

CHURCHES TOGETHER FOR CHIPPING BARNET

Justice and Peace Newsletter 26 February 2015



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1. Valley Centre Update

At the AGM of Churches Together for Chipping Barnet, Rosemary Watkins reported that the work of the Valley Centre will continue until August and they hope to continue seamlessly in the new community centre in Mays Lane. The centre has still not yet been given a new name.

Julian Desborough reported on behalf of Barnet Churches Action that funds are coming in for the new building, with the Eleanor Palmer Trust being particularly generous. The parking problem is being addressed by the borough officers, who now acknowledge that the Traffic Plan for the area round the new building did not make sense and needs to be re-assessed.

For the background to this story, see J&P Newsletter 25.



2. Emmaus Barnet

The shop at 11 High Street, Barnet continues to do good business. In December, people brought items to the shop as part of the Rucksack Challenge: things to put into rucksacks for homeless people to help them endure the freezing temperatures this winter.

Does anyone know of a small workshop space that could be used for minor repairs and refurbishment of furniture? Also, more volunteers are still needed in the shop. Details from www.emmausbarnet.org.uk or phone 8440 8342.

On 29th March, there will be an Afternoon Tea Concert at Wesley Hall to celebrate the 1st Anniversary of Emmaus Barnet. All welcome.



3. Foodbank

At their 2014 AGM, Chair of Trustees Andrew Summers reported that food had been given to 1617 people during the full first year of the foodbank. 120 volunteers had been involved in collecting, sorting, coding, storing and parcelling food, and that the number of voucher givers was growing. He thanked Captain Julia Adcock of the New Barnet Salvation Army, who had first allowed the use of the Albert Road Citadel for the foodbank; she has moved to a south London posting. The foodbank is applying to the Charity Commission for charitable status. The main reasons for clients needing food parcels remain as before: unemployment, changes in benefits and delays in benefits being paid.

Martine Whitaker, who took over from Sheila Gallagher as Project Co-ordinator, reported that she is developing the work being done, alongside the Rainbow Centre on the Dollis Valley Estate and the London Foodbank Network Manager of the Trussell Trust. This includes donation of pasta to the Rainbow Centre so that they can provide midday meals for local children during school holidays.

4. The General Election

Bishops caused quite a stir recently by encouraging church members to engage in the political process ahead of the General Election. In a pastoral letter from the House of Bishops to the people and parishes of the Church of England, they urged Christians to consider the question of how to build a society in which voters think about others, not just their own self-interests. There were the usual protests from commentators about the church meddling in politics, but the bishops pointed out that the church's presence in every community enabled them to see the effects of the disengagement between politicians and the people they claim to serve. All political parties need to seek bold new visions of hope and idealism rather than sterile arguments about who might manage the existing system best. The bishops hope for 'a fresh moral vision of the kind of country we want to be'.

For the full text visit www.churchofengland.org and click 'House of Bishops Pastoral Letter on the 2015 General Election'.

The bishops are not the only ones. Christian Aid is also trying to bring people together to find out what faith has got to do with public life, why politics matter and how positive change can be created. At their meeting at the City Temple on 28th February, one of the speakers will be Dr Rowan Williams. www.christianaid.org.uk.

There will be an opportunity to question the candidates standing for election in the constituency of Chipping Barnet, at a hustings in Barnet parish church before 7th May.

5. The Environment

Caring for God's Earth— growing sustainable communities: a conference at St Albans Abbey on Saturday 25th April 2015. Has modern humanity become estranged from the natural world? How can we recover a sense of the sacredness of our universe? Speakers include Philip Roderick, Founder of the Quiet Garden Movement, David Shreeve, Director of the Conservation Foundation, Steve Hollinghurst, co-leader of the St Albans Forest Church and Anne Hollinghurst of God's Acre. To book, visit www.stalbans.anglican.org/faith/caring-gods-earth or telephone 01727 818148.

Green Christian is the new name of Christian Ecology Link, the charity that works to support a positive Christian response to the environmental crisis. Visit www.greenchristian.org for information on their publications and events.

They invite people to join the National Climate March on Saturday 7th March, to put pressure on the Government to take action to defend future generations and all creation from climate chaos: the climate talks at the UN in the autumn will be critical. There will be an ecumenical service at St Mary le Strand at 11.30 am, then the march from Lincoln Inn's Inn Fields to Parliament Square. See www.timetoact2015.org.

Climate Change and the Government: Christian Aid is joining with other groups to hold a massive event in central London on 17th June to tell the newly-elected government to make climate change a top priority. It will be a day filled with music, witness and worship. To attend, register at www.christianaid.org.uk/climate-summer.



6. Open the Book

According to a survey carried out for the Bible Society by YouGov, almost 3 in 10 young people do not know that the story of the birth of Jesus comes from the Bible. A quarter of adults think Superman is a Bible hero. Although primary schools are supposed to hold a daily time of 'collective worship ...of a broadly Christian character' it does not always happen. The teaching of RE is poor in many schools because the training for primary school teachers is inadequate and the teachers lack confidence. But if children are not taught bible stories they are deprived not only of a basis for their moral education but also of an important part of British culture.

Open the Book is an initiative supported by the local group of the Bible Society and Churches Together for Chipping Barnet. Open the Book proposes a programme of story-telling by volunteers prepared to act out bible stories from the Old and New Testament at Primary School assemblies, using costumes and props as appropriate. It has been a great success in some parts of England and Wales: it is in 1,500 schools thanks to the enthusiasm of 10,000 storytellers. See www.openthebook.net. In Barnet there are retired teachers who are prepared to enter into discussions with head teachers in local schools. They now need volunteers who enjoy acting who could take part. Please would anyone interested and wishing to have more details contact jennyremfry@btinternet.com.

7. Shrinking Congregations

Are you worried about the emptying of the pews? Below is a summary of an article 'Towards a Theology of the Death of the Church' by John P. Bradbury, Westminster College, Cambridge, in Theology 2014, Vol. 117(4) 249-255.

Is the Church in Europe dying? Yes, in the sense that congregations are falling. No, in the sense that the Church cannot die – there will always be the People of God. Some observers see religious belief dying as a result of the secularization of modern society; others see a strong desire for religion without actual observance. Yet others point to the radical resurgence of religion in all forms around the globe, with Europe merely returning to its historical norm, where religious belief was in a minority in spite of obligatory observance. The author suggests six ways in which to respond:

1. A doctrine of providence: the incipient death of the Church in Europe is perhaps our fault, but there is nothing we can do about it, except to try to be more faithful. There will always be a tension between human responsibility and divine providence.
2. The Church as the Body of Christ: Christ died and rose again. As Luther taught, the Church must endure misfortune, persecution and weakness in order to become like Christ.
3. The Church exists for the world, not for its members: Can only members of the Church be saved? In the early Reformation, there was an understanding that a small number of the elect were enough for the salvation of the whole world. Not even in Roman Catholic doctrine does salvation equate with membership of the Church.
4. Should the Church be small? The Covenant with Abraham promised that a small, exclusive people would bear witness to the creator God of the cosmos. The New Covenant broke this open to form a community of people regardless of race, gender or culture united by baptism in water and the Spirit. Perhaps the demise of the Church from its dominant place in Europe might actually be its return to be a small, covenant community that mediates the reality of salvation within the life of the world?
5. Christ and Death: before his death on the cross, Jesus put his affairs in order, for example by ensuring the future care of his mother by John. This reminds us that the lives of people who die well, with earthly things put in order and reconciliations effected, will be celebrated and mourned and a sense of peace obtained. 'What if the way of the cross for the church was to lead us to embracing a good death? What if we ensured ongoing life in the places where it mattered before we died – just as Jesus did with his mother?'
6. Resurrection: Christ's resurrection was unexpected; even Mary did not recognise the risen Christ. This was not resuscitation but transformation. For the Church to live under the cross is to know that resurrection will come - but not to be able to anticipate in what form the transformation will emerge. When Christ returns, he will probably not be recognised.

So what should we do? The author suggests a return to fundamentals: faithfulness, proclamation of the word and celebration of the sacraments. Anything extraneous to that is not necessary for the Church to be the Church. "What if, as the body of Christ, the call of the Church is to take up its cross and head for Jerusalem?"

Please send comments and contributions to the next edition of the Newsletter to jennyremfry@btinternet.com. Back numbers may be downloaded from the CTfCB website.