Contact me if you need help.

Most words in Hebrew have three letters, but many words appear to be longer because of the prefixes and suffixes. Most suffixes are pronominal, that is they indicate to whom the word (usually a verb) applies. One such prefix mentioned in an earlier article is the word for "and", which consists of a single letter, and as far as I am aware,

it never stands alone. It is always used as a prefix. So the word for this article is RECHEM. The middle is pronounced with a guttural sound like the Scottish Loch, and the composer Bach. Both of the vowels are short, like the “e” in set.

The most basic meaning of RECHEM is translated as womb. But with only one vowel change it means mercy. Perhaps the word mercy is not the best English word to translate this Hebrew word RACHAM. We would expect mercy to be connected with the idea of withdrawing from a relatively harsh action to a less harsh action. Perhaps it might even involving begging for mercy. This suggests a relationship with the potential mercy giver to be very different from that of the mother of the babe in the womb. Such a context, of a babe in the womb, invokes loving care, protection, feeding and nurturing.

This seems to open up the possibility of a richer interpretation of Bible passages which use these two words in English.

Just as footnote, the way the words would have been written in ancient times would have been identical, but the difference was in the pronunciation. The Masoretic text with the vowel signs added makes it clearer.

Geoff Walker

~ Church Weekend 2016 ~

This year the Church Weekend will take place from Friday 24th June until Sunday 26th June. We will be staying at Scargill House in the Yorkshire Dales. The theme will be Festivals and David Garner writes:

As we all know, God came to earth disguised as a baby at Christmas, then got killed in a way that had been planned all along, and then after a bit he disappeared again. Later, the Holy Spirit came and somehow the church got started.

Even with a bit of refinement, does all this mean anything in a useful sense? Does being a Christian with all this glorious heritage

(or cumbersome baggage) mean anything special? Do we need anything more than “Be helpful, be kind”?

We will look at major festivals in the Christian Year as a way in to understanding more about what it means to be people following Jesus.

The Christmas stories – what are they there for? For example, the genealogy list in Luke is full of prophets, in Matthew it features kings. Herod does not get a mention in Luke, but Matthew paints him as Pharaoh (remember what was happening to the male babies). What are all the stories for? What was all that about leaving Egypt?

We might think the stories didn't happen, but they are still true. Finding out how and articulating it will be the work of the weekend.

More information about booking can be obtained from Ian Geere 07552 788733 or rev.geere@gmail.com

~ News of the Family ~

We were glad to hear that **Ted Land** is back at home after a stay in hospital following a heart attack. **Eileen Land** had a long wait in A&E after hurting her knee. Fortunately she had not broken anything. We send them both our best wishes for a speedy recovery. They are very much in our minds and prayers.

Congratulations to **Ruth Welford and Steve Richards** on the birth of a son Andre Iyanu Michael. It was a difficult delivery but we are happy to report that mother and baby are doing fine. Iyanu means miracle.

It is good to hear that **Margaret Edmonds**, who has been unwell, is feeling a lot better.

We send our best wishes to **Irene Roberts** who will celebrate her 90th birthday on 1st May.

~ Fallowfield & Withington Food Bank ~

Its been a very busy couple of months at the foodbank with many generous donations and lots of support from our superb volunteers. We have had more chocolate from Lindt. This time Easter Bunnies



and the photograph shows Valentin dealing with the pallet containing 86 boxes.

The following day at Holy Innocents Valentin can be seen with colleagues adding them to the distribution room (*see over page*).

A mobile phone company has donated 80 sim card pre loaded with £15 of credit which will enable clients to make telephone calls without running up extra debt.

The year end has seen a doubling of the numbers fed (1,691) whilst this has helped many clients in a positive way it's a sad indictment of our Society that food banks are still needed and there seems to



be no slow down of benefit delays, homelessness, ill health and zero hour contracts.

Our next Tesco collection takes place on Thursday June 30th from 8am until 10pm and Friday July 1st 8am until 2pm. If you are able to spare an hour to help make this collection bigger than the Christmas one please do let me know.

Thank you so very much for your continued support of the Food Bank which is an expression of the Churches mission to love, care and feed those whose need is very apparent.

Colin Marchbank Smith

~ A wonderful story ~

A little while ago someone found a door key outside St Mary's Church in Hollingworth. It had a purple tag on it saying 'Fallowfield church key'. It was handed in to a local shop. The lady there used the net and found out how to contact some of the churches in Fallowfield. I rang her and after she described the key said that it could well be one of ours. She got a padded envelope and posted it to me. When it arrived, sure enough, it was one of the church back door keys.

If I ever get discouraged about the way people behave I will always have her to think of. The trouble she took to find us and get the key back to us! Such an inspiration.

Michael Welford

~ Sunday Morning in the Park with Junior Church~



If Jess does manage to shift that log it'll wipe their smiles off.



Lorna, Isobel & Nathan just realising that Anna has set the rotation speed to 300 rpm



“If you think that’s tough brother just wait for the next push.”

**~ Minutes of the Church Meeting
of Union Chapel Fallowfield (Baptist)
held on Sunday 20th March 2016
at 11.20am.~**

Present: Gwyneth Heritage Roberts (chair), Ian Geere, Andy Howes, Eileen Land, Ted Land, Gwen Mattock, Steve Roberts, Jonathan Roberts, Colin Marchbank-Smith, Margaret Garner, David Garner, Sarah Geere, Carole Walker, Geoff Walker, Irene Roberts, Anne Phillips, Lorna Richardson, Carmen Bowman, Michael Welford, Margaret Edmonds, Owen Roberts

Apologies: Enid Welford, Rose Bell, Alan Redhouse, Margaret Redhouse and Rachel Adebago

The Minutes of the January 2016 Meeting (*in current magazine*) were approved.

Matters Arising: Linton House – the University has now instructed solicitors so the legal side is moving forward.

Any Other Business: The Baptist Union Council Statement on Same-Sex Marriage

1. Church Weekend 2016:

There is a small group working on content, based on the topic of Festivals but as a way of considering the basics of the Christian faith. Booking forms have gone out and should be returned by the end of March.

2. Registrars of Marriage at Union Chapel

Rachel Scott has resigned as Assistant Marriage Registrar. Brenda Marston continues as our Authorised Person with Michael Welford as Assistant. Thanks were expressed to Brenda for her calmness and efficiency at the time of the wedding of Rachel and Matt last August.

3. St Chads Gardening Group

This group have given us 2 fruit trees which we have planted in the Chapel grounds. We are fortunate in having help on Fabric issues from neighbours of the Chapel.

4. Liabilities not covered by insurance

The Baptist Union has issued an advice note that in the case of liabilities not covered by insurance, church members could potentially be personally liable, although they would probably be entitled to be indemnified from the assets of the church. The BU is not aware of any situation where a claim against individual church members has in fact been made.

5. Linton House

It is intended to form a Linton House management group to

deal with practical issues when we have a handover date.
Offers of interest invited to Ian G or Gwyneth HR.

6. The Faith Network for Manchester

The Faith Network for Manchester does valuable work in the city on interfaith matters. It has now had its funding from the City Council confirmed for a further 12 months. Andy H felt that we should give positive support to their work. Agreed to invite a speaker to take a Second Session in the first instance.

7. Yellow Pages

Yellow Pages, the Church Directory of members and friends, has not been updated for a while. Agreed that it would be useful to produce a new edition, to be made available on request.

8. Junior Church

The fluctuating numbers in Junior Church are causing a few logistical issues and these are being looked at by the Junior Church team.

9. BU Council Statement on registration of buildings for same-sex marriages

A statement had been issued by the Baptist Union Council two days prior to the Meeting requesting churches who are considering conducting same-sex marriages to refrain from doing so “out of mutual respect”. The Statement and supporting email from the BU General Secretary had been circulated by the Secretary to the Deacons and to those who were present at the Book Group on Thursday. Copies were also made available to be read prior to the Meeting.

There followed a full discussion when more than half of those present spoke. The Meeting agreed strongly that:

- (a) The Council Statement is contrary to the Baptist Union Declaration of Principle which clearly states that each

local church has liberty, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to interpret and administer the laws of Christ, and

(b) We deplore the Council's view of same-sex relationships, which we regard as inconsistent with the love of God for all people and our mission as a local church.

The Secretary was asked to investigate what formalities are necessary to register our building for same-sex marriages.

The Secretary was also asked to send an immediate response to the General Secretary of the BU expressing our dismay. Alan R was requested to prepare a more considered and detailed response, to be circulated to the membership for approval before being sent.

The Meeting closed with song at 12.10pm

Date of Next Regular Meeting: 15th May 2016

~ Annual General Meeting 2015 ~

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: See Christward July-August 2015

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



Tax and Transparency in the Philippines

Filomeno Santos Ana, Coordinator at Action for Economic Reforms, will be telling us about his work on tax and transparency in the Philippines. Don't miss out on the opportunity to hear first hand about Christian Aid's partner's work in the Philippines



When: Tue 26th April, 12noon starting with light lunch

Where: Bold Street Methodist Church,
Palmyra Square North, Warrington. WA1 1JQ

To book: Contact the Warrington office
(W@christian-aid.org) 01925 573 769

~ 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

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2b Wellington Road, Fallowfield Manchester, M14 6EQ

Web Site: www.unionchapelbaptist.org.uk

Editorial Group:

David Garner: e-mail: david.garner@mac.com

Steve Roberts: e-mail: steve.roberts@man.ac.uk

Alan Redhouse: ☎445-0020; e-mail: alan.redhouse@virgin.net

Minister: Revd Ian Geere. email:ian@unionchapelbaptist.org.uk

Mobile: Tel: 07552 788 733

Office ☎225-4226

Secretary: Gwyneth Heritage Roberts; ☎431 4446

Treasurer: Nicola Hamilton ☎270 0087

Users & Buildings Co-ordinator: Eileen Land. ☎445-7694

Deacons:, Leonie Earnshaw, David Garner, Nicola Hamilton, Gwyneth Heritage Roberts, Andy Howes, Eileen Land, Gwen Mattock, and Carole Walker.