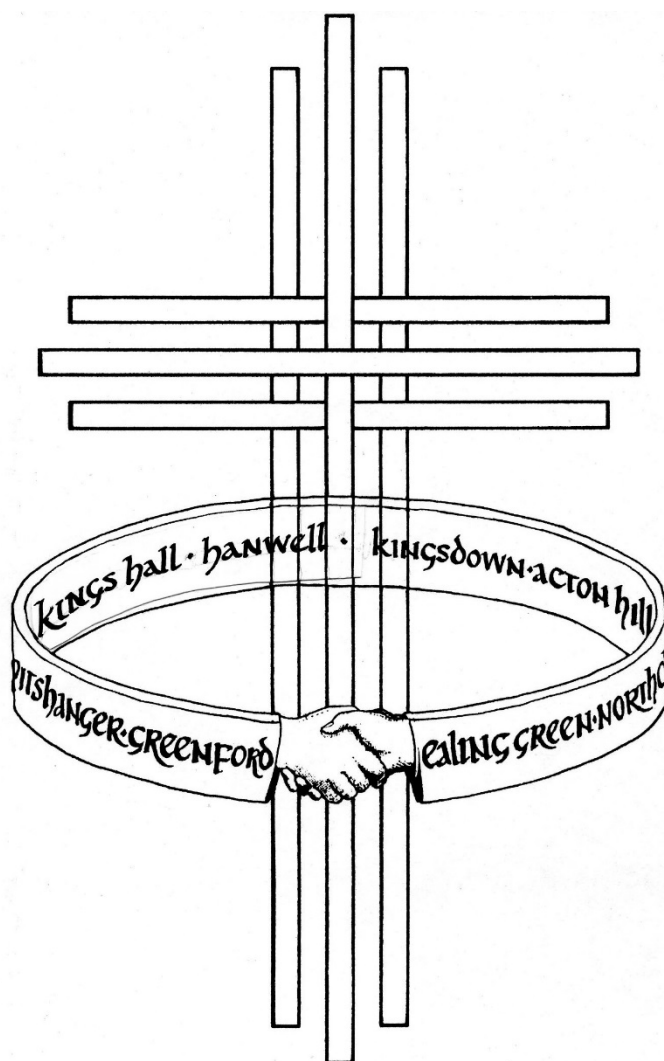


In-touch

No 78

December 2016 – February 2017



The magazine for *all* the Ealing Trinity Circuit.

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Circuit website

www.ealingtrinity.org.uk

Front Cover designed by Marion Narain

From the Superintendent

Dear Friends,

Welcome to the winter edition of In-touch magazine! As ever, we turn towards the new church year in Advent: always, we begin again. Kindness, joy, light, courage. Recently I heard a good news story that really cheered me. Someone noticed a man washing at the tap at the side of our church in Hanwell, and went to speak to him about it. The upshot, a few conversations later, is that the church is opening for a few hours on a Wednesday afternoon for anyone who needs to have a wash and shower (see p8). I found out about this from a notice asking for donations of old towels in the weekly news sheet: what a simple thing, and what a good thing. Amidst all our laudable mission plans and strategic budgets, I hope we retain space for the excitement of the immediate experiment in mission: the person we invite to come to church with us, the conversation in the night shelter, the extra food after a community meal. Of course we plan, and work faithfully, and prepare, but I hope our engagement with the communities around us keeps always something of that surprising joy that Hanwell's shower project shows. Such a simple thing, so easy.

Around the Circuit this Autumn we celebrated the wonderful centenary of The King's Hall, with over 300 gathered to pray and praise God for what has been, and in preparation for the future, we hope in partnership with the Wesley Hotel, the Methodist International Centre. These plans go forward. We have good news too that the Southall Schools Project and our educator Karen Greenidge has gotten access to work now in all the target secondary schools, and has started a network of groups of student 'faith ambassadors', promoting critical thinking about faith, and supporting students of Christian and other faiths. Karen is working alongside the RE and PSHE provision to bring a particular Christian voice to the curriculum, and to link the life of the schools with local congregations. We always thought the project was a good idea, but it's wonderful to have the schools think so too and make use of her resource. Look out for her preaching and promoting this work in worship around the Circuit!

Also, hot off the press I can report that Ade Benson, a member of Greenford Church, has passed the London Course 5 and completed the training element of becoming a fully accredited local preacher: this should be a source of pride and delight for the whole Circuit, and we will look forward to hearing some more of her story in a special service to welcome and commission her. Well done Ade!

Both Randolph Turner and Will Quansah have joined the Circuit team, Randolph as Associate Pastor replacing the work of one of our diaconal stations this year, and Will as Circuit Finance Officer. We still need to appoint a lay Circuit Treasurer, and I have to believe that the gifts for this role exist in our Circuit. It is nonetheless a relief that the treasurer will not have to do the work of day to day book-keeping and

payments in the same way that David Street always did in his tenure as Circuit Treasurer. The systems he set up are serving us well, but we need a successor. Please continue to consider who you think might do this work, and approach them to suggest it!

As you read this, we may well have news of appointments for the MHA Ealing Live at Home scheme, and for our new minister arriving in September 2017: watch this space!

Friends, as the days shorten and year turns, keep your wits about you and keep courage and faith. If we continue to act from these things, the growth and development of the Circuit will continue and we will delight in God and in each other. Stay in touch, and please send news of what is on in your community, or questions you face for inclusion in In-touch - people really like reading about what is going on and how we are all doing.

Every blessing, Jen

PS Look out for news of our new diaconal stationing process: pray for the minister we hope will join us next Autumn and for all our lay officers and staff. Behind the scenes, they do such work to make a platform for our mission as church. Thank you to all!

From the Circuit Meeting

The most recent Circuit Meeting was held on 14th September 2016 at Ealing Green.

With the departure of Deacon Richard Goldstraw in July, action is in hand to replace him with another deacon from September 2017 through the 'stationing' process. A profile for the deacon's position has been drawn up and agreed with Acton Hill and Ealing Green, the two churches most affected by Richard's departure. This has now been formally submitted. In the meantime, Rev Randolph Turner has been appointed as Associate Pastor for Acton Hill and Ealing Green to fill the gap until a new deacon is appointed.

The meeting decided to set up an Employee Management Group to support the Circuit's lay employees. The Group will be chaired by Rev Rachel Bending and Group will need at least five members, one for each employee. Volunteers were requested to join the group. The employees are the Associate Pastor for King's Hall, the Circuit Property Administrator, the Circuit Administrator and the new Associate Pastor and Circuit Finance Officer.

The current Circuit Stewards, Blossom Jackson, Mike Brown and Derek Nicholls were re-confirmed in their roles – although they will serve a term of six years, it is appropriate to re-confirm them annually. Rev Jen Smith stressed the need to appoint further stewards to augment the team – after the meeting Colleen Hicks and Cathy Snow volunteered to become Circuit Stewards. There is still a need, however to identify a new Circuit Treasurer to replace David Street, who stood down at the end of August and also a minutes secretary for the Circuit Meeting and the Circuit Policy Group.

Regarding the redevelopment of The King's Hall, Rev Rachel Bending reported briefly on meetings with the Planning Department of the London Borough of Ealing and a forthcoming meeting with Methodist International Centre and the Connexion. She hoped to be able to report developments in detail at the next Circuit Meeting. In the meantime, more maintenance had been needed over the summer owing to thefts from the building. However, the Connexion has indicated that they are willing to support, or at least share, the costs of this whilst discussions continue. The King's Hall Property Group, which is overseeing the redevelopment of The King's Hall would welcome additional volunteers.

The purchase of a new manse at Dormers Wells Lane was completed on 21st September, although the timetable had unavoidably slipped and as a consequence refurbishment work had been delayed. Thanks were expressed to Rev Oluyemisi Jaiyesimi and his wife, Moji for their patience during this process and for agreeing to occupy the Rosemont Road manse on a temporary basis. They moved into their new manse on 31st October.

On safeguarding, Cathy Snow reported that training courses for all relevant office holders in the Circuit and its churches will commence in early 2017. More information will be provided nearer the time.

The Meeting approved several grant applications –

Acton Hill: £1,000 in support of their Community Meal scheme
£250 in support of the Iris Axon Concert Series

King's Hall: £700 in support of the centenary celebrations on 15th October.

A number of forthcoming events were publicised by various of our churches, including the 100th anniversary of the Scout group at Hanwell. It was also noted that Hanwell church has recently completed its formal registration as a charity. Northolt is planning some building work to improve disabled access, prompted by wear and tear in parts of the current structure and because the current numbers in the congregation are overflowing the available space. Northolt's Church Council has given its approval and further progress will be reported in due course.

Finally, the meeting heard that Rev Rachel Bending will be taking sabbatical leave from April – June 2017. A sabbatical support group will be set up to help support Rachel's congregations (Kingsdown, King's Hall and the King's Hall Class Meeting).

The next Circuit Meeting will be held on 23rd February at Pitshanger.

Circuit Service at Ealing Green

There will be a Circuit Service on 22nd January at Ealing Green at 6.30pm to coincide with the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. The service will be led by Rev Rachel Bending and the Circuit staff. All are invited to attend!

New Circuit Stewards

Following the Circuit Meeting on 14th September, Colleen Hicks from Pitshanger and Cathy Snow from Northolt volunteered to become Circuit Stewards. Their appointment was endorsed by the Circuit Policy Group pending confirmation at the next Circuit Meeting which will be on 23rd February 2017.

Circuit Appointments

The Circuit is pleased to announce the appointment of Rev Randolph Turner as Associate Pastor and Will Quansah as Circuit Finance Officer. Randolph took up his position in October and is already known to many of us through his preaching at our churches. He will primarily work with the congregations at Acton Hill and Ealing Green. The position is for one year pending the stationing of a new deacon to replace Deacon Richard Goldstraw who has moved to be Deputy Warden of the Methodist Diaconal Order.

Will Quansah is a qualified accountant and is currently treasurer for the Methodist London Mission North West Circuit. He took up his post as Circuit Finance Officer on 17th October and is based at Ealing Green Church. Apart from undertaking finance work at Circuit level, Will will assist Circuit churches to improve and update their financial controls and to prepare for the new Charity Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP) as well as providing training for church treasurers and Church Councils. Will can be contacted at finance@ealingtrinity.org.uk, tel 020 8810 0136 and is available Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10.00am – 3.00pm.

Outreach From Within

Sylvia Murray, Acton Hill

Acton Hill's Gospel Chorale has long included outreach as part of its mission. This is an opportunity for the group to spend some time sharing a musical evening with the residents of some homes in the Acton area, aiming to bring some lightness and joy to the residents. This has been greatly appreciated.

This year the group added a different aspect to its programme and held a concert at the church on 8th October to raise funds for Macmillan Cancer Support. Macmillan is well-known for the tremendous work it does in providing much-needed comfort and advice to cancer sufferers and their families. The purpose of the event did not dampen our spirits. It was rewarding both in terms of enjoyment and the knowledge that we were able to help such a worthy cause. The evening was well supported by people from different churches and local clubs. Many of the songs such as *Lean on Me*, *Something Inside so Strong* and *That's What Friends are For*, were selected because the lyrics spoke to everyone about the power of mutual help and of hope and determination against the odds. *Lead Me Lord* and *We've Come This Far by Faith* reminded us of God's unfailing love at all times. The evening ended with the beautiful chorus *Reach out and Touch Somebody's Hand* as everyone touched hands.

The event raised £609 for Macmillan and £118 raised from the raffle held on the night went to the children's cancer unit at Great Ormond Street. We are grateful to all who attended for making this a successful evening.

Telemann Fantasias at Acton Hill

Christine Edwards, Acton Hill

I was fortunate enough to hear Richard Boothby give the first performance of the *Twelve Fantasias for Viola de Gamba* by Georg Philipp Telemann (1681-1767) at Acton Hill Church on 4th September. The Fantasias were originally published in August 1735 for the viol da gamba but were lost for 250 years before they were found in the Library of Baroness Eleanore de von Grothaus from Ledenburg.

These works have now just been published and are causing quite a stir thanks to Richard Boothby, the top gamba soloist in this country. He handled these fantasias with consummate ease and as always, played beautifully. The Twelve Fantasias were all different, and included a couple of fugues and gigue as well some folk music. I have enjoyed playing some Telemann pieces myself over the years, but was very impressed by the Twelve Fantasias as each one was different keeping me enthralled throughout the concert. The audience was very enthusiastic. Thank you Richard for a very special afternoon we will not forget.

Haruko Seki at Acton Hill

Haruko's concert was a great delight taking us through the panoply of emotions in Chopin's 24 Preludes – each one a character piece expressing a particular feeling and emotion. Haruko's playing exhibited effortless brilliance, bringing out the many colours of our grand piano. Her concluding piece – Peter Maxwell Davies' "Farewell to Stromness" was breath taking in its gossamer delicacy.

We are so pleased Haruko has agreed to return next season on October 1st.

A date for your diaries:

December 4th at 4.00pm - Kaleidoscope Wind at Acton Hill Church.

Come and hear a rare combination - a double wind quintet - 2 flutes, 2 clarinets, 2 oboes, 2 bassoons and 2 horns play exciting music - some written especially for them. This group is extremely entertaining and promises a programme of easy-to-listen-to classics. Programme £5.00 for circuit members/friends.

Also.....

It's that time of year again. Hope to see you at Acton Hill's Christmas Fair which will be held on 26th November.

Shower for the Homeless at Hanwell

Mary Blackwell, Hanwell

Hanwell Methodist Church will be opening their Main Hall on Wednesdays between 1.00pm and 2.30pm from 26th October to allow homeless people to use the shower at the church. This initiative will run until Christmas, at which time demand will be assessed and a decision taken whether to continue into the New Year.

If you refer a homeless person to this facility you should tell them to walk down the right hand side of the church and ring the bell at the second door after the double fire doors.

Ealing Churches Winter Night Shelter

Ealing Churches Winter Night Shelter will be running at churches in the Borough of Ealing from 25th November 2016 to 31st March 2017, with a break at Christmas from 23rd to 29th December when the guests will be at Crisis at Christmas. Once again, churches in our Circuit will be participating in the Shelter with Ealing Green, Greenford, Hanwell and Kingsdown opening their doors at different times during the season to Shelter guests.



The Night Shelter provides up to 14 guests with overnight accommodation for up to 28 nights. All are screened for suitability by homelessness charities before being accepted by the Shelter. One important feature to note is that the Shelter offers accommodation to those guests only – it is not open to all-comers. During their time in the Shelter, ECWNS works with partner agencies (St. Mungo's Broadway, Ealing Soup Kitchen and Acton Homeless Concern) and local housing services to look for a way to move on.

In addition to hosting the Shelter, members from various of our churches also volunteer their help at churches outside of the Circuit reflecting another significant feature of the Night Shelter, ie the way it brings together volunteers from a variety of backgrounds, ages, different church denominations or with no church allegiance. Some even come from outside the Ealing area but all are motivated to help provide practical help and fellowship to the guests.

There are, at the time of writing some gaps remaining in the schedule for the Shelter. Venues are being sought for 30th December to 1st January, a Wednesday night venue for the six weeks following New Year's Day, and a Saturday night venue for the final six weeks up to the end of March. If any other church in the Circuit would like to offer to host the Shelter this year and can manage the missing nights they should contact the Project Co-ordinator, James Luckhoo on 07930 378263, or by email at: office@ecwns.org.uk.

If you'd like to volunteer for the Night Shelter this year, you can do so online by going to: www.ecwns.org.uk/how/volunteer-registration-form/ where you can also indicate your preferred days of the week and shift preferences.

"I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me."

Matthew ch 25 v 35

The King's Hall Centenary Celebrations

Over 300 people gathered in a large marquee at Hambrough Primary School on Saturday 15th October to celebrate the centenary of The King's Hall. The service was attended by the Mayor of Ealing, Councillor Dr Patricia Walker and was led by Rev'd Rachel Bending. The preacher was Rev'd Dr Stuart Burgess CBE, a former President of the Methodist Conference.



The congregation at the celebration



Rev'd Rachel Bending and
Pastor Salamat Zindani

The King's Hall was built in 1916 and was designed by architect Sir Alfred Gelder of Hull. It was part of the Uxbridge and Southall Wesleyan Mission and was among the last of the 'central halls' to be built. These were designed to be large multi-use city centre churches serving both religious and secular needs. Following its opening, The King's Hall was soon screening religious films and by 1926 was operating as a regular cinema managed by the Methodist Church, although the cinema closed in 1937. From then until January 2013 the building served as a regular Methodist Church. In 1967 the congregation was joined by the current Urdu/Hindi speaking congregation – next year will see the 50th anniversary of the Urdu/Hindi speaking church.

Whilst the building has been closed because of its physical condition, the Urdu/Hindi congregation continues to worship in Hambrough Primary School and the English congregation (now a class meeting) meets at Hanwell Methodist Church. The Circuit's aim has been to redevelop the building retaining space for the Methodist congregations as well as community use. Encouraging discussions are now in hand with (Methodist-owned) Wesley Hotels for the development of the building as a conference centre and church. This will involve the Methodist Church retaining ownership of the site rather than selling it to a developer.



Rev'd Dr Stuart Burgess
giving the address

In his address, Rev'd Dr Stuart Burgess spoke of the changes that have taken place in Southall during the 100 years of The King's Hall and the challenge these present to the church for the future. In 1916 Southall was very different from what it

is today. The church was also stronger with more members and more money and the area much less diverse. The changes over time notwithstanding, throughout its life The King's Hall has served as a beacon to the surrounding community sustained by the faithfulness of its people. The challenge now is to maintain that presence and to continue serving as a beacon of hope. The Wesley Hotel at Euston has maintained a Methodist presence in that area and the current discussions for the future of The King's Hall are building on that model. Within the diverse community of Southall there is a great need for respect for each other and a need to rejoice in that diversity. Stuart finished his address with some words of John Wesley, 'If your heart is right, as my heart is right with yours, give me your hand.'

George Lafford from the class meeting and Edgar Money from the Urdu/Hindi speaking church spoke of some of their experiences at The King's Hall. George recalled being taken to the Sunday School in the 1950's when he was 6 years of age and how he has been with the church ever since. Edgar pointed out that The King's Hall is close to several major temples and commented on the number of non-Christians who approach the church seeking prayer. Maintaining the Christian presence at The King's Hall was, he felt, very important.



George Lafford



Edgar Money

The service included readings, prayers and hymns in both English and Urdu/Hindi. Other participants included Rev'd Dr Jennifer Smith, the Right Rev'd Alwin Samuel, Bishop of Sialkot, Deacon Lemia Nkwelah, Pastor Salamat Zindani, Suzanne Miller, and Mary Peters.

Following the service, the congregation was treated to an excellent meal in the school hall.

There was also the opportunity to look at an exhibition of photographs of the people and activities at The King's Hall during its first century of life.

The number of people attending the centenary celebrations demonstrates the support for The King's Hall congregations around the Circuit and beyond. Hopefully, the current discussions with Wesley Hotels will lead to a sustainable future for The King's Hall as a beacon of hope and faithfulness for the next 100 years.



The musicians

Christmas Services around the Circuit

Acton Hill

18 th Dec	9.30am	Carol Service
25 th Dec	10.00am	Christmas Morning Worship

Ealing Green

18 th Dec	6.00pm	Carol Service
24 th Dec	5.00pm	Christmas Eve Worship
25 th Dec	10.00am	Christmas Morning Worship

Greenford

18 th Dec	6.30pm	Carol Service
24 th Dec	4.00pm	Carols around the Tree
	11.15pm	Holy Communion
25 th Dec	11.00am	Christmas Morning Worship
31 st Dec	11.30pm	Watchnight service

Hanwell

18 th Dec	6.00pm	Carol Service
24 th Dec	11.30pm	Holy Communion
25 th Dec	10.30am	Christmas Morning Worship

Kingsdown

18 th Dec	6.00pm	Carol Service
24 th Dec	11.15pm	Holy Communion
25 th Dec	10.00am	Christmas Morning Worship

King's Hall

25 th Dec	1.00pm	Christmas Day Worship
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Northolt

25 th Dec	10.00am	Christmas Morning Worship (<i>nb time to be confirmed</i>)
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Pitshanger

25 th Dec	9.30am	Christmas Morning Worship
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The Days of Our Life

Gerald Barton, Editor

I sit beside the fire and think
Of how the world will be
When winter comes without a spring
That I shall ever see.

From 'I Sit and Think' by JRR Tolkien

I first heard this poem about 40 years ago as a song set, if I remember correctly by Donald Swan of Flanders and Swan fame. These lines in particular struck me sufficiently strongly for them to have remained with me ever since. You can imagine the person Tolkien was writing about sitting beside a roaring fire of an evening thinking about the past: the days and hopes of childhood, youth, and adulthood, of family, children and grandchildren, friends past and present, the happy times and sad times past. But also contemplating the future – when will winter come without a spring “that I shall ever see”? Clearly, for this person many more days have passed than are to come.

The fifth sermon in our Summer Series based on lament focussed on ageing and death. The sermon did not seek to answer questions about life after death, nor even console us that whatever may happen to us in this life ‘our reward will be in heaven’. Rather it addressed the issue of how we face ageing and death. Do we fight it, struggle against it, seek to deny it? Or do we seek to accept the changes that ageing brings, modifying our approach to life accordingly? Perhaps we may, or indeed, need to lament what has passed and what we can no longer do as we age, but at the same time accept change as it comes. Not letting go of the past inhibits our ability to embrace and enjoy the present, not to mention whatever future we may have left.

The sermon ultimately did not answer the questions ageing and death pose for us all – these are things we must each resolve in our own fashion. Rather it ended with a series of questions of its own: “How do we enable ourselves and each other to talk about death together? To express our hopes and fears and our longings so that we may be more fully alive? So that we may say our goodbyes and know that we mourn and face fresh beginnings fully alive in the present?”

But suppose we could extend our lives and put off death, perhaps for many years. What then? We tend to assume that ageing reflects an accumulation of defects in the body (a bit like the way various components in vehicles all gradually deteriorate until too much is wrong to warrant further repair). However, evidence from pharmacology and genetics suggests that ageing may be a phenomenon in its own right under the control of our genes and the environment. If this is so, changing our environment (our diet, the way we live etc) or getting in amongst our genes with

drugs could alter the picture altogether. Perhaps we could even reach a point where life expectancy increases by more than a year every year, thus giving us something that approximates to immortality. Not surprisingly, this is very much a minority view amongst researchers of the ageing process – most scoff at the idea.

Research into drugs specifically to counteract the effects of ageing is currently stymied by that fact that regulatory agencies, who must approve the use of drugs do not regard ageing as a condition (or ‘indication’ in the jargon) in its own right. There is little incentive for drugs companies to put money into research leading to drugs which regulatory agencies will not consider for approval. However, certain drugs developed for other purposes – metformin, a treatment for diabetes and rapamycin which reduces the risk of rejection in organ transplants do seem to have broad anti-ageing effects. Such effects need to be researched further, but the US Food and Drug Administration is beginning to consider the possibility that these effects could be real. In the dry language of a government agency it is, “looking forward to seeing this area of science evolve”.

Other research is studying the differences in tissues between young and old people and how patterns of gene expression evolve as people age. Yet others are generating and sifting through vast amounts of genomic data in the hope that genes related to ageing and longevity can be identified. Indeed, it has already been found that some genetic variations are absent in older people, a finding that suggests that those variations could be tied to shorter lifespans.

Another line of research is focussed on cancers and degenerative nerve conditions. Understanding degeneration leads to thoughts of how to promote regeneration. This is where research into stem-cells comes in. Stem-cells play an important role in the repair and regeneration of tissue and can be induced to differentiate into a range of specialised cells. They are thus able to replace cells that have been worn out or used up. Indeed, many stem-cell therapies are moving towards clinical trials under the title “regenerative medicine”.

If the idea that research into ageing might push our lifespans reliably into the 100's and beyond seems far-fetched, consider this. Jeanne Calment lived to the age of 122, a lifespan that has yet to be bettered. When she was born in 1875, germ theory was new and the word “gene” had never been uttered. During her lifetime and by the time of her death in 1997, all of modern medicine and psychiatry except general-purpose anaesthesia had been developed and the human genome almost sequenced. Who knows how much further medical science might go in the lifetime of a child born today? Maybe it will be possible to extend life well beyond what we might consider ‘natural’ today. After all, we are generally living longer now than in the past. My family history includes many who died in their 50's. My mother thought she'd never get past 70, but reached 91. Many of us now think reaching 80 is not out of the ordinary.

When I first read about this research (in *The Economist*, August 13th 2016), my reactions were mixed. My first reaction was to think that whilst researchers are trying to find ways of extending life, there are many in this world effectively condemned to short lives as a result of poverty and, often curable diseases. For numbers of them life continues to be “nasty, brutish and short”. Was this a case of benefitting the rich world (or perhaps just the rich) while the poor world continues to suffer? But then much medical research has, in effect been about how to help us live longer by curing diseases or infections that might kill us early, and by helping us keep active for longer and thus age more gently. What then is necessarily amiss with trying to develop ways that directly extend life?

The idea of extending life makes the implicit assumption that long lives would be worth living. Generally speaking we would all like long lives provided they are healthy and that we retain the mental and physical capacities to live meaningful lives. Certainly, pushing healthy life spans towards 120 or so implies changes to how we think about our lives – we’d all have to keep working for much longer for one thing with pension ages rising, who knows to 90 or even higher.

The fundamental question, however is that of life’s meaning and how we maintain a sense of meaningfulness in our lives. I recently read and re-read “When Breath Becomes Air” the moving autobiography of Paul Kalanithi, a neurosurgeon who died of cancer at the young age of 37. Kalanithi was always interested in life’s meaning and, in particular how meaning can be maintained in the face of potentially life-changing neurosurgery and death itself.

Brain surgery is a very delicate process requiring great knowledge and skill on the part of the surgeon. Even minor errors can have devastating effects. For example two regions of the brain, usually located on the left side called Wernicke’s and Broca’s areas control the understanding of language and the production of language respectively. Damage to the one leaves a patient without the ability to understand language, but with the ability to speak. Damage to the other leaves the patient unable to speak or write but with the ability to understand language. Damage to both leaves the patient isolated. Without the ability to communicate, what is left of meaningful life?

Alongside skill at neurosurgery, Kalanithi considered the pastoral role of the surgeon equally vital. When surgery on the brain is required, it is important to help patients and their families consider what is most important to them - to their identity and their sense of what makes life meaningful. Whilst it is easy to assume that life should be preserved whatever the cost, it is necessary to consider at what point life might lose its meaning. As an extreme example, how many of us would wish to be preserved in a permanent vegetative state? There were times when Kalanithi felt himself to be not so much an enemy of death but its ambassador.

Kalanithi looked forward to a long and fruitful career both as a neurosurgeon and as a neuroscientist. Then, at the age of 36 he found himself looking at scans that

showed his own, inoperable cancer and the consequent need to face those questions himself. Added to this was the disorientating impact on his sense of identity from being the doctor to being the patient, albeit one with significantly more knowledge than the norm.

Like most people he wanted to understand his prognosis – how long had he got? There are sets of statistics which show life expectancy in general, but none that give more than a broad guide to any given individual. If he had a reasonable expectation of some good years to come, he would continue working. If not, he would do other things, write for example. The shadow of death brought a sense of dislocation. It made decisions more urgent, but at the same time seem meaningless. He recalled Beckett's seven words "I can't go on. I go on". With that he decided he would return to work, because he could. He and his wife, Lucy also decided that they should have a child, although he had concerns about leaving his child fatherless possibly at a very young age.

Tests on his cancer showed that it would respond to a drug called Tarceva. Treatment with this drug shrank the cancer and Kalanithi was able to return to work eventually undertaking all the responsibilities he had borne before. The future seemed to brighten with the cancer under control and shrinking and offers of prestigious positions in prospect. He was offered the chance to start a neuroscience lab in Wisconsin and be head of his own clinical service. On the evening after the interview the chairman of the interviewing panel drove him to a spot in front of the hospital by a frozen lake. "In summer you can swim or sail to work. In winter, you can ski or ice-skate." As Kalanithi recounts, "It was like a fantasy. And in that moment it hit me: it was a fantasy..... For the last several months I had tried to restore my life to its pre-cancer trajectory, trying to deny cancer any purchase on my life, As desperately as I now wanted to feel triumphant, instead I felt the claws of the crab holding me back. The curse of cancer created a strange and strained existence, challenging me to be neither blind to, nor bound by, death's approach. Even when the cancer was in retreat, it cast long shadows." He decided did not to take the position in Wisconsin.

Seven months after returning to work as a surgeon, a new growth appeared on his scans indicating that Tarceva was no longer working. Other forms of treatment would be necessary. Chemotherapy was tried, but itself almost killed him. Decline from that point was rapid. Seriously weakened by his cancer, time became static and, as he put it, verb conjugation became muddled. Which was correct, "I am a neurosurgeon," "I was a neurosurgeon," or "I had been a neurosurgeon before and will be again"?..... "Everyone succumbs to finitude. I suspect I am not the only one who reaches this pluperfect state. The future, instead of a ladder towards the goals of life, flattens out into a perpetual present. Money, status, all the vanities the preacher of Ecclesiastes described hold so little interest: a chasing after wind, indeed."

There was one aspect of his life that could not be robbed of its future, however: his daughter, born in July 2014. He wished her to know that she had filled “a dying man’s days with sated joy, a joy unknown to me in all my prior years, a joy that does not hunger for more and more but rests, satisfied.” When he died in March 2015, his daughter was just 8 months old.

The final section of the book was written by his wife, Lucy. It describes the final stages of his illness leading to the point when the choice was between highly aggressive forms of treatment to prolong his life and ‘comfort care’, the removal of treatment along with action to make his final days as comfortable as possible. With the cancer now in a very advanced state, he chose the latter. “I am ready.” These were, perhaps some of his final words.

Looking back to the sermon in our series on lament with which I began this article, this moving book tells the story of how one man faced his own impending death. From deciding he would return to his work because he could and because that was important to him, to the realisation that he could not rely on the future he had hoped would stretch out before him, to an acceptance that that future was behind him. As he went through this process, for that is how he described terminal illness, his values kept changing: “You try to figure out what matters to you, and then you keep figuring it out.”

Central to this story is the question of meaning. Paul Kalanithi was brought up a devout Christian, but like many drawn to science, came to believe in the possibility of a material conception of reality – a scientific worldview without the need for ‘outmoded’ concepts like souls and God. As he realised however, the problem was that making science the arbiter of all things left out not just God, but also hope, love, hate, beauty, striving, suffering, virtue, meaning – all the things that are central to human life and most important to us.

I do not believe we can ever establish or know a single over-arching ‘meaning of life’. Life has many meanings and those meanings depend on where we are in our lives and will change as we go through the process of living, and finally dying. The meanings we find grow from the relationships we create with one another and are, like human knowledge, never complete.

I will give the final words to Paul Kalanithi’s wife. “For much of his life, Paul wondered about death – and whether he could face it with integrity. In the end, the answer was yes.”

“When Breath Becomes Air” by Paul Kalanithi is published by The Bodley Head, price £12.99.

Christmas Crib

Gerald Barton, Editor

We are all familiar with Christmas cribs showing the nativity scene with the baby Jesus, Mary and Joseph, the shepherds, the Magi and a few animals to round it all off. The tradition of Christmas cribs goes back to St Francis of Assisi. In order to help people focus on the worship of Christ rather than the giving of material gifts, in 1223 he arranged a 'living' nativity using people and animals cast in the Biblical roles in a cave near Greccio, a small town in central Italy. Pope Honorius III gave his blessing to the scene and it wasn't long before such 'nativities' became hugely popular throughout Christendom. Within a hundred years every church in Italy was expected to have a nativity scene at Christmas. Eventually, statues replaced human and animal participants, and static scenes grew to elaborate affairs with richly robed figurines placed in intricate landscape settings.

Most of us are used to fairly simple scenes confined to the principal characters in the Christmas story set in an idealized stable. Particularly in southern Europe however, some 'nativities' can be amazingly elaborate affairs.



This scene (*left*) dating from 1527 by Antonio Begarelli (1499 – 1565) in the Duomo in Modena is the kind of affair we are used to. The scene is fairly simple and has a quiet intensity.

Similarly, this glass panel (*right*) of the Holy Family by Josef Mehoffer (1869 – 1946) has a serene Mary adoring the Christ child. Joseph however, looks a bit puzzled as if to say "I wonder how this happened..."

The panel is to be found in the Mehoffer House in Krakow, Poland.



Now let's go to the church of San Giovanni Battista in Ravenna, Italy where there is an extensive 'Neopolitan' nativity scene. There's the Christ child surrounded by Mary and Joseph, the Magi with angels flying overhead, and much more.



Look closely and you can see not just shepherds in the fields, but people singing, dancing and going about their daily business, even a group of penitents (below). That seems to jump to the end of the Christ story, however!

Finally, an old tradition in England involved baking a mince pie in the shape of a manger to hold the Christ child until dinnertime on Christmas Day when the pie was eaten. When the Puritans banned Christmas celebrations in the 17th century, they also passed specific legislation to outlaw such pies, calling them "idolaterie in crust". Think of that when you bite into a mince pie this Christmas!



Photos: Gerald Barton

Remember in Winter 2016

Compiled by Mary Newman, Pitshanger

Some Thoughts for Every Day

Lord, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and
they shall call him Emmanuel, which means
'God is with us'. Matthew 1 v 22

'God loves you
Christ died for you
You are precious.'

10 words which Oluyemisi Jaiyesimi said at his Induction service on 3rd September
2016 summed up his message.

Kindness is the language which the deaf can hear and the blind
can see.

Mark Twain, author (1835-1910)

O Lord, that lends me life,
Lend me a heart replete with thankfulness

William Shakespeare

He prayeth best who loveth best;
All things great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all.

S.T Coleridge (The Rime of the Ancient Mariner)

Life isn't about waiting for the storm to pass,
It's about learning to dance in the rain.

*Anon (I read this in the restaurant in Wareham
which T.E Lawrence (of Arabia) used to frequent).*

In his book 'God has a Dream' Archbishop Desmond Tutu writes the following:

I have often told the story of the rustic priest in Russia who was accosted by a
brash young physicist who had rehearsed all the reasons for atheism and

arrogantly concluded, "Therefore I do not believe in God." The little priest, not put off at all, replied quietly, "Oh, it doesn't matter God believes in you."

Taken from the Kingsdown Messenger, July 2016

The Role of Fathers

It must have been a shock for Joseph to learn that Mary, the young woman to whom he was not yet married, was pregnant. It must have been a shock when, this year, Justin Welby the Archbishop of Canterbury, learned that the man who had, with his mother brought him up, was not in fact his biological father.

How did both men re-act? Joseph trusted God and responded in the way the Angel told him was God's will. We believe that he was an important figure in Jesus' life, caring for him as a loving father should.

Justin Welby said at the time that his Heavenly Father figured first and foremost in his life and then the father who had raised him as his own.

We may never know how we would re-act to this sort of news, or whether we would show the same faith as St. Joseph and Justin Welby.

Good News!

The number of monthly users of the Church of England's Daily Prayer app would be enough to fill St. Paul's Cathedral five times over, according to figures released by the church. Church House Publishing says that the Daily Prayer app has 12,500 monthly users. It also reports that there have been more than 200,000 first time downloads of its apps since the first – Reflections – was published in 2011.

On Reflection, We're all Special

In "The War Cry" (the Salvation Army magazine) Cliff Kent wrote the following, which I think is worth sharing with you.

"I was giving a talk to a group of children in church and told them that I was going to show them an image of an important person. They all wondered who it might be - the Queen? President Obama? David Beckham?

I showed the image to just one child at a time. Each of them expressed surprise when they discovered that the image facing them was their own reflection in a mirror. The message I wanted to get across was that everyone is special.

Sometimes we don't feel special or important. Certain situations or the way others treat us may make us feel worthless. It can be easy to believe that we're not slim enough, likeable enough, brainy enough and so on.

But in God's eyes, we are his wonderful creation, crafted by his own hand. However we feel when we look at ourselves in the mirror, God sees that same image and feels love. He cares about everything that happens to us.

Jesus said, 'Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care...

So don't be afraid, you are worth more than many sparrows' (Matthew 10:29-31 New International Version).

O Love That Will Not Let Me Go

John Martin, a good friend of Pitshanger and an Anglican lay reader, told us the story which is said to have inspired this hymn.

It is said that the hymn writer, George Matheson, a Scot, was engaged to be married when he was told that his sight was failing and he would soon be blind. George went to the banks of the River Clyde to take in the beautiful landscape for perhaps the last time.

When he told Isabel, his fiancée about his prognosis she told him she could not cope with it and broke off their engagement.

The poignant words of the hymn speak of joy even through his pain and also of his faith in the eternal love of God that followed him all his life and assured him of "a life that shall endless be".

Told by John Martin August 21st 2016

Greater Love Hath No Man

By the time you read this you and I will have forgotten what it is about Thomas (Tom) Jackson, which made him so special.

He was a 30 year old British charity worker who was staying in a hostel in Australia when a young British woman backpacker, Mia was savagely attacked in the hostel dormitory. He was stabbed 20 times while bravely trying to defend the young

woman, while others hid. Sadly, Mia died and in spite of a 6 day fight for his life Townsville Hospital, Queensland, Tom, too died.

His father left this message for the many people who had given the family support: "There is dark and evil in this world perpetrated by a few, but so much more love and light emanates from so many more. That thought will sustain us."

A police spokesman said it was clear that Tom acted in a selfless way to provide assistance to Mia; a true hero. I wonder whether the text from St. John ch 15 v 13 was read at Tom's funeral; "Greater love hath no man than this; that a man lay down his life for his friends." I hope so.

A Prayer for Christmas

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of your Son, Jesus Christ.

We pray that this Christmas there will be peace in the UK and throughout the world. We remember those who have suffered greatly through terrorism and wars this year.

We pray for those who will enjoy Christmas at home with their families, especially families where there are children.

We pray for those who will be separated from their loved ones, because they live many miles away.

We pray for those who have a relative in the Armed Forces, who are unable to return for the festive season.

We pray for the work of the Food Bank and the Night Shelter; for the volunteers and those who benefit from their services.

We ask for your blessing on all who know pain, loneliness or fear this Christmas time.

Help us to be sensitive to all for whom Christmas is not a time of great joy.

For Jesus' sake, Amen

Some Readings this Winter

John 8 v 12.

Jesus said, "Whoever follows me will have the light of life and never walk in darkness."

Ephesians 3 v 17

I pray that you--- may have the power to understand how broad and long, how high and deep is God's love.

Circuit Directory Update

Forthcoming Events around the Circuit

[as notified to, or discovered by, the Editor]

December

4th Sun 16.00 **Iris Axon Concert Series at Acton Hill**
Kaleidoscope Wind
(£6.00, £5.00 concessions, £2.00 children)

January

22nd Sun 18.30 **Circuit Service at Ealing Green**

February

2nd Thurs **Deadline for receiving grant applications**

9th Thurs 19.30 **Circuit Policy Group at Kingsdown**

11th Sat 10.00 **Kingsdown Book Fair**
12.30

16th Thurs 19.30 **Local Preachers Meeting**

23rd Thurs 20.00 **Circuit Meeting at Pitshanger**

March

4th Sat 10.30 **Ealing Animal Welfare Bazaar** at Hanwell
16.00 Admission free

5th Sun 16.00 **Iris Axon Concert Series at Acton Hill**
The Kingsway Trio
(£6.00, £5.00 concessions, £2.00 children)

Articles for '**In-touch**' **Issue No 79 (March - May)** should be sent by e-mail headed '**In-touch**' to the Editor, **Gerald Barton**, or as hard copy to the Circuit Office.

Ealing Trinity Circuit Office
Kingsdown Methodist Church, Kingsdown Ave, West Ealing, London W13 9PR
office@ealingtrinity.org.uk

Office hours: Tues & Thurs 09.00 – 14.00

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