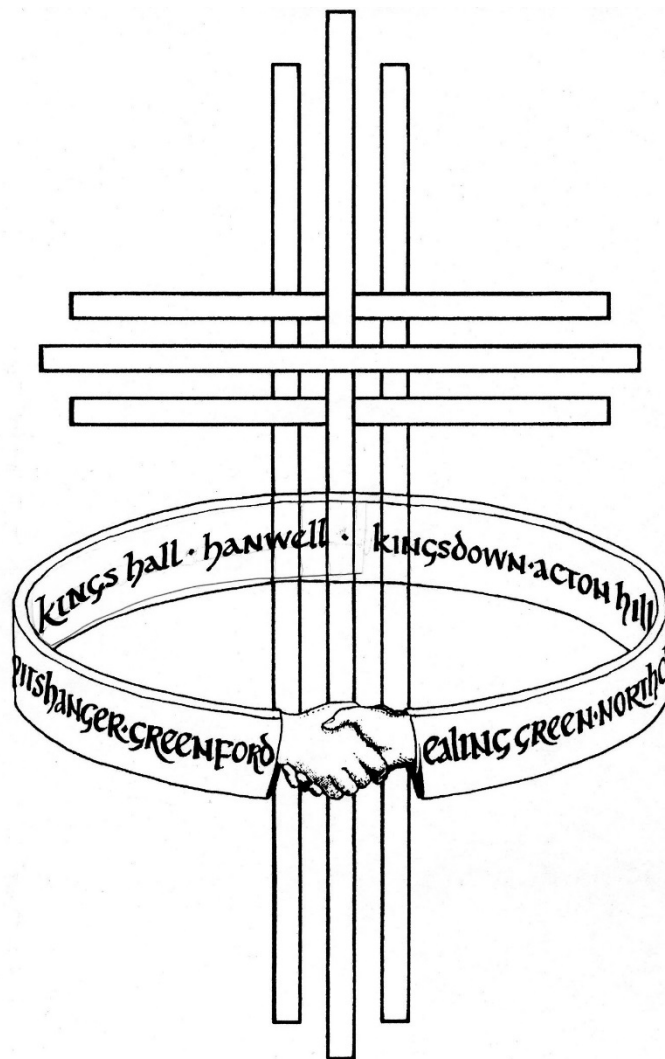


In-touch

No 89

September - November 2019



The magazine for *all* the Ealing Trinity Circuit.

IN THIS ISSUE

	Page
• From the Superintendent	3
• Giving Thanks	4
• “So What’s the Story...?”	4
• Conference Business Digest	5
• FoodBank News from Ealing Green Church <i>Rev Sue Male</i>	9
• The Welshore Community Hub <i>Christina Tom-Johnson</i>	11
• Ealing Trinity 21 st Anniversary Garden Party	14
• The Turning <i>Rev Yemi Jaiyesimi</i>	15
• A Question of Race <i>Gerald Barton, Editor</i>	16
• International Evening at Greenford	19
• Forthcoming Events Around the Circuit	20

Circuit website: www.ealingtrinity.org.uk

Front Cover designed by Marion Narain

From the Superintendent

Dear Friends,

Happy 21st Birthday!

This September marks the 21st birthday of the Ealing Trinity Circuit. Over the last 21 years you have collectively welcomed people into our churches, worshipped on Sundays and beyond. You have helped people to survive food poverty through the food banks and given shelter through nightshelters. You have helped young people grow and be challenged through Junior Churches, Sunday Schools and by supporting our uniformed organisations. You have supported older people through tea clubs, strength and balance classes and the Live at Home Scheme. You have welcomed and cared for people through life's highs and lows at funerals and baptisms, through healing services and prayer and conversation. I can't count the number of flowers that have been arranged in our churches, the hours of prayer, the hours of music played and sung or the acres of floors cleaned. For all this and so much more we give thanks to God.

On Saturday 7th September we will have a party to celebrate at the Elers Road manse. It would be great to see you all there. I'll provide a light afternoon tea and children's activities. It would be great if you would bring photos of the life of the Circuit over the past 21 years - has anyone got a photo of the opening service? If you'd like to write the story of a memory of the Circuit, something you're particularly thankful for, then please send it to me or the Circuit Office and we'll collect them together and publish them.

If you're coming to the party, and I hope you are, please do remember to bring some money to donate to the Circuit's Christian Aid appeal. If you haven't heard about this yet, we're collecting for projects providing education and support in Iraq and Lebanon. For every £1 we raise Christian Aid will be given another £6. So if we raise £5,000 they will receive £35,000. If you haven't been involved in the fund raising yet please talk to your minister and join in.

As we start our next 21 years, I ask you to think and pray about your continued discipleship and commitment. All we have achieved as a Circuit has come through God's grace and through the actions of the members of our churches. What is God calling you to do? Are you called to join a Bible Study, to pray through the week, to lead the church or the Circuit as a steward, to listen to people's stories at foodbanks, cafés and in pubs? There are so many ways you can be involved. God continues to call you to grow as God's people and to work for God's Kingdom. How will you answer the call?

With love and prayers,

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

Giving Thanks

At our last two Circuit Services we have given thanks for the ministry amongst us of three Circuit Stewards – Derek Nicholls, Blossom Jackson and Colleen Hicks. The Circuit has been enriched in many ways by their service, not just as Circuit Stewards but in many other roles over many years. We are deeply grateful to them and thank God for them.

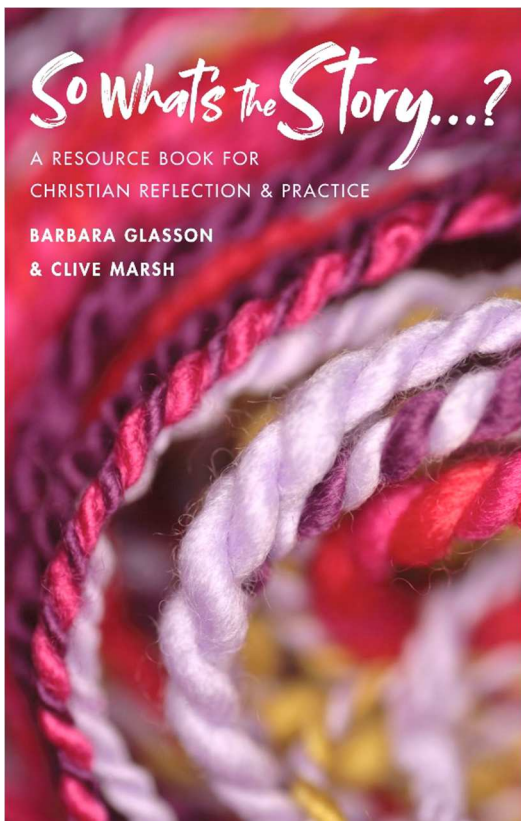
Blossom, Colleen and Derek have each asked that we pass on their thanks for the gifts they received as they retired as Circuit Stewards and for the privilege of serving the Circuit.



So What's the Story...?

Have you seen the President and Vice-president's new book?

Life is an intricate tapestry of stories.



Stories help us better to understand the world around us, our relationships with other people, and even ourselves. We use them in our daily life and work; churches and other communities use them to build from within and to reach out to others; and stories enrich our knowledge of God and help us grow in faith.

What can we learn from other people's stories? How can we better express our own story, and hold it alongside the stories of God? How can a deep engagement with all these stories be helpful to our life and witness, and on what occasions can they be unhelpful?

The Circuit has a number of copies for people to borrow and read. Please contact Rev Rachel Bending if you would like to read a copy. The Circuit will be organising opportunities for conversations about the book and what it has to say during the Autumn.

“So What's the Story...?” by Barbara Glasson and Clive Marsh is published by Darton Longman and Todd price £9.99. For more information or to purchase a copy go to dltbooks.com

Conference Business Digest

A report for local churches about the business of the 2019 Methodist Conference

The 2019 Methodist Conference, Hilton Metropole Hotel, Birmingham:
Presbyteral Session 27th – 28th June;
Representative Session 29th June – 4th July.
www.methodist.org.uk/conference2019/

Presidential addresses

The Revd Dr Barbara Glasson was inducted as President and Prof Clive Marsh as Vice-President of the Conference. ‘So What’s the Story...?’ was the theme chosen by the President for her address, with the Vice-President exploring ‘Pleasure, piety and politics’ in his address.

- You can read the President’s address in full here:
<http://bit.ly/PresAddress19>
- You can read the Vice-President’s address in full here:
<http://bit.ly/VPAddress19>

Ordinations of presbyters and deacons

Twenty-two presbyters and four deacons were received into Full Connexion on Sunday morning during Conference Worship, along with seven presbyters by transfer, and one by reinstatement. Later that day ordination services took place in four venues across the region.

The Theology and Ecclesiology underpinning the Diaconate and the Methodist Diaconal Order

The Conference adopted this major report brought by the Faith and Order Committee. The report emphasises that deacons are ministers of the Church, focusing and representing a ministry of witness and service. The Conference reaffirmed that the Methodist Diaconal Order is a religious order open only to those who are deacons in Full Connexion with the Conference and that all Methodist deacons are also required to be members of the Methodist Diaconal Order. The report explored the broad ministry of proclamation as it is exercised by deacons and affirmed that preaching is part of the ministry of deacons, making proposals for how that will be worked out in practice.

Connexional finances and allowances

The Conference received the Statement of Connexional Finances for 2017/2018 and adopted the Connexional Central Services Budget for three years commencing with 2019/2020, which covers all planned income to, and expenditure from, the connexionally-held funds that are administered via the Methodist Council. The

budget for income in 2019/2020 is £36.2m and the expenditure £41.2m, a net deficit of over £5m. This reflects a deliberate policy of reducing reserves on some funds by releasing additional amounts for grants.

The Methodist Church Fund assessment for 2019/2020 is budgeted at £13.7m, in line with a previous decision to restrict increases to 1% per annum. The Conference further agreed to restrict increases for the three years commencing September 2020 to a fixed amount of 1% per annum. Using the formula agreed by the Conference, the level of increase in the standard stipend will be 2.8% to £24,852. The Conference considered a review of the preaching fee for supernumerary presbyters, agreeing that the fee should be retained for the foreseeable future (remaining at £25 for two years until August 2021, at which point the amount will be reviewed). Further to the report concerning the preaching ministry of deacons, the Conference agreed that the preaching fee should also be applicable to supernumerary deacons with effect from September 2020.

3Generate

Jasmine Yeboah, Youth President, reflected on her presidential theme, encouraging young people to step outside of their comfort zone to do something courageous for Christ. In an address to the Conference, Jasmine spoke of the priority for the Church to listen to the voices of children and young people. A manifesto has been developed which includes taking action on homelessness, building relationships within communities, supporting the lonely, caring for the environment, creating safe spaces for people to listen to each other and being creative in worship. The Conference urged Local Churches actively to engage with the 3Generate manifesto, by including it on Church Council agendas and committing to intentional actions as a response. The manifesto is available at www.methodist.org.uk/3genmanifestos

The Methodist Council

The Council is charged with responsibility to keep in constant review the life of the Church, to study its work and witness throughout the Connexion, to advise on changes to make the work of the Church more effective, and to give it spiritual leadership. Along with other matters detailed in this Digest, the Council reported to the Conference and received its approval as necessary for the following:

- the adoption of a connexional financial strategy and a connexional property strategy (available for download from www.methodist.org.uk/property);
- a change in focus for the work of One Mission from connexional Forum to connexional support for events in Districts which will enable a broader engagement with One Mission thinking, resources and inspiration more locally;
- an encouragement to churches to increase their awareness of human trafficking and what they can do to prevent it.

The Conference received a report from the Council in relation to practical strategies for implementing a connexional approach to vocations. The Conference also accepted a memorial from the Bolton and Rochdale District which requested that the relevant officers be given the resources and time to explore this area as a matter of urgency. The Conference heard from the Secretary of the Conference, who emphasised the importance of vocational conversations and the need for boldness in talking with others about the call that God places upon our lives.

The Conference agreed to create a Global Relationships Committee, to be appointed by the Council who will also set its terms of reference. The Committee will advise and support the Connexional Team in overseeing the implementation, development and monitoring of the strategy of expressing One Mission through our global relationships.

Reaffirming Our Calling

The Conference received a report celebrating some of the ways in which the reaffirmation of Our Calling has shaped the life and work of the Methodist Church during the 2018/2019 connexional year. The Conference explored in workshops the implications for the Church of this renewed focus on Our Calling by reimagining structures of decision-making and the developing of an emerging strategy of evangelism and growth.

Action for Children

The Deputy Chief Executive of Action for Children made a striking presentation to the Conference, marking the 150th year of the charity's support for children, young people and families. In response, the Conference encouraged all Methodists to write to their local MPs to express their concerns about the ongoing plight of children in the UK.

Marriage and Relationships

Following debates held on Monday 1st July and Wednesday 3rd July, the report of the Marriage and Relationships Task Group was commended to the Connexion for study and prayerful discussion. Provisional resolutions were passed on the qualities of good relating, an understanding of cohabitation, celebration of civil partnerships, prayers following the end of a marriage and permission for same-sex marriages to take place in Methodist Churches. These will be voted on by District Synods during the year, and a report will be brought to the 2020 Conference based on those responses. A clause has been included in the proposals that no one would have to officiate at a same-sex marriage if they feel prevented by their conscience. Resources will be available (by emailing MandR@methodistchurch.org.uk) for churches to facilitate discussion of the report.

Housing and Homelessness

The Conference received a report setting out the actions taken

since the 2018 Conference expressed its concern about the crisis in housing and homelessness. The Conference commended the work being taken by churches and communities across the Connexion to support people experiencing homelessness and to provide housing and combat the housing crisis. The Conference agreed to encourage Circuits and Districts to consider increasing the social impact of property in local mission and how property might play a part in a holistic housing strategy of reduction, respite, recovery and reconnection. The Conference urged Her Majesty's Government to accelerate its targets to eliminate rough sleeping, allow local authorities to build more housing and to enable the building of more genuinely affordable homes as a means of building stronger and more cohesive communities.

Climate Emergency

In 2011, the Conference adopted Hope in God's Future, which set out a Methodist understanding of the challenges facing our global ecology and the theological and ethical implications, as a Statement of the Judgment of the Conference. The Conference heard that since then, both the scientific evidence and the global ambition for action have developed further. The Council reported to the Conference that it had endorsed proposals for the development of Eco Circuits and Eco Districts along with the Eco Church awards.

The Conference received a memorial from the Bristol District, which highlighted the need for urgent action on climate change. Recognising the climate emergency, the Conference endorsed the need for urgent action. The Conference also adopted a notice of motion concerned with reducing the use of plastic.

The Unfinished Agenda

The Conference spent some time discussing matters relating to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). The Council reported on the EDI Symposium which had taken place in March 2019, and the work still to be done to increase participation and inclusion. Concerns were expressed about procedures relating to incidents of hate or unlawful discrimination and the ways in which EDI issues are dealt with in stationing processes. These will be discussed by the Methodist Council in the year ahead.

Memorials

Memorials are messages from Circuit Meetings and District Synods to the Conference. They play a vital part in enabling the Conference to hear and to respond to concerns from across the Connexion. This year the Conference considered and replied to 56 Memorials on topics including: safeguarding training, marriage and relationships, Israel/Palestine and a proposal for a year of prayer.

Notices of Motion

The Conference debated and adopted a variety of Notices of Motion (items of business put forward during the Conference) including: the role of the Youth

President, reviewing the complaints and discipline processes and support for refugees including support for the Lift the Ban campaign which seeks to make it possible for those seeking asylum to work.

The 2020/2021 President and Vice-President

The Conference designated the Revd Richard Teal to be President and Mrs Carolyn Lawrence to be Vice-President of the Methodist Conference 2020/2021.

Appointments

The Conference appointed the Revd Dr Jonathan R Hustler as Secretary of the Conference and the Revd Ruth M Gee as Assistant Secretary for the connexional year 2019/2020. These appointments will enable the Council to oversee a process of discernment during the ensuing connexional year, and to bring nominations for new appointments to the 2020 Conference.

The Conference appointed the Revd Dr David Hinchliffe as Chair for the South East District from 1st September 2019 and the Revd Dr James N Tebbutt as Chair for the Cumbria District from 1st September 2019.

Future dates of the Conference

The Methodist Conference will meet in Telford from 25th June – 2nd July 2020 and in Birmingham from 24th June – 1st July 2021.

Registered charity no. 1132208.

© Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes 2019

“Foodbank News” from Ealing Green Church

Rev Sue Male

In February 2019, Ealing Green Church agreed with Ealing Foodbank to hold a weekly “café” in the church.

Before the opening date this meant church members and hirers working together to find a way of making space available. On a Tuesday morning space is needed for the café to take place, and cupboard space is also required for storing food. As you can imagine, finding cupboard space was the hardest task, but in the end church and outside groups were only too willing to compromise in order to see this important project put in place. Many thanks to them.

On a Tuesday morning volunteers arrive at 09.30 to set up the “Café”, and for a short briefing. The café opens from 10.00-12.00pm each week. Clients are referred to the Foodbank by many different “partners”. They arrive - from all walks of life -

with their referral form and we can provide them with enough food to last for three days.

Additionally if people need pointers with specific issues which are contributing to their crisis, they can be referred to the "Help through Crisis" Team member in the café itself. Already many have told me how useful their conversations with the team were.

Often when clients arrive, they are anxious, or even tearful. They can feel ashamed that they have come - falsely believing that they are somehow "lesser people" because they are in crisis. One of the most rewarding aspects of the work is to be able to reassure them that anybody could find themselves in such need very quickly, that lots of people do, and that that is why we are there. Nobody's fault. Just life happening. (It would be impossible to work in the Foodbank Café for very long without realizing that).

One of Ealing Foodbank's guiding principles is that we are there to help people restore their sense of self-respect. People are still getting used to the fact that "Ealing Green Foodbank Café" exists. We average about 6 or 7 clients at the moment. An established Foodbank Café might well see 40 clients in the same length of time. We would like to be busier now - if only to ease the strain on the other cafés, but the slow build up has given us time for proper conversations with clients which have been fruitful both for them, and for ourselves. It has also given us time to learn the role. Most of the role is to listen, but I have also found that many clients want to talk with me about the church and God.

The session closes at 12 noon. Volunteers then tidy up, have a short debrief and then leave at about 12.30pm.

Another set of volunteers then collects food for the next session from the warehouse and puts it on the shelves in the cupboard so that everything is set. Aside from the work itself, one of the aspects of working in the café which I value most is the richness of ecumenical conversation amongst volunteers from many denominations of Christianity, and none. Christians doing valuable work together, alongside non-Christians, is the best possible kind of expression of ecumenism, and does also give rise to opportunities for theological discussion, and talk about the work of the Church. Mind you, that might be more difficult when we get busier!

A really rewarding project!

If you would be interested in joining our team, either contact Ealing Foodbank directly or be in touch with me.

The Welshore Community Hub A Recourse Centre for Residents of West Ealing,

Christina Tom-Johnson, Operational Director, Welshore Community Hub

Introduction

Ealing is home to over 300,000 people, the third largest borough population in London, sharing characteristics associated with those found with inner London boroughs. It is a strong economic centre with over ten thousand businesses, a workforce of one hundred and fifty thousand of which over fifty six thousand commute into the borough.

Although the area has seen the impact of recession, the skills level amongst adults and household income levels are above the London average. Ealing is in a good position to achieve economic growth. However, the general prosperity of the borough is not shared by all of its communities. Poor standards of health and education, low household income and high benefits dependency are concentrated in pockets of deprivation.

Lack of opportunities for young people in the area, many of whom have limited opportunities to develop their potential for enterprise and entrepreneurial ventures along with high levels of crime causes safety issues and a perception of West Ealing as an evening and night time no-go area.

Over forty per cent of residents come from ethnic minorities, making Ealing the fourth most ethnically diverse borough in the country. These include refugees and asylum seekers, a large Polish community, and the largest Sikh population outside India. Over one hundred languages are spoken in the borough's schools.

This diversity extends much further than ethnicity, and covers age, family types, faith, languages, cultures and tradition, and comes together in a unique mix that makes the borough for many a very special place to live. However, a group of residents have recognised that some do not feel that Ealing is a special place to live because of their circumstances, and was determined to continue to work with other residents of various social backgrounds to continue helping everyone feel part of the Ealing community.

How I became involved

I had been Board Member for Catalyst Housing Ltd for a year, Board member for Pathways Housing for over nine years, and chair for the West London Residents Association for over nine years. So, I was very much aware of the struggles of residents in the community. In 2010 I retired from my professional career after fifty years in the NHS. After staying at home for about six months, I decided that I wanted to give something back to the community rather than just engage in socialising. I approached the then CEO of Catalyst Housing when I discovered that

there was a property belonging to Catalyst Housing Ltd that was empty. Fortunately not only did he allocate the property to me but on a peppercorn lease for five years initially, but for as long as possible, so Welshore Community Hub was born.

Background

The Welshore Community Hub is a charity and a limited company set up initially to provide residents of Catalyst Housing Ltd (CHL) in West Ealing with community engagement. Since then the Hub has expanded to welcome not only residents from across the Borough of Ealing, but also Catalyst residents from neighbouring boroughs who travel to the Hub to participate in social activities which foster inclusiveness, participation and co-operation amongst the ethnically diverse areas in which we operate and to assist with resolving administrative issues.

Increasingly it is important that social services are 'owned' in the communities as a means of ensuring quality delivery and empowering users to take control of the outcome they hope to experience. The move to create the Hub was a right step towards achieving this. The project is run by a resident supported by volunteer residents. The ethos is 'for us by us', although there is partnership and close links with agencies and organisations whose own aims and objectives complement those of the Hub.

The aims and objectives of the Hub

To further benefit the residents of West London, without distinction of sex, sexual orientation, race or political views, religion or other opinions by associating together the residents and local authorities, voluntary and other organisations, in common efforts to advance education, and provide facilities in the interest of social welfare, for recreation, leisure time occupation with the objective of improving the conditions of life for residents.

The desired outcome is for users to learn new skills, increase inter-generational understanding between the old and young and provide interaction between formerly isolated groups. To achieve this the Hub delivers weekly programmes at little or no cost to users.

Operational Activities

The Sewing Group

The Hub hosted a pop-up shop in partnership with Ealing Council in June 2013 where sixty residents took part in demonstrations of how to make cushions. This attracted much interest in sewing, leading the Hub to initiate a survey of residents to gauge the level of interest in a sewing class specifically and its wider services. There were a total of fifty respondents out of one hundred in favour of starting a sewing group which was then launched in July 2013.

The group has consistently been ethnically diverse with a mix of male and female participants. Most participants are on a low income with small budgets so with the new skills learned they are able to make clothes for themselves and their families.

The male participants have been able to make their own trousers, shirts and ties and mend their clothes. The women have made and altered dresses and curtains and young people have made shopping bags. In one case, a nine year old made a dress from scratch during the summer holidays using a pattern with help from the tutor.

We started with four machines, but we now have fourteen. There is an average attendance of sixteen residents weekly including some members of Ealing Trinity Circuit. Since we started in July 2013 we have trained over four hundred residents with sewing skills. Those who cannot access a machine are taught how to sew by hand. The sewing group meets every Tuesday from 10.00am to 1.00pm. Participants pay £5.00 per session to offset the tutor's fees.

Knit and Natter Group:

In West Ealing there is a high level of social isolation, exclusion and vulnerability leading to high levels of anti-social behaviour, drugs and alcohol abuse. There are many no-go areas late evening and at night leaving older residents feeling vulnerable and isolated. The Knit and Natter group was set up in June 2016 with just four residents meeting three hours on Friday from 11.00am to 2.00pm. The Hub provides beverages and biscuits, which are nice ice breakers to help residents to make friends and socialize, while learning how to knit, crochet, set out floral arrangements or play games. Some residents do more nattering than anything else, as attending this session takes them out of the house during those hours.

This project gives me the most satisfaction and offers the widest range of activities to local elderly residents in the Hub. The group has now grown from four to twenty five residents, ten occasionals and a handful of infrequent locals. They knit scarves and gloves for themselves and in some cases for members of their families, and recently they have knitted ten blankets for Meadow House Hospice at Ealing Hospital.

With the increase in participation we have extended the hours from 11.00am until 4.00pm. Initially, we offered the residents soup and bread for lunch, but this is now replaced with a three course meal. We are able to provide this through the generosity of two charities, the Felix Project and City Harvest who supply us with fresh meat, fish and vegetables three times a week. The extended time now includes Strength and Balance and Zumba exercise classes and relaxing massage. Whatever food is left is divided into bags for the residents to take home. As one of the residents said recently, 'Not only is my fridge full for the week but I also have one properly cooked meal a week.'

The Hub supports all of the sheltered houses of housing associations in the area. Members of Ealing Trinity Circuit are also supported from this project. We also provide visits to places such as Kew Gardens, workshops on dementia, fraud,

energy, and keeping warm during winter months and hydrated during the warm weather.

Chess Club

This was started in 2016 and has since grown and we have had the pleasure of going to the London Chess Classics, the most prestigious chess tournament in the UK and across the world. The group have been able to meet and interact with chess world champion Magnus Carlson and former world champion Vladimir Krasnik.

One of the younger members who is eight years old demonstrated exceptional skills to secure a chess rating grade and became our first recognised amateur at the Classic. He also became the chess champion in the under eight category at North Ealing Primary School, winning five out of six games to clinch first prize and became the Middlesex under eight class champion.

Changes by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) have created a huge demand for support in filling in all the required forms and the Hub is able to provide this service. We also provide a language course for residents whose first language is not English to help improve their literacy and communication skills.

We are working in partnership with MHA Ealing Living at Home services, Community Ealing and voluntary services, BOB (Beyond Belief), Recovery Integrated Services Ealing (RISE) and Age UK.

The Hub is proud to be able to offer these services because they provide positive stimulation with both mental and physical benefits for residents. I am looking forward in the near future with the help from God to increase all activities to meet the needs of residents, undertake vigorous fund raising, and so increase the number of volunteers, and introduce 'eat more for less' to low income and isolated groups

The Welshore Community Hub is at 99 Broadway, West Ealing, London W13 9BP
Tel 020 8566 4099 e-mail: info@welshore.org.uk

Ealing Trinity Circuit 21st Anniversary Garden Party

This September sees 21 years since Ealing Trinity Circuit was formed.

Come and celebrate at the Circuit 21st Birthday Garden Party!

Saturday 7th September 2.00 – 6.00pm at Rev Rachel Bending's manse
Refreshments – Birthday Cake – Children's Activities

Donations will go to the Christian Aid Iraq and Lebanon Project

The Turning

Rev Yemi Jaiyesimi



The Turning is a movement in the church which galvanizes Christians to move forward into the community with confidence to share the good news of Jesus with people on the streets. It is simply obedience to Mark 16:15. Yinka Oyekan, the Turning Team Leader says, "It is a gift from heaven that miraculously empowers ordinary Christians, enabling them to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ."

"In May 2016, the Gate Church in Reading started a two week mission. Before the first day was over, over 80 people had accepted the invitation to Christ on the streets of Reading. Many more were told the Truth that God loved them and had an awesome plan for their lives, and allowed a member of the church to pray a blessing for their lives." Yinka continues, "Every place The Turning went to, we saw the grace of God at work, the church equipped and mobilised to evangelize."

The Turning has now come to London and will be launched on Saturday 21st September 2019. There are various hubs across London that will help to make evangelism possible on our streets. Greenford Baptist Church is the hub in our area and some other local churches are going to team up with them to take the good news of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ onto the streets of our neighbourhood. If you are interested in finding out more or joining in, contact Rev Yemi Jaiyesimi or Pastor Warren McNeil (Greenford Baptist Church) at pastorwarren@greenfordbaptist.london.

You can find out more about The Turning by going to <http://theturning.eu/>.

The Turning: - Mission to London Launch

The Turning Mission to London will be launched on 21st September at Westminster Chapel, Buckingham Gate, London SW1E 6BS with keynote speakers Pastor Bill Johnson (Bethel Church, Redding, California) and Pastor Yinka Oyekan (The Gate Church, Reading, UK).

Registration starts at 9.15am and the event will begin at 10.00am and finish at 8.30pm with breaks for lunch and dinner. There will be an opportunity for an hours' outreach on the streets around Westminster to share the Gospel and see people respond.

The cost for the day is £30 (lunch and dinner not provided). You can sign up for tickets on Eventbrite. You can find out more about The Turning by going to <http://theturning.eu/london/>

A Question of Race

Gerald Barton, Editor

Questions of race have been around for a long time whether they are about racism, racial discrimination, racial equality or whatever and often form the backdrop to public discourse and policy. In many ways 'race' just sits there as a given in the background. For some time, however I have taken to wondering what the idea of 'race' is really all about and whether, indeed there is anything in it scientifically.

The notion of 'race' implies that there are differences between groups of people that mark them off from one another in fundamental ways. This does not just refer to skin colour which is an obvious but superficial marker, but to something deeper. It implies that members of a given race inherit biological characteristics that they each have in common and which make them distinctive in terms not just of colour but of their nature – their capabilities and propensities. In other words, by knowing a person's race, you can predict certain aspects of their personalities and how they will behave. Knowing an individual's race tells you something about them as an individual. For instance a Roma will behave like a Roma because he or she is Roma. If that sounds like tarring all Roma with the same brush, or any other 'racial' group for that matter that, in effect is exactly what it is.

Once upon a time people might have talked about different groups of people based on where they came from and/or their real or imagined ancestry. At least in the Judeo-Christian-Muslim world everyone knew that all people were descended from Adam and Eve in the first instance and one of the sons of Noah after the Flood. We all came from the same place so to that extent all belonged to the same 'race'. One might add that evolutionary theory holds that modern Homo sapiens (ie us) originated in Africa and spread out over the millennia to populate the rest of the earth. Like the Biblical account, we all ultimately come from the same place. Historically, what interested people more was the impact of climate and geography on people's colour and customs.

The Swedish naturalist, Carl Linnaeus (1707-1778) is regarded as the 'father of taxonomy'. His system for naming, ranking, and classifying organisms is still in wide use today, albeit with many changes. His ideas on classification have influenced generations of biologists during and after his own lifetime, even those opposed to the philosophical and theological roots of his work. On the basis of his ideas scholars began to see human beings as part of the natural world in a way that meant that we could be classified like other animals and plants by genus and species. As the travels of European scientists and explorers increased knowledge of the diversity of humankind alongside the view that this diversity could be categorised into different 'races', a number of ideas increasingly took hold.

Firstly, people came to the conclusion that many of the characteristics of human beings could be explained as a product of their race. This was not limited to the thinking of medical scientists or biologists, but also extended to literary critics such as Matthew Arnold who explained the work of poets and novelists with reference to

the innate character of the race to which they belonged. Each race had a specific 'genius' that showed up in its literature. For example, the 'genius' of the Celts lay in a love of beauty, charm and spirituality. Secondly, if individuals' character, not just physical characteristics but also their temperament and habits could be explained by their race, then the shared nature of a race could be seen in all members of that race. In other words, each member of a race would be typical of that race. Thirdly, from these ideas also comes the notion that we all carry something within us that derives from our race that also explains our mental and physical potential.

Having drawn these conclusions, it was but a short step to placing races in a hierarchy so that some races were seen as 'superior' to others. Not surprisingly, the white Europeans who had developed these notions placed the white race at the top and regarded others, notably the black races as 'inferior'. This, of course was highly convenient if you were a slave owner – the black races could easily be seen as more suited to slavery. Even such august philosophers as David Hume and Immanuel Kant fell into these ways of thinking.

If people had cared to think about it, and some did, they would have noted that there were examples that flatly contradicted these notions. Admittedly the number of examples that could be cited were few, but nonetheless they speak powerfully. For example, in 1707 an African boy was taken from the Gold Coast to Amsterdam and given as a gift to Anton Ulrich, Duke of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel who in turn handed the boy to his son August Wilhelm. The boy, who became known as Anton Wilhelm was educated alongside the children of the local aristocracy before moving on to the university at Helmstedt and then the University of Wittenberg. He became the first black African to earn a European doctoral degree in philosophy after which he went on to teach at Halle and Jena.

Proponents of racial theory could dismiss this and other examples as 'anomalies'. However, the fact that an African boy selected at random had the potential to be educated to such a high level contradicts the notion that all individuals of a 'race' are typical of that race. If Africans were of 'inferior' intellectual capacity it simply should not have been possible to educate the boy who became Anton Wilhelm to that level. Along similar lines, the fact that some white Europeans could be educated to the level of doctoral degrees in philosophy does not imply that all white Europeans have that potential. The point is the intellectual or any other potential of an individual cannot be predicted from a knowledge of that person's 'race'.

This racial theory developed before the advent of modern genetics. Gregor Mendel published his theory of genes in 1866, but its significance was not recognised for a further 30 years and modern genetic theory did not really kick off until around 1900. In short, genetic theory holds that our biological inheritance is the product of tens of thousands of individual factors. What started to become clear was that whilst different groups of people had genes in common that explained similarities in appearance, those genes played no role in determining their intellectual or artistic propensities. Racial theory started to fall apart.

As genetic theory was developed further during the 20th century it became clear that all human beings share the vast majority of their genetic material irrespective of 'race'. Around 90% of the world's genetic variation is found in every so-called racial group. Of equal significance is the fact that there is significant variation within populations. Whilst it is true that patterns of genes emerge in different populations accounting for various aspects of physical appearance, these populations shade into one another reflecting the way people have moved around over the millennia. Thus it is not possible to define groups that are absolutely clear and distinct from one another on the basis of genetic inheritance. As a result the notion of distinct 'races' does not work.

There is a further aspect of human societies that the old racial theory missed. An important contributor to who we are as people is that of culture. In this case 'culture' can be broadly defined as all those influences that shape how we think, feel, act, our customs and beliefs and so on. In all likelihood our abilities as individuals are at least partly determined by our genetic inheritance. However, the environment in which we grow up is also vitally important of our development as individuals. The ability of the human brain to absorb things from the people around us marks Homo sapiens off from other species. We also have a cultural inheritance as well as a genetic inheritance. Racial theory made the mistake of compounding these two aspects of human development assuming that everything was inherited biologically, which is not, in fact the case. What we become as individuals is a function of the specific genetic package we inherit combined with the cultural milieu in which we grow up and live and is not predictable from the 'race' to which we ostensibly belong.

Having wondered whether there was anything in the notion of 'race', I conclude that fundamentally there isn't. Racial theory has been fully contradicted. However, this does not mean that racial issues don't continue to exist despite our increased understanding of genetics, because they clearly do. Racial theory underpinned slavery, apartheid and the idea that some races were superior to others and could thus rule over others, or worse. Colonialism typically held that 'native' populations were not able to govern themselves so needed the colonial powers to look after (and exploit) them. It also gave rise to the idea of the 'master race' and the view that some races were 'sub-human' and a threat to the purity of the race and thus should be removed, a process resulting in more than one genocide. Certain irresponsible politicians persist in using racist language as part of their pitch and thus 'legitimize' the racial prejudices of their supporters and others. How is it, though that the notion that there is something in 'race' persists even though racial theory itself has been thoroughly discredited?

In part the answer may be the fact that once ideas move from the academics and others who think them up into the general population they tend to persist for considerable lengths of time. It follows that it will take some time for the conclusions of modern genetics to become widespread in the population as a whole and supplant the old racial theories. Secondly, and importantly, human beings have a natural tendency to see people in terms of groups – my group, your group, us and them, northerners and southerners, my nation, your nation, my religion, your

religion and so on. It also appears that we have a natural tendency to ascribe an 'essence' to different groups, ie that all members of a group will, in some way be typical of that group.

As a childish example of this, when I was a young child I had a cousin who was a bit of a problem for a whole raft of reasons. In short, David was very 'naughty'. In my childish way I extrapolated from this to think that all boys called David were naughty. Of course, it came as a bit of a surprise when I met other boys called David who were not similarly naughty. In effect I had constructed a group comprising 'boys called David' and had ascribed an 'essence' of being naughty to all members of that group. One can hear echoes of this kind of thinking when certain politicians decry people from certain countries as rapists and criminals implying that all people from those countries are rapists and criminals and therefore should be kept out or deported. What is not mentioned, of course is that there are plenty of rapists and criminals from that politician's own country, but somehow they don't seem to matter.

This natural tendency to think of people in terms of groups may have had adaptive value in early human societies when banding together for self-protection was vital for survival. In the much more complex societies in which we live today it can, however get us into real trouble as the notions of racial theory have shown. Our issue now is how we transcend those tendencies so that we give all people the value and respect they deserve. As the Dalai Lama said recently in a television interview, "Too many of us have become narrow minded. We think only about our own country and making our country great again. We forget we are all one."

Acknowledgement:

I am indebted to Kwame Anthony Appiah's book "The Lies that Bind – Rethinking Identity" for focussing my mind and allowing me to develop this article. Editor

International Evening at Greenford

Saturday 5th October from 6:00 to 9:00 pm

Greenford is organising an International Evening on Saturday 5th October from 6.00 – 9.00pm. There are many nationalities and cultures within our Circuit and if any of you would like to provide a song, dance, sketch etc from your homeland for the entertainment, please let Greenford know – contact Win Thompson at win.thompson69@btinternet.com.

National dress would be welcome as it will make the evening colourful.

A donation of £5.00 is requested which will go towards the Christian Aid Project in Iraq and Lebanon

Forthcoming Events around the Circuit

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

September

- 7th Sat 14.00 **Circuit 21st Birthday Garden Party** at Rachel's manse
18.00 *Donations for the Christian Aid Iraq and Lebanon Project*
- 14th Sat 10.00 **Kingsdown Book Fair** with cakes & bric-a-brac
12.30 *In aid of All We Can*
- 14th Sat 18.45 **Acton Hill Gospel Chorale Concert**
Tickets incl light refreshments
£8.00 adults, £4.00 children under 12
In aid of Meadow House Hospice
- 19th Thurs 19.30 **Circuit Meeting**

October

- 3rd Thurs 19.30 **Local Preachers & Worship Leaders Meeting**
- 5th Sat 18.00 **International Evening at Greenford**
21.00 Admission £5.00 per person
In aid of Christian Aid Iraq and Lebanon Project
- 26th Sat tba **Church Officer Training**
Venue tba

November

- 2nd Sat tba **Circuit Barn Dance** with live caller and band
Venue tba
In aid of Christian Aid Iraq and Lebanon Project
- 28th Thurs 19.30 **Circuit Leadership Team Meeting at Kingsdown**

Articles for 'In-touch' Issue No 90 (December - February) 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

Deadline for next issue: 29th October 2019