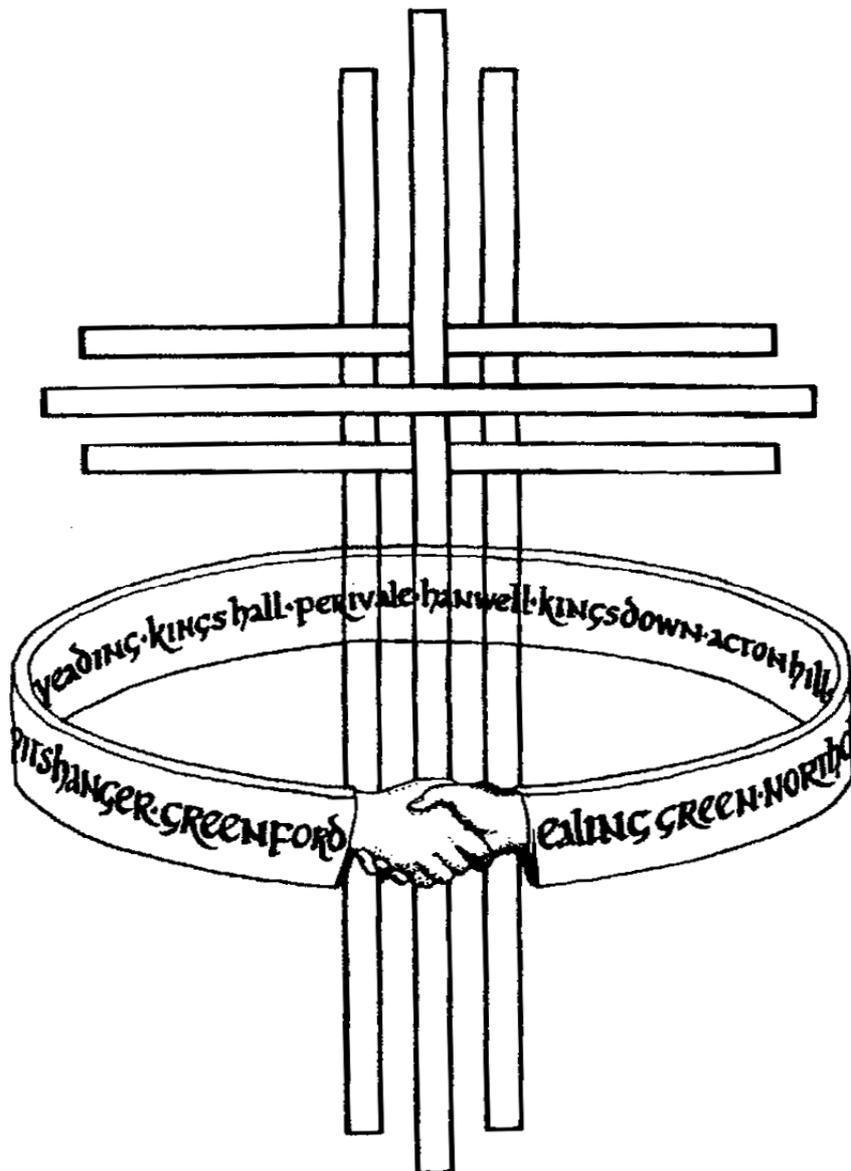


In-touch

No 53

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The magazine for *all* the Ealing Trinity Circuit.

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From the Superintendent

Time for a spiritual de-clutter?

One of the 'joys' of moving house this summer has been trying to decide what to keep and what to pass on to the charity shop or the tip. It may be a saggy old jumper that has seen better days, or a shelf-load of books that take up a lot of space considering they haven't been read for over ten years.

People tell me that we are not the only ones to surround ourselves with 'stuff'! Having spent three weeks in temporary accommodation, we had to pay a lot of attention to what we needed, rather than having the comfort of having all our possessions around us. It was an interesting exercise.

I think from time to time we need to do something similar in our spiritual lives. What are the things we spend time and energy on? What are the things that get in the way of our journey with Christ? Do we need to shift our focus for a while, spending more time in prayer and listening to God?

As a Circuit we are trying to look again at how we use the resources we have been given to best serve God in the present age. This may involve some changes over the next year or so, letting go of some things and looking for the signs of God's Spirit prompting us to show the love of Christ in new ways.

Please pray for the Circuit Staff and Stewards and all those who will be involved in shaping the work of the Circuit in the years to come. Also pray especially for King's Hall and Kingsdown churches facing big decisions about their buildings. Hold Moullin Hostel and its staff and residents in your prayers at a time of uncertainty.

May God bless you,

Michaela

We read in the *Gospel*, Lord,
that you went away to lonely places to pray.
In my busy days of noise and action,
remind me of my need
for time alone
and for peace and quiet
and silence within.
Be with me now
as I pause for a few moments in quietness.

Flooding in Pakistan

MRDF has set up an emergency fund and donations will be channelled through its partner Action by Churches Together (ACT) International, which is responding to some of the immediate needs. This includes providing food and temporary shelter to some of the most vulnerable communities, as well as setting up mobile health clinics.

With at least 1,600 people dead and 14 million people (around 8% of the population of Pakistan) affected after heavy flooding in Pakistan, the Methodist Relief and Development Fund (MRDF) and the Methodist Church are supporting efforts to help the survivors. There are fears that the number of casualties and homeless will rise as rescuers gain access to hard-to-reach areas where roads were destroyed. Initial aerial pictures show that whole villages have been washed away. There are also concerns that diseases such as cholera and diarrhoea will spread as there is a limited supply of clean water. In an appeal for help, the Bishop of Peshawar, Rt Revd Humphrey Peters, said: "The monsoon rains have caused havoc all over Pakistan, but the Khyber Pakhtunkwa province has been hit hard by the floods. Thousands of villages are under water and hundreds of people are either dead or missing. All road links within the Province have been cut and relief workers are trying to reach through boats or on foot."

Simeon Mitchell, MRDF's Fundraising Director, said: "This is the worst flooding Pakistan has experienced in over 70 years, and has affected a region already dealing with poverty and conflict. The immediate priorities are getting people to places of safety and trying to prevent the outbreak of waterborne diseases. In the long term, restoring the communities and livelihoods swept away by the floods will be a major challenge. Donations to our appeal will help alleviate some of the suffering in the short term, and empower people to begin rebuilding their lives."

This special prayer has been offered for use by churches and individuals in response to the flooding.

*God of compassion and mercy, who loves all your children,
Be with the people of Pakistan who are facing floodwaters today,
Strengthen all who are trying to rescue stranded people,
Bring consolation to the children and all who are scared.
In the face of hardship, hunger and disease, may our prayers and our actions,
and every small act of kindness so multiply that your love is reflected in the darkest times. In the name of Jesus Christ who suffered for us all, Amen*

To donate to MRDF's emergency fund, visit www.mrdf.org.uk, or call 020 7224 4814 to give by debit or credit card or by a cheque made payable to 'MRDF (Pakistan emergency)' and sent to MRDF, 25 Marylebone Road, London NW1 5JR. If you prefer, you can also make donations via the general appeal set up by the Disasters Emergency Committee at www.dec.org.uk or by calling 0370 60 60 900.

From the Circuit Meeting

The most recent Circuit Meeting was held at Pitshanger on 15th June.

A draft Circuit Budget for the 2010/11 connexional year was presented by Peter Green. This provides for expenditure of £227,400 (about 8% lower than the expected total for the current year). At the time of the meeting, however only 5 churches had responded to Peter with their offers for assessments for the coming year and it was not possible for him to give a precise picture of expected income. Church assessments provide the principal source of income for paying for our ministers and making our contributions to the London District and the Methodist Church centrally. The budget was, however agreed by the meeting.

Each year church Safeguarding Officers are asked to complete a Local Church Safeguarding Audit for their individual churches. These should have been completed in time for a summary report to be presented to the Circuit Meeting by Christina Tom-Johnson, the Circuit's Safeguarding Co-ordinator. However, only 5 of the 10 churches had completed their audits by the time of the meeting. In the meantime, a Core Skills training course for people involved in children's work has started.

A total of 27 people attended the Lent course organised by Rev Jen Smith. This year's membership classes had also gone well and it is planned to run a further class in September.

The March Circuit Meeting had agreed to the development of proposals for a Community Project at King's Hall and also for a deacon to work in the Circuit. However, work on other issues, principally Moullin House had eclipsed these proposals and little progress had been made. However, Rev Jen Smith is setting up a small group to work on doing background research and to develop the proposal for the King's Hall Community Project. If you'd be interested in joining the group, please contact Jen on 020 8579 8114 (or e-mail jennifer.smith@methodist.org.uk).

The King's Hall Community Project involves creating a 'drop-in' and community outreach centre staffed by two lay workers. One of these would be based in the building and would run the drop-in information centre, offering hospitality to passing members of the public and identifying and responding to needs that arise in conversation with them. The second would have a community outreach role and would initially focus on making links with community organisations, the local police, other churches and other faith groups to identify how the Methodist Church can offer a presence in Southall that builds community and shows God's love for all.

Ealing & Brentford Consolidated Charity (EBCC) made a presentation of possible proposals for Moullin House. These included –

- i. Upgrading Moullin, retaining either the current configuration of 54 lettable rooms or extending the building to give 77 lettable rooms. EBCC felt this could be viable, but rents would have to rise above their current levels.
- ii. Converting Moullin to self-contained 'affordable' 1-bed flats for rent giving 22 – 28 units depending on whether the building is extended. However, to cover conversion costs, rents would be above the limits set by the Local Housing Allowance and EBCC therefore felt this scheme was unlikely to be viable. Also Ealing Borough does not see a need for further 1-bed flats in the area – they see the need being for 4 – 5 bedroom houses to be let at 'affordable' rents.
- iii. Disposing of Moullin and using the funds generated to meet other needs in the community. EBCC had looked at the possibility of acquiring a cheaper site elsewhere in the Borough and developing a supported housing scheme for mothers and babies together with crèche facilities and meeting rooms and facilities for use or letting out by the Circuit.

EBCC also suggested that they could take on the management of the existing house on a temporary basis while proposals were being implemented.

The Meeting agreed to explore these proposals further. It also agreed to reconsider proposals put forward in 2008 by 'Tomorrow's People'. This proposed using Moullin to create a work-based project to get marginalised people – for example ex-offenders, homeless ex-servicemen, people coming out of drink or drugs problems etc, firmly on their feet. Discussions will also continue with Chester House. This is an organisation linked to the Methodist Church which runs a house similar to Moullin in Muswell Hill but with conference, meeting and retreat facilities. Finally, in order to help develop its thinking, the meeting agreed to obtain valuations for both Moullin and King's Hall plus the 3 'redundant' manses owned by the Circuit and which are currently let.

The next Circuit Meeting will be on 14th September at Hanwell.

Want a potentially life changing challenge?

Basic Caring Communities (BaCC) aims to provide genuine support to ex-prisoners on release from prison. Volunteers give weekly support – both meeting as a group and one-to-one, for an agreed length of time to help prisoners resettle effectively in the community and not re-offend. Full training is provided. You can find out more about BaCC at www.prisonadvice.org.uk/bacc#about.

To explain exactly what is involved, '**Taster Mornings**' are being held on **11th September and 6th November** in Vauxhall, London. For details call 07976 284 355 or email: Janeth.kempston@prisonadvice.org.uk.

Thoughts of September

Rev Jen Smith, Ealing Green

September will always feel to me like the month of new pencils. I remember in school the thrill of an unfettered visit to the stationery store, (I didn't get out much as a teenager) when all of my best intentions seemed vested in the choice of divided notebooks and box files. I would lay out the new things on my bed and carefully write in the names of subjects, the timetable of classes. I would be filled with strategic fervour: this would be the year when I did my weekend homework on Friday afternoons, when I kept good records of my assignments, and when everything was tidy.

Of course it never worked. By September 10th I would have scratched my maths prep in my English notebook, dropped my science book in mud by mistake, and lost my French vocabulary list. I would have muddled my schedule and arrived panting and late to the wrong classroom after spending too much time in the girls' room deciding if the spot on my forehead was less visible from the left, or right side of my face. I would have tried unsuccessfully to walk sideways for the rest of the day. And despite my new diary, I would have known that sinking dread on Sunday night at the sudden discovery of the lost French vocabulary list with a test date set for Monday.

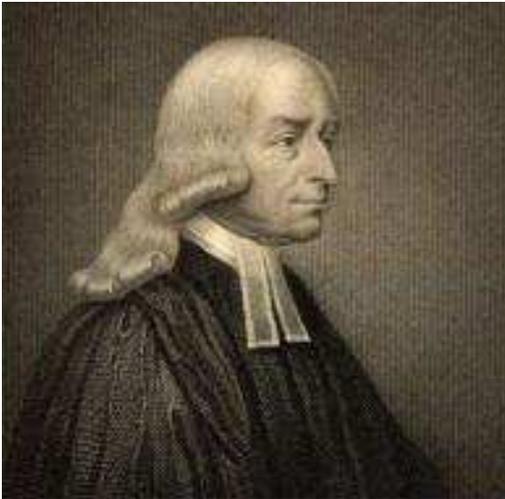
Of course I muddled along, and learned with everyone else to be good enough at managing myself without needing to be perfect. I learned enough perspective that dread became relative, and French vocabulary tests less important.

But September still represents all the possibility of new pencils to me! In church, suddenly everything is in motion: property schedules beckon, circuit, district, and connexional meetings lay down a new layer of agendas and minutes, and all of the things that got put off in August turn up in September's church council meetings. Indeed, we know the strategic planning we do in September sets us up for both the progress and frustration of later months. It is worth the effort. There is a great excitement and energy in this time of year, and much to do.

Amidst the temptation of 'new pencils' however, I am trying still to listen for the still small voice that helps me to distinguish between the anxious doing which serves only itself (the time spent in the girls' room and walking sideways) and the gentle actions which set us up for progress this year. 'God was not in the fire, nor in the whirlwind, nor in the storm.' God is not in the frantic doing either. I know this, yet somehow still spend more time than I need in the service of false priorities – arranging notebooks vs working in them. So happy new Methodist year, and all the best as we work together this season for listening ears, the absence of dread, and the legitimate excitement of new pencils.

Words from the Wesleys: “The Use of Money”

The London District Social Responsibility Commission asked one of its members, Rev Jennifer Potter to give a sermon on ‘The Use of Money Today’. Her sermon is reproduced from the London District website.



John Wesley preached a sermon with the bald title, ‘The Use of Money.’ It is Sermon 44 – the final sermon in the ‘popular’ collection which is required reading for Methodist preachers in training.

Wesley’s dealing with the fraught subject of money and our attitude to it, reflects both the frequency of references to money in the Bible, especially the New Testament and the times in which he lived. Let us remember that the Wesleys’ lifetimes spanned much of the 18th century – the beginning of the industrial

revolution with its growing wealthy class of entrepreneurs, and the beginning of colonies in North America, the Caribbean and beyond. It was also the era of Adam Smith and the writing of his seminal work, ‘The Wealth of Nations’ – still much quoted and misquoted in our present situation.

Perhaps some of you remember from your school history lessons, the ‘South Sea Bubble’. This was a Joint-stock company that was founded in 1711 and granted a monopoly to trade in Spain’s South American colonies. Speculation in this company’s stock led to an ‘economic bubble’ and to financial ruin for many who had invested in the company. The parallels with our own time are salutary and chilling.

So that was the economic backdrop against which Wesley formulated his ideas – but his real source book was not Adam Smith’s ‘Wealth of Nations’ but the Bible. Wesley knew just how many of Jesus’ stories and parable revolved around money and peoples’ attitudes towards it – the parable of the talents, the widow’s mite, the workers in the vineyard, the ointment which could have been sold for much money, and many more. In his sermon Wesley decided to draw his inspiration from the story of the dishonest manager as told in Luke Chapter 16.

Of course, perhaps the best known quote on money from the Bible comes from the book of 1 Timothy chapter 6 and verse 10 – and it is often quoted wrongly as ‘money is the root of all evil’ whereas the correct quote is ‘the love of money is the root of all evil.’

John Wesley certainly considered money to be useful – in his sermon he says – *‘the invention of money is just one example of God’s wisdom and gracious providence to us.’* But for Wesley money was what it should be – a medium of exchange, a means to an end with the end as the well being, the abundant life that God

promises to all his children, not just some. Mr Wesley, himself, lived a frugal life. The profits from his numerous publications were ploughed back into his Methodist Connexion and when he needed additional money for the building of a school or for the relief of the needy, he went, cap in hand from door to door asking for donations.

'Money' Wesley said, 'is indispensable to everyday life, it is versatile and if used wisely can be put to many good purposes.' He emphasised to his preachers and congregations that Christians should know how to use money in the right way and he summed this up in sound bite that even the modern media appreciate - *'Earn all you can, save all you can, give all you can.'* And, for those old enough to remember a certain Methodist Local Preacher's daughter from Grantham loved these words – pity she usually forgot to add the last four words.

Wesley urged his people to earn money but never at the expense of their conscience. Work should be safe, not threatening to a person's health and always allowing a proper work/life balance as we would say today. Wesley was vehement in his criticism of smuggling - an activity rife in his time. Methodist congregations around the coast and especially in the Cinque Ports declined steeply because of his strong criticism of their smuggling activities. *'We must not earn a living at the expense of our souls,' Wesley stated in this sermon, 'nor at the expense of our neighbours' wealth or their physical or spiritual health.'*

Then he urged them to save money, and he unpacked what he meant by this – no impulse spending, no waste on worthless luxuries or an extravagant lifestyle – *'don't indulge in keeping up with the Joneses.'* At a time when the 'consumer society' was only a possibility for the rich few, he had some shrewd things to say about 'insatiable wants.' His line was that whenever you spend your money on personal indulgence you are paying some of it to sensuality, as a kind of tax. And he was very forthright about bequests – *'don't leave your money to your children unless they know how to use it wisely.'* He goes on to say, *'I am amazed at the infatuation of some parents. They think they can never leave their children enough money. Having become slaves of pride, vanity and ambition themselves they do their best to enslave their children as well.'* And then the words in Wesley's 'sound-bite' that Margaret Thatcher conveniently left aside – *'give all you can.'* Wesley's commentary on these four simple words should not only give pause to many of us as individuals, but also to the Methodist Church at large with its Circuit and District Advance Funds.

Mr Wesley said, *'Do not let money lie idle – use it.'* He reminded his hearers that the whole creation belongs to God; we are merely stewards or managers – not owners – of all that we have. Following on from this Wesley lays out how people should use their money and possessions - for their own basic needs, for the needs of their family and those dependent on them, for the needy in the household of faith and, if there is still money left over, to do good to everyone around them.

We have had our own equivalent of the South Sea Bubble – never was there a more appropriate time than now to examine our personal, institutional and national attitude to money and the creation of wealth. Money should be the servant of the

economy but in our time it has become the master. Money has been used for speculation, like chips in the casino, debts have been wrapped up into special funds and sold and resold until no one knows who owes what to whom any longer. The financial tail has been wagging the economic dog for far too long.

Is Wesley's sermon too harsh? Too ascetic for our day? I think not. In a recent edition of BBC Radio 4's 'Today' programme, there was a discussion about the real purpose of human life and making money was definitely not the real purpose. Happiness, well-being, contentment, the common good – these were the words used in the programme to describe the meaning and purpose of human life. *GWB* not *GDP* should be the order of the day if we are to lead meaningful and happy lives – *General Well-Being* not *Gross Domestic Product*.

Mr Wesley – would that you were living at this hour!! But you have left us your Sermon and its guidelines are still used within the Methodist Church, most notably by the Central Finance Board (CFB) which takes care of millions of Methodist money – in pension funds, church, Circuit and District funds. Just recently the Central Finance Board issued its report for 2009, entitled 'investing with a moral compass.' The CFB try, in difficult circumstances to follow an ethical and prudent investment policy. In this report they state that they did not compromise on the quality of their holdings. That has meant that in the superheated times their returns have been lower than their competitors but that now, in these straitened times, their returns have held up better.

Our current crisis has also highlighted the link between weak corporate governance and potential company collapse as unacceptable risk was taken by those tempted by excessive remuneration packages. The CFB has made full use of its voting powers in this regard.

In 1776 the Commissioners for Excise (the equivalent of the modern day HM Revenue & Customs) were doing an inventory of all the privately held silver plate in England. Sure that Wesley must have amassed quite a fortune, they wrote to ask him what quantity of silver plate he owned. His reply, 'I have two silver spoons at Bristol and two at London.' Our discipleship as Christians and as churches stretches to how we use our resources – financial, personnel and buildings. We would do well to read Sermon 44 and see that Mr Wesley still has much wisdom and guidance to give us if we want to live not only a Christian life but a happy, Christian life.

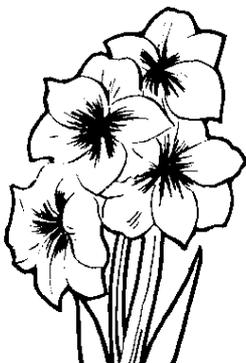
Lord, inspire me to live in such a way
that my choices each day
and my commitment to live in a positive way
may transform
the negative into something positive,
and the ordinariness of daily life
into something extraordinary. Amen.

Farewell – a poem by Doreen Darke

Reading this poem it's clear that Doreen must have written it shortly after the death of her husband. The sentiments expressed in the third stanza echo the feelings of those left at home when their loved ones are called to war, something which seems appropriate given that Remembrance Sunday falls in the current quarter and also reminding us how service families must continue to feel whilst their loved ones serve in Afghanistan.

I wonder what is this dull, heavy ache
That weighs my heart, each day when I awake,
Until I turn to see my dearest dear
No longer lies beside me, warm and near.
And then floods back the memory of his pain,
His hope for health and strength that was in vain,
The long days spent reclining in his chair:
The prison of his weakness hard to bear.

But then I recollect the many years
We shared through laughter, sadness, joy and tears.
The waking love, in our young salad days,
Was sensitive and tender, and our gaze,
At meeting, spurred the throbbing heart:
Each trysting painful when we had to part
To count the hours till we should meet again,
And shyly kiss, embrace, to lay our claim.



Bereavement now seems like those days of yore
When we were suffering agonies of war:
The partings, and the fear of no return,
When we would write our letters, and then yearn
To hear our absent loved ones, safe and sound,
Whilst we toiled daily on the ceaseless round.
Farewell - this final parting gives no qualms
For he lies in the everlasting arms.

Walk for Water at Greenford

How would you like it, if every drop of water used in your house had to be collected from the river and carried home? To give people a taste of what is the reality of life for 900 million people world wide, and raise some money, Greenford Church joined up with local charity Operation Wellfound (www.operationwellfound.org) to stage a sponsored Walk for Water.

The idea was simple. Take a bucket to the river, fill it with water and bring it back to the church to fill a children's swimming pool on the forecourt of the church. The geography is perfect. The River Brent is one third of a mile from the church, and the walk is straight through the town centre. So with buckets in hand or on heads, and participants wearing special T-shirts there was plenty of scope for engaging the local people in conversation on the way.

Participants came from Greenford, other churches in the Circuit, the 'SING' ecumenical group of churches in Northolt and Greenford, and people from other churches and denominations in Ealing. The event was started by the Mayor of Ealing, Barbara Yerolemou, and participants included Stephen Pound MP, and Ian Gibb, the Conservative parliamentary candidate.



Comfort, Joyce, Yvonne and Olive
in Greenford Broadway

Music on the church forecourt was provided by the Stonebridge Steel Band, and a barbecue lunch completed the Fun Day atmosphere. And despite earlier dire weather forecasts the sun shone.



Rev Kip Bennett with
buckets

By the end of the morning about 100 people had carried at least one bucket of water up from the river, one person had collected 149 litres in 7 trips, and there was 2,342 litres of water in the swimming pool. At the time of writing, some of the sponsor money is yet to come in, but estimates suggest that about £3000 will have been raised.

Perhaps the most striking thing however was the experience and expertise on display. For a surprising number of people, this was not a new experience, but a reliving of what had been their own reality at an earlier period of their lives. How many in your congregation have carried water out of necessity?

The Amish

Gerald Barton, Editor

We came across the Amish, or the 'Plain People' as they are also known, during a couple of trips we made to Lancaster County, in Pennsylvania 'Dutch' country with groups from Norwalk United Methodist. We actually went there to see some shows at the 'Sight & Sound' theatre - a major Christian theatre which just happens to be in Amish country and couldn't help but be intrigued by them. The second time we went, we were treated to an Amish horse-drawn buggy ride, which brought at least some direct contact with them.

There are some pretty obvious features of the Amish that make them stand out from the rest of us. These derive from taking a literal view of the Bible and, in particular their reading of Romans 12:2 *Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world.....* Thus, their particular resolution of the age-old problem of how to be 'in the world, but not of the world' focuses on 'not being of the world'. In essence, the Amish keep themselves apart from the 'world' and maintain a whole series of distinctive features which identify and mark themselves off from the rest of society.



The origins of the 'Plain People' go back to the Protestant Reformation and the emphasis at the time on returning to the purity of the New Testament church. One group of reformers, the Anabaptists, rejected the concept of infant baptism, believing that only adults who had confessed their faith should be baptised. Furthermore, they believed that they should remain separate from broader society.

In 1536, a young Catholic priest from Holland named Menno Simons (1496 – 1561) joined the Anabaptist movement. Through his writings and leadership he was able to unite many of their groups, who later became known as 'Mennonites.' One of the important teachings of the Mennonites, which is continued by the Amish was that of the 'ban' or 'shunning'. This is based on the injunction in 1 Corinthians 5:11 – *But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolator or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.* 'Shunning' imposes a requirement not to associate with church members guilty of sinful conduct but who remain unrepentant. The purpose of this discipline is to help those members realise the error of their ways and to encourage their repentance, after which they are restored to church fellowship.

At first, this practice was only applied to access to Holy Communion. However, the followers of Jacob Amman (1656 – 1730) took a stricter line arguing that

unrepentant individuals should be completely shunned by all church members, even down to wives refusing to eat with their husbands. This belief, along with other differences, led to Amman's split with the Mennonites in 1693. His followers later became known as the 'Amish'.

Anabaptist groups were severely persecuted throughout Europe and many were condemned as heretics by both Catholics and Protestants. To avoid this persecution many fled to the mountains of Switzerland and southern Germany. Here began the Amish tradition of farming and holding their worship services in homes rather than churches. When William Penn made his offer of religious freedom as part of his 'holy experiment' of religious tolerance, many Amish and Mennonites accepted. Leaving Europe behind, they settled in what later became Pennsylvania. The first sizable group of Amish arrived in Lancaster County in the 1720's or 1730's. Today, they can be found in 23 states in the US and in one Canadian province with their settlement in and around Lancaster County being their second largest. Because of their large families, the total Amish population has more than doubled since 1960 to over 85,000.

The Amish remain a farming people. The most noticeable features that mark the Amish out from the rest of us are their dress and the fact that the vast majority of Amish refuse to use motor transport, relying on horse power, or to connect to the electricity grid. They do use electric power, but only that which they generate themselves. Connecting to the grid would be to connect to the 'world', so that is not permitted. For the same reason, they do not have telephones, in their homes at least – they do permit them in their barns where they are less likely to be used for idle gossiping.



Transport is horse-drawn and their buggies are uniformly black. Similarly their dress is uniform. Amish women and girls wear modest dresses made from solid-coloured fabric with long sleeves and a full skirt (not shorter than half-way between knee and the ground). These dresses are covered with a cape and apron. They never cut their hair, which they wear in a bun on the back of the head. On their heads they wear a white prayer covering

if they are married and a black one if they are single and they do not wear jewellery. Men and boys wear dark-coloured suits, straight-cut coats without lapels, broadfall trousers (ie with a wide front flap rather than a fly), braces, solid-coloured shirts, black socks and shoes, and black or straw broad-brimmed hats. Their shirts fasten with conventional buttons, but their suit coats and waistcoats fasten with hooks and

eyes. They do not have moustaches, but they grow beards after they marry. The Amish feel that these distinctive clothes encourage humility, and separation from the 'world'.



Given that dress is so highly regulated, it is not surprising that their social and religious lives are also highly regulated. Family is central to their way of life and remains a prime source of authority. There is strict discipline of children and a clear division of labour by gender and when at worship, the sexes sit separately. Social life is governed by the 'Ordnung'. This reflects a set of unwritten social rules which have never been set down, but which are just absorbed and understood by the Amish as they grow up.

Amish churches are composed of 20 – 40 families – for the Amish the church they belong to is determined by which family they belong to, not by any personal choice. This encourages long-term relationships between neighbours, often stretching over several generations and forms the basis for strong cohesion within Amish groups. They meet for worship in each other's homes every second Sunday for a service which lasts all day. Each family hosts worship in turn and the congregation has common ownership of chairs, tables etc which are transported by wagons, also owned in common, from farm to farm for Sunday worship. On the intervening Sundays, Amish are free to visit neighbours and friends both inside and outside their congregation.

The Amish remain Anabaptists, rejecting infant baptism and recognising only adult baptism after a confession of faith. Amish undergo baptism somewhere between the ages of 16 and 25. If they are to marry, they must be baptised and then they may only marry within the faith. That said, the choice of spouse is very much up to the individuals concerned. They typically start looking for a spouse around their 16th birthday. When they have found one, which may take some years of course, intentions are kept secret until July or August when they are revealed to parents. Weddings then take place in November or early December – after the harvest and before severe winter weather sets in.

All this does seem very regulated and restrictive, even stifling to the outsider. However, most Amish grow up in it and stick with it. In a way it does provide a clear framework for living with patterns and norms that are well understood. Despite all this rigidity, the Amish are capable of remarkable compassion and forgiveness. This was clearly demonstrated in October 2006 when Charles Roberts burst into an Amish one-room school and shot dead ten girls aged 6-13 before killing himself. Rather than react with anger, in the midst of their grief over this shocking loss, the Amish community reached out with grace and compassion toward the killer's family. The afternoon of the shooting an Amish grandfather of one of the girls who had been killed expressed forgiveness toward the killer. That same day Amish neighbours visited Roberts' family – he left a wife and three children, to comfort

them in their sorrow and pain. Later that week the Roberts family was invited to the funeral of one of the Amish girls who had been killed, and Amish mourners outnumbered the non-Amish at Roberts' funeral. It is ironic that Roberts had been tormented for nine years by the premature death of his young daughter, never forgiving God for her death. Yet, after he shot 10 innocent Amish school girls, the Amish almost immediately forgave him and showed compassion toward his family.

As an outsider who has grown up in a liberal Western society, the Amish way of life does look to me to be overly restrictive and arid. However, I'm sure they would say that it resolves, or simply avoids many of the stresses and strains of modern life enabling them to live contented, compassionate and simple lives. There has to be something to be said for that.

There's more information about the Amish on the web at:-
<http://www.800padutch.com/amish.shtml>

CLAAS

Gerald Barton, Editor

Most of us in the Circuit probably don't know that lodged in an office at King's Hall is an interdenominational charity supported by the Methodist Church - CLAAS, or to give its full name, the Centre for Legal Aid Assistance & Settlement. This charity has a very specific focus – Christians in Pakistan and assisting them when they fall foul of that country's religious and blasphemy laws. Now, I have to admit that I don't find this an easy topic to think or write about. In this country, we put a high value on tolerance and that includes believing that all should be equal in law, and that all should be free to practice their religion without fear. I am well aware that not all countries are like that (try practicing Falun Gong in China for instance), and that many Muslim countries have laws restricting the activities of people of other faiths.

As you may know, Pakistan was founded in 1947 when the British Raj came to an end. Whilst there had been hopes that there would be a single united India, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, whom many regard as the founder of Pakistan, had argued for a separate Muslim state on the basis that the primary source of identity for Muslims was their faith and not their country. In the end, the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League could not work out a power-sharing formula which would have kept a single, united India, and a two state solution was adopted. Thus Pakistan was born as a state reflecting the cultural norms, principles and traditions of Islam. The dreadful inter-communal violence that accompanied the founding of India and Pakistan mars relations between the countries to this day. Pakistan's blasphemy law goes back to 1860 when the British sought to create a means of protecting the large Muslim minority in India from discrimination by offering all religions equal protection. When the country became independent at National Constituent Assembly was set up to frame a constitution for the new

country. In 1971 General Zia-ul-Huq, who had seized power in a military coup, began a process of Islamising the country's constitution. In 1982, a presidential ordinance made defiling the Holy Qu'ran punishable by life imprisonment whilst in 1991 Shariah Law became the supreme law in Pakistan. Under pressure from religious extremists, the blasphemy law was again amended in 1986 to include defamation of the Holy Prophet, whether directly or indirectly, both in spoken and written form, as well as by way of impersonation. For the first time, blasphemy also carried the possibility of the death sentence. When, in 1991, the Federal Shariah Court rescinded the option of life imprisonment, the death penalty became the automatic punishment for anyone found guilty of blasphemy.

The Islamisation of Pakistan's constitution has had devastating consequences for the country's religious minorities, not least because they exacerbate religious intolerance and fuel tension between members of different religions. Whilst in principle all Pakistani citizens are equal before the law, in reality the blasphemy laws disregard Pakistan's multi-faith society by protecting only Muslims and the Islamic faith. Those who object to any aspect of the constitution or the Islamic faith stay silent rather than risk their lives by voicing their objections publicly.

The penalty for those convicted of blasphemy is death and yet the law does not have a clear definition of 'blasphemy', let alone make any provision for cases of false accusation. Blasphemy charges can be brought against any individual with nothing more than a "reliable" testimony and once made, can lead to immediate and indefinite detention without bail for the accused. It is not uncommon for victims to spend weeks, months, even years, in prison before their case is brought before the courts and the experience of torture and abuse are not uncommon.

CLAAS campaigns for the repeal of Pakistan's blasphemy law - last year it presented a petition calling for its repeal signed by more than 9,000 people to the United Nations Human Rights Commission in Geneva. In addition, it provides direct support, including free legal aid to Christians in Pakistan accused under the blasphemy law as well as shelter and financial support for those accused and their families.

The cases CLAAS describes on its website make for depressing reading. In many respects, these aren't just about people being accused for religious reasons, although some clearly are under pressure to convert to Islam, but in order to settle scores of one kind or another – for example, Rehmat Masih accused of blasphemy and imprisoned in Faisalabad on June 19th, but whose son believes the accusation is more about a dispute over land, or Rubina Bibi accused and held in prison as a result of what boils down to a dispute over the return of a food product she had bought from a Muslim neighbour. It is also depressing to read how sometimes at least, when Christian communities are threatened or attacked by Muslims, they strike back. Violence begets violence.

All this brings to mind the words of a hymn by Fred Kaan (1929 – 2009), which you can find in Hymns & Psalms (No 402) -

*For the healing of the nations,
Lord, we pray with one accord;
For a just and equal sharing
Of the things that earth affords.
To a life of love in action
Help us rise and pledge our word.*

You can find out more about CLAAS by visiting their website at www.class.org.uk

Feel like teasing your little grey cells? then come to.....

Pitshanger

on Saturday September 18th at 6.30pm for a

Harvest Quiz and Fish & Chip Supper

Tickets are £7.00 – please contact Margaret Hunter on 020 8997 3230 in advance – she needs to know numbers for the order to the local chippie

A Circuit Choir is being formed.....

If you enjoy singing and would like to be a part of a Circuit Choir come to **Kingsdown** on **Thursday 23rd September at 7.30pm** for an initial get-together

The aim is to sing at Circuit Services and events with rehearsals in the weeks beforehand. To join you don't need to be able to read music, just able to sing in tune.

For more information contact Gerald Barton on 020 8840 7704 or by e-mail: gerald.barton6039@btinternet.com



**'Get Connected' is London District's Big Celebration
Youth Event on September 11th 2010
at Westminster Central Hall.**

**Workshops 2.00 – 4.30pm and Evening Celebration from 6.00 – 8.00pm
12 yrs+: Workshop: £2.00, Celebration service: £2.00, Both: £3.00
To book places contact Chux Daniels (contact details below)**

The aim of Get Connected is to encourage young people to connect with themselves, with others and with God. Building up to the Celebration Service in the evening, there will be three interactive **workshops** on:

- 1. Performing Arts & Dance**
- 2. Gospel choir singing**
- 3. Praise & Worship music**

There will also be another workshop/learning space "Jesus in the quiet and in the world". **Places on the workshops will be limited so young people will have to have signed up for these in advance.**

The workshops will feed into the Celebration service which starts at 6.00pm and finishes at 8.00pm. There will be music for the half hour from 5.30 in the hall. The Celebration will include spots by the young people who have participated in the workshops as well as performances by professional Christian artists. It will be a wonderful event!

Chux Daniels

Event Co-ordinator, London Methodist District,
Central Hall Westminster, London SW1H 9NH
079 5046 5054
chux@methodistlondon.org.uk

nb Cheques for bookings should be sent in advance and made payable to 'Methodist London District'.

Circuit Directory Update

Forthcoming Events around the Circuit [as notified to, or discovered by, the Editor]

September

- 14th Tue 8.00pm **Circuit Meeting** at Hanwell
- 18th Sat 6.30pm **Pitshanger** Harvest fish & chip supper and quiz
£7.00 – contact Margaret Hunter in advance on 8997 3230
- 23rd Thu 7.30pm **Circuit Choir** - first meeting at Kingsdown
- 25th Sat 10.00-12.30 **Kingsdown Book Fair**
In aid of United Anglo-Caribbean Society
Entrance: 40p
- 25th Sat **Kingsdown:** Concert by Capital Chorus
In aid of Redevelopment Fund

October

- 9th Sat 7.30-10.00pm **Kingsdown:** Barn Dance
In aid of Redevelopment Fund

November

Articles for '**In-touch**' **Issue No 54 (December - February)** should be sent by e-mail headed '**In-touch**' to the Editor, **Gerald Barton**, or as hard copy or on disk to the Circuit Office (labelled disks will be returned).

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Office hours: Tues & Thurs 09.00 – 14.00

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