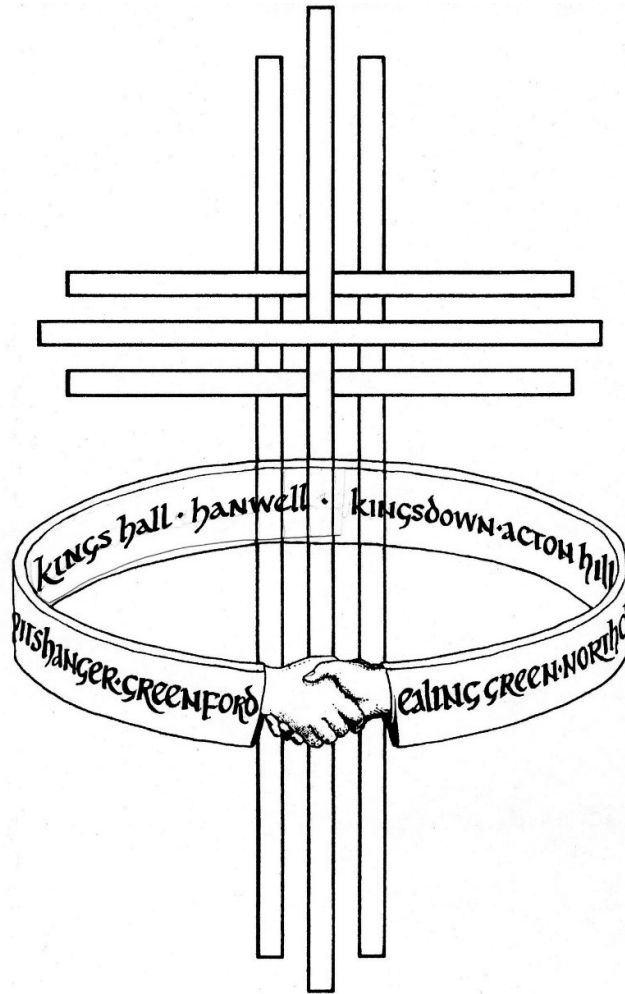


In-touch

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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

This edition of *In-touch* comes to you as we journey out of the Easter season into Pentecost (Pentecost falls on the first Sunday of June this year.). I'm fascinated by the way in which the writers of the Gospels of John and Luke/Acts depict the gift of the Holy Spirit and the disciples' reactions to it.

In John's Gospel the disciples' reaction seems to be to go back to where it all started, to where they met Jesus. There they are confronted by the fact that they can't go back, that nothing is the same and they find abundance only when they do something different as instructed by the risen Christ standing on the shore line. (John 21).

In Acts we're given this image of the unstoppable power of the Holy Spirit which sends off the disciples preaching the Gospel from Jerusalem, to Rome and the ends of the Earth. However, in Acts too we see the disciples trying to cling to what they have known and having to learn that God has other plans. Think of Peter's invitation to stay in the Gentile Cornelius' house and eat at his table and all the consternation that caused with the disciples back in Jerusalem (Acts 10-11).

Both writers show the disciples trying to stick to what they knew in the past and to live as they did before knowing Jesus, before the years on the road, before the triumph and heart break of Holy Week with its excruciating suffering and before the astonishing and incomprehensible reality of the resurrection. What they find is that, to use Jesus' words, they can't contain new wine in old wine skins, that life must change, that they must change.

Peter's experience in Acts 10 shows us that God's resurrecting power cannot be contained in upper rooms or in churches, nor in one particular group or religious custom or culture. Peter is called not to take that life to Cornelius but to discover that life is already there and to be transformed by it.

How does this calling translate for us today? Where is God calling us to go? How is God challenging us and changing us?

The world around us and so much of our lives feel unsettled and unsettling at the moment. The cost of living crisis is causing significant hardship to those inside and outside our churches alike. The war in Ukraine continues. The last two years have led many of us to reassess our needs and priorities: many still feel safer not gathering in groups while others are eager to be out and with others as much as possible. Our NHS and other care systems, already over stretched before Covid, are struggling to keep up with need and many working within them are struggling. I could go on but I'm sure you're adding your own items to the list as you read.

Like those first disciples it is natural in times like these to want to go back to a familiar or imagined normal where everything feels familiar and secure but like those disciples we're called to find God's abundant life beyond the familiar, to see beyond what we think of as possible. Around the Circuit there are signs of new life

with some of our churches trying new things. I am so thankful for all of you who have sought to find new expressions of God's life and love and are putting your faith into action. Let us praise God for all these signs of new life, explore fresh ideas and pray for more for God delights to meet our needs and lead us onwards.

As an aside, trying to put together the preaching plan for this coming quarter has felt a little like those fishermen sending out their nets and catching nothing! Our 'old ways' of doing things don't seem to work so the plan looks slightly different this quarter with each section of the Circuit meeting together for worship as well as several Circuit Services. I pray that these services give us the chance to build stronger relationships across the Circuit and begin to think about how we can better work together to release life and energy in our churches.

May God continue to bless you all and give you fresh dreams of God's kingdom and lead you to find the abundance of God's life in new places as well as the familiar.

Love,



A Call to Solidarity and Prayer

As the war in Ukraine continues why not plant sunflower seeds (the national flower of Ukraine) in gardens, window boxes, and invite neighbours and friends to do so also as a living sign of prayer and solidarity. Why not take some photos of your sunflowers as they grow and send them to the Circuit Office so we can put them on the website. Many of you have already been generous in donating to the DEC or other appeals for Ukraine, Afghanistan, Syria and elsewhere. Sadly the need continues.

Sharing Abundance

"As Christ breaks bread and bids us share..."

As the cost of living crisis deepens sadly there will be more and more need for our food banks. Please consider increasing your support to them as you are able with donations of food or money.

Things to Celebrate – Circuit Service at Kingsdown 5th June at 6.30pm

Worship celebrating and giving thanks for the ministry of our local preachers and worship leaders followed by refreshments. Come along and support them and show them your appreciation. Contributions to the refreshments welcome!

Circuit Service at Greenford – 17th July at 11.00am

A Circuit Service to launch our Summer Series: "Feasts of the Kingdom, chow, chat and challenge in Luke's Gospel". This service will be followed by a 'bring and share' lunch and workshop giving resources and ideas for local arrangement services.

Circuit Service at Hanwell – 28th August at 11.00am

A Circuit Service to celebrate the end of the church year followed by a picnic. Bring your own picnic, rug, chair, plates etc.

Circuit Mission Day

Gerald Barton, Editor

On 9th April people from around the Circuit gathered at Hanwell to begin thinking about the shape of our future mission. About 25 of us came together from most of the churches in the Circuit.

The day was introduced by Rev Sue Male who gave a brief overview of our Lent course 'Unless the Lord Builds the House' which had led up to the Mission Day. The course had encouraged us to look around our local areas thinking about the kind our housing there is and what services there are – transport, parks, libraries etc and then to have conversations with people on what they felt was good and not-so-good and what they liked and didn't like about their areas. Leading on from that, we can begin thinking about what our circuit and churches might do in response taking account of what is already happening and whether there are any gaps that we might seek to fill.

The first speaker of the day was **Mark Dishley** from **Christians Against Poverty (CAP)** who is the Centre Manager of their Ealing & Acton Debt Centre based at the Oak Tree Fellowship in Acton. Mark outlined how he had grown up in the Ealing area and, although he had felt led by God to work in a number of countries, he had been involved in local initiatives such as the St John's Soup Kitchen before working with CAP.

CAP was founded in 1996 and since then has become a nation-wide charity offering debt counselling and practical help with getting people out of debt. When someone contacts CAP for help the following happens:

- To begin, a Debt Coach and a support worker will visit the person in their own home and will gather as much information as possible about their financial issues.
- CAP head office in Bradford will then put together a realistic budget prioritising the payment of essential bills. Cap will also negotiate affordable payments with each creditor and take action to stop unfair interest and charges where possible.
- The Debt Coach will then make a second home visit to explain the budget and the payments the person will need to make.
- In most cases, a 'CAP Account' will be set up for the person – rather like a simple bank account. The person pays an agreed weekly or monthly amount into the account to cover bills and debts and CAP then pays the creditors.
- If debt is severe, CAP will help people with insolvency options such as petitioning for bankruptcy and will help with the necessary forms and, if necessary court proceedings.

How can churches help? Mark explained that one option is for people to volunteer to 'befriend' people struggling with debt. This would involve occasional phone calls just to see how people are doing and offer a friendly listening ear. There are other ways churches can help on the 'get involved' pages of the CAP website.

Throughout his talk, Mark stressed the need for churches and people to come together to do things and that everyone can have a part to play in that. God had challenged him to do things he had not foreseen and may challenge us in a similar way. In that, we need to be open to being 'changeable' and to embrace change.

You can find out more about CAP by going to <https://capuk.org>. Note that in addition to debt counselling, CAP also runs Job Clubs to help people with practical help in finding employment and Life Skills courses to help people to get their most from their finances.

Our next speaker was **Marie Newstead** from **Ealing Churches Winter Night Shelter** (ECWNS). Marie has direct experience of homelessness and knows 'what it is like' - some of us will remember her as a night shelter guest a few years ago. She was made homeless in 2017 and struggled to get help. At the time Ealing Council was unable to offer support although she did receive help from Crisis in Brent who found hostel accommodation for her in Harringey. Despite her struggles, Marie volunteered with the Salvation Army and with Build on Belief (which helps people struggling with substance use). Eventually, she and her partner found a studio flat that they were able to move into. Then, the opportunity came up to work with ECWNS as a Shelter Worker. Underpinning her work is not only her own experience of homelessness, but also the network of contacts she built up with the various organisations she had contact with during that period in her life.

A number of our churches have worked with ECWNS providing volunteers and venues for the night shelters. This all came to a halt when the pandemic began. Fortunately, Ealing Council found accommodation for homeless people in Ealing which rather solved the problem, if only for a time. Although some churches in Ealing were keen to re-start for the 2021/22 season, the risks were still too great. Just one guest or volunteer testing positive would have caused the whole night shelter to collapse as multiple people would have had been at risk and would have had to self-isolate. In practice the operation would then have had to shut down.

A solution was found when the opportunity arose to take 10 places in a small B&B hotel in Southall – the Broadway Hotel – from 1st January to the end of March. This gave guests their own rooms, TV, WiFi and the ability to self-isolate if necessary. The hotel had a small kitchen with a washing machine and churches delivered food for evening meals on a rota basis – Ealing Green provided one meal a week for 7 weeks and Kingsdown provided 2 Sunday evening meals. In addition, a Saturday breakfast was provided by the Church of Our Lady of the Visitation in Greenford – something that is continuing although the shelter has now closed.

Marie has worked closely with shelter guests helping them sort out a whole range of issues. Apart from providing accommodation during the winter months, guests

are also helped with such things as GP registration, getting them glasses as well as complex issues such as replacing passports and obtaining 'settled status'.

The plan for next winter is not yet clear. As Marie explained, the hotel was good and worked well but lacked anywhere where the guests could meet together. Guests liked the flexibility of the hotel in that they could come and go as they needed but missed the community that being in church halls gave them. ECWNS are now exploring the way forward for next winter.

Marie pointed out that in many ways the homeless are 'hidden from view' In 2020 St Mungos estimated that there 13 people in Ealing Living on the streets. However, this took no account of people sleeping on friends' sofas and having to move from place to place. They are also to be counted as 'homeless'. At least there is no reason for people to go hungry in Ealing – there are soup kitchens and places where people can get free food open every day.

In conclusion, Marie asked for continuing prayers for the work of the night shelter.

Our third speaker was **Janet Fletcher** from **Ealing Foodbank**. Referring to the title of our Lent course, Janet began by saying that her image is that of a dry stone wall rather than a house. The blocks needed to build houses are typically all of the same size and shape whereas in a dry stone wall all the stones are of different sizes and shapes. Each has its place and each is important in keeping the wall together.

Ealing Foodbank began in 2013 (although foodbanks in general date back earlier than that) when there was a growing consensus among churches that there was an emerging need within the borough. With growing economic pressures, benefit changes and the impact of the pandemic more and more people are finding they need to use the foodbank.

Poverty is often described as a prison, a trap into which people fall. The foodbank recognises that the issue goes beyond feeding people and has come up with an acronym for its work - 'FEED' – Focus on Ending Ealing Deprivation centring on:

1. Food
2. Fellowship
3. Funded Advice
4. Forums
5. Finance

1. **Food** – from April 2021 to March 2022 the foodbank supplied 3-day food packages to 31,898 clients and fed 600 – 800 people each week.
2. **Fellowship** – as a result of the pandemic it has not been possible to offer people coffee, cake and a chat when they collect their food. Two of the centres are looking at how they might re-start offering fellowship in some form. However, the numbers of people using the foodbank poses issues for providing fellowship in the 2-hours that they are open.

3. **Funded advice** – the foodbank has received a high level of financial donations and has been able to fund the involvement of Crosslight Advice which provides advice on money and other issues to foodbank clients. The foodbank is also looking at a new advice service to help people adjust their lives to meet the issues posed by their current circumstances.
4. **Forums** – working through such forums as Ealing Business Expo 2022. Businesses in Ealing have a huge impact on people’s lives. The foodbank is working to encourage businesses to consider their levels of pay and moving towards paying at least the London Living Wage (currently £10.55/hour) rather than the National Minimum Wage (£9.50/hour from 1st April 2022).
5. **Finance** – the foodbank needs to be good stewards of its resources and is looking at how it can professionalise its fund-raising.

The foodbank shows what can be achieved when churches work together – the same can also be said about ECWNS. In conclusion Janet posed a question as we think about the Circuit’s future mission – “Is the Lord asking us to build new houses or an extension to somebody else’s?”

At this point in the proceedings we broke for lunch. Sue Male summed up the needs of the organisations we had heard from as follows:

- Christians Against Poverty: Prayer and volunteers to become ‘befrienders’
- Ealing Churches Winter Night Shelter: Patience as they work out how to operate next winter.
- Ealing Foodbank: Prayer and resourcing to help with skills advice.

Sue Male also mentioned Hanwell’s Wednesday coffee mornings which coincide with the foodbank sessions at St Mellitus opposite the Methodist Church. Hanwell makes conscious efforts to draw people in and people using the foodbank do drop in for a coffee and a chat.

The speaker for the afternoon session was **Sharon Nugent** from the **London District Learning Network** who spoke about ‘mission’ more broadly and the initiatives the Methodist Church is currently promoting.

Mission begins with God. As the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams has put it, mission is “finding out what God is doing and joining in”.

Most church mission has focussed on what Sharon called the ‘attractional’ model, ie trying to draw people into the church, to ‘come and hear’. On this model, the best place for mission activity is the church and church-sanctioned meetings. Sharon contrasted this with the ‘incarnational’ model as used by Jesus and the Apostles. This involves going out to where people are to engage with them and build relationships. “Every Methodist wherever they are is a part of mission”. Mission is about living out God’s love in the world and our wider communities.

Sharon briefly described the Methodist Church's mission initiatives since 2000 – Our Calling, Fresh Expressions, Mission-shaped Church. However, society has continued to change and there is an increasing degree of disengagement from church in our society.

New Places for New People (NPNP) is about projects focussed on forming new Christian communities for those not yet part of an existing church. This may involve projects in, for example new towns or new housing developments, among students or families with children. Projects could begin anywhere in very diverse contexts. In part, NPNP is about reclaiming Methodism's missional DNA.

Allied to NPNP is Church at the Margins which is more closely linked to nurturing new Christian communities amongst marginalised people. This links in with projects directed at people who live on the margins of society – the homeless, those struggling with poverty and debt etc. To quote Deacon Eunice Attwood, the Methodist Church's *Church at the Margins* Officer, "social justice and evangelism are deeply intertwined".

Every circuit is being asked to imagine and begin sustaining something new. By 2025, all circuits should include Church at the Margins in their mission action plans. There will be some central funding available for projects although this will not be for a while yet.

In sum, we are encouraged to go out, to re-discover, to re-connect, to go to where people are, to build relationships, to listen and to take the love of God to meet people out there wherever they are.

To find out more about New Places New People, go to:

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/evangelism-growth/new-places-for-new-people/>

A series of webinars is being organised for each Learning Network region to introduce Church at the Margins – watch out for dates for the London region.

Rev Ajay Singh brought the day to a close. While we had heard some interesting and inspiring things, he was concerned that the number of people attending the day was fairly low (25 out of a total Circuit membership of 372). In itself this gives cause for thought and reflection as the Circuit seeks its way forward.

Thanks go to our Deacon, Theresa Simons-Sam for her hard work in organising the day and to Hanwell for providing the venue and lunch.

Response to the Government's plans to offshore asylum seekers in Rwanda

*The President and Vice-President of the Methodist Conference,
The Revd Sonia Hicks and Barbara Easton*

The Government's plans to offshore asylum seekers in Rwanda gives yet another insight into its hostile, uncompassionate and ineffective response to asylum seekers and refugees.

People are not a problem to be dealt with, but are individuals with inherent value and dignity made in the image of God. Sending some of the most vulnerable people in the world thousands of miles away to be imprisoned does not respect this dignity.

The factors which push people out of their homes and into displacement will always be much stronger than those which motivate them to claim asylum in a certain place. As we have seen in Ukraine, conflict and persecution can become a daily reality at a distressingly rapid pace.

Whilst it is important to address the dangerous trade of people smuggling across the channel, the lack of safe and accessible routes by which people can claim asylum in the UK will ultimately contribute significantly to increased small boat crossings. The government have shied away from committing to a resettlement target, and the Nationality and Borders Bill lacks detail of new or expanded resettlement routes. Now, the government is passing the issue onto another country, which the UK has previously criticised for holding a poor record on human rights.

Offshore processing is a distraction from the real work which needs to be done to establish workable, safe and welcoming routes through which the UK can play its part in responding to need.

We urge the government to reconsider their approach, and accept proposed amendments to the Nationality and Borders Bill to uphold a practice of welcome.

A Prayer for our lawmakers

O God, who holds the nations in loving hands, we pray for British Parliamentarians as they hold the futures of asylum seekers and refugees in their hands. We pray O God, for new laws to be just and fair, to be compassionate and life enhancing. We pray for those who will debate, table amendments and vote on the Nationality and Borders Bill. May your love, O God, reign in their hearts. May they see beyond short term populism and grasp the common humanity that we all possess. May your Holy Spirit inspire us as we campaign against any government initiative which seeks to override the fact that we are all made in Your image. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray.
Amen.

From the Circuit Meeting

The most recent Circuit Meeting took place on 23rd February at Kingsdown and was the first 'in person' meeting since the start of the pandemic. Opening devotions were led by our Superintendent Minister, Rev Rachel Bending.

Rachel opened by giving a round-up of some of the things that have been going on in and around the Circuit.

- Hanwell's Wednesday coffee mornings were going well and were having a good impact in the local community.
- The Ealing Churches Winter Night Shelter had taken 10 places in the Broadway Hotel in Southall. Ealing Green had taken an evening meal on Thursdays to the hotel for the Nightshelter guests for 7 weeks. (*nb Kingsdown also provided 2 Sunday evening meals – Editor*).
- There were concerns about the number of people returning to Sunday services. Churches had seen a drop compared to before the start of the pandemic and were wondering what the future holds.
- Our deacon, Theresa Simons-Sam will be ordained in June having completed all parts of her training. The Ordinands' Testimony Service will be at Wesley's Chapel on 22nd May at 6.30pm.

From time to time there are changes in the representatives to the Circuit Meeting. On this occasion, Esther Ackah (Kingsdown) stood down and Anil Griffin (King's Hall) formally joined the meeting. It is worth remembering that the members of the Circuit Meeting are the Managing Trustees of the Circuit and that an up-to-date list of trustees must be maintained with the Charity Commission.

Last year the annual Methodist Conference decided that churches should be able to register for the solemnization of same-sex marriages although the final decision rests with each local church council. This is an important issue which church councils need to consider. The meeting heard how this had been approached by Rev Sue Male in her pastoral section - Ealing Green, Kingsdown and Pitshanger. Sue led discussions with each congregation at which people were encouraged to express their views. At the end of each discussion, an indicative vote was taken by secret ballot in order to gauge the overall feeling of each congregation. The church councils could then decide what in the light of the results whether or not to register or, whether to re-visit the issue at a later date.

On safeguarding, the meeting heard that training had been held up during the pandemic. Churches are now assessing their needs to training as well as for DBS checks which must be renewed on a four year cycle.

The pandemic has slowed progress on the King's Hall development project. However, work is progressing on finalising the 'Heads of Terms' which will form the basis of the agreement with the developer, Pocket Living. The project will then

move on to developing the design of the proposed building in more detail with architects. In the meantime, discussions are ongoing with Ealing Council's Planning Committee. Thinking forward, the King's Hall congregation needs to begin to consider how it can engage more widely with the community in Southall so that they can maximise the opportunities which the new building will present.

A new board is to be put up outside the King's Hall board to publicise the fact that the church continues to meet in the school next door.

The Circuit's finances continue to be a source of concern and the meeting heard that; although they were broadly as expected, the results for 2020/21 showed a further deficit of around £40-50,000. The assessments paid by our churches to support our ministers and the work of the Circuit were not generating sufficient income. This is, of course doubly problematic as a number of our churches are themselves struggling financially at present.

The Circuit owns a number of properties which are let to generate income. These include a former manse and two sets of flats. Whenever tenancies come up for renewal or re-letting, the meeting must give its approval (this is also the case when church flats are let) and the meeting approved the letting of two flats at Havelock House and a re-valuation of rents at a property comprising two flats at Newton Avenue in Acton.

As a landlord, the Circuit must also ensure that its properties are properly maintained and looked after. The meeting approved proposals to replace windows and carry out other refurbishment works at Havelock House. A proportion of the expenditure is recoverable from the owners of three of the flats which were sold on long leaseholds in 1987.

Finally, the meeting prayed for those who had died during the Coronavirus pandemic.

The next Circuit Meeting is planned for 26th May 2022.

Leading Worship and Local Arrangements

"Local Arrangements" are a regular feature of our churches' worship. They give people in our churches the opportunity to arrange services and lead worship. They can, however be intimidating....

Following the Circuit Service at Greenford on 17th July, Rev Rachel Bending will run a workshop on how to organise Local Arrangements and leading worship and will hand out resources.

Anyone who is interested is invited to attend.

Christ has No Hands

Gerald Barton, Editor

During the last session of the Monday evening Lent group led by Rev Sue Male, more than one person mentioned writers who made reference to poems or readings that say 'Christ has no hands'. The message, of course is that Christ can only work through us and the actions we take in the here and now. Here is a translation of a poem I found while on holiday in Genova in 2012 alongside another poem dating from the 15th century attributed to St Teresa of Avila expressing the same idea.

Christ has no hands,
He has only our hands
To do his work today.

Christ has no feet,
He has only our feet
To go to people today.

Christ has no voice,
He has only our voice
To speak of Him today.

Christ has no strength,
He has only what we can do
To guide people to Him.

We are the only Bible
That the peoples still read.
We are the only evangelist
Written in deeds and words

Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to
do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he
blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
compassion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours

Walking for Diverse Leadership

Daud Irfan, Methodist Youth President 2021-22

When the COVID-19 pandemic suddenly affected the whole world, its impact on the lives of people was unimaginable. This was something we were not prepared for. Being at home during lockdown was a time of new beginnings for me. I discovered new hobbies and interests, one of which was walking. When we were going through a period of lockdown during the first wave, one thing I was able to do was go outside and exercise and for many months I began walking miles and miles on a daily basis. Little did I know at that time that this was God's idea to prepare me for something which I could never have imagined, walking from Cardiff all the way to London.

When I started my year as the Youth President, one thing I was passionate about was seeing culturally diverse people take up the torch and step up into leadership roles. The experiences I have picked up throughout my life growing up as a culturally diverse young person in a country as diverse as the UK have inspired me to encourage other young people to come forward as future leaders.

The challenge was a tough one but myself and my father, Revd Irfan John, the Synod Enabler for Culturally Diverse Congregations in Wales, managed to walk 167 miles over seven days. This was no easy feat to achieve. The first day began full of sunshine as we left Rumney Methodist Church in Cardiff after a wonderful and truly moving service. The next few days were filled with heavy rain and strong winds. We were determined to finish the walk in London and had prepared for all weather conditions with a positive mind-set and warm, waterproof clothing.

As you can imagine on such a long walk, blisters and sprains were bound to happen, and mine began to appear by the end of the second day but we carried on with the walk. Having my father by my side was a huge encouragement having his passion, dedication and support throughout our journey. He had been training for this for some time so it was no surprise to see how full of energy he was from the start of the walk and, every day from the early hours of the morning until we reached our destination each evening. This was a huge motivation for me alongside all the inspiring phone calls, messages and comments we were receiving on social media from people who were tuning into our videos and live streams.

The final stretch of our journey was from Uxbridge to Wesley's Chapel and Leysian Mission in the City of London. That day seemed to go by so much quicker than expected due to the excitement and joy at how far we had walked in the past few days. The two of us had walked the entire distance and throughout the week, we had made short stops in local Methodist churches and met many friends, church members and colleagues who joined us in fellowship and prayer. For the last mile through the City of London we were joined by a dozen people before reaching Wesley's Chapel where we were welcomed with a celebration service organised and led by the Rev'd Canon Dr Jennifer Smith.

I would like to thank all those who were such a huge support for us throughout the walk and helped myself and my father to complete this huge target that we had set out to achieve.

Downloaded from the Methodist Church website www.methodist.org.uk

Religion and the State

Gerald Barton, Editor

In July 1982 a special service of thanksgiving was held in St Paul's Cathedral to mark the end of the Falklands War. I recall the irritation in certain political circles when it was clear that prayers would be offered not just for the British dead but also the Argentinians who had lost their lives in the conflict. It struck me then that one of the functions of the church in this country is to act as a kind of 'conscience' for the nation and for the government in particular. Of course, this might be said of any church and, indeed any religion, in any country. Becoming directly involved in politics can be problematic for the church as it inevitably leads to areas where messy compromises have to be made and where the 'least bad' option is often the best there is. Nonetheless, governments need groups and institutions such as the church to perpetually remind them of the moral issues surrounding their decisions and actions.

Personally, I am highly sceptical of the desirability of aligning church and state too closely. Certainly, I would not feel comfortable living in a theocratic state or one which claims that its religion is its foundation. That would smack too much of rulers and governments regarding their policies as God's policies, a high form of arrogance if ever there was one. Fortunately, in this country we have not had such a government since the Commonwealth that followed the Civil Wars of 1642 – 1651.

In some countries there is a worrying trend for religion to become too closely aligned with nationality. For example, this has been the case to one extent or another in India ever since independence. Even though India is officially a secular state, the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has 'Hinduvta' within its founding philosophy. Regrettably, it is also seen in Russia where being 'Russian' is often closely tied to being Orthodox. In other words, to be truly Russian is to be Orthodox.

It is not surprising, nor indeed unusual for states to attempt to co-opt religion into their service. In 1941, when German tanks were at the gates of Moscow, Stalin co-opted the previously persecuted Russian Orthodox Church as a means of rallying the people in their struggle against the invaders. Post war, relations between church and the Soviet state went through periods of relative 'freedom' and periods of persecution. At times, the church colluded with the state, for example in the repression of Ukrainian Catholics after 1945. At times, the church could be useful to the state but it would always sit awkwardly alongside the atheist ideology of the communist regime. Since the fall of communism however, links have become very much stronger.

One of the underlying reasons for the Russian invasion of Ukraine is Vladimir Putin's belief that Ukraine is not a 'valid' state and that there is no such thing as a Ukrainian 'nation'. When Ukraine emerged as an independent state at the break-up of the Soviet Union, an independent Orthodox Church of Ukraine also began to

emerge. Officially, the church in Ukraine remained part of the Moscow Patriarchate and the emerging Ukrainian church was not recognised by other Eastern Orthodox Churches. In October 2018, however, the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople signalled its intention to grant autocephaly (ie independence) to the Orthodox Church in Ukraine. In response the Moscow Patriarchate denounced the move and broke its ties with the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

This did not mean that all Orthodox parishes in Ukraine suddenly left the Moscow Patriarchate. At the time, there were about 7,000 parishes forming the Orthodox Church of Ukraine and about 12,000 that adhered to the 'Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate' (known as the 'Moscow Church'). By recognising the independence of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine from Moscow, the Ecumenical Patriarchate had, in effect legitimised it, but had not transferred parishes forming the Moscow Church to it. Perhaps not surprisingly, since the invasion of Ukraine began in February around half the parishes of the Moscow Church have applied to join the Orthodox Church of Ukraine.

Patriarch Kirill, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church has aligned himself and the Russian Church closely with Vladimir Putin and has gone so far as to declare his presidency "a miracle of God". Further, he has declared the invasion of Ukraine a 'godly affair' and praised the role it will play in keeping Russia "safe". Doubtless, Kirill was deeply annoyed by the recognition of the legitimacy and independence of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine as he saw it as being properly part of the Russian Church in a similar fashion to the way Putin sees Ukraine as 'really' part of Russia. His position means, though that he is unable to criticise the actions of Vladimir Putin's government and has become complicit in what it does. In effect, he finds himself and the Russian Church lending a religious legitimacy to the actions of the Russian state and is, in turn compromised by those actions. The conflation of Russian Orthodoxy with 'Russian-ness' and the Russian state must surely stand as a great mistake on Kirill's part.

Whilst always being ready to engage, the church needs must stand back from government so that it can legitimately call government to account and remind it of its moral responsibilities. The Archbishop of Canterbury was surely right to criticise the UK government's plans to ship so-called "illegal" asylum seekers to Rwanda to have their claims processed. I have a feeling that quite a lot of people in this country might think it a good policy, but that would not mean it is in any sense 'right'. The church must look at such things through the prism of how it sees the love of God and how it believes that love should be expressed in the world as we find it in the here and now, and speak and act accordingly.

To quote John 1:23:

I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord'....

The Bristol Bus Boycott

Gerald Barton, Editor

During April BBC Radio 4 ran a series of short programmes by Neil MacGregor, former Director of the British Museum touring museums throughout the country. Neil asked each museum to focus on just one object from its collection which in some way speaks about the city or region the museum covers. When it came to the museum of my home town, Bristol, I was intrigued to hear that they had chosen the largest item in their collection – a Bristol ‘Lodekka’ double-decker bus housed in the M-Shed, a part of the museum in Bristol’s former city docks. When we visited the M-Shed some years ago, I sat on that bus feeling no end of nostalgia. These buses were introduced in about 1963 when I was 9 or 10 years old and were the buses on which I went to school and travelled in and out of the city from my home on the Hartcliffe housing estate. As a boy I was fascinated by these new buses. They looked more modern, were longer, had a front entrance/exit with doors controlled by the driver and/or conductor and stairs at the front but, like the older buses still had half-cabs and needed to be crewed by both a driver and a conductor.

None of that, nor nostalgia for that matter, explains why the museum chose the Lodekka bus. Rather, they chose it for what it says about race relations in Bristol in the early 1960’s. By that time the West Indian community numbered about 3,000 people mainly living in the St Paul’s area, a little to the north of the city centre. Like their counterparts in other British cities, they suffered discrimination both in employment and housing. Some were employed by the Bristol Omnibus Company which operated all the bus services in Bristol and surrounding areas but only in lower paid positions in workshops and canteens. Despite there being a labour shortage, none were employed in better paid positions as drivers or conductors.

Around that time, the local press ran a series of articles on the ‘colour bar’ on the buses. The company management admitted that there was in effect such a bar but largely blamed the Transport & General Workers Union (TGWU). The union denied this although in 1955 their Passenger Group had passed a resolution that "coloured" workers should not be employed as bus crews. Andrew Hake, curator of the Bristol Industrial Mission, recalled that "The TGWU in the city had said that if one black man steps on the platform as a conductor, every wheel will stop". In addition, bus workers were concerned that a new source of labour might lower their wages – a complaint still made about the impact of immigrant workers today. In short, the TGWU and the existing bus crews objected to working alongside Afro-Caribbeans and the company management was quite happy not to make an issue of it.

Four young West Indian men, Roy Hackett, Owen Henry, Audley Evans and Prince Brown, formed an action group, later to be called the West Indian Development Council as they were unhappy with the lack of progress in fighting discrimination by the West Indian Association. The group decided to persuade another young West Indian, Paul Stephenson to be their spokesman. Stephenson set up a test case to prove the colour bar existed by arranging an interview with the bus company for

Guy Bailey, a young warehouseman and Boys Brigade officer. When the company discovered that Bailey was West Indian, the interview was cancelled. The activists then decided on a bus boycott in Bristol.

The boycott was announced at a press conference on 29th April 1963 after which the *Bristol Evening Post*, in an editorial pointed out that the TGWU opposed the apartheid system in South Africa and asked what trade union leaders were doing to counteract racism in their own ranks.

What then followed was a rather ugly and contorted public debate. Students from Bristol University demonstrated in support of the boycott but were jeered by bus crews as they marched through the city centre. A Labour Alderman, Henry Hennessey spoke of the apparent collusion between the bus company and the TGWU and was threatened with expulsion by the Labour Group on the city council in response. Tony Benn MP (Bristol North) supported the boycott and Harold Wilson, then Labour Leader of the Opposition spoke out against racial discrimination.

An increasingly bitter war of words was fought out in the local media. The local branch of the TGWU refused to meet a delegation from the West Indian Development Council. Ron Nethercott, South West Regional Secretary of the union, persuaded a local black TGWU member, Bill Smith, to sign a statement which called for quiet negotiation to solve the dispute and condemned Stephenson for causing potential harm to the city's Black and Asian population. Nethercott, attacked Stephenson in the *Daily Herald* accusing him of dishonesty and irresponsibility. Stephenson then accused Nethercott of libel and took the case to the High Court which awarded him damages against Nethercott.

The Bristol Council of Churches rather danced around the boycott and the issue of racial discrimination when it issued a statement saying *"We seriously regret that what may prove an extended racial conflict arising from this issue has apparently been deliberately created by a small group of West Indians professing to be representative. We also deplore the apparent fact that social and economic fears on the part of some white people should have placed the Bristol Bus Company in a position where it is most difficult to fulfil the Christian ideal of race relations."* That in turn drew criticism from the Jamaican High Commission.

The TGWU, the city's Labour establishment and the Bishop of Bristol tried to work with Bill Smith to resolve the dispute, ignoring Stephenson and the West Indian Development Council. Learie Constantine, the High Commissioner for Trinidad and Tobago and former cricketer put pressure on the Lord Mayor of Bristol, the Secretary General of the TGWU, Frank Cousins and the Transport Holding Company, the Bristol Omnibus Company's parent. Negotiations went on for months between the bus company and the union. Eventually, on 27th August a mass meeting of 500 bus workers voted to end the colour bar. The day after, the general manager of the bus company announced an end to racial discrimination in the employment of bus crews. Then on 17th September, Raghbir Singh, a Sikh became

Bristol's first non-white bus conductor and a few days later two Jamaican and two Pakistani men joined him.

Parliament passed two Race Relations Acts – one in 1965 and a second in 1968 outlawing discrimination in public places (1965) and in housing and employment (1968). Many see the Bristol Bus Boycott as laying the ground for Harold Wilson's Labour government to act and some argue that it would have been difficult for Wilson to move forward on racial discrimination had it not been for Paul Stephenson's efforts.

Personally, I have to say I don't remember the bus boycott but as a boy of 10 I just wasn't aware of such things at the time. Also, very few people of West Indian or Asian origin lived on the housing estate where I lived and in any case it was on the other side of the city from St Paul's so the boycott would have had very little obvious impact in my area. The financial impact on the bus company would also have been quite small – the West Indian community accounted for only about one half of one per cent of Bristol's population at the time. The public rancour, however and its exposure of the hypocrisy of the bus company, the union and society more generally, most certainly had its impact.

Finally, and to show how long it can take for changes in attitude to seep through society, in 2009 Paul Stephenson was appointed an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE), for his part in organising the bus boycott. Guy Bailey and Roy Hackett were also awarded OBEs. In 2013 perhaps marking the 50th anniversary of the boycott, Unite, the successor to the TGWU, issued an apology. Laurence Faircloth, the union's South West secretary said of the union's stance at the time, "*It was completely unacceptable. I can well accept the sense of injustice and pain that has been felt because [of] what happened in Bristol all those years ago*".

Toolkit for Churches Responding to the Crisis in Ukraine

The Methodist Church website has a special section for churches and individuals thinking about how they might respond to the crisis in Ukraine. To access the kit, go to: <https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/prayer/ukraine/>

The toolkit is based on one initially prepared by the Faith in Public Life Department of the Church of England and the Diocese of Canterbury, who have kindly permitted the Methodist Church to share it across the Connexion. Please note that due to the fast-evolving nature of events in Ukraine elements of the Toolkit will be updated periodically.

Forthcoming Events around the Circuit

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

June

5th Sun 4.00pm **Iris Axon Concert Series at Acton Hill**
Jelena Makarova, piano
£5.00 concessions, £6.00 adults, £2.00 children

5th Sun 6.30pm **Circuit Local Preachers & Worship Leaders Dedication Service at Kingsdown**

July

17th Sun 11.00am **Circuit Service at Greenford**
Followed by a 'bring and share' lunch and a workshop led by Rev Rachel Bending on leading local arrangement services.

August

28th Sun 11.00am **Circuit Service at Hanwell**
Followed by a 'bring and share' picnic in the field behind the church - bring your own food and something to sit on.

Articles for '**In-touch**' Issue No 95 (September - November) 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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