

Weoley Hill Church News



February 2019

From the Minister's study—

Dear friends,

I always wanted to participate in a book group but I never managed to do so until now. So far I have twice gone to our church's book group and very much enjoy it, even though the books that had been chosen for us to read were not of authors I had ever read before nor books that I might have chosen myself. But that is the joy of being part of a book group in which people take turns to suggest a book title and you are introduced to different authors.

Like many of you, I think, I love reading and my bedside table has always a stack of books on it. Some of the books I just dip into, one chapter at a time, others I read in one go, cover to cover. And others I just have no time to read but perhaps I hope that the mere title will inspire me or the content will somehow magically enter my brain just by lying next to me! Oh, you want to know what books are presently stacked up? Among others, Yuval Noah Harari's *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*, *Climate Justice* by Mary Robinson, *Pachinko* by Min Jun Lee, *Interrupting Silence*, *God's command to speak out* by Walter Brueggemann, besides *The distant echo* by Val McDermid, which is the next book on the book group reading list, as well as some books in foreign languages.

But, let me tell you about a short but beautiful book I read recently that touched me and of which I was reminded again on the occasion of the Holocaust Memorial Day at the end of January. It is *Noah's Child* by the French writer, Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt. It is a story inspired by real events and real people.

The story is about Joseph, a young Jewish boy in Belgium, who has to go into hiding when the Nazis start rounding up the Jews. Torn from a loving family life and given a new identity' he is taken in by a Catholic priest, Fr Pons, in his Catholic boarding school. Some of the pupils in the school are genuine pupils, others, like Joseph, are Jewish children who are given sanctuary. Fr Pons takes good care of all the children

and makes sure that the Jewish children are not found out, for instance by letting the Christian and Jewish children shower at different times and by pretending the Jewish children are ill on the Sunday when the Christian children go to the local church for their first Communion. While Joseph at first struggles to settle in, after befriending another boy and as he is well cared for in the school, he gradually adjusts to his new life.

One night, Joseph discovers that Fr Pons has a secret. Hidden in the crypt of a chapel on the grounds of the school Fr Pons has reconstructed a synagogue where he keeps Talmud and Torah scrolls, rabbinical commentaries, menorahs and recorded Jewish prayer music. Fr Pons describes himself as a collector and, like Noah, he wants to save people—as many Jewish children as possible—as well as the Jewish religious and cultural artefacts which he wants to preserve for the future. He does not want the Nazis to destroy the Jewish heritage for which he has great love and respect.

When Joseph finds out his secret Fr Pons can do no other than take the boy into his confidence. From then on Fr Pons starts to instruct Joseph into the Jewish faith, at the same time encouraging the young boy to remain true to the faith of his ancestors, even when Joseph expresses his desire to become a Christian. No, Fr Pons does not want to convert his Jewish pupils.

Fr Pons and Joseph have many night time discussions on Judaism and Christianity and it allows Joseph to appreciate his own faith tradition more. “Is a Christian a Jew who has ceased waiting [for the Messiah]?” Joseph asks. And he asks Fr Pons why he should respect all religions “if they are not true.” Fr Pons replies, “If you only respect the truth, then you will not have much to respect” And Fr Pons tells him that a religion is neither true nor false; it is a certain way of life. And what Fr Pons especially wanted to teach Joseph is that it is not so much religion that matters but faith in God.

After the war Joseph is reunited with his family. And the book ends when fifty years later Joseph is living in Israel. And he shares these words with us: "Being in favour of Israel does not mean approving all of Israel's decisions. We must make peace with the Palestinians. It is their territory too. The very history of our persecution should lead us to deliver the words that we ourselves have been waiting for, over the centuries"

And I end with a Jewish greeting which is a word that we are all waiting for:

SHALOM! Peace!

Leonora

Reading/Discussion Meeting at the Manse

As several of you having expressed an interest in participating in a morning meeting at the Manse I will have a first meeting on Wednesday 27 February at 10.30 AM. We will look at news items and articles that are of particular interest or relevance (but not Brexit!). If you sometimes feel overwhelmed with all the news that the media bombards us with and would like to "process" it with others, or if you would like to have an interesting and positive conversation based on comments or features in a (church) paper or magazine, please do come!

Personalia

Please remember those who are ill,
undergoing medical treatment or recovering
from illness or treatment.



Social Evenings

Our Elders meeting in January was a discussion meeting which took the form of an appreciative inquiry, in which we were encouraged to talk about the positives of our church life and ministry, appreciating “what is, what might be, what should be and what will happen if *might* be and *should* be happen.” One proposal was to organise social evenings, with Elders inviting the people on their pastoral list for further discussion. We will work this plan out at the next Elders meeting so please watch this space!

February Retiring Collections

The retiring collections for February will be for the Leprosy Mission.

Neighbourhood News

News and events from other local churches:

Bournville: a new TLS Lite course, *Thinking about God*, on 12 February, 5 and 19 March (tbc), 2 April (tbc), at 2 PM.

Getting to Grips with the Bible study day on Saturday 2 March from 10 am-3.15 PM

Barnes Close: *Reflection days*, 2nd Thursdays of the month, 10- 4 PM. £15 including lunch.

The Cotteridge Church: *Political prayer night* on Sunday 3 March, 7.30-9 PM, on the theme of climate injustice

Weoley Castle: *Messy Church*, Friday 8 February, starting at 3.30 PM.

Spring Activity Day including making a mosaic church sign, Tuesday 19 February.

Political Night Prayer at The Cotteridge Church

Every quarter a Political Night Prayer is organized by a group of concerned Christians from various denominations, each time focusing on a theme to reflect on, and to pray about and act upon. The next political night prayer is on Sunday 3 March and the theme is *Climate Changing Our Lives. Bringing together our concerns about Climate Injustice and our hope in God's creation.* The service (which can take various forms) starts at 7.30 PM (until 9 PM) and if anyone would like to attend and needs/wants a lift, please let Leonora know!

Study Day

On 2 March there will be a *Getting to Grips with the Bible* study day from 10 AM-3.15 PM at Bournville URC, led by Stuart Scott and Leonora. While it is part of the TLS (Training for Learning and Serving) *Thinking about the Bible* course, the study day is open to everyone and we will look at ways of studying the Bible, ways of interpreting the Bible and praying in and with the Bible. See the program of the day on the noticeboard and do sign up if you are interested!

TLS LITE Thinking about God

A short course led by Stuart Scott, including sessions on *Jesus, the Holy Spirit, Saviour, Lord*. (Sorry, we've already had *God!*) Guided discussion of these aspects of God and the Trinity with members of Weoley Hill and Bournville.

12 February, 5 and 19 March (tbc), 2 April (tbc), 2 PM at Bournville URC (Beaumont Rd). See Cheryl or Leonora to arrange lifts.

FISH AND CHIP SUPPER AND QUIZ

This will take place on **Saturday 2 March** from 6.00 PM and is in Fairtrade Fortnight so any profits will go towards Fairtrade. The quiz will start promptly at 6.30, with a break around 7.30 for fish, chips, bread and butter, pickles, tea or coffee, and then finish after a raffle around 9.00. **Teams of six at £6.00 per head** will battle for prizes to leave you speechless, and it is always a fun night, whether you have a team of six or join in with others, so do try to come along. Do tell me as soon as possible so I can get an idea of numbers to order for. Thank you.

Lorraine DaCosta

Brexit Borders and Belonging conference at Queens Foundation in December 2018

As a follow-up from this conference I am starting a series of short articles on some of the organisations and topics which came up at the conference. Here is the first of them.

J.P.I.T. is the Joint Public Issues Team of the Baptist Union, the Church of Scotland, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church.

John Fletcher

The following information is extracted from the web site <http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/> which I suggest we link from the Weoley Hill Church web site.

CHURCHES WORKING FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE

Our Mission

Christians are called to act justly and to work for God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. What does this mean today, and how can we make a difference?

We work to:

- equip Christians to act and pray on issues of injustice,
- resource churches to reflect and campaign effectively,
- help our Churches to speak out with a distinctively Christian voice on injustice.

Birmingham City Mission food collections

Birmingham City Mission's food bank at the Resource Centre provides over 150 food parcels each month for individuals and families in need. If you are able, please help by donating non-perishable food items and toiletries, *for example:*

Coffee, tea & hot chocolate

Milk (UHT or powdered) & sugar

Tinned potatoes, vegetables & tomatoes

Pasta, rice & noodles

Spaghetti hoops

Tinned meat & fish

Tinned fruit, rice pudding & custard

Cereals & biscuits

Jam & marmalade

Toothpaste, soap, shower gel & shampoo

Toilet rolls & nappies

Deodorant & sanitary products

They tell us that they are particularly short of food items at the moment, and they were very glad of our larger-than-usual donation following Christmas.

FRIENDSHIP GROUP

On Wednesday 9 January we started **Rosie Mayer's** talk on *Postcard Collecting* with some 'origami', trying to fold a letter for posting as would have been done before the invention of envelopes in 1845. Letters, paid for by recipient rather than sender, were rare; few people could read or write and most lived close to their families or places of work. With the Industrial Revolution requiring more communication, literacy becoming more common, and workers moving into towns, letters became more important. They were sealed with wax and a seal pressed into it. In 1837 Rowland Hill's pre-paid stamp, and charging by weight rather than distance, promoted the new postal service. The first commercially produced postcards were issued in America in 1870; these smaller, cheaper notes caught on worldwide, and postcards appeared in Britain in 1872. Two deliveries per day meant messages arrived very quickly so arrangements to meet, or confirmation of arrivals of people, or parcels, could be notified quickly and cheaply.

At first there was no convention about where to write address or message so sometimes messages appear over the front picture, but in 1902 the dividing line at the back designated the spaces. At first postage cost $\frac{1}{2}$ (old) penny, rose to 1d in 1918, then to $1\frac{1}{2}$ d for a brief period in 1921 before returning to 1d in 1922 following a huge national outcry! All stamps, from the original Victorian Penny Black, show the monarch's head looking to the left.

Few people had cameras then, so as well as recording more generally significant places, areas of local interest were photographed. The village church, shops or high street. The village fete, a bridge, pub or manor house. Sometimes shop owners, a local band or local residents were included and these and more now provide themes for postcard collectors, who may specialise in a particular area or subject. Early postcards were lithographs or woodcuts, and photographs were usually black and white although later some were hand tinted or used early coloured film. The process and rarity determine the value of a postcard. Rosie usually pays £1-£2, but some are worth £50 or more.

The oldest known postcard, handmade and thought to have been sent as a joke in 1840, was recently sold for £31,750!

Rosie grew up in Coleshill and collects cards and letters connected with the area. Coleshill was on the main coaching route from Birmingham to Liverpool, coaches passing through twice a day. It had a market, a small tannery, mills and a bridge over the river Cole and later a station. Local pubs brewed their own beer and Hams Hall and Blythe Hall were nearby. Photographs show many shops and houses, some with large cellars formed as the road level rose over time; the grammar school, the church interior and its eleventh century font. The stocks and pillory, moved to the side of the High Street, was a favourite subject. The local countryside of Maxstoke and Shustoke was also pictured at all seasons.(stoke/stock is Anglo-Saxon for 'place').

Many of the cards shown were by *Frederick Downing Spencer*, a local chemist born in 1872. With access to the chemicals and equipment needed, he obtained additional income through photography. He later moved to Stratford, became a surgeon and left the large sum of £13,852-16s-d on his death. Others that left Coleshill to 'improve themselves' were the man who invented Brylcreem (1928) and the Sumner family, who imported and sold Ty-Phoo tea.

Both the picture and the message can give historical facts, social history or lead to further investigation. The word "local" written across either side of the card told the post office to keep the card in the area for quicker delivery rather than send it to the main office in Birmingham to be returned to Coleshill. A picture with *named* people may help to identify family members and the date of the stamp could confirm, or deny, events. If you are interested in this enthralling hobby just pick a theme or area, or concentrate on a particular photographer as Rosie has, and use Google to check what is available. Some antique fairs sell postcards but much ephemera is on sale on the internet.

Our next meeting is on **Wednesday 11 February** when **Pancakes and Puzzles** are on offer from 2.15 PM. Lorraine DaCosta

Flowers in Church – a lost opportunity?

I'm sure we all appreciate the flowers in church on a Sunday morning. The front of the church can be a little bare and the colourful displays certainly brighten the place up. We should be thankful to those who are prepared to use their artistic talents to arrange them on a regular basis.

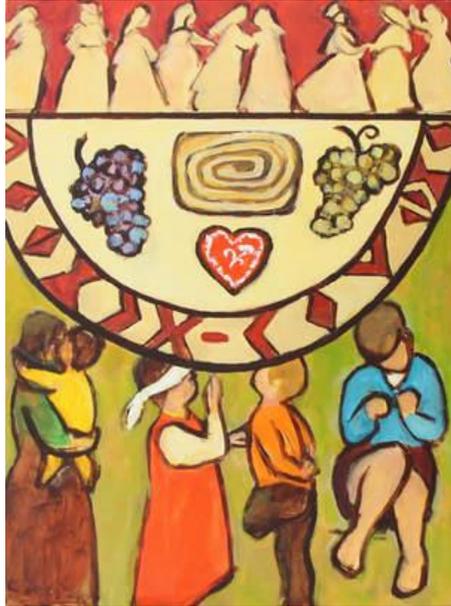
I can't help thinking though that we are missing an opportunity here. There is something symbolic to me that flowers last for so long in the sanctuary. The walls, windows and atmosphere of the church are clearly conducive to preservation, but perhaps that is a problem. If the walls are acting as a preservative to the flowers are they also protecting us from the local community too?

In Matthew 28:19 Jesus charges the disciples to "Go, then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples". This 'great commission' applies to us today and I know that maybe we are not that comfortable with it, we can often find it difficult to start those conversations. How useful, then, might a bunch of flowers be as an 'excuse' to go and talk to a friend we haven't seen for a while or a neighbour who we know is ill or lonely? Just a brief message from the church to say that we are thinking about them may not make them into disciples but it will certainly give them the impression that they are cared for.

In many of the churches I visit there is an organised system to make sure that the week's flowers are enjoyed by someone in the community who maybe needs a bit of a boost. I'm not suggesting that we need yet another rota or system in place just that it would be nice for that little bit of God's beauty that we have enjoyed for the hour on a Sunday be given the chance to brighten someone else's life during the coming week. Perhaps if we know of someone who might benefit from a short visit we could take the flowers out to them and so take a little bit of Weoley Hill Church and the Good News with them.

Alan Cotgreave

World Day of prayer



This was previously the Women's World day of Prayer but the name has been changed. It is a service prepared by women in different countries around the world. This year it is Slovenia.

The service will be on Friday 1 March at 10.30 AM here at Weoley Hill. It will be led by participants from the local churches.

Please invite your friends and neighbours to come along and share this worship. It is open to men and women so all are welcome.

Ann Evans

WEOLEY HILL UNITED REFORMED CHURCH PRAYER DIARY

Praise the Lord, all living creatures!

Praise the Lord!

Ps 150:6

MONTH: FEB 2019	CHURCH FAMILY	OTHER PRAYER POINTS
WK 1: 3rd-9th Feb	Grace & Joy Carter Mohamad Chamanbaz Juliet & Yvonne Chideya	Groups and activities that build up our fellowship and spiritual growth.
WK 2: 10th-16th Feb	Jinsub, Youngsun, Edward & Grace Chung Ina Clason	The care of our planet and what we can do to help protect it.
WK 3: 17th – 23th Feb	Joyce, David, Susan & Catherine Cope	The future of the UK and for greater understanding and acceptance of others' views.
WK 4: 24th Feb - 2nd Mar	Alan, Lydia, Jacob, Esther, Levi & Joel Cotgreave Roger Cotgreave	Countries living under dictators.

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

You may wish to add other members of the families mentioned to your prayers.