

MINISTER'S LETTER



In response to the introduction of the *Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013*, the *Methodist Conference* in July 2013 set up a working group “to consider whether the Methodist Church’s position on marriage needs revising in light of changes in society, undertaking this consideration with reference to scripture, tradition, reason and experience.”

In December, and as part of an ongoing consultation process, the working group published a questionnaire on the Methodist Church website and is inviting all Methodists to complete it. It can be found at the following website www.methodist.org.uk/ssmcpworkinggroup

The deadline is 9am on 10th February 2014 so, if this is something that you would like to do, you will need to act soon.

Within the church we understand marriage to be a gift of God and have long since proclaimed it to be “God’s intention that a marriage should be a life-long union in body, mind and spirit of one man and one woman.”

When the Bill was passing through the House of Commons and the House of Lords, before it received Royal Assent, the Church of England opposed it saying, ‘The Church of England cannot support the proposal to enable “all couples, regardless of their gender, to have a civil marriage ceremony”. Such a move would alter the intrinsic nature of marriage as the union of a man and a woman, as enshrined in human institutions throughout history.’ (to see the full document visit www.churchofengland.org/media/1475149/s-s%20marriage.pdf). This would, I imagine, be a view held by many within the church across all denominations yet it is worth posing the questions, ‘How much of this statement is, in fact, correct?’ and, ‘Would it matter if such an understanding of marriage were to change?’

Marriage has a more interesting history than some would have us

believe. For great swathes of human history the norm was for one man to marry several women. The Biblical story knows a great deal about polygamy: some of the great heroes of the faith had more than one wife. Beyond this, it is claimed that the Roman Emperor Nero was married to not one man but two during the course of his lifetime. But even if we accept that marriage has, within our own culture, long been understood to be a (lifelong) union between one man and one woman, need that be our understanding for all time? If marriage has been understood in different ways in the past then why not again?

It was, I would suspect, a deepening understanding of the human condition over time that led people to see that life is enhanced when two people who love each other exclusively commit themselves to one another in marriage. Our politicians have recently acknowledged that it cannot be acceptable for some people to be denied this opportunity to flourish simply because they happen to be of the same sex as the person they love. I only wish that the church had led the campaign that brought about this change in the law.

If we are willing to proclaim that ‘God is love’ then surely we have to also assert that where love is, so too is God.

At the Greenbelt Festival last year, the Canon Chancellor of St Paul’s Cathedral, Mark Oakley said,

‘I believe that any person who finds him or herself with a homosexual orientation deserves to be happy, deserves to be fulfilled and should be encouraged to flourish as a human being. If this means, as it does for a lot of people, that a permanent, faithful, stable relationship is what one looks for then - if one is fortunate enough to find that person in life (and what a miracle it is when you do), that you both decide to share life together, to share intimacy - maybe sexual intimacy - emotion, a future, a home, holidays; to have that person there when you get home; to grow old together, to be there when you go into hospital, to hold your hand when frightened, to hug when full of joy, then where love is, God is.’

If two people find love of the kind Mark describes and want to

commit themselves exclusively to one another and choose to celebrate this with family and friends, and if they want to have this relationship blessed before and by God and call it marriage then, I for one, yearn to be able to say, 'Amen' whatever the sex of those people. And I yearn to be able to do so in church.

Please visit the Methodist Church website if you have access to it and, even if you do not feel able to complete the questionnaire, allow yourself to sit with the questions that it raises.

With every blessing,

Paul

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BIG BRUNCH



years and they are very popular.

Once again we are running Big Brunch events this year to help us take the young people to Spring Harvest (a Christian festival held over Easter at Butlins). We have been fund raising by providing people with cooked breakfast at Big Brunch events over a number of

We have 2 more dates for Big Brunch before we go to Spring Harvest - Saturday 15th Feb and Saturday 8th March both 10.30am until 1pm.

It is a friendly and relaxed atmosphere where people can come along for breakfast, brunch or lunch, so if you haven't been before why not give it a try and join us. Come along for a full cooked breakfast, a sandwich or if you just fancy some tea and toast. We will be happy to serve you.

Many thanks to all those who have been along and continue to support us. Also Thank you to all those who help provide the cooked breakfast.

Abby Herring

THANKS TO ALL WHO CONTRIBUTED

Over the Christmas period the collections that were taken at the various services were going to the Syria Disaster Appeal. Our annual carols at Morden Station was for NCH and finally, donations were invited for Methodist Homes for the Aged from those using the church Christmas post box. We raised over £1400 for all of these good causes.

National Children Homes

Carol Singing at Morden Station	£ 564.00
Carol Service with SIGMA	£ 204.06

Syria Disaster Appeal

Christingle Service	£ 228.73
Collection at Christmas Day Service	£ 152.22
Midnight Communion Collection	£ 58.50

Methodist Homes for the Aged

Christmas Post Box	£ 194.05
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Thanks are due to all those who took part in all the various activities and to those that gave their hard earned money.

Roy Ellis

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CONGRATULATIONS!



Last October Derek and Mary Heaton were invited to the Annual Service by Embrace (formally 'Biblelands'), the Christian charity that is tackling poverty and injustice in the Middle East.

There they were honoured with a presentation for their time and support to the charity since 1988. They were also mentioned in the Christmas edition of the charity's magazine.

They were the first volunteers to showcase Embrace's work through film shows across East England, and over the years they have raised over £20,000 for the charity. Embrace also wish to give a huge thank you to all that have supported Derek and Mary in their work with the charity.

Extreme Focus

Taken from: Extreme devotion, the voice of the martyrs from the co-authors of Jesus freaks. Serious followers of Jesus pay a price, and extreme followers often pay the ultimate price. Each story is true.

CHINA: ME LING

"I purified my heart of the fear of men, and I learned to see God".

Me Ling was young when she was arrested for her Christian activities in Communist China. During times of interrogation, the police would torture her to try to force her to betray friends in the underground church.

At first Me Ling was extremely fearful, and she could not see the purpose that God had for her in that terrible place. But then she remembered the teachings of her pastor who had said, "Real suffering lasts only a minute, and then we spend eternity with our awesome Saviour."

When asked how she was able to keep from going crazy during those terrible times, she replied, "When I closed my eyes, I could not see the angry faces of the men or the instruments of pain they were using. I kept repeating the promise of Christ to myself: 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God' (Matthew 5:8). I also found that when I purified my heart of the fear of men, I learned to really see God. I took courage from all the others who had gone before me and focused on him until everything else faded away. When the officials learned of my defence, they taped my eyelids open. But it was too late because my vision was secure."

We admire people whose professions require a great deal of concentration and focus. The skilled neurosurgeon, the Olympic athlete, and the corporate visionary share a common trait: They are focused. The discipline of focus transcends intelligence, athletic agility, or charisma. Without focus, these people would be merely smart, athletic, or interesting at best. Their ability to stay focused contributes greatly to their success. Developing an earthly focus can bring earthly success, but what about matters of eternity? If you are more focused on the temporary things of this world you will miss the goal. What can you do today to ensure you are focused on Christ and on spreading his good news?

Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. (Colossians 3:2)

In the December/January Newsletter we featured a story from Bill Pollock. It is with sadness that we learnt of his passing last year, but his stories live on and we now present a second from his 'Advent Anecdote - Mishaps of a Minister on Mull'.

Carols for CalMac

(Caledonian MacBrayne, usually shortened to CalMac, is the major operator of passenger and vehicle ferries, and ferry services, between the mainland of Scotland and 22 of the major islands on Scotland's west coast.)



When the Church of Scotland was rent by the Great Disruption of 1843 the people of Torosay (Craignure) strove famously to ensure no laird could use the church for his own ends. But there are new lairds today and one might be CalMac. A parody of Psalm 24 went

*The earth belongs unto the Lord
And all that it contains,
Except the ferries and the piers
For they are all MacBrayne's.*

One year well-intentioned CalMac captain may have tried to use the Torosay teenagers' carol singing albeit in a kindly and amusing way ... But the kids were ready for him.

On 23rd December each year I and two other adults used to go carol singing around Craignure and Lochdon with most of the district's early teenagers. The weather was often bad but one night it was surely worse than others. I knew the young people would want to continue but as I drove through the storm and the floods on my way to our rendezvous I knew we couldn't spend our evening in the open air. But how would I get out of it?

Then, as I rounded the bend towards Craignure I saw a possible answer. M.V. Isle of Mull was still tied up, presumably stormbound at Craignure. If her passengers were still on board we might sing to them. I collected

the kids and we headed for the pier. I saw the mate just inside the vessel and ran down alone to speak to him. He liked my idea but referred me to the captain and took me to the bridge. But the captain's face darkened when I told him my plan. He stood silent for what seemed an age, then he visibly brightened and beamed, "Of course, you're most welcome and the passengers will be delighted." I went back to the vehicles and got the kids. I passed the mate again on boarding and he whispered, "In fifteen minutes from now the captain is going to announce that he's not going to sail again tonight - but don't tell the passengers." We probably sang for more than fifteen minutes but it didn't take us long to exhaust our repertoire and as we headed up the pier we heard the captain making his announcement.

It is only now, twenty years later, that I see a plausible explanation for what I have otherwise regarded as the captain's rather odd behaviour. Perhaps he had just steeled himself to announce 'No Sailing' and face passenger reaction when I walked onto the bridge and gave him a dilemma. Warm and courteous as he was he wouldn't want to turn us away or to cause the passengers to leave while we were singing but everyone would want him to announce his decision as soon as possible.... unless ... He may suddenly have thought that it would be in everybody's interests, not least CalMac's, if the carol singers spread good will before his announcement. And so, for largely commendable reasons the captain may have tried to use us and our carol singing for ends we hadn't intended.

Now, what would our fathers from the Disruption have thought of that? Well, they needn't have worried. The captain might have half expected a fairly respectable-looking, semi-talented choir. Instead he got a dripping rabble, clad in their oldest waterproofs, who hadn't rehearsed, some of whom couldn't sing, and whose customary style of singing was to bellow into a gale. If he intended using us to fill his ship with lovely music and his passengers with goodwill towards CalMac he would be sadly disappointed. The Torosay kids, true to their heritage, didn't let themselves be used. Are we true to what we've inherited?

Bill Pollock

Embrace the Middle East (formerly Biblelands)

25 Years of Fundraising and memories of the Holy Land

(part one)

Derek and I were pleasantly surprised to receive a phone call saying that we were to be publicly recognised at the Embrace AGM in October 2013 in London. There we were presented with a visual history book called 'The Story of the Holy Land' written by Peter Walker, as recognition of our past 25 years fund-raising for the charity and raising over £20,000. In their Christmas magazine it mentions how we became the first volunteers to showcase their work through our film shows across East England (actually the shows stretched to Scotland, Wales, even the far flung shores of Greece, in fact wherever we were invited!). The presentation was in acknowledgement of our 'enthusiasm and time' as we became pioneers in this field. It made us feel very proud and humble at the same time.

Peter Walker's book brings many happy, but also frightening memories of our time in 1992, 1994 and 1995 when we worked independently at the Helen Keller School for Blind Children. All this had been as a result of our life-changing experience following our 1988 pilgrimage led by the dear Rev Leonard Barnett and his wife May (sadly both now deceased). Now there remains only Jean Gear, Joyce Plant and us from the 13 folk of Martin Way Methodist Church who travelled that Pilgrim Way. Jean & John Butland, Ivy & Bill Bass, Bill & June Cox, Fred & Doreen Warren and Douglas Gear are sadly no longer with us.

One experience we recall from that initial pilgrimage was Len telling our band of 41 Christians (made up of Church of England, Catholics, Baptists and Methodists) that on the Friday we HAD to be out of the cobbled narrow streets of Jerusalem by noon, because we could have been crushed by the throng of Muslims making their way to the huge 5000 capacity Al-Aqsa Mosque for prayers.



Years later, on one of our independent visits when working at the Helen Keller School, lost sight of Len's advice and found ourselves there after noon literally squashed against the side walls our feet sliding from under us, we finally took refuge in a café!

A pleasant reminder of 'being out of an area by a certain time' was on one of our days off duty from the School. We departed very early in the morning to drive down to the Dead Sea Nature Reserve. We were there



for when it opened at 8am, because the temperature was just below 100°. We had been told to take swimwear with us by Helen Shehadeh, the Principle of the school, so that we would be able to cool off by standing under cascading water falls and we were very thankful that we

had heeded this advise. It was so hot that we dropped our shorts and tops in the cold water before putting them on to counteract the excessive heat! This unspoilt landscape had at its entrance an avenue of date palms all netted in black to stop birds from eating the ripening dates. We had been advised we HAD 'to be out of the area' by 4pm as this was when the roaming leopards woke up and prowled about freely, hunting Rock badgers, wild goats and the unwary tourist!

One time, when we were staying overnight in an old army camp (which had been converted into a holiday kibbutz) high up in the 1200 foot mountains that ring the Dead Sea I had a close encounter that I could well have done without. We were enjoying our evening meal when Derek suddenly shouted out across our small table 'don't move!' A few inches from where I was sitting there was a gigantic sandy coloured spider (it was about the size of an outspread hand) slowly climbing the wall. We were then reliably informed by a TV camera man who was filming for the BBC, that we were very fortunate to see such an elusive Desert Spider!

Mary Heaton

(part two by Derek will be in next month's Newsletter)

WOMEN'S WORLD DAY OF PRAYER



Friday 7th March 2014 **'Streams in the Desert'** **Egypt**



On Friday 7th March women and men will gather to celebrate using a programme of worship offered this year by women in Egypt. The theme this year is 'Streams in the Desert' and we are asked to reflect on our Christian role of being a 'stream in the desert' for those who experience spiritual 'drought'.

Mentioned in Genesis, Egypt is one of the oldest civilizations in the world. Variouslly called 'motherland of the world' and 'cradle of civilizations', Egypt was populated soon after the Flood by Mizraim, grandson of Noah. His name gives the Arabic for Egypt – 'Misr'.

Egypt is twice the size of Spain, the population is over 84.5 million, 95% of whom live in the Nile Valley and Nile Delta. Cairo, the capital city, has 16 million inhabitants. 99% of the people are Egyptian and the remaining 1% is made up of Nubians, Armenians, Greeks, Italians and other Europeans.

Egypt has long been home to Coptic Christians. Since the uprising in 2011 there has been an increase in violence between Muslims and Coptic Christians. In October that year, at least 25 protesters died during clashes with the army at a peaceful protest for Christian rights in Cairo. To date no one has been held responsible for the deaths. Women have been subjected to humiliating treatment in an apparent attempt to deter them from protesting. 2012 saw more of the same as military forces continued to restrict the right of Egyptians to protest and to freely express their views. Political change affects individual lives and we pray

with the women of Egypt for peace.

It is envisaged there will be a great wave of prayer, rising with the sun over the island of Samoa and sweeping across Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Europe and the Americas, coming to rest in American Samoa some 36 hours later. By then WWDP services will have been celebrated in over 170 countries.

Here in Merton a time of prayer and meditation will take place at Wimbledon Methodist Church, Griffiths Road, SW19 1SP, starting at 8.00pm, with a morning meeting at St John the Divine, High Path, South Wimbledon SW19 2JY starting at 10:30am.

Although organised and led by women, this is essentially a day of prayer for everybody as we demonstrate our solidarity with our sisters and brothers in other countries and all are welcome to attend. Further information and resources, can be found on the WWDP website at www.wwdp.org.uk

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CHRISTMAS CARDS



Thank you to every one who used the ‘Christmas Post box ‘ this year. Also a great thanks to the ‘post people’ who between them sorted all the cards. In all £194.05. was raised through this to help the Methodist Homes for the Aged.

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CAROL SINGING - THANKS

Once again Thank you to all those who braved the elements and joined together to serenade the commuters of Morden with carols during two nights in December.

Over £560.00 was raised for NCH this year.





**CHRISTIAN
SOLIDARITY
WORLDWIDE**
VOICE FOR THE VOICELESS

“The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.” – James 5:16

In December you were asked to pray for Christians around the world who often experience increased harassment and attacks because of their faith over the Christmas period. Sadly, this increase in violence happens so regularly at this time of year that it is almost to be expected.

Iran

Five Christian converts were arrested as they celebrated Christmas in a house in Tehran. Another convert in the Karaj region was sentenced to one year in prison on evangelism-related charges. However that said, Farshid Fathi, an imprisoned church leader reported that Christians in his prison were reported to be celebrating Christmas with “joy in Christ”.

Nigeria

The Christmas period was quiet in Nigeria; however, this did not last through the new year.

Two people were killed and sixteen severely injured when armed Fulani Muslims stormed a New Year’s Eve service at a church in Maikatako village, Bokkos, Plateau State. Another person was killed in the Manguna area of Bokkos. The following day, 16 more were killed in attacks on villages.

On Monday 6 January, 33 people were killed during an attack on Shonong village in Bachit District, Riyom, in Plateau State. Victims were given a mass burial the following day. There have also been similar attacks on villages in Kaduna State – all a continuation of events last year.

Vietnam

While Christmas was mainly peaceful in large, urban areas, reports mentioned that some rural villages in the Central Highlands were being surrounded by officials threatening to arrest any Christians discovered celebrating Christmas or even praying in their own homes.

Sri Lanka

Sadly in Sri Lanka there were three attacks on churches on Christmas Eve. No one was reported to be hurt in the attacks, which largely consisted of mobs throwing stones at the windows, and demanding the services stop. During December another pastor was shot at, and yet another had petrol bombs thrown into his home. Again, thankfully no one was hurt, and police protection was subsequently provided.

Egypt

The Christian community was greatly encouraged when Egypt's interim president, Adly Mansour, recently visited St Mark's Cathedral in Cairo. However, a Coptic man was shot outside Mar Girgis Church in Cairo on New Year's Eve, and died in hospital. There was a significant police presence for the Coptic Orthodox Church's celebration of Coptic Christmas, which falls on 7th January.

Central African Republic

Although Christians were able to meet on Christmas Eve, continued fighting in the capital city Bangui prevented people leaving their homes on Christmas Day. The continued targeting of Christians by the Seleka rebel coalition has led to the fourth consecutive Sunday where churches were unable to hold meetings. Christians have instead been gathering together in small groups in homes across the capital.

Mexico

Over the Christmas period, a group of 180 Protestant Christians were finally able to return to their village in Altamirano, Chiapas, thanks to the intervention and mediation of local Christian groups and government officials. The community had been forcibly displaced because of their religious beliefs for almost three years.

However, a number of Catholic priests were forcibly disappeared, one was beaten to death and another is in a critical condition after being attacked with a baseball bat. Two more were murdered in another state. It is believed that these are all crimes committed by large criminal groups which are increasingly targeting religious leaders who refuse to cooperate with them.

Mervyn Thomas
Chief Executive, Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW)

CHURCH DIARY



Sun	2	10.30am	Morning Service led by Mark Williamson
Tue	4	10.30am-noon	Coffee and Chat
		8.00pm	Time for Prayer
		8.00pm	F&P Committee Meeting
Fri	7	12.30pm	Luncheon Club
Sun	9	10.30am	Morning Service led by Brenda Cannon
		6.30pm	Communion Service led by Rev Paul Timmis
Tue	11	10-12noon	Coffee and Chat
		8.00pm	Time for Prayer
Thur	13	7.00 pm	Circuit Meeting at Stoneleigh
Sat	15	10.00am	Big Brunch
Sun	16	10.30am	Communion Service led by Rev Paul Timmis
Tue	18	10.30am-noon	Coffee and Chat
		8.00pm	Time for Prayer
		7.00pm	Men's Supper Club - <i>WWI Grave Sites</i> - Clive Gilbert
Fri	21	12.30pm	Luncheon Club
Sun	23	10.30am	Morning Service led by Rev Paul Timmis
Tue	25	10-12noon	Coffee and Chat
		8.00pm	Time for Prayer

*Please refer to the Website (www.martinway.org.uk)
or Weekly Notice Sheet for any additional information*

We wish all of those who celebrate a birthday
in February a very

Happy Birthday
and especially to:

Ashley Hillhouse on 1st February
Joshua Fuwa on 20th February



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Church Ladies With typewriters . . .

They're Back! Those wonderful Church Bulletins! Many thanks to those unknown church ladies with typewriters. These sentences (with all the BLOOPERS) actually appeared in church bulletins or were announced in church services:

This evening at 7 PM there will be a hymn singing in the park across from the Church. Bring a blanket and come prepared to sin.

The eighth-graders will be presenting Shakespeare's Hamlet in the Church basement Friday at 7 PM . The congregation is invited to attend this tragedy.

Weight Watchers will meet at 7 PM.
Please use large double door at the side entrance.

Low Self Esteem Support Group will meet Thursday.
Please use the back door.

The Associate Minister unveiled the church's new Campaign slogan last Sunday:
I Upped My Pledge - Up Yours!

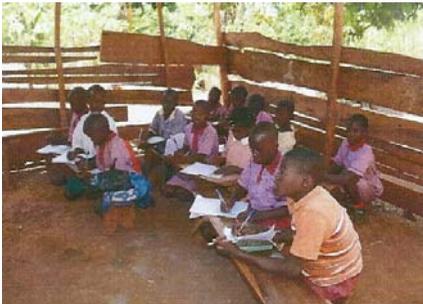


WIMBLEDON CIRCUIT TRIP TO UGANDA

JUNE 16th - JULY 2nd 2014

Care for Uganda has a particular emphasis on working with children and young people and part of its work is an ever-growing sponsorship programme. It is committed to working in partnership with other agencies seeking to deliver the Millennium Development Goals in that part of Sub Saharan Africa. For more details about Care for Uganda visit their website at www.careforuganda.org

This summer there is an opportunity for individuals from the Wimbledon Circuit to gain first hand experience of development work within a community of great need in Uganda. The majority of time will be spent at Care for Uganda accommodation in Bbowa and the trip will be for 14 days, and will involve helping with the Support Programmes run by Care for Uganda in the area.



The cost of the trip will be £1250 per person, which covers all the travel, accommodation and meals in Uganda as well as the air fares.

If you would like to be part of the team or find out more about the trip please contact:

Revd Margaret Adams

Email: margaretjadams@btinternet.com

Phone: 020 8946 3181.

Items for the **March Newsletter** should be with Andrew Fox, (email: roife@hotmail.co.uk) by **Sunday 16th February** at the latest