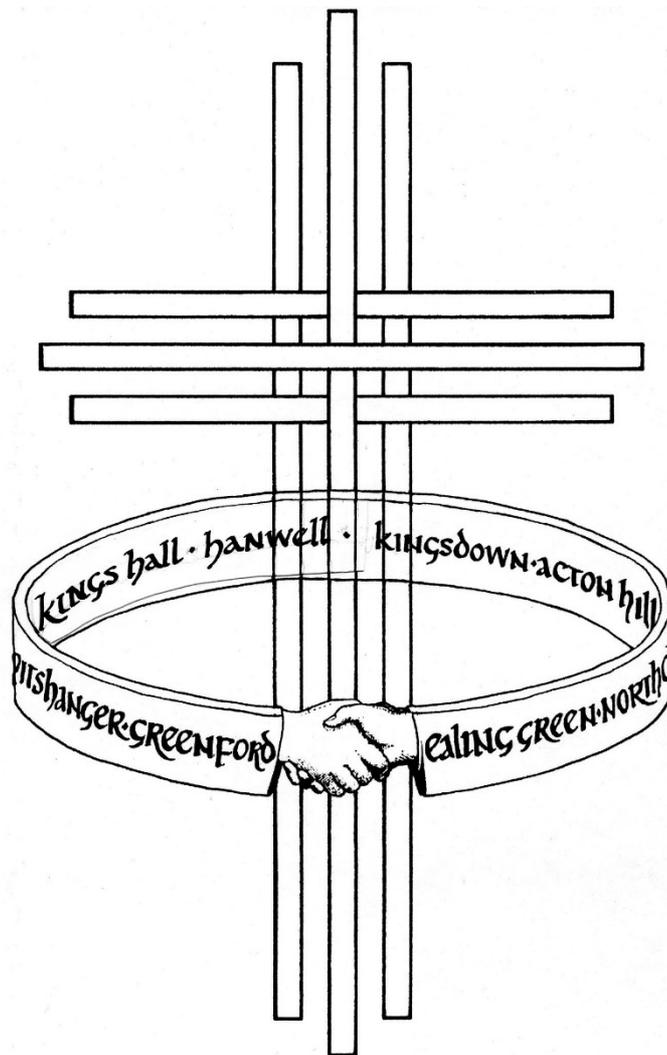


In-touch

No 87

March – May 2019



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,

One of the things I've most valued over the last few months is sharing with you in the annual Covenant Services. Its focus on the breadth and richness, the seriousness and discipline of being one of God's people always stops me in my tracks and leads me to reflect on my own calling and whether I'm listening to God's voice and following God's lead or striding along following my own ego's call.

I'm reminded of the story of Balaam and his donkey. Balaam decides that he knows better than God what he should do and goes in a direction God has forbidden. An angel appears before him which is seen by his donkey but not by him. He fights and fights to go his own way and in the end the donkey has to teach him to listen to God.

Our vocation as God's people is a serious one. The introduction to our Covenant prayer says the following, "Christ has many services to be done: some are easy, others are difficult; some bring honour, others bring reproach; some are suitable to our natural inclinations and material interests, others are contrary to both; in some we may please Christ and please ourselves; in others we cannot please Christ except by denying ourselves. Yet the power to do all these things is given to us in Christ, who strengthens us."

In order to live as God's people we need the Holy Spirit's strength and vision to help us to discern God's will rather than our wish. We need to nourish the life within us through Bible study, prayer, worship and fellowship. We need to take time to hear God's voice, rather than to rush to join Balaam on his ass! This is serious, joyful work which allows the life God has put within us to blossom and grow.

As this New Year continues I pray that we may take the time to pray and to listen for God's voice but that we may also then have the courage to take risks as we go where God leads.

May God bless us all as we discover God's way together.

With love and prayers,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rachel".

Feedback from 3Generate

Karen Whitehouse

We all met up at Greenford Methodist church on Friday 23rd November. We had 4 leaders and 11 young people from our circuit. Ramona and Yemi both sent us on our way with prayers for us to arrive safely.

Derek and I were in the mini bus with 10 young people while Anthony and Michelle and Carlos travelled by car. We stopped at a service station for a toilet and coffee stop then carried on our journey. We arrived at Pontins Southport at 8pm. Once we had sorted our accommodation and made our beds we had our tea then set off to the evening activities. Some of us went to the gospel worship while others were in the games tent. The Worship was fantastic and Derek and I had a good sing. We were back at our chalets for hot chocolate and biscuits and settled down for the night.

In the morning the younger room were all up and dressed while the teenagers took a bit longer. Breakfast was cereal and cooked which we picked up and ate in our chalets. The young people made their decisions on what they wanted to do. I stayed with the girls who spent most of the day doing craft activities which they really enjoyed and got to speak to other people. In the evening some saw a comedian, others open space. I unfortunately had to get my son checked at A&E but all was well.

The Sunday morning some went go carting. Derek and I went for a leaders' prayer drumming session which was fantastic. We were all banging out our names on our instruments - it sounded amazing. We ended the weekend worshipping together and a talk by the Youth President.

I can honestly say that the young people represented our circuit by taking part and hopefully enjoying themselves and behaving well. As a leader it was a fantastic experience and to see so many young Methodists worshipping together

Thank you to everyone who supported the trip.

Saufhuya Deare

2018 3generate wasn't as enjoyable as 2017, because half of the outdoor activities were shut and the lines were excessive and time consuming, I went on zero outdoor activities but my favourite event was 'go creative'. I got to design a white rock and decorate a cross with sharpies, the lunch was better this year and so was dinner and it was a pleasure to have Karen, Michelle and Anthony. Thanks for all your support.

It would be good to have feedback from some of the other participants – there will be space available in the next edition of In-touch, so there's still time! - Editor

Why am I a minister?

Rev Sue Male

The simplest answer to that is, “because God called me”. I grew up in the Church of England. For that reason, at that time, a calling to ministry (to being a vicar) was not one that was open to me. The closest I came to grappling with that at the time was a protest at age 12, by that time being the oldest child in the church choir, and the longest serving, that I should be the head choir “boy” and not the lad - a year younger than me, who had been given the position because he actually was a boy. They tried to console me by saying that I was being treated as a grown up and singing with the women rather than the boys. I was not convinced, but I did not win the battle. Neither was I allowed to be an altar server - something that should probably have made me crosser than it did! But I loved my church. Certainly, I attended the youth weekends - and the sessions on vocation - they were more interesting than the other sessions - but it simply never occurred to me that I could actually be called myself. I suppose I just believed “women don’t do that”. Instead I decided to be a doctor. By age 16 it was clear that I was not going to get there. My head of year suggested nursing, and I opted for teaching - infant school teaching - something women did do!

I remained happily in my church until I was 19. I sang and taught. Teaching was vocational too - and I was called to it.

At 19 I became visually impaired overnight and have had about 5 percent vision ever since then. By coincidence at the time I was reading Karl Marx’s thoughts on religion – “religion is the opium of the people”. I was also heavily engaged in reading Graham Greene’s “Catholic” novels, and was part of a friendship group made up entirely of active Christiansbut all I noted was that I had had my sight taken away from me, and that God must have been punishing me for reading Karl Marx. That belief stayed with me for much of the next 6 years and I stopped going to church.

If anyone had suggested to me that I might have ended up as a minister during that time, I would have laughed or shouted, or thrown things at them. I spent 6 years - during which time I got married and became a teacher-- hating the God who I believed had hurt me. I always **believed** in God though. I yelled and shouted and screamed and fought. The second battle I didn’t win (sort of). God wasn’t the only person I battled with. I did that with the rest of the world too. My friends - and strangers - all found this really difficult - I was not easy to be with. They steered clear of me, or that’s how it seemed. God reacted differently though, and I guess that was the beginning (of the middle anyway). God just took it all, and loved. I can sum it up no other way. This resulted in me feeling totally askew with the world, which I didn’t think understood me, my sight, or my needs, and yet totally in line with God because he understood all of these.

When I returned to church it was to Trinity Methodist Church in Leighton Buzzard, and I ended up there because our neighbour went there. It was not an easy return, and again I was very difficult. My church was wonderful throughout. To cut a long story short, I turned up at Trinity to spy on my neighbour's minister - Rev. Nichola Jones to see what difference it made her being a woman. In the event, it didn't make much difference (surprisingly enough) but God made everything different from that day.

It was a Holy Communion service - what I was used to being an Anglican. I sat in the balcony. I was curious, but still very angry with God. I therefore did not feel at one with God, and did not want to receive communion (Anglican teaching, not Methodist. We would say that's when we need to receive communion most!) However, I was too embarrassed to stay in the balcony whilst everyone else went down to receive so I followed them down for a blessing. Let's just say I received one. I am quiet, shy and reserved, would rather kneel in silence in a church than move or clap, certainly had no prior knowledge of anything charismatic. As I knelt at the communion rail, I felt God move through me at some force, I had to grab the communion rail to prevent myself from falling backwards. At the same time, I heard God say to me, "This is where I want you". It would have been completely impossible for me to hear and experience that and not respond.

At that time, I didn't question which side of the communion rail he wanted me but later it was those same words, and that same memory that resonated within me as I understood my calling not just to receive but to preside at communion.

I am a minister because God called me, and I heard.

I am also a minister because Trinity Methodist Church in Leighton Buzzard, received a young woman, disturbed by her loss of sight, put up with my bad behaviour and my questioning, nurtured me until I was standing on my own two feet both with God and the world, and then as I gradually developed, let their picture of me develop too. That was the crucial thing - they did not label me but allowed me to grow supporting me every step of the way from first visit to ordination. If I could teach every community I ever engage with to be like that with people, I will have responded to God's call to me.

As I had grown through the church, I had been a church steward, a Sunday school teacher, a youth leader, a Bible Study group leader, a pastoral visitor, and a Local Preacher. I was teaching at the time. When teaching I found myself much more interested in the nurturing and pastoral aspects of the job, including home visits to new families. When I was not teaching, I was at church - like all weekend and every evening, literally. I loved my work in the church, and always had a strong sense of wanting to give God more time than I was. It was like my teaching had begun to get in the way. I wanted to be at church - still teaching, but about God, and with people of all ages.

At the same time my role at church had changed. I had for some time been giving pastoral support to youth group members, but since becoming a local preacher this had grown hugely. My preaching has always been largely pastoral, and this led to people seeing me in that way, and to God using me in listening, as well as in grappling with their pastoral theological questions. This is something I still enjoy doing, and something I am still learning to do better – to help people to think about how God is at work in their lives.

Why am I a minister now?

It still goes back to that call - this is where I want you ... and a feeling that, although the specifics have changed God is still saying that and I do feel that strongly now, and of course specifically to Ealing Green and Kingsdown, and to the work I can do with them, with God, in the community. That call sustains me in ministry both when things are good and when things are bad.

I would describe myself as a strong introvert who enjoys being with people, and I like the contradiction in that ... but it is what makes ministry right for me, and I hope what makes me right for ministry. You will find me trying to engage - hands on - with people. I don't enjoy committee meetings, although obviously I do reluctantly accept that some are necessary. What I enjoy is meeting and getting to know people and communities. This relational aspect of "ministry with and for God" is what sustains me - getting to know people - some like me, like those of you reading this, and others who are different - different denominations, different religions, those at the night shelter, school communities, food bank volunteers. These are all "places" where God calls me to be representative for him.

But as a strong introvert I also have a deep need to run away on my own and to pray. I love silence, in solitude, but particularly in a group praying silently together in the presence of God. Here I can spend time with God - sometimes half an hour and sometimes 10 days in silence. Here God's heart touches mine and I know over and over that no matter what else is going on in our churches, in our world, or in our private lives, our God is there drawing us to him, loving us and wanting relationship with each one of us.

I am in the end still a minister because God has called me, as the flawed and clumsy person that I am, to meet him in that solitude, to be transformed - very little by very little - and then to share what I have discovered with others lots and lots of different others.

I hope that over the next few years there will be many opportunities for me to do that with you, and for you, in your turn, to share your stories with me.

My Father in 1957

Michael Pidoux, Hanwell

Michael Pidoux looks back at his childhood and memories of his father in Marlow in the Thames Valley.

I see you in a garden
Which is undoubtedly yours.
There used to be a willow growing there
(Till council edict foreshortened the plot);
Now, nearer the house, a range of bushes,
With a few remaindered hips and haws.

It's hot, but only Easter,
Your foot is on a spade....
You've been digging all afternoon,
And you stop to mop your brow,
You were obviously digging so hard.

I see you've got a vest on,
A bit in the old-fashioned style.
You've got a puzzled look on your face,
But then you start to smile.

As you smile, I feel happy,
Kind ofwell, reassured...
That there's sense and meaning,
And belonging and trying and getting.
For you showed me that there is.

Those drills you've dug are for vegetables,
And the soil looks pretty good.
That spade's a bit old and worn...
You should replace it,
I remember you saying you would.

Soon it'll be time for tea,
Time to stop for today.
Those vegetable seeds you've just planted
Are sure to be up by May.

Cathy Snow

Jane Bennett, Northolt

Cathy Snow sadly left Northolt Church and the Ealing Trinity Circuit in October 2018 to go and live back in the Isle of Wight – her birth place. Cathy made a huge contribution to the life of Northolt Church and the Circuit in so many ways.

Cathy is a strong, passionate person. She has a very real faith and knows Jesus as her Lord and Saviour. Cathy is a very dedicated person and is always willing to help out and get involved in church life. She is someone who thinks anything is possible and will put her heart and soul into things. She will never let you down.

Cathy came to Northolt Church about 5 years ago. She came to us because she was looking for a new church to join. She felt a warmth and friendship at Northolt and settled in very quickly. We certainly benefited from her decision to join our church as she achieved so much.

I have known Cathy best in her role in Shalom, our music group. Cathy loves singing and she has said that singing gets her through the day. I know she has loved the congregational singing at Northolt which was a particular comfort to her after her mother died. Cathy has been a very faithful and committed singer in Shalom, turning up every week for practice and for Sunday worship. She has often brought new songs for us to try and we have enjoyed her singing the alto harmony. Cathy has sung at Bright Hour and sung solo at concerts we have done. Cathy was a keen advocate of the 'Big Sing' held at the Royal Albert Hall, especially having worked at the BBC who run this event. She encouraged Shalom and others to take part in the choir at this event. Cathy loves her music and we know that she has a passion for Donny Osmond and the Sound of Music - and she has sung with Graham Kendrick!

Cathy has helped with leading worship on many occasions and has organised parts of our Local Arrangement services, coming up with readings, prayers and poems. She was pivotal in helping with the 'Giving up church for Lent' house group meetings that we ran.

Cathy has helped with lunches at Strength and Balance classes and made numerous yummy, beautiful cakes for church events, birthdays and anniversaries.

Cathy has been our Events Organiser and helped us to raise a lot of money for our church and charitable funds. This is not an easy task and took a lot of chivvy and work behind the scenes. We have had table sales, concerts, quiz evenings, bring and share lunches, - all of which helped to grow the Christian fellowship at Northolt.

Cathy has been a pastoral visitor, showing great care, concern and mindfulness for those in need. She has showed a real sense of mission to those on the peripheries

of church life such as her neighbours, for whom she organised a blessing of their wedding at Northolt. She invited colleagues from the shop where she volunteered to come to one of our quiz evenings.

Cathy has served on Northolt's Church Council, Property Committee and been Lettings Secretary. She has served the Ealing Circuit as a Circuit Steward for a while and as Circuit Safeguarding Officer.

Cathy never let anything stop her from being involved and committed to church life and has shown fortitude during some difficult times. We thank Cathy for her dedication and her resolve never to give up. She kept faith even when things became very tough and she made a difficult decision to move back to her roots in the Isle of Wight.

We all miss Cathy but will always consider her to be part of our church family at Northolt. Please pray for Cathy as she continues to settle in her new environment.

Acton Hill Nativity Play

A photo from Acton Hill's Nativity Play last Christmas.



Photo: Chris Spring

Christian Aid 2019

Ruby Warne, Kingsdown

The London Team Christian Aid 2019 Launch Event took place on Thursday 7th February, rather later in the year than usual. As I am writing this before the event, I am unable to tell you anything about it!

Count Your Blessings – Rise Up Against Climate Change

This year our Lenten journey will take us to the Philippines and we are invited to join Eva and Lope and others in their community on some of the small remote islands. Our journey will start on Ash Wednesday (6th March) and we shall meet members of the community and read how Christian Aid partner ICODE is helping them thrive. When Typhoon Haiyan hit in 2013, the area was devastated. ICODE provided housing materials and training so that the fisherfolk could use sustainable fishing methods.

As you travel through Lent you will read many examples of help given by ICODE and we are invited to help this wonderful work to continue.

Free booklets 'Rise up' are available through the Christian Aid representative in your church.

Christian Aid Week 2019

12 th – 18 th May	House to house collecting
18 th May	London Area Flag Day
19 th May	Circle the City Walk

In May 1998, 70,000 people took to the streets in Birmingham to form a human chain. As part of the Jubilee Debt campaign we called on world leaders to cancel the debts of the poorest countries. Now, 21 years on, a new debt is looking.

In Sierra Leone, communities are recovering from the Ebola crisis which claimed the lives of 4,000 people and killed 10% of healthcare workers. Judith Tom-Kangho, who works for Christian Aid in Sierra Leone said, "Ebola really devastated us. It wiped out whole families. We nearly gave up." Tenneh nearly lost her life giving birth - the health clinic she went to could not meet every need – the roof leaked, there were only two delivery beds and it had no electricity.

Sierra Leone lacks the funds to provide basic services such as adequate health clinics, proper health training and enough ambulances to transfer people to far-away hospitals. The government was given loans to help cope with the Ebola crisis but is now expected to pay them back.

Christian Aid Week will soon be here and we must hope that through our gifts, prayers and actions, poverty and injustice can be overcome.

Christian Aid in 2018

The following amounts were collected by churches in our Circuit during Christian Aid Week 2018:

Acton Hill	£944.46
Ealing Green	£1,220.65
Greenford	£220.45
Hanwell	£2,146.14
Kingsdown	£3,637.57
Northolt	£228.67
Pitshanger	£344.35
Total	£8,742.32

Last year, churches in our Circuit participated in numerous ways during Christian Aid Week – church collections, house-to-house collecting, Flag Day, Circle the City and the Richmond Riverside Walk. John Bearstall, Ealing's Christian Aid Treasurer sends many thanks and best wishes to all.

Christian Aid Project: Lebanon and Iraq

At the Circuit Policy Group meeting in November, Gill Coombe from Christian Aid gave a short presentation about their project in Lebanon and Iraq to support people displaced by the war in Syria.

While there are 6.5 million people displaced inside Syria, more than 5 million have fled the country as refugees. The vast majority are now living in Lebanon and Syria. This has placed significant pressure on the resources and capacity of these two countries, already strained by previous conflicts. Marginalisation is a defining aspect of displaced people's experience – marginalisation from the wider community, education, access to health, legal support and employment. This leaves them vulnerable to abuse. Through education, psychosocial support, economic empowerment, advocacy and direct service provision, Christian Aid is working with partners to strengthen the social cohesion and resilience of refugees and young refugees in particular along with their host communities.

The Circuit has been asked to contribute £5,000 to the project between now and 31st December 2020. This will be matched 6:1 by Bread for the World, a US charity aimed at ending hunger. Thus, a grant of £5,000 from the Circuit is worth around £35,000 to Christian Aid with the matching. Churches will be asked to consider how they can help support the project.

Note that the Circuit's support for this project is completely separate from the fundraising undertaken by our churches during Christian Aid Week and at other times during the year.

The Angel Gabriel from Heaven Came...

Gerald Barton, Editor

You may well have sung these words around Christmas time –

The Angel Gabriel from heaven came,
His wings of drifted snow, his eyes as flame.
'All hail,' said he, 'thou lowly maiden Mary,
Most highly favoured lady.'
Gloria!

No 187 in Singing the Faith recounts the story of the Annunciation when the Archangel Gabriel appeared to Mary to announce to her that she had been chosen to bear Jesus. The hymn is, of course based on Luke 1: 26-38 which contains both Gabriel's visit and Mary's reaction in the form of the song we know as the Magnificat.

Whilst we might think of this as being all part of the Christmas story, the feast of the Annunciation actually falls on 25th March, exactly nine months before Christmas. When, during the fourth century the Church set the date of the celebration of Christ's birth as 25th December, it followed that the Annunciation must have been nine months earlier. Compared to the Catholic and Orthodox churches, Protestant Christianity does not make a great deal of Mary. She has her role to play, of course as the mother of Jesus, but the main focus is on the person and works of Jesus himself. She is not the figure of devotion that she is in Orthodox or Catholic Christianity.

In some ways this lack of attention to Mary means that Christianity as I have known it is very heavily focussed on the masculine. Whilst there are important female characters in the vast sweep of the Old and New Testaments, few spring readily to mind. Arguably, we have overlooked the feminine in our religion. Perhaps, thinking a little more about Mary and her place in the Christian story may go some way towards striking a better balance.

Anyone interested in Christian art will inevitably come across many depictions of the Annunciation. The mosaic on the right dates from the 11th century and is to be found in the Dafni monastery in Athens. High up in the vault of a chapel, Gabriel greets Mary as she sits listening to what he has to say.

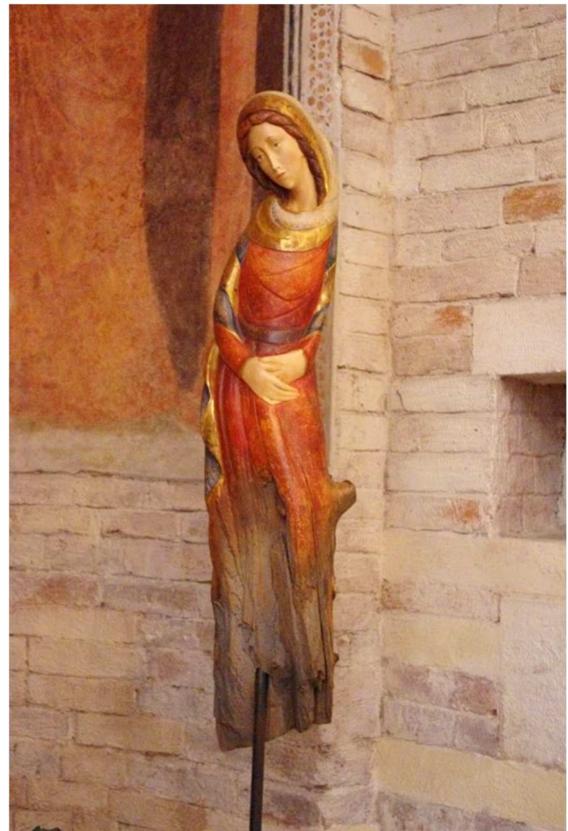


Most Annunciations are similar in form although the style may differ.

This Annunciation by Leonardo da Vinci and Andrea del Verrocchio dates from the mid 1470's and hangs in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence. Again, Gabriel greets Mary as she sits reading.



In the church of San Giovanni in Fonte, once the baptistery of Verona cathedral, Gabriel and Mary appear as two figures either side of a chapel beside the main altar. Stepping into the chapel between the figures one can almost feel part of and witness to the story.



In the lower church of San Fermo, also in Verona there is an intriguing modern free-standing sculpture of the Annunciation by Hermann Josef Runggaldier (b 1948).



In this depiction Mary and Gabriel appear as two sinuous life size figures. Unlike in most Annunciations, Gabriel is presented as a human figure without wings and simply dressed. He stands behind Mary, gently leaning forward whispering his greeting and the request that he brings to her. For her part she turns her head a little to listen attentively to the message that Gabriel brings. Her response is shown in her hands – her left rests on her abdomen where she will carry Jesus while her right rests on her breast where she will suckle him.

Of all the Annunciations I have seen this one speaks most clearly to me. The figures, being much more 'human' could be in the here and now, ceasing to be just part of a story from long ago.

Universal Credit: “Designed by the Wrong People to do the Wrong Thing”

Gerald Barton, Editor

The quote above is from the talk on Universal Credit given by Paul Morrison from the Joint Public Issues Team at Greenford on 21st January. It's a very stark message indicating that all is not well with Universal Credit.

Firstly, a bit of background. The Joint Public Issues Team was set up by the Methodist Church, United Reformed Church, Baptist Church and the Church of Scotland to provide expert analysis and advice to the churches on a range of public policy issues. Apart from poverty and inequality, which is Paul Morrison's particular area of responsibility, the Team covers issues such as politics and elections, religious persecution, the environment, peace-making, gambling and alcohol, and asylum and immigration.

If you are like me, you will have heard of, and may know a bit about Universal Credit (UC), but be rather hazy about what it is, what it's designed to do, how it works and who it's for. UC replaces six means-tested benefits paid to people and families of working age. These are:–

Tax Credits Child Tax Credits Job Seekers Allowance
Housing Benefit Employment Support Allowance Income Support

Contributory benefits are not being rolled into UC, so are not affected.

This should simplify the benefits system and importantly creates a 'single taper' when benefits are withdrawn as people's income rises. The system allows people to earn a certain amount while continuing to claim UC. Over that level, their benefit is withdrawn at a rate of 63p for every £1 earned. This provides an incentive to work – to 'make work pay', although retaining just 34p of every extra £1 earned may not seem that great – even the highest-rate taxpayers retain more of the pounds they earn over the highest rate tax limit.

Before going into further detail, it is worth considering what kinds of people are eligible to claim UC. Once upon a time, the majority of people claiming benefits were unemployed. Now however, about 50% of claimants are in work but receiving low incomes, about 30% have health issues that prevent them from working, about 10% have caring responsibilities – often children but also other relatives and about 10% are unemployed. The key point is that significant numbers of people claiming UC are in work, but their earnings are insufficient to pay their living costs. This may be because they can only work part-time or because their rate of pay is low. The proportion of the workforce out of work may be at a 40 year low, but many of the jobs created in recent years have been low-pay low-skill jobs which still leave working people struggling to make ends meet. Hence the need for support from state benefits.

As already noted, UC was designed to simplify the benefits system and to provide incentives to work – to ‘make work pay’. It was also designed to more closely ‘mimic the world of work’ in the way people receive their benefits. UC is paid monthly in arrears. The amount payable is calculated monthly taking into account the earnings people have had during that month. Being paid in arrears, the first payment is made 5 weeks after the claim is submitted – 4 weeks to assess claimants’ circumstances and income, and 1 week to process the payment. As reported in the press, however some claimants wait significantly longer for their first payment.

This works well if claimants have:

- Monthly incomes
- Savings
- Trustworthy partners
- And are IT literate – claims are made and processed online

Many working people will fit this picture. However, many people and particularly those who are poor, do not. Not all jobs pay monthly. Some pay weekly, others 4-weekly. Throughout my railway career I was paid 4-weekly, not monthly. This meant that for 11 months of the year I lived on one thirteenth of my annual salary, then in one month I received the bonanza of being paid twice. Similarly people who are paid weekly receive four payments in some months, but five in others. UC claimants who are paid weekly will find that in certain months their UC payments are reduced because of being paid five times instead of four. If their income in any given month goes beyond a certain limit, they lose their UC altogether. They then have to start a new claim. As a result, UC payments can vary significantly from month to month. In his talk, Paul showed us details of how this affected one person whose monthly UC payment varied from about £225 to about £1,250. If one of the aims of UC is to ‘Mimic the world of work’ and to encourage people to budget on a monthly basis, it fails dismally.

To add to the problem, entitlement to UC is assessed on household income. If there are, say two earners, both their incomes go into the pot for assessment. If they are paid on different cycles, the complications balloon.

Being paid in arrears, the system assumes that people can cope with the (minimum) five weeks they have to wait for their first UC payment. That’s fine if you have savings or if you received some redundancy payment if you lost your job. The simple fact is that poor people do not have savings and very often live ‘hand to mouth’. They clearly cannot cope without support during those five weeks. Claimants can apply for ‘advance payments’ to tide them over, but these are loans which have to be paid back during the course of the following year. The repayments are taken from their UC payments meaning that some people see their monthly payments reduced by up to 40%.

It would be nice to think that everybody has trustworthy partners. However, this is by no means true of everyone and is compounded by the fact that relationship breakdown is relatively common. UC is managed using a single account and is paid

to one bank account. If a partner has, for example drink, gambling or other problems and is inclined to waste money there is no protection for the other partner.

Being IT literate is, in truth very important now because so much of what we want or need to do has moved online. That does not of course mean that everyone is IT literate any more than it means that everyone has access to a home computer or device that can access the internet. Again, the issue is that many people, and not just poorer people do not have IT skills or access to computers. Coping with an online system is going to be difficult for such people.

We could ask why the designers of UC did not think of these things. The answer doubtless lies in the fact that UC was designed by people who had no real knowledge of how the people it was intended to serve actually live. You might say, it was designed for people rather like the designers themselves. In other words, they didn't understand and they didn't know they didn't understand.

Underlying all this however, is something rather deeper. The thinking behind UC includes a 'theory of change'. One of the main thrusts behind UC is a desire to get more people into work on the assumption that 'work is the best route out of poverty'. That may be true if work pays well enough, but often unfortunately it does not. UC is meant to lead to changes in people's attitudes and behaviour towards work. The implied assumption is that people claiming benefits have something wrong with their attitudes to work that prevent them from working. Bristolians of my generation may remember a line from the 'Bristol Song' – "T'ain't that we do shirk to do a bit of work, but is thees cus live without it, then who be such a berk!" Slopping around our society and often reinforced by the popular press is a long-standing assumption that people on benefits are lazy or scroungers. This is akin to the old idea of the deserving and the undeserving poor.

While there may be legitimate concerns about 'welfare dependency' in which the benefits system itself causes people to become dependent on benefits, basing the system on the idea that fundamentally people's attitudes are at fault and need changing misses the point, or at least a very large part of it. The poor, as Jesus commented, are always with us. There will always be a need to have a system designed to alleviate poverty. In certain respects, the UC system worsens poverty – by making people wait for their first payments when they have no resources, by reducing their payments to pay back Advance Payments, by providing no support for any children beyond the second etc.

To back up the push to change attitudes, the UC system includes a range of sanctions to punish people who are judged not to be obeying Jobcentre instructions. These instructions specify 35 hours of activity a week aimed at improving the person's earnings. This activity includes things like attending appointments, courses or applying for enough jobs each week. People can be sanctioned if they fail to do any of these things. Universal Credit for the first time introduces sanctioning, not only for people who are seeking work, but also for people in low-paid work.

If people are 'sanctioned' it means their UC payments will be reduced or suspended normally for one month, but also for longer periods of time. There has been no evaluation of the sanctions regime to see if it drives people to hunger and foodbanks. This can erode people's sense of dignity as many find it 'shameful' to have to ask for charity. As one commentator put it, UC is the 'death of dignity'. Furthermore, the Government's own auditors have criticised the sanctions regime, saying that there was no evidence it helps people into work long term and that it harms those with disabilities.

If you are the bottom of the pile, it seems, then that the basic approach is to get out a 'big stick' to compel you to look for work, seek a better job, do training etc. I can't help but contrast that to the top of the tree. High-flying executives receive large salaries and then have the prospect of incentive schemes to encourage them to perform well. Sticks if you're at the bottom, carrots if you're at the top. I feel somewhat cynical for saying it, but that's what goes through my mind.

The proof of the pudding is, however in the eating. Does UC succeed in getting more people into work? The early UC system could only handle the simplest claims - single people without children, renting, and who were fit and ready for work. Even in these favourable circumstances improvements in gaining work were only very modest compared to the old system. Claimants were likely to do some paid work on 1 - 2 days a month more but they worked very few actual extra hours. The only earnings data indicates that over 9 months they earned £60 more in total. Data on more complex families due in December 2016 has yet to be published. These results are not exactly convincing.

One of the things that came over to me in Paul's talk is that fact that UC is just one part of a broader set of problems. Poverty in our society is linked to the fact that many people are in jobs that do not pay enough to allow them to make ends meet. For them, work is not a route out of poverty, it just ameliorates it a bit. Housing costs are another major issue, particularly the cost of renting compounded by the relative lack of social housing. This is a major issue in the UK which some economists argue arises from credit having been too easy over very long periods of time which has simply served to push up property values, and thus rents.

The benefits system has, in part to function as a mechanism for redistributing some of the wealth created in our economy to the people at the bottom who struggle with poverty as a way of redressing some of the inequalities in our society. It cannot just be about getting people into work and off benefits.

There is at least a glimmer of hope in that the Government has at last recognised that UC is problematic. It seems though, that their view is that with some improvements to administration, all will be well. This does not seem likely.

Thanks to Paul Morrison for coming to talk to us on a cold January evening. I have tried to give a flavour of Paul's talk along with some further information gleaned from the Joint Public Issues website (www.jointpublicissues.org.uk) and some reflections of my own. Paul certainly left us with food for thought.

Remember in Spring 2019

Compiled by Mary Newman, Pitshanger

Some Verses to inspire you this Spring

You have done
so much for me, O Lord,
No wonder I am glad!
How refreshed I am by
Your blessings!

Psalm 92: 4 The Living Bible

Habakkuk's prayer of trust

Though the fig tree does not blossom,
and no fruit is on the vines;
though the produce of the olive fails
and the fields yield no food;
though the flock is cut off from the fold
and there is no herd in the stalls,
yet I will rejoice in the Lord;
I will exult in the God of my salvation.

God, the Lord, is my strength;
he makes my feet like the feet of a deer,
and makes me tread upon the heights.

Habakkuk 3: 17-19

Trust the past to God's mercy, the present to God's love and the future to God's providence.

Saint Augustine

Enlightenment

Plutarch tells the story of Alexander the Great who came across Diogenes looking attentively at a heap of human bones.

"What are you looking for?" asked Alexander.

"Something that I cannot find," said the philosopher.

"And what is that?"

"The difference between your father's bones and those of his slaves."

From Anthony de Mello's book 'The prayer of the frog'

Give Thanks

For friendships – past and present
For life's journey with all its ups and downs
For our minds and powers of thought and intellect
For animals and insects – creatures great and small
And finally for our faith that sustains and refreshes us
In times of sadness and of joy.
Thank you God. Amen

On Mothering Sunday (Mothers' Day)

Praise God for Mother's gentle hand
and love we cannot understand.
Praise Him who sent us from above
the blessings of a Mother's love.

Forty years ago Rev Clive Thexton, our then minister at Pitshanger wrote a letter in our magazine 'Contact'. The following extract seems to be as applicable to us today as it was then.

"There always seem to be some gloomy prognosticators to tell us that the earth is shortly going to dry up, or freeze up, or blow up. But somehow or other, according to God's promise, it carries on – 'summer and winter, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat...'

There are plenty of bad and sad things – quite apart from the weather – about our nation and world just now, and we can easily get depressed by the prophecies made on all sides that this, that and the other is very bad and likely to get worse. But let's remember that life and nature have a remarkable way of balancing things out, and that God is on record as constantly doing the most surprising things to meet our deepest needs. Even in February it is worth remembering the old words:

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take,
The clouds ye so much dread,
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head.
With every good wish,

Rev Clive Thexton, February 1979

Turn Around When Possible

My friend Stella who, with her husband Roy lived in Solihull until recently, sent me the following cutting from a column in the local newspaper, entitled 'Faith Matters'. 'The lady in my 'sat-nav' really is lovely. She has taught me more about God than my long-suffering theology professor ever could. In spite of my own wilfulness, she has never once rebuked me or given me the silent treatment. My attraction to unknown lanes or forbidden places of interest has had no detrimental impact on her patience. Whether by accident or in defiance, I go off in the wrong direction, she very politely nudges me with the words, "Turn around where possible."

She never gives up on me. When I have been so far off course that to turn has not been possible, in her own relaxed and calming manner she simply re-programmes a new route. None of this 'get back to the beginning and start again'. She comes to where I am and puts together a whole new plan for the rest of the journey.

She warns me of impending violations with three sharp beeps, and is a great comfort in the vortex known as the Solihull roundabout! All I have to do now is keep count of the exits.

Isn't that so much like us and God? We start out in life programmed to do our best, knowing right from wrong, good from bad, but how long does it take before we get off the plan and find ourselves heading down strange lanes, crossing ridiculous motorways and ending up lost?

So the moment you realize you are on the wrong road, turn around when possible. When it comes too late to turn around, trust God to re-programme you. No matter where you are, he will pick up your signal and travel along with you down the lane that will bring you home.'

*Michael Crockett
Solihull Methodist Church*

The Joy of the Resurrection

Remember that the passion of Christ ends always in the joy of the Resurrection. So when you feel in your own heart the suffering of Christ, remember the Resurrection has yet to come; the joy of Easter has to dawn. Never let anything so fill you with sorrow as to make you forget the joy of the Risen Christ.

(Thank you Mary for giving me this beautiful meditation of Mother Teresa)

Prayers for Evening taken from the ancient service of Compline.

These are taken from the Parish Pump. St. Peter's Henfield, which friends Valerie and Geoff attend.

'Visit this place, O Lord we pray and drive far from it all snares of the enemy; let your holy angels dwell with us to preserve us in peace; and let your blessing be upon us always through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Or, in a simpler version: 'Be with us, Lord and take away all fear, may your angels protect us and give us peace. And bless us always. Amen.'

You can use these lovely prayers any time when you need a reminder that God is with you – especially at the end of a difficult day, or when something sad has happened or when your family is worried about something.

Under the heading 'Only Connect' a writer for the Salvation Army magazine 'War Cry' wrote the following lovely story:

Only connect 'War Cry' Salvation Army 22nd September 2018

In his song 'Can't Smile Without You', Barry Manilow sings, 'I feel sad when you're sad' and 'I feel glad when you're glad'. Isn't that true. Our feelings are often affected by those we are closest to. We celebrate and commiserate with our loved ones.

Barry's words remind me of two stories. The first is of a little girl who was late arriving home from school. Naturally her parents were anxious. When she finally came through the door, her mum said to her: 'What happened? We've been worried about you.'

The little girl replied, "I went to my friend's house to help her mend a doll that she'd broken. But we couldn't fix it, so I stayed to help her cry."

We celebrate and commiserate with our loved ones.

Readings for Easter

The Resurrection – Mark 16: 1-12

The Empty Tomb – John 29: 1-16

We are raised to life – Colossians 2: 12

Raised to a better life – Hebrews 11: 35

Circuit Lent Bible Study Series

This year's Circuit Lent Bible Study Series will be based on 'Hospitality and Sanctuary for All' by Dr Rev Inderjit Bhogal, a former President of Conference. Sessions will be on Mondays at 10.30am at Kingsdown and at 7.30pm at Greenford. The first session will be on 11th March and the series will run for five weeks finishing on 8th April.

Forthcoming Events around the Circuit

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

March

- 2nd Sat 10.30 **Hanwell: 41st Ealing Animal Charities Fair**
16.00 *Many participating societies - great guest speakers - live music.*
Admission FREE. www.ealinganimalsfair.london.
- 3rd Sun 16.00 **Iris Axon Concert Series at Acton Hill - Yoon Chung (piano)**
- 6th Wed 18.30 **Ash Wednesday Service outside King's Hall**
- 9th Sat 10.00 **Kingsdown Book Fair - In aid of the Log Cabin**
- 11th Mon 10.30 **Circuit Lent Bible Study Series at Kingsdown**
19.30 **Circuit Lent Bible Study Series at Greenford**
- 18th Mon 10.30 **Circuit Lent Bible Study Series at Kingsdown**
19.30 **Circuit Lent Bible Study Series at Greenford**
- 25th Mon 10.30 **Circuit Lent Bible Study Series at Kingsdown**
19.30 **Circuit Lent Bible Study Series at Greenford**
- 28th Thurs 19.30 **Circuit Meeting at Hanwell**

April

- 1st Mon 10.30 **Circuit Lent Bible Study Series at Kingsdown**
19.30 **Circuit Lent Bible Study Series at Greenford**
- 8th Mon 10.30 **Circuit Lent Bible Study Series at Kingsdown**
19.30 **Circuit Lent Bible Study Series at Greenford**
- 18th Thurs 19.45 **Circuit Service for Maundy Thursday at Ealing Green**

May

- 11th Sat 10.00 **Kingsdown Book Fair - In aid of Christian Aid**

Articles for '**In-touch**' Issue No 88 (June - August) should be sent by e-mail headed '**In-touch**' to the Editor, **Gerald Barton**, or as hard copy to the Circuit Office.

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