

CHRISTMAS 2016



.... born for us
on earth below

A Christmas letter from our Minister

Dear Friends,

Imagine if you were to reserve a place for Jesus at the Christmas table just as Jewish people often leave a cup for Elijah at a Passover meal. To invite Jesus to sup with us is actually to ask him not merely to be a guest but to come as the host, after all it is not our Christmas but his. If we do indeed invite him in, he tends to come in unexpected ways, in ways that we can easily overlook.

In one of her hymns Bernadette Farrell writes, "Longing for light, we wait in darkness". There are those in our world today who wait in the darkness, their lives having been uprooted, fleeing from persecution or oppression in places such as Iraq and Syria. Mary and Joseph were forced to go and be registered in a distant place, then later they had to flee with their child to Egypt from the death threats of king Herod. Others wait in the darkness of their own lives, having experienced broken relationships, hopes and dreams. We live in a political world where many things are broken. Others again feel excluded from modern society, because of their background. Christmas can be a hard time for those who feel lonely or downhearted.

Yet to each and to all, Christ comes just as he did at Bethlehem that first Christmas. Arguably he remains unlooked for, unlonged for, but still he comes to heal broken hearts, to set at liberty those who are burdened or oppressed. He doesn't come with all guns blazing, rather in humility and weakness, as a tiny little baby. He comes to us clothed with our humanity so that we can be clothed in his divinity, 'born to raise the sons of earth, born to give us second birth' (Wesley).

We can make room for Jesus this Christmas, and that not just at the dinner table. Our hearts, our homes, our church, our society can know true joy and peace when Jesus is given his rightful place as the host, not merely as a guest, for 'unless Jesus is Lord of all, He is not Lord at all' (Luther).

May we know the grace of the Lord Jesus with us during this Festive Season and throughout the New Year when it arrives. John

Church Family News

90th birthday greetings to Helen Mitchell who celebrates her birthday on December 8th.

Sadly we had to say 'Farewell' to Elorm, and to Isaac and Ebo as they returned to Ghana, following their studies here. We wish them success in the future.

We were happy to welcome Dwight who will be studying in Aberdeen.

Our thanks to Willie and Dot Primrose who organised a NEOS event and raised £240 from the refreshments served which will go to support a primary school in a fishing community in Jamestown, Accra, Ghana A.H.

CTM BUILDING UPDATE

Work on retiling the Church roof has been completed. We will have to check that earlier water damage has dried out without further complications. Then we can proceed to redecorating some rooms. Costs have been in line with expectations, although if the short steeples at the front of the Church need repointing in the next couple of years, there will be further expenditure.

Particular thanks are due to James Stevenson for liaising with the architect and checking bills and to Tomas Serafinavicius, both of whom kept an eye on how the work was progressing.

J.H.

IN THE CIRCUIT

In September we welcomed the Rev. Chris Jackson and his wife Jo. They come to us after 9 years in Shetland where they lived in a manse previously occupied by Colin and Joyce Wilson. Chris has a keen interest in music, playing the piano and organising musical events and takes on the pastoral care of the churches on the Moray coast. Before entering the ministry, Chris had a career in publishing. We ask God's blessing on his ministry and look forward to seeing him from time to time.

IN THE CONNEXION

The *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* recognises that the word 'connexion' (with an 'x', the normal spelling in the Wesleys' day) means 'an association of Methodist churches'. The connexion of which we are a part includes Methodists in Scotland, England, and Wales. (Methodists in the whole of Ireland have a separate structure.) So in Britain we have a small Connexional Team, including a Connexional Secretary, even a Connexional Complaints Panel. One of the recent decisions taken at connexional level (that is, by the Methodist Conference) was to make Scotland and Shetland a single district. Particularly important matters, such as our view of marriage and relationships, are of course the subject of widespread consultation in local churches, circuits, and districts, but final decisions are made by the Methodist Conference in the name of the connexion; that is, the whole church. Whether or not too much power is exercised at connexional level is another question, but the word itself reminds us that British Methodists are one, and act together on matters that concern them all.

WOMEN'S FELLOWSHIP CAFE

During the last year Women's Fellowship, with invaluable help from other church members, has run a Cafe at the Craft Fair which is held at CTM on the first Saturday of most months. We serve homemade soup, sandwiches, tea, coffee and biscuits and donate the profits to Action for Children. The Cafe enables us to build links with the stallholders and customers and to share with them information about Action for Children, especially about its support for families through their Torry project. £200 + has been raised since Sept and we plan to run the Cafe again on Sat Dec. 3rd. In 2017, we will have to restrict the Cafe to the December Craft Fair unless, of course, we receive additional offers of help. Could you spare an hour? The kitchen conversation is scintillating and the soup's not bad!

M.D.C.

OAK CAFE

It was quite a simple request by Betty Steel to Bill Cooper and Rev. John Watson, the former minister at St. Mark's

“Find some premises and I'll run a Cafe”.

So was born “Oak Cafe”. Initially the cafe operated in the Free Church at Alford Place, but about 16 years ago it moved to St. Mark's Church Hall. Regular readers of our church notices will know it operates 10.00am - 1.00pm Monday to Friday serving soup, breakfasts, main meals etc. with bi-monthly Special Lunches for specific charities and Christmas Lunches. It is run by a pool of about 30 volunteers mostly from St. Mark's, with some from CTM and other Churches, but the mainstays have been Betty and Malcolm Steel. Initially Malcolm did the shopping after his overnight duty at the hospital and Betty organized the Cafe and planned the Special Lunches. In the Autumn shoe boxes were filled with toys, toiletries, hats scarves and gloves and sent to Orphanages in Romania.

Profits from the Cafe are donated to charity and to support children in Kenya through the Cogwheel Trust. The Cafe also provides food for the homeless. Apart from its contribution to charities, which have included some particularly relevant to CTM and Methodism, like Action for Children, Scottish Bible Society and support for education in Ghana, it provides a meeting place and friendship for customers and staff and enhances the quality of life of our helpers with learning difficulties. However, December 2016 marks a turning point in the life of OAK Cafe as Betty and Malcolm are taking their well earned retirement. They will be greatly missed by customers, staff and by folk at home and abroad who have benefited from the charities Oak has supported. Betty and Malcolm retire with our love and best wishes and their work and witness will be acknowledged with a presentation at the Christmas lunch and a staff meal in 2017.

The reverse of the price list at the Cafe bears the quotation
“Brother, sister, let me serve you, let me be as Christ to you”
That is what Betty and Malcolm have done.

Oak Cafe will continue in the New Year and additional helpers would be most welcome. Offers please to Rev. Diane Hobson at St. Mark's.
D.M.C.

Remembering Ghana.

We recently had our annual service during which we celebrate our Covenant with St. Peter Methodist Church, New Achimota, Accra. It brought back some memories of the first visit there of a group of our members, in which I was privileged to take part. Since I don't keep a diary, all I have are impressions of the trip, but these have lasted, proving they were significant, I guess. My lasting impression is one of good natured welcome, from all who we met. Hospitality was the order of the day, wherever we went, including some quite impoverished areas. The other significant thing to record was the innate dignity of the people in all walks of life, not brash or overbearing you understand, but modestly dignified. Anyway, here are a few impressions of situations and things that happened on that trip.

Sunday Service:

Our visit was timed to coincide with St. Peter's fifth anniversary. The fact that the building was unfinished proved to be no barrier to worship. In fact the unfinished walls of what would become the lower floor of the church building provided access for much needed natural ventilation. The breeze was most welcome to those of us from northern climes transported to West African temperatures and high humidity. A fifth anniversary demanded a special service, with visiting preachers, special anthems and the like. This was when I was confronted by the cross-border phenomenon known as "African Time" i.e. it doesn't just happen in Ghana that things probably start a bit late, and carry on until everybody thinks they are finished, whatever time of day that may be! In this case, the fifth anniversary took roughly five hours to celebrate, but five wonderful hours of worship and fellowship, preaching, singing and, yes, DANCING! Such dancing, I'm not built for, physically or psychologically, but what a joyous event to witness.

The singing was memorable. The choir entered in solemn procession, black gowned and wearing headgear I know as mortarboards, but which probably have a suitably academic name. Following the choir was a group of brightly dressed and smiling people who formed the Singing Band. The opening hymn, a Wesley one of course, was delivered solemnly by the black robed choir. Well, the first verse was solemnly delivered, following which the drums and the Singing Band chimed in to literally swing the service, the choir and everybody on the platform and in the congregation into action. Charles Wesley meets Cab

Calloway! It was different, but as fervent as you'd hear a Wesley hymn anywhere in the world.

Sermons were delivered by the Minister, Rev Dan French, and by other guests on the platform. When oratory flagged, with a sweep of the arm, the Singing Band was summoned by Rev. Dan, and rhythmic enthusiasm revived. Two collections were taken, one "normal" and the other by calling up groups of people based on the day of the week on which they were born. I was pronounced a Tuesday, after some discussion with some who were convinced I was a Saturday child. I have no idea who was right, maybe neither but it didn't really matter. This second collection was counted on the spot, and the winners were announced and applauded. Incidentally, both collections involved dancing down to the front, where collection plates were stationed, greetings being exchanged all the while.

And then there were the Chair Stewards! The seating arrangements for the congregation consisted of plastic garden chairs. These chairs seem to have been constructed for cooler climes, as the plastic appeared to be not up to the climatic conditions, and began to sag under the weight of the occupant, the legs bending and splaying out alarmingly. I was somewhat discomforted by this, and trying to lean forward to take my body weight on own my bent legs produced agony in what's left of my thigh muscles. All to avoid the embarrassment of breaking a chair. And then he appeared, the eagle eyed Chair Steward, who swapped my fatigued and stressed chair with a flourish and relieved my fatigued and stressed body in the nick of time.

Church Planting

Notwithstanding the fact that St. Peter church building wasn't finished by any means, the Society had been busy church planting. A further four small churches had been planted in the vicinity. One we went to was in an unfinished house, still being built. The roof was a tarpaulin. When I asked how many worshipped here on Sundays, the answer was "Only about a hundred". Makes you think.

Osonodompe

This is a poor village some way out of town. It's up a hill and has no running water or electricity. We were taken up there by car. It's only the second time I have been in a Toyota Land Cruiser, The other time was in Tajikistan, but that's another story. We got to this hill village, and saw the spot where the mud walled chapel had collapsed in the last rainy season. We witnessed the cooking

arrangements for a family. There's plenty of fire wood around, but not much in the way of cooking utensils, and the food grows quite close. Not so the water, which has to be fetched from the stream down quite a steep hill. The collective arrangements for water carrying were notable. We looked at what we thought the small community needed, and debated. Time to leave, we who had arrived in a Toyota Land Cruiser, but had brought nothing but suggestions, were each presented with a pineapple! The rich who had brought nothing, were given food by those who had nothing. I'm still trying to reconcile that.

Cape Coast

We inspected a slave castle on the beach. Slaves were brought to these castles, some captured, some sold by chiefs, and assembled ready for the next slaver to call and pick up human cargo. Gives you an eery feeling to be at such a place of injustice and sadness, but it's worth having that experience to let you know that although these things happened long ago, there's still a legacy around. Never forget.

The fishing port of Elmira gave the opposite feeling. A bright, bustling place, with a huge market selling fish, and fishing boats brightly painted, bearing names of Psalms and favourite Bible passages, all manned by bright, bustling people.

The Covenant

Going out there, we had been thinking of opening what we called a "Twinning Arrangement" with St. Peter congregation. In businesslike fashion, it was more than suggested that we resolve this by having a Joint Leaders' Meeting. It's a title I remember from my youth, before they invented Church Councils. Anyway, this Joint Leaders' Meeting solemnly debated what was needed, and it emerged that a "Twinning Arrangement" was not it. Something altogether more binding, and in keeping with two societies devoted to Christian Fellowship was needed. In fact A Covenant. It remained only to listen and note what was on the hearts and in the minds of we "joint leaders" and then put it down in writing. This I did, and that Covenant is what we celebrated.

Yes, Ghana's a bit special to us, and we look forward to making more Ghanaian friends with whom to share our Covenant.

R.K.

Sinners?

Rootling one day in the church music cupboard, I was surprised to find a book containing no music at all, bearing the title *The New Oxford Book of Christian Verse* (NOBCV). I borrowed it and took it home, where Pauline pointed out that it was not new at all, but a 1988 paperback reprint of a 1981 publication.

Before returning the book to the church library (that under-used resource), I turned to the poem *Nativity* by James Montgomery (1771-1854), which we sing as the well-known hymn 'Angels, from the realms of glory' (*Singing the Faith* 190, *Hymns & Psalms* 92).

So far, so good; but a note in NOBCV informs us that the poem originally had sixteen verses. The *Companion to Hymns & Psalms* tells us that the 5th verse came from another hymn, also attributed to James Montgomery.

Singing the Faith has the same final verse: 'Though an infant now we view him', published in 1825 but without any author's name.

So why all this kerfuffle about the last verse? Clearly the original ending raised problems for later editors; and when we read it in NOBCV we can understand why. Here it is:

Sinners, wrung with true repentance,
Doom'd for guilt to endless pains,
Justice now revokes the sentence,
Mercy calls you, - break your chains;
Come and worship, Worship Christ the new-born King.

Do we not believe in hell any more? or guilt? or repentance? Are we too mealy-mouthed to address other members of the congregation as sinners? Charles Wesley had no such inhibitions:

Outcasts of men, to you I call,
Harlots, and publicans, and thieves!¹

But there is more to it than this. The five NOBCV verses call on all creation together to join in worship of the new-born King: Angels, Shepherds, Sages, Saints ... and Sinners! And anyway, the final verse, like all the others, is gospel, beyond and above law. P.E.

¹ *Hymns & Psalms* 706. *Singing the Faith* 454 replaces this with 'Outcasts, to you, yes, you. I call, / Christ's love invites you to believe!'

Community Family Lunch - Melton Mowbray

Soon after we moved to Melton Mowbray I was asked to represent Sandy Lane Methodist Church on the Churches Together in Melton Mowbray Committee & became involved in a new initiative - Community Family Lunch. This was started in 2014 by members of Churches Together in Melton Mowbray as a way of showing God's love to the local community and is organised by a steering group from different churches, in partnership with professionals from Sure Start and Supporting Leicestershire Families. My role has been primarily as the bookkeeper & fund raiser, raising funds from local charities & businesses & then as a volunteer in the kitchen.

The aim of the project, over the school summer holidays, is to give families in need a fun packed morning and a hot healthy meal. The activities this year were based on healthy living and to demonstrate how nutritious meals can be made on a low budget. The food has been prepared by two volunteer chefs at two Sure Start Centres, this year on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and Recipes have been chosen that families can easily replicate. Food is given away at each event for families to use at home. Church volunteers welcome families, help in the kitchen, wait on tables and wash up afterwards, while staff from Sure Start and Supporting Leicestershire Families invite the families and organise the pre-lunch activities.

This year 100 meals a week were prepared for families, staff and volunteers. No food is wasted - any surplus is distributed to the hostels for homeless people and families in the town. The project was generously supported by local supermarkets, Rotary, Lions and Mars, a major employer in the town, with financial support from the Churches. Last year Mars, who besides chocolate, also make Uncle Ben's rice, Dolmio sauces and more, gave a cookery demonstration during the pre-lunch activity.

I have enjoyed being involved, particularly as it demonstrates how different denominations can work together and have made new friends and got to know quite a few people in the community.

With greetings to all at Crown Terrace – Barbara Cresswell

Christmas in Hong Kong

Just like its counterparts in the West, Christmas in Hong Kong is very much commercialised – fabulous neon lights, big shop sales, expensive restaurant dinners, luxurious tours, lavish gifts, and so on. Many people celebrate Christmas without knowing the true reason behind. Schools, including both Christian and non-Christian ones, hold Christmas parties for children to play games and exchange gifts at the end of the semester. I remember as a child growing up in an ancestor-worshipping family I hung a sock next to my bed on Christmas' eve longing for a surprise gift from Santa Claus (who was my elder brother because my parents were not into this game)!

However, Christmas is also a great opportunity for Christians to reach out. Some churches organise Christmas caroling activities in busy streets, shopping malls, elderly homes and hospitals, which are usually well-received. Many churches hold evangelistic meetings attended by hundreds. I myself was invited more than once to bring a Christmas message to more than 1,000 students in secondary school assemblies. These are wonderful opportunities to share the greatest gift of all – the Son of God born into the human world!

For most families, Chinese winter festival (usually December 22nd) rather than Christmas is the occasion for reunion and celebration. My family does not have Christmas dinner together; nor do we eat turkey. But during Chinese winter festival three generations of more than twenty people meet for a sumptuous meal either at home or in the restaurant. We Chinese are just like the Brits – we enjoy good food and fun!

Maureen Marshall

Christmas away from home

We spent our first Christmas away from "home" in Indonesia. We went to the island of Lombok, a largely Muslim population, and as the Bali bomb was a very recent incident, we found ourselves the only Westerners there, until a couple of human rights inspectors from East Timor turned up.

On Christmas Eve morning, I woke up homesick and fed up. Christmas was not happening here, no decorations, nothing. So very tongue in cheek, when I was asked the inevitable "is everything alright" by the receptionist, I said "No, not really, you see I need a Christmas tree, preferably with lights and decorations, and some Christmas things", so she reassured me there would be a seafood buffet the next day!

At around 6pm, there was a knock on our door. I opened the door to find no-one there but a trolley. On the trolley was a little branch of a tree, planted in a pot. Lights and tinsel and decorations in the form of shells were hung off the tree. Around the tree on the trolley were 6 little miniture Christmas puddings, and six slices of Christmas cake. A card accomanied the trolley saying they wishes us a Happy Christmas! I was overwhelmed with this tiny tree. The following morning when we came into breakfast..Christmas morning, the Muslim waiters all took off their Nerhu-style black hats, and put on Father Christmas hats! They brought presents for Lizzie and Henry.

Surrounded by peoples of other faiths, in an Island where extreme violence had been shown to Christians in the recent past, it was beyond doubt an example of the goodness of mankind, that we can so easily loose faith in.

Sarah Johnson

The Riding of the Kings

In a far land upon a day
Where never snow did fall
Three Kings went riding on the way
Bearing presents all.

And one wore red and one wore gold
And one was clad in green
And one was young and one was old
And one was in between

The middle one had human sense
The young had loving eyes
The old had much experience
And all of them were wise

Choosing no guide by eve and morn
But heaven's starry drifts
They rode to find the newly-born
For whom they carried gifts.

Oh, far away in time they rode
Upon their wanderings
And still the story goes abroad
The riding of the Kings.

So wise, that in their chosen hour,
As through the world they filed,
They sought not wealth or place or power
But rode to find a child.

Eleonor Farjeon

Christmas in a North East Fishing Community

Born in 1949, I grew up in Macduff in the 1950's and '60's. The town had a population of about 3000 and depended on fishing and the ancillary trades. Employment rates were high but incomes relatively low. There was a strong Christian commitment in Macduff reflected in their life style, with very strict Sabbath Observance - boats never went to sea on Sunday (nor Saturday).

Christmas then was more simple and modest –the Scottish Fisher Christmas not yet come under the transatlantic/Coca-Cola influence we would recognise now. In the pre war years there was little if any celebration on Christmas Day - boats went to sea and life went on much as normal. Santa came on Hogmanay Night, an old boat filled with tar was towed out to the bay and set alight and the holiday and celebration meal were on New Year's day. By the 1950's the boats still worked on Christmas Day but Santa arrived on Christmas Eve and we had a celebration meal on Christmas day. Down the coast in the Buchan area Santa continued to visit on Hogmanny well into the 1960's. On Hogmanay night our family gathered in my grandfather's house for a meal of salt herring and boiled tatties; possibly a ritual to bring good fortune for the coming year's fishing!

Christmas decorations were modest compared with now. I remember our first electric fairy lights and making our own decorations with aluminium foil milk bottle tops and coloured twine. Bought decorations included tissue chains and Chinese lanterns which concertinaed flat for storage. Christmas meals were prepared the day before - usually chicken or steak pie - both rare and expensive items then. Bakers opened on both holidays to cook peoples' chicken and pies in their large ovens and one had to collect them when they were ready.

Attending Sunday School at the Church of Scotland and the Gospel Hall every Sunday , we enjoyed a Christmas party at one and a Soiree at the other.....bring your own mug plate and bowl for the goodies!

My brother and I each hung up one of Grandfather's sea boot stockings from the mantelpiece and Santa duly delivered our presents- hopefully dinky toys and airfix aeroplane or ship model kits. In the toe of the stocking was a thrupenny bit (which would buy a bag of chips or a Tobermoray Tattie), an apple and a tangerine.

A parcel from cousins in America was always greeted with great anticipation filled as it was with sweets and my first bubble gum- (post-war rationing still in the UK.) Thanks to the cousins I was also the first boy in Macduff to have a Davy Crockett Buckskin (vinyl) jacket and (faux) Raccoon Skin hat. How's that when you're eight or nine years old?

Life, and death, continues regardless of Christmas and a vivid memory is of when, in the Parish Church on 17th December 1959, as the school practised for our Carol Service, the Headmaster and two policemen interrupted proceedings calling a number of pupils to go out with them. On a calm clear winter morning the crew of the Betty Yorke had been gutting their catch and hauling the next shot when the seine net ropes sprang out of the guide roller whipping three of them into the sea. The remaining crewman managed to haul one back on board but the other two were gone leaving two wives widowed and four of my friends fatherless. In a small town a shadow was cast over that Christmas.

A happier Christmas thought from my slightly later years: when we were newly married and living in the Roanheads in Peterhead (upstairs flat, no bathroom, no inside toilet, severe winter, coal fire, miners' strike, nae coal). I went for my usual walk around the harbour to find a large fleet of Danish fishing boats sheltering stormbound in the South Harbour. Typically the Danes' boats were painted light greyish blue and very tidy. They were covered with a dusting of fresh snow and each boat had a Christmas tree lashed to the top of its foremast. A beautiful sight which I'd never seen before, have never forgotten and seeming to me to be a perfect manifestation of Christmas in a fishing community.

D.P.

Christmas in Lithuania

Christmas is one of the most beautiful holidays of the year. Every country has their own traditions. Lithuania is no exception. In Lithuania the Christmas Eve (Kūčios, December 24th) is more celebrated than Christmas Day itself and is also a day off work. Kūčios is also the last day of Advent, so it is important and special. It draws family members closer, binding everyone together and strengthening family ties. It is still a strong tradition and most families celebrate Christmas Eve by sharing meal together.

Before the meal can be eaten, lots of preparations take place. The whole house is cleaned, the bedding changed and everyone washes and puts on clean clothes - only then you are allowed to sit at the table. If a family member can't attend the meal for really serious reason or has died that year, an empty plate is set at the table for him or her. It is believed that the spirit of the deceased family member participates along with everyone.

The Kūčios meal normally has 12 dishes - one for each of Jesus's followers. Every one tastes each dish after a prayer is said. The first meal is always the flatbread wafers (Kalėdaitis). None of the dishes contain meat (and some also don't have milk or eggs in them). Traditional and popular dishes include fish (often herring), kūčiukai (small sweet pastries) normally soaked in poppy milk, kisielis (a drink made from cranberries), dried fruit soup, beet soup (often with mushroom filled dumplings in it), vegetable salad, mushrooms, boiled or baked potatoes, sauerkraut, a kind of wheat porridge with honey and bread.

After the meal there might be a visit from 'The Old Man of Christmas' (Santa Claus) with presents. When the presents have been exchanged, children often go to bed and the adults go out to Midnight Mass (Bernelių mišios - which means Shepherds's Mass) which lasts approximately until 2am.

The Christmas day in Lithuania is same as in all Europe. We just eat lunch or dinner, exchange gifts .

J.S.

A Christmas Tradition?

I emigrated to America with my family at the age of 8 and started attending the local primary school in a little country town in the middle of nowhere (Central Kansas, central U.S.) amongst cattle ranchers and farmers. My father, who was grateful to escape communist China and overjoyed to have the chance to start over in the USA, loved all things American. He would regularly wear large cowboy hats in public (along with his usual suit trousers, button up collared shirts and dress shoes) because that is what he sees others wearing. He would sow wheat in our yard just to have the excuse to borrow a tractor from the neighbour during harvest time. We were all trying to learn and adopt the American way of living.

So imagine his delight when one year, I learned from my classmates that the proper Christmas meal consists of turkey, potatoes, green beans, cranberries, and pumpkin. Being a Hong Kong-trained chef, he excitedly announced that we will have a real Christmas meal. Much preparation occurred the next few days and when Christmas Day came, my mother, brother, and I excitedly gathered around the table as my father proudly set down each dish. There was indeed turkey....7 dishes of it in fact....each dish consist of small pieces of cut-up turkey stir-fried or braised or sautéed Cantonese style with potatoes, green beans, cranberries, and yes, even pumpkin. My smile froze and my mouth gaped open, but to see the satisfied expression on my dear father's face was enough to convince me that he need not know the disparity. It was one of the best Christmas meals I have ever had.

Years later (and many repeat Christmases of the same), we would eventually tell Dad. By then, he had so incorporated the dishes into our Christmas tradition that we laughed but continued to enjoy stir-fried turkey and pumpkin. This year as Joe and I get the chance to sit down at the table again with my father during Christmas, this tradition will remind me of our family's arrival to the land of immigrants and the joy and laughter of learning a new way of living. We wish the same joy and peace to each immigrant family across the world living in a strange new land this year.

C.M.

THE UNSEEN HANDS OF GOD

by Carole Rol Bowles, Ruddington Methodist Church Nottingham.

In a neighbour's wave or saying "Good morning" or "How are you?" or your scheme warden saying "Good morning" or a cat or dog greeting you it does not take anything to say "I'm feeling fine". It might be from staff in a local shop or, if you are not feeling well, it might be your GP, the District Nurse or hospital staff who put you right.

The one thing we can all do in our own homes in our prayer time is to say thank you to everyone who looks after us. to thank those who keep our area clean and provide the services we need, also the people who walk past our houses every day.

'Father of the universe accept our prayer of shame. We are sorry that we have neglected your world which was perfect. We did not treat it properly - our brothers and sisters are dying for lack of shelter, water and food.

You taught us to love one another and do that - but it is easier said than done.

Now we know what to do in your name. Amen

Submitted by MB

(Carole is registered blind and suffers from other disabling conditions)

Long, long ago when I was small
Few folk kept Christmas here at all.
For most it was a working day,
Their holiday started on Hogmanay.

Our family here kept Christmas Day,
That, my friends, was the English way.
A chicken was a special treat,
Not something we had any day to eat.

I had sugary pigs and sugary mice,
I thought they tasted rather nice.
A selection box-now that was a treat,
What a time I spent deciding what to eat.

Two cards could be posted for a penny (old money)
Even so, we didn't send that many.
Each was chosen with someone in mind.
To get it wrong would be unkind.

The long, long verses were read and re-read.
"Now would that be right for Uncle Fred?"
Folk sent me gifts of the useful kind,
Socks, gloves, hankies I had in mind.
And we made gifts with loving care,
The spirit of Christmas we loved to share.

I could go on for evermore,
But that, my friends, would be a bore.
So I'll send my greetings to you all
Merry Christmas one and all.

E.C.Y.

We are using cubes at the beginning of services during Advent to spell out words connected with this time of year.

How many words connected with the theme of Advent can you make with the letters on the 5 cubes listed below?

C H Y – cube A 

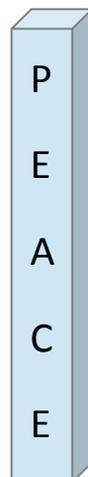
 T E – cube B

G V O A – cube C 

 I E O J – cube D

F P L H – cube E 

May the peace of Christ
be with you this Christmas



ADVENT BIBLE STUDY..... and what next?

In the first part of our Advent Bible study we read Matthew 25:31-46 and a brief account of Martin of Tours. Our God loves everyone; including those with whom we may feel uncomfortable.

The final question for discussion was as follows:

How can you as an individual disciple of Jesus and as a church community serve the community around you? How do you think that people will react to you?

A few months ago I visited the 'Toastie' club at King Street Community Church with Joe McColligan: a warm welcoming atmosphere where food is eaten, board games and pool played and people socialize.

We have a building that could accommodate something like this.

Do we have the people who would help?

How would you feel about our premises being used for this outreach?

We have a Coffee, Cake and Carols service on 18th December. This service, as all our services, is open to everyone. Leaflets are being distributed around the neighbourhood giving details of church services in Aberdeen over the Christmas period. Should extra leaflets be handed out to people we see on the streets so that they can experience the warmth of our fellowship as well as coffee, cake and carols? Would that make our church uncomfortable for some of us? This is a conversation we need to have among the CTM congregation so please discuss it among yourselves and especially with Carol or Alix. Can we offer a sustainable outreach to our less advantaged fellow citizens? Could this be our Christmas gift to our City?

I hope that whoever attends will be made to feel welcome.

C.R.

Fairtrade and the Christmas Cake

Raisins, Sultanas, Almonds, Walnuts, Spices, Cherries

Most of our Christmas cakes will contain such ingredients, but while you enjoy, spare a thought for the families who have produced them. For most they will be lucky to have a little of their produce to enhance their staple carbohydrate – rice, cassava etc. to celebrate Christmas.

But the Fairtrade mark makes all the difference as here we know the producers will have a fair wage and be able to feed their families a healthy diet and maybe afford a little luxury (by their standards) to celebrate.

COMMON FAIRTRADE MYTHS

MYTH 1 Fairtrade products are more expensive – not so. All major supermarkets now sell own- brand Fairtrade goods and like for like some of Traidcraft products are a little cheaper. Cadbury's Dairy Milk, Mars and Maltesers are all examples of Fairtrade.

MYTH 2 Anyone can stick the label on their product to claim ethical credentials – not so. The Fairtrade mark is registered certification for products from developing countries which meet the standards set by Fairtrade International. Any unauthorised use makes the user open to legal action.

MYTH 3 The farmer only gets a small percentage of the retail price-not so. The price is agreed with the initial buyer and ensures the farmer can cover the costs of production. This price is a safety net but if world prices go up, a higher price can be negotiated . Also, improved quality may command a better price. All this gives the farmer the confidence to invest in fertilizer and seed for the next crop. More information from www.fairtrade.net

J.P.O.

Pause for Thought

So the detective officer is giving evidence in the sheriff court and the defence lawyer asks him: 'Do you ever tell lies officer?'

Certainly not' replied the officer.

The defence lawyer went on "Do you and your wife have children officer?'

'We do' said the officer.

'And do they believe in Santa Claus officer?' asked the defence lawyer .

'Yes they do' replied the officer.

And who told them about Santa?' said the defence lawyer

'My wife and I' replied the officer –

'But you know there is no such person don't you'? –

At this the officer gripped the rail of the witness box and in a loud distressed voice said - 'What?'

R.H.

SITUATION VACANT

The Church is still in serious need of a property steward.

Is there any way you can help?

Would you be interested in taking on this very necessary task if you could share it with someone else?

Or is there one particular aspect for which you could take responsibility ?

If you are willing to help please speak to one of our stewards or Rev John McNeill

Dates and times of our Advent and Christmas services

11th December 11am - Nativity & Toy Service**

18th December 11am - Carols, cake and coffee

24th December- 4pm Christingle

24th December 7pm Candlelight Communion Service

25th December - Christmas Day 10am All Age Worship

*Many thanks to all who have
contributed to this edition of our
magazine.*

*We wish all our readers
a time of peace and joy
this Christmastide*

Anne, Joan and Paul