

Weoley Hill Church News



May 2019

From the Minister's study—

Dear Friends,

In an article in the Christian Century (a highly respected church magazine in the USA) a minister tells of her experience in church in which all the study groups were cancelled because of lack of participation. As she writes: *We've done things in the morning and the evening, onetime deals and series of various lengths....We've gone general ("The Gospels") and specific ("Sex in the Bible")....We've tried book studies, multimedia projections and videos on famous people. We've met at church, in homes, in coffee shops, in bars. We've used catchy titles, posters, social media, newspaper ads and lawn signs. We've shared potlucks and catered dinners and yummy snacks.....*

And after telling of the many different ways her church has tried to attract participation with all kinds of different study groups, events, on different days, at different times, catering for a variety of different needs and tastes, she concludes.....*but folks simply have not been coming.*

I am not surprised that many responses to this article affirmed that this is a rather general trend in many churches. But why the lack of participation? Because of lack of time, is the usual response! There is so much else going on....*When I ask why people don't come, the answer almost always is time. They have good intentions, but their lives are so full. So they tend to use their precious free time only for things that they really care about, which tends to be things that offer immediate good feelings....*And these may be things that are very practical such as helping a friend or a neighbour, looking after grandchildren, doing voluntary work, supporting charities, engaging in advocacy and campaigning etc.....*And they love to eat with friends – the church's social calendar is filled with dinners and parties...But the idea of having leisurely conversations about Jesus is just, well, too slow.*

Well, we like dinners and parties too but we didn't do too bad over the past few months having conversations about our faith as some of our

congregation have participated in the TLS “Talking about God” course, led by Stuart Scott, in which we did talk about God, and Jesus and the Holy Spirit etc. And some attended the Lent Study on “The mystery of God” which was held in our church on the Tuesday afternoon during Lent. It was a well-attended ecumenical gathering and we had good conversations too.

That said, I know that times have changed and many do not see the need, or have the time, to participate in regular (Bible) study groups. Learning is important but nowadays we can find so much information by just “googling” on the internet. Yes, the internet may well give us all the information we are looking for although certainly a discerning eye may be needed to sift through the wealth of material we can access, all of which is not necessarily helpful or what we would agree with!

The article in the Christian Century ends with the writer observing: *Lately I'm seeing the need to reverse what I learned as the linear process from inner conversation to service in the world. What if instead the Spirit is leading us to begin with acts of mercy and justice? How can we use our connective technology to host conversations about real-life experiences, to ask thoughtful questions and then see where our stories intersect the gospel? And then how can we take things deeper, challenging one another to live a life of integrity and purpose, using God's gifts for the healing of the world?*

I tend to agree but I hope that beside using “connective technology” we can still find time to meet face to face to share our experiences as people of faith seeking to be “faith”full in our living. And so I invite you to attend the **Pastorate Day** on **18 May** in which we will “explore experiences of change, loss and bereavement” and how we live through these experiences and help others to deal with them. (See separate notice)

Also I invite you again to come to the Manse on the 4th Wednesday of every month (from 10.30 AM-12 NOON) for an informal time of reading news items of interest and discussing them or letting them remind us

of our own stories. At our last meeting we read an article on how the Home Office uses bad bible study to reject asylum claims, we read about Mary Warnock's public service and shared our views on assisted dying, which she was in favour of, and we read about how social norms can change and have changed, etc. In our conversations we can share ideas about our faithful response to the issues of our time and we get to know each other better too!

I hope to see many of you at one (or more) of our events and meetings during the Easter season that runs through the month of May!

With all best wishes,

Leonora

NOTICES

PASTORATE DAY 18 May at Bournville URC

On Saturday 18 May Stuart Scott (Synod Training Officer) and I will lead a day on "Exploring experiences of change, loss and bereavement" for the three churches in the Cadbury pastorate. It will be a day in which we can share our experiences as well as learn from each other how we live through them ourselves or help others to cope. As we all live through experiences of change and loss, and as we all may find ourselves fulfilling a pastoral role when accompanying others in their journey of loss, I am sure it will be a worthwhile day! Bournville will host the day, starting at 10 AM and ending at about 2.15 PM. We will have a lunch break with coffee/tea provided but please bring your packed lunch. Please sign up for the day and if you need a lift let me or one of the Elders know.

Social Evenings of Elder's Groups at the Manse

As mentioned earlier in the year, we are now organizing the social evenings when Elders will invite the people on their pastoral list to come with them to the Manse for fellowship as well as conversation about our church life and ministry, appreciating what our church does well and recognizing that while we are faced with challenges, they can be opportunities too! The first evening is planned for the 16 May from 7.30-9 PM for Loraine's, Alan's, Norma's and Linda's Elders groups. A personal invitation will follow.

Leonora

Weoley Hill URC Special Service Trinity Sunday, 16 June

The church has a long past association with the Selly Oak Colleges and many of the staff and students worshipped with us during their time in Birmingham. We want to celebrate this and in particular to remember some of the leaders of this work of mission. We will recall in particular Ian Fraser, Lesslie Newbiggin, Dan Beeby, John and Elnora Ferguson and Tom and Kay Hawthorn.

We invite all who wish to join us for worship or to send us messages and recollections.

This idea started with my wish to mark the passing of Ian Fraser, who was Dean of Mission at Selly Oak Colleges and the last living founder member of the Iona Community when he died at the age of 100 in 2018. He was never a minister of the URC. We have widened the original idea to cover other people who were at the Selly Oak Colleges and also associated with Weoley Hill.

Also, many of the students of the colleges worshipped with us while staying in Birmingham and are now scattered all over the world.

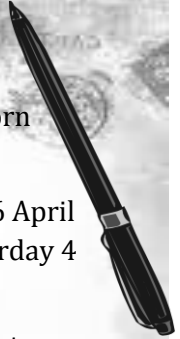
John Fletcher

Personalia

The Thornetts have a new grandson, Cormac John, born 11 May. Mother Susan and baby are both thriving.

Miles 'the Piano' of Weoley Castle died on Tuesday 16 April after a long illness. His Memorial service was on Saturday 4 May.

Please remember all who are ill, undergoing treatment or recovering from treatment, including Deb Moriarty, John Glen, Betty Johnston and Kath Upton.



Neighbourhood News

News and events from other local churches:

Weoley Castle is taking part in 'Love Weoley Castle' Awards Night on 22 May at Shenley Academy. Their pre-worship brunch on 26 May will benefit Christian Aid.

Restore training: *Who is Fleeing Persecution and Seeking Sanctuary?* 21/05/2019 7.15-9.15 PM, Tuesdays 21 May, 4 & 11 June, Carrs Lane Church Centre,

Eco Church Bronze award

We have received the certificate—now on to silver!

FRIENDSHIP GROUP

On Wednesday 10 April we were fortunate to have Jeremy Thompson, head of **Restore**, give us a talk about their work. Started in 1999, and adopted in 2000 by Birmingham Churches Together, their remit is to help all refugees and asylum seekers who come to our city. We learnt that a refugee is someone who is fleeing persecution or the threat of it, in their homeland and when they later apply to stay then they become an asylum seeker.

Jeremy had worked in both Pakistan and Afghanistan and discovered how lonely and disorienting it can be when all the culture is different and one cannot understand a word of the language. In both places the people were very welcoming, he was often invited to weddings and meals, and they were also helpful with directions, but as a member of a minority group, in this case Christian, and with conflict within the capital amongst several different mujahidin groups, after three years he felt “physically and emotionally drained”. This experience made him realise how important it is to help those who need safety, welcome and friendship when uprooted from their home.

This is the essence of what **Restore** hopes to do following injunctions to “care for the alien amongst us”, and to “welcome the stranger”. (Matthew 25 v35-40). Jeremy showed us a ‘Lampedusa cross’, made from two rough pieces of wood taken from a boat that was wrecked at Lampedusa, Italy where 311 Eritrean and Somali refugees were drowned en route from Libya to Europe. Thankfully 155 were saved by the inhabitants of this small island and each survivor was given a cross made from the wreckage by the island carpenter, Mr Tuccio.

At the moment there are 2.4 million refugees from South Sudan, 2.6million from Afghanistan and 6.3 million from Syria, most now in refugee camps in Turkey, with 69 million worldwide (2018... HNCR). Britain has in the region of 122,000(2018) which is 0.25% of the

population, one quarter of one percent. Birmingham has declared itself a City of Sanctuary and has pledged to support organisations helping refugees and to actually DO something practical. There are 350 here from Syria at the moment with another 200 to come and RESTORE is helping them, and others, to gain confidence, learn English, develop and improve skills, have access to medical and financial aid, find accommodation and simple things like finding the nearest mosque or Halal butcher. They are helped to fill in the complicated forms to apply for leave to remain, or for asylum, and perhaps to eventually settle into the country or even to return home.

To do this they train 'befrienders' who are matched with a refugee and they become a supportive friend, helping them join a doctor's surgery, go out for a coffee, visit the art gallery, Lickey Hills, Central market or any local place around the city, find a school for their children, or a training course for themselves and all the time help with speaking, and becoming more confident in, English. There is always help and advice from RESTORE and often group outings with families and other 'befrienders' so you are not alone. The next training sessions are **Tuesday 21 May and 4, and 11 June from 7.15-9.15 PM at Carrs Lane Church Centre. Contact 661 4275 or admin@restore-uk.org** There is no upper age limit and training is free but donations are welcome. We collected £53 for Jeremy from the 16 people who attended the meeting.

Our next meeting, Wednesday 8 May from 2.15 PM, is the **Bring and Buy to raise funds for Christian Aid**. As usual we are asking for donations of books, bric-a-brac, jewellery, plants, toiletries, *and especially cakes*, to go with the tea and coffee. If you have lots of items they can be collected or just bring them to church at the usual time, but if you haven't items then still come along, you could grab a bargain! All profits go to this worthy cause.

Lorraine DaCosta

May retiring collection for Barnabasfund

We hear of and pray for Christians being persecuted because of their faith in many countries and are encouraged by the growing number of Christian converts in places where it is hard or even a life sentence to be a Christian. These believers need support and that is what the Barnabasfund does. It sends financial support for projects which help Christians, churches and their communities where they suffer discrimination, persecution and oppression as a consequence of their faith. When requested, Barnabasfund draws attention to issues by public petitions and letter writing campaigns. It also makes known the plight of the persecuted Church and encourages prayer by producing information and resources.

The information below is from the Barnabasfund website.

Egypt Legalises More Churches

Another 111 churches and church affiliated buildings were legalised in Egypt in early April, bringing the total to 894. The Prime Minister has told the committee overseeing the process that it needs to speed-up as the majority of the 3,730 churches which applied are still awaiting approval. This follows new standards under the Law for Building and Restoring Churches introduced in 2016.

Since coming to power in 2014, Egypt's President al-Sisi has treated Christians more favourably and his government has passed laws making it easier to build new churches. However, Christian communities regularly face violence and church buildings are often targeted by Muslim mobs, especially those which are unregistered or newly registered. Muslim-dominated Egypt has a substantial Christian minority, which is one of the oldest Christian communities in the world.

Sue Beeby

WEOLEY HILL UNITED REFORMED CHURCH PRAYER DIARY

*Give thanks to the Lord, because he is good, and his love is eternal.
Ps 118:29*

	Church members	
WK 1: 5-11 May	Sam & Alex Lukwago David & Christine Marlow	The work of Christian Aid in supporting projects that help improve people's lives. For all those who are involved in raising funds and awareness of its work. Persecuted Christians and Christian minority groups. Organisations that support oppressed Christians.
WK 2: 12-18 May	Jose Marsland Chris Mayhew	
WK 3: 19-25 May	Rob & Anna McManus, Ieuan, Ciaran	
WK 4: 26 May-1 June	Deborah Moriaty Nancy Nicholls	

NOTE: As always, please feel free to send any feedback on the 'Prayer Diary' and specific prayer requests that you would like to include in future lists to Sue Beeby