

Minister's Jottings

It is coming up to that time of year! Christmas for many is a time of joy and expectation, but for others a time of loneliness. We know the story well; Mary's story, the shepherds in the field, the wise men, and of course the infant Jesus born apparently with a halo around his head?

We know about the cost of Christmas, the presents, the food and the disappointment on twelfth night when the glitzy decorations come down, and reality returns as it shows the starkness of the undecorated room.

For many years I have looked forward to twelfth night, as it brings with it a sense of the living Jesus stripped away from the commercialism of social expectations and extravagances to being a living Son of God who breathed, walked and lived as we do in a real world.

Upon returning and opening up my emails, I had a message sent to me via the computer stating I have won a holiday for two, FREE, at Disney World in Florida. Great I thought to myself, but then I looked at the small print. (I must tell you that I do not believe that holidays are ever given away free, there has to be a catch)! The print was so small that I had trouble reading it. But the terms and conditions applied. If I went, I would have to spend £...s in Disney World. I would be therefore a fully paid up member of the fairy world, which is Disney World; being alongside Mickey, Snow White, Creatures of the deep, and hundreds of other inventions of people's imaginations. The idea appealed to me, a little bit of escapism is good for all people for a short time.

But, and this is the question I have to answer for myself, how would I feel as I left the vast complex and headed back to the resort? Would I feel let down that Disney World had let me down when I had to face the real world? Would I feel a desire to return to the fantasy world, which was so pleasing?

Is that the feeling about Christmas when twelfth night approaches, that the fantasy world of Christmas, the birth of the Son of God is all over for another year?

Christmas is about the mysterious beginning of God coming to live our human life, a life which each year should motivate us to see less of the fantasy, and more of the reality of the consequences of that birth. Yes; let us have the tree, the crib, the presents, the wise men and all the social celebration that accompanies it, but let us live also the reality of that birth, and move on through the year learning, and living to learn more about the life, teachings, death and resurrection on this infant who grew to manhood, and lives as God in heaven.

As hard as it is not to be sucked in to the false winning and escapism that is offered to us; we have to be grounded in truth and working for justice in this real world we live in. (Please see article on the conference in Israel/Palestine).

Have a wonderful Christmas, and a very happy New Year. I wish you also God's blessings, strength to be a people of God incarnate in this world in our lives.

Jon

THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH IN CHELTENHAM

From the church registers:

In Memoriam

It is with sadness we report that Dr Malcolm Tait, husband of Ann, recently passed away after battling against cancer over the last year. Please remember Ann and the family in your prayers.

Baptism

We welcomed into the family of the Church at St Andrew's on 23 November by infant baptism Erin Townsend. We look forward to getting to know Erin and supporting the family as he grows in faith over the years.

Our prayers: we hold in our prayers those who are ill as well as those who are or have been in hospital: Gilbert Aldridge, Ann Ashworth, Carol and Lorna Dewhurst, Dennis Goldring, Hylda Greening, Mary Howes, Paulette Hyde, Dorothy Lamb, Mair McIndoe, Peter Meason, Carole Pennington, Betty Price, Nick Smith, Sadie Smyth, Jean Smith and Carole Wallace.

Congratulations

To **Revd Jack Garside**, who celebrated his 80th birthday in November.

To **Brenda & Geoff Manser** (Julie Jefferies' parents) warm congratulations as they celebrate 50 years of marriage on 6th December.

To George Spence who received the following trophy awards for sporting achievements, at the Presentation Evening of Cheltenham & County Harriers, held on Friday 10th November:

- Best Under 11 Boy -- Sports Hall Athletics.
- Manager's Award Under 13 Boy -- Track and Field.

Birthday Teas

The November/December Hatherley tea is on **Sat. 13 December** 3-5pm. All with birthdays these months are welcome. Thank you Maz on behalf of all those who have enjoyed tea, cake and chat throughout the year.

Pensioners' Forum

The next talk will be held at St Andrew's on Wednesday **3 December**, 10.30am – 11.30am. The speaker is Natasha Sampson from the Alzheimer's Society. She will be speaking about dementia in its various forms, how we can reduce the risk and what the Society does nationally and locally. **There will be no meeting in January but we will start again on 4 February** when the Lions Club will be giving us a talk on their campaign called 'Message in the Bottle'.

Literary Group

Will meet on **11 February** at Prestbury URC at 7.30pm to discuss the book 'Birdsong' by Sebastian Faulks. All newcomers are welcome.

Tuesday Forum

9 December will be the Christmas Party. This year we are looking forward to being entertained by Tim and Dorothy Odell, followed by a delicious bring and share tea. This starts at 2.30pm in the Garden Room, do come and join us. There will be only one meeting in December and January because of the Christmas break.

The TV programme featuring Bess Cummings will be shown on 15 December and is called 'Evacuees Reunited'.

On **Tuesday 27 January** Norman Biggs will be giving us another of his popular talks 'A Glance at the Victorians'. This is at 2.30pm in the Garden Room followed by tea and biscuits. All are welcome.

Bible Study Groups

The Friday morning group at 51 Bournside Road and the Wednesday evening group at St Andrew's continue to meet during December.

Tuesday Morning Prayers

Everyone will be familiar with the phrase from St Matthew “where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them”. Well, it’s true of the URCiC each Tuesday morning at Warden Hill. A small friendly group meets at 11.30 a.m. for about half an hour of worship, prayer, meditation and discussion. The meeting has a semi-formal framework, but for the most part the proceedings are informal. There is a morning hymn, sometimes sung but often spoken, a psalm, a scripture reading and open free-flow prayers. The reading sometimes provokes informal discussion about its relevance in today’s world. The prayers are an expression of concerns for the world and the problems confronting individual countries, the church, particularly the URCiC and its present worries, and those known to us who need our prayers both inside and outside the church. Prayers may be spoken or unspoken and there are periods of silence for private prayers.

Everyone has the opportunity to play a part in the proceedings if they wish, conducting the semi-formal sections, leading prayers, reading the scripture passage or choosing the hymn, changing roles week by week. Worship in this friendly, intimate atmosphere can be very rewarding and refreshing and those who attend regularly will tell you that it can be enjoyable too. Because it tends to be a smaller “congregation” than at a regular formal church service, there is a special warmth of fellowship that can be very comforting in troubled times. The meetings are open to all who can get there and would like to take part in a homely but spiritually uplifting half hour. *Keith Norcott*



C4 CHILDREN’S CHOIR

proudly present

TATTY ANNA’S SECRET

a short Christmas musical

Prestbury URC Friday 19th Dec. 7pm

Warden Hill URC Sat. 20th Dec. 3pm

Admission Free. Please support our children.

KENYA 2008/9

Our current total is £22,850

Many thanks for all your support. The three Christmas Fairs and the Charity Market in town will be our last fundraisers before leaving for Kenya on 28th Dec. None of the three projects have been completed, sadly. Our Health Centre has at least been started, so we will have photos to show you. Our work will therefore focus on gardening and painting existing buildings. No matter – meeting the children is the important thing!

**YOUR SUPPORT HAS BEEN WONDERFUL. ON BEHALF OF
THE KENYA TEAM – ASANTE SANA!!**

Maz

KIDS STUFF

Nearly New Children’s Goods

Sat. 13th December

Warden Hill URC
£6 per table. Contact Maz

William Wilkerson once said: *'The Church is full of bones'*:

Wish bones: who wish someone else would do the work.

Jaw bones - who talk a lot but do little else;

Knuckle bones: who knock what everybody else does.

Back bones: who get on and actually do the work.

Whether we see ourselves as fitting into any of those categories or not, we might reflect on the lesson of the "dry bones". Ezekiel had a vision of a valley of dry bones and watched as God caused them to come together, regain flesh and become living, breathing warriors once more - symbolising how the dead nation of Israel would one day be revived and returned to their own land. **(Please remember that Israel is a term used to represent God's people not a nation state and gives no legitimacy to the human rights issues and the lack of implementation of Geneva and UM resolutions and the situation in the Holy Land.)** It is a vision, which speaks of the Holy Spirit's power to transform lives and situations for good.

The prophet spent time listening to God so he would know exactly what vision God wanted to communicate to His people in that time and place, to give them hope and a purpose. Nowadays the Spirit chooses to speak through anyone who takes the trouble to listen, and we as a Church are committed to providing opportunities for people to share their insights and discern together what God's good will is for this Church in this time and place. An example of this should be our Vision prayer; 'Bringing the gospel of Christ into the heart of the community'.

We could identify a lot of dry bones around us, representing all sorts of valid needs in church and outside, that we can see need reviving and attending to. The question is, exactly where does God wish us to act so He can bring new life at this time?

The more listening we do, the more sharing, the more likely we are to see just where our energies can be best directed. After all, whether referring to a preacher's sermon or the latest project at Church, our best efforts are just a lot of dry old bones until God breathes life into them, turning them into something vibrant and alive, with the power to reach others in His name.

Let us pray for the Holy Spirit to breathe life into each one of us, and the projects and mission we believe called to pursue in Christ's name.

Amen and Blessings Jon



CHRISTIAN AID CAROLS December 2008

Please volunteer to sing or shake a bucket for the Christian Aid Carols at Cheltenham supermarkets this year. URC churches will be in the following places and there will be fund raising all day on both days.

Saturday 13 December at Morrisons, Hatherley

9-10am – singers from URCiC

11-12noon – singers from The Church at Warden Hill

Saturday 20 December at Waitrose

1-2pm – Royal Oak Brass

Interim report from the 7th international Sabeel Conference held in the Holy Land. Yet again a personal struggle to comprehend it, fight the injustice, and share the truth and reality of the ongoing Nakba (Arabic word 'catastrophe') with you.

A long flight via Amsterdam I arrived in Nazareth at 4.40am a little tired. It is strange, and many of you will know that even though the body and mind know of the sleep deprivation being experienced, rest is not at all easy within a new environment. The hotel was the cheapest of the options available, but very atmospheric with good company, (only drawback was that my room was underneath the furniture store that included the repair workshop. They work nights!!)

The conference proper started in the basilica, the Church of the Annunciation on the hill in Nazareth, next door to the original Synagogue that dates back to pre Jesus days for over 250 delegates. Worship was led by the Latin Bishop Boulos Marcuzzo, followed by a welcome meeting and instructions.

The day started with a wake up call at 6.45am and then the choice of a bus or walk to the conference centre; (I chose to walk as there would be a lot of sitting down every day). Lectures, activities and trips lasted until 9.30pm each day, but the time flew past.

The themes started from a perspective that some people were not aware of the importance of the 1948 Nakba, and I can tell you that there was an enormous gap between those with some knowledge and others not realising what the Nakba was and still in many aspects of life is.

The sessions in Nazareth were titled; '*A Time to Welcome, A Time to Remember, A Time to Mourn, a Time to Work, and the closing session in Nazareth again was a time to worship*'.

The speakers were on the whole very good, passionate about their subjects, enlightening and open for questioning. The only problem with one or two was they didn't know when to stop. (I had fifteen minutes and you will be surprised to know that I only took twelve, but had more time for questions).

On the Sunday afternoon we left for Jerusalem, with worship in St. Georges Cathedral, (always a moving experience for me). Again my hotel was atmospheric, situated in the old city, the fellowship was wonderful as we started out on another section of the Nakba Conference; '*A Time to Speak, A Time to Act, and A Time for Peace*'.

The conference was held at The Notre Dame Centre which was the same one used for the last visit by Condaliza Rice, and previously by President Clinton, and thus very professional. Speaker after speaker continued the theme of the injustice and ongoing problems in the State of Israel as well as addressing the situation within the Occupied Territories.

Worship concluded the international conference at the Lutheran Church with the Lutheran Bishop Munib Younan preaching; there was not a dry eye in the place by the time communion was taken, such a moving time.

However, what I have written so far does not tell you about the commissioning of the people attending the conference. What it meant and continues to mean; not just for we who were there, but what and how we have to present the truth of the ongoing situation to our churches, communities and country.

The first thing to do is to tell you that in 1948, a year after the UN agreed a partition of Palestine (1947), 750,000 Palestinians became refugees as the Zionist militias started cleansing the land of people. The newly declared State of Israel needed land and instant housing, so they took it by force. For the Palestinians it was a catastrophe, *an-Nakba*. In total 531 towns and villages were depopulated or destroyed, the people either moved on or killed. A promise was made to the people that if they should leave, in two weeks they could return after the security situation had been dealt with. The people were lined up, and forced to walk to seek refuge in other villages e.g. Nazareth, and neighbouring countries such as Lebanon, Syria in the north or in southern Palestine, Egypt and Jordan. Please remember we are not talking about the Occupied Territories now, this was happening in Israel! This was against the UN Resolution 194 agreed by all nations of the world, yet still it happened. I am sorry to say; that it was also going on whilst the British army were still in Israel. The Palestinians could not fight back as the British had disarmed them as a result of the uprising in 1936-38 making it illegal for a Palestinian to have a gun or even a knife whilst the Zionist militia were allowed freedom to arm themselves. Please also remember that the Zionist movement also came out of Britain, supported by Lord Balfour with a press machine giving credence to a State of Israel with an indigenous people moved.

The Nakba happened, and the world let it happen, maybe as it had let the Jews be marched off to death and displacement only a few years before. As with The Nazi regime of cleansing, it must be understood that there was not Biblical Jewish claim upon the Holy Land by the Zionist movement, any biblical claim came as an add on to legitimate a secular claim well after the State of Israel came into being, and is still used to this day with great success in justifying the invasion and expulsion of the Palestine people.

Yet the Nakba is still happening, not only the 1967 occupation of Gaza and the West Bank, but today there is a 'Master Plan' that is about the systematic removal of the Palestinian people. We cannot deny the situation, house demolitions, the confiscation of land, (it is now illegal for the Palestinians to rebuild even upon their own land without a building permit, which is almost impossible to get from the Israeli authorities resulting in re-demolition) the covering up of the truth, the planting of trees that poison the earth making it impossible to grow fruit or crops; travel restrictions, blocking the farmer's route to his fields, (made worse now by the fact that after one year, it used to be after three years, non-harvested land is legally seized by the Israel's under Israeli law), the apartheid wall, the new road matrix, and much more, all implemented to drive the Palestinians from the land. There is no legal recourse for the people, random arrest, being held for 90 days without charge, open ended continuation orders.

There are refugee camps that have been in existence for 60 years, complete villages being supplied by UN refugee agencies, 1.2 million people in Gaza totally dependent upon aid, and even though they cannot get out either by road or sea, when the border is closed then aid does not get to them either.

I only have a few more lines as I am late getting this to press upon my return. On Tuesday evening after visiting a refugee camp in the cut off city of Bethlehem, the conference was told that (my friend) Costa Debbagh could not get out of Gaza to speak to us on the refugee problem and that not only had the UN run out of all food and medical supplies, but that Gaza had no milk, flour, or petrol. The NGO's were also being denied access into Gaza. There was an impassioned plea that we should do something; so we did.

I led a group of 48 people to the Erez border crossing to hold a silent witness with the NGO's who were trying again to enter Gaza. The world press had been briefed so off we went; leaving at 5.30 am.

We met with the NGO's and I read out our statement to the world press in support of the NGO's. As the rockets began to land and the Sonic Booms of the Israeli's were fired, not to mention the fact that I was just about to be arrested by the security forces, it was time to leave, even though it was a legal witness on Israeli land by an international group of people. The Israeli's made it quite obvious to us that they did not take pleasure in our presence; especially as their tanks were just entering Gaza as part of the new incursion, (this was not reported by the BBC, when 13 Palestinian civilians lost their lives).

We arrived back to Jerusalem elated that our group had witnessed and been observed by both oppressed and oppressor. There was a personal cost for what we had undertaken - the cost of standing up for justice, the cost of showing solidarity for just peace.

This is where we have to also pay the price for a 'Just Peace', What is happening is not something we can ignore, it is the longest illegal occupation of a people in modern history. Every day, over \$10.000 000 is given by the American tax payer, the EU have made and continue to give special trade preference to Israel even if the good being sold are manufactured by illegal settlers in the West Bank.

We have to be involved where it will hit hardest, through informing people of the reality. Our government will not get involved because of the age old problems of being called anti-Semitic but we have to 'show and tell' what is really happening to a people who have been continuously on that land for 2000 years. We have options; the first is BDS - Boycott, Disinvestment and Sanctions. We have the right to ask where in Israel a product comes from, if it is from the Occupied Territories, it will no doubt come from a settlement. DON'T TOUCH IT. Christmas is coming, look at your fruit, the figs and alike.

We need to be a people of the third gospel as well as the spiritual, and social, that is the political gospel of Christ.

I close with a plea that we get to the facts, share the stories I come home with and do something against the destruction of humanity. The perception of oppressed and oppressor is skewed, the victim and victimiser humane and inhumane. These are what we have to face up to; are we Christ like enough to stand against oppression, victimisation and inhumanity?

I finish with a quote from Mr. Andreas Van Agt, former Prime Minister of the Netherlands who said; 'the threat for the world is not just about adoption of a child or an animal; even a rain forest. No it is about the recreation of humanity and those who will be Christ like in the overseeing that humanity is not destroyed by inhumanity. The West is convinced that it can buy appeasement of conscience with acts of good in Africa and other third world countries, yet still allow the world's most inhumane, systematic cleansing and expulsion from the Land of all three monotheist faiths; this being done in the name of God, security and for the building of the most powerful nation in the world.'

For your information, when I arrived at Tel Aviv airport, I was arrested and taken to the cells to await my flight. (My camera was taken, memory cards and phone wiped as well as laptop computer formatted; basically no trace of my visit, however, I had sent the info and photos before arriving at the airport, so I have them to show.)

My simple crime was to have been with a group at Erez, in solidarity with people illegally being denied access to give aid to people. The people should not need the aid, they need freedom, the freedom they had before the Nakba of 1948 when so many lived side by side, Christian, Jew and Muslim.

Please invite me to speak to you so that you can be involved in recreating a just peace, a reconciliation of the truth of the Nakba. Where there is truth, there is a chance for reconciliation.

WE HAVE TO STAND UP FOR THESE PEOPLE DEHUMANISED ON BOTH SIDES FOR THE SAKE OF CHRIST, for the sake of our

future Christianity and the gospel we are called to live. We ignore it at our peril; remember the past that brings us to our present, today that shapes our future and the future of others. We will be judged for our living witness!!
JON 22 November 2008

You are invited to
The Annual Carol Service and Finger Buffet

Sponsored by the Gloucestershire Branch of the
Chartered Management Institute

**6.00pm on Sunday 14 December
at St Andrew's Church**

Tickets £3; available from Margaret & Geoffrey Harmsworth

Statement from the Ecumenical group witness to Erez

WE are a group of international Ecumenical Christians and people of other faiths who have come to Erez this day; November 18th 2008 to bear witness and stand up in non-violent solidarity for the people of Gaza, and in support of the NGO's who have been delayed and denied access into the Gaza strip.

We come in love and with love. We come in the hope of arousing the conscience of world leaders to seek a just peace, equal human rights, and a safe homeland for all peoples of the holy land. We urge leaders to honour and implement conventions and resolutions passed relating to the suppression of the Palestinian peoples both in Israel and the Occupied Territories.

Blessed are the peace makers for they are the sons and daughters of the Lord.
18th November 2008 Erez

This statement was adopted by the Sabeel conference on the 19th Nov 2008

Prestbury News

A Christmas Cracker ! Saturday 6th December 10.30 - 2.00

This year's Prestbury Christmas Event will be 'Christmassier' than ever. There will be stalls to buy cards, paper, crackers, decorations, small gifts, cakes and preserves and the tree will be up and ready to be decorated. For fun there will be a raffle and tombola and during lunch (12.30 onwards) Anne Grant and friends will be reading Christmas Poetry and prose.

Prestbury Christmas cards and calendars will be on sale at this event and at St Mary's but orders can be placed at any time – please contact Fiona on Cheltenham 511143.

Prestbury URC

!A Christmas Cracker!

Christmas Stalls ~ Games
Coffees ~ Lunches ~ Cakes
Dress the Tree ~ Christmas Readings

Saturday 6 December
10.30 – 2.00



Afterwards, why not drop into St Mary's for a restorative glass of mulled wine and some stollen and experience their 'Real Christmas' event ? Charity stalls, teas, hand bells, carol singing and readings.

In Touch – Contributions always welcomed

Please either see Ian Brooks at Church or forward all contributions to him directly via e-mail (ianbrooks444@btinternet.com). Ian can also be contacted on 01242-603467.

Christmas Services at Prestbury

Details of our Christmas services and those at St Mary's to which we are, as always, warmly invited to come are in the centre pages. As usual, there will be no morning service on the 21st December as it is our Candlelight Carol Service at 4 pm. On Christmas Day, Maz invites all members of the congregation (both young and old !) to bring a sample gift to show everyone. Our Salvation Army Gift Service will be on Sunday 14th December.

A reminder to all the congregation at Prestbury that our service on Sunday 7th December will be followed by a **Church Meeting** ; these meetings decide the future of our church and it is important that as many members as possible attend so that their views can be heard.

January Coffee Morning

The January Coffee morning is on Saturday 3rd January 2009 at 10.30. Please come along and enjoy the Coffee, goodies and fellowship.

Julie Jefferies / TLS Gateways into Worship – a few more volunteers needed !

Firstly, a big 'Thank You' to those who have already volunteered to be part of my study group in the new year.

We will be trialling some new Canadian materials "Seasons of the Spirit" following the lectionary over a 6 week period through discussion, prayer and reflection. We will probably run the group on a Thursday at a venue to be decided, depending on the group.

I am a few people short of the ideal number & would particularly welcome some male volunteers to better balance the group. If you are interested in joining this small group and providing me with some constructive feedback as part of the process then please contact me – Julie Jefferies (Cheltenham 232892).

St Andrew's News

December Communion Offering

Cheltenham Open Door

Located at 39 Grosvenor Street, Cheltenham, Open Door was founded in 1992 as "Open Door at Christmas", and is registered as a local charity for the relief of poverty, hardship and social or emotional distress. The premises offer hospitality, warmth and food to those who need them, and it is a place to relax. The weekday service runs on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays from 10.30am to 1.45pm. Self-service hot drinks are provided and a meal is served from 12noon to 12.45pm. On Sundays it is open from 9.45am to 11.45am to serve a continuous hot breakfast, and self-service hot drinks are also available.

Each year, since 1998, the **Christmas Shelter** is run at St Luke's Hall, from midday Christmas Eve to after lunch a few days later, usually 27th December. Three hot meals a day are served, sandwiches are available during the afternoons, and hot and cold drinks are continually on tap. Mostly people come and go, but some may choose to stay in the beds overnight. Everyone gets a wrapped present, crackers to pull, and can join in sing-songs, play a game, or watch TV. An expanded clothes store is run at 39 Grosvenor Street, and any spare food is distributed at the end.

From the Church Meeting

Budget 2009 This was presented and explained by Donna Sutherland, and adopted by the meeting. Donna and the Finance Committee were thanked for their hard work.

Communion Offerings The meeting supported a continuation of the current policy of topping up from church funds any collection that fell below £100. If you would like to suggest a local charity for inclusion in 2009, please contact any of the elders. The communion offering in **January 2009 will be for Westminster College**, which trains URC Ministers.

Portuguese Church

Revd Dr Jon Morgan reported on a proposal to hold a joint service before Christmas with the Portuguese church, and the meeting supported this.

Montpellier Late Night Shopping Evening – 11 December

St Andrew's will be open for refreshments from 6pm onwards, and Peter and Lyn Ricketts have offered to run the coffee bar. Mistletoe and holly will also be sold – anyone able to supply either (preferably with berries) was asked to bring it to the church, and any that is unsold would be held over for the St Nikolaus Fair.

URCiC Combined Carol Service with the Institute of Management

It is hoped to form a choir for the service on 14 December from the four churches - if you would like to be included, please contact Alison Kerr. There will be a finger buffet afterwards, and if you would like a ticket for the buffet (£3), please contact the church secretary.

Church Vacancies

The following posts are, or soon will be, vacant. The church is experiencing a shortage of active volunteers to fill them. Please give this your serious consideration, and if you are able to help, please contact the church secretary:

- a) Two elders to cover Sabbaticals in 2009
- b) Lead Concert Steward from April 2009
- c) Deputy Transport Officer – vacancy from the last AGM
- d) Assistant housekeeper for Premises Committee – new post
- e) Burglar Alarm Keyholder, with immediate effect

Ministry and Mission

At the church meeting on 23 November 2008, Donna Sutherland advised that our budget for 2008 had offertory collections at a similar level to our payments towards Ministry and Mission (M and M) of the URC but that the budget for 2009 includes an increase in M and M payments that is greater than our estimated increase in offertory, partly because attendance at services has dropped but also because we have lost members by death and transfers out but not replaced them with newcomers to the same extent.

We appreciate that all of us have concerns and problems because of the recently changed financial climate but we do wish to ask for your prayerful consideration of how we can all try and help resolve this concern. We pay more than our membership formulae says we should, as a way of helping smaller congregations to obtain ministry, and we consider that is part of our duty to the wider church but having M and M exceed offertory is not sustainable in the longer term as it means that hall hire and other property related activities have to cover all other costs including further renovations to the building.

Should anyone wish to discuss these concerns in more detail, please contact Donna or David Black - they would appreciate feedback that can be relayed to the finance committee and elders when planning for commitments in 2010

David Black

From the Elders' Meeting - Hirings v Church Use:

The elders held a discussion about a perception in the church that hiring rooms to various organisations was inhibiting certain church activities, particularly Thursday and Saturday Coffee mornings. Despite the vital financial support derived from room hire in general, the elders recognised the need to ensure that the requirements of the church came first. It was, therefore, agreed in principle that the Garden Room and Link Gallery be available for Thursday and Saturday Coffee

URCiC Directory

Copies are now available and if you would like one, please contact the church secretary.

Traidcraft Stall

This will be available on **14 December** for those last minute Christmas Gifts. Also from January, the stall will be on display on the second Sunday in the month.

Toddlers' Club

We now have a very successful Toddlers' Club which meets on a Tuesday morning. There are over 40 families on the books with an average attendance of 25 parents and more than 30 children attending each week. We will be having a short Christmas service on **Tuesday 23 December** in the Church at **10.30am** followed by coffee and mince pies. Everyone is welcome to come along and join in the fun.

14 December 2008 – Gift Sunday

As usual we are asking you to support the Salvation Army by providing gifts for their Christmas parcels at the morning service. This year they have asked for gifts for 'teenagers'. If you find this difficult, gift vouchers are very acceptable. All gifts to be unwrapped please.

Correspondence – placed in the Link Gallery

- SW Christian Resource Exhibition 29th Jan to 31st Jan 2009 at Westpoint, Exeter
- West Midlands Synod Meetings, Sat 14th March 2009 at Carrs Lane and Sat 10th October 2009 at Trinity Church, Leek
- Festival of Praise – 17 Oct 2009
- Sue Ryder
- VSO
- Livability (disabled people)
- Crossways Course Programme 2009
- Word in Action
- Medair News
- MAF News
- Prophetic Vision

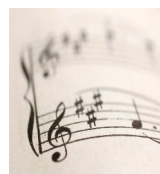
‘JUMP FOR JOY’



**Sunday 21 December
& Sunday 18 January
9.30am – 10am**

Informal Short Service for all the family

Music at St Andrew's in December/January



**Wednesday 3 December at 7.30pm
Cotswold Male Voice Choir**

**Saturday 6 December at 7.30pm
Cheltenham Silver Band**

**Saturday 13 December at 7.30pm
Gotherington Singers**

**Friday 19 December at 8.00pm
& Wednesday 14 January at 8.00pm
Cheltenham Contemporary Concerts**

**St NIKOLAUS' &
CHRISTMAS GRAND FAYRE
SATURDAY 13th DECEMBER
10am – 2pm**

LOTS OF STALLS INCLUDING: Home made cakes and preserves, Christmas items, raffle, jewellery, cosmetics & toiletries, cards, tombola, collectables, presents, crafts, holly, home made sweets, white elephant, children's toys, continental items, lucky dip, books, games etc.

Meet St Nikolaus at 1100 & 12.30 with free gifts for the children

Entrance £1 – with a Glass of Gluhwein or Tea/Coffee & a mince pie Children Free

Lunches also being served

Goods to be received on Friday evening or Saturday morning

Venture Studio Session auction

We have been given a voucher for a Venture Studio Session in support of the Christmas Fair. This entitles one family to a photographic session, followed by a viewing of the images and the choice of one image framed as a 7" x 5" gift portrait. The whole package is worth £145.

Anyone who is interested in this great offer is invited to bid for the voucher by contacting Bob Alger (01242 512343) before the Christmas fair. The voucher will go to the highest bid received by 12 noon on 13th December. The bid money will all go to St Andrews Fair proceeds. Hurry to take advantage of this great offer by the Cheltenham Venture Studio in Montpellier!

Warden Hill News

A few weeks ago, I received news of the death of a friend. We first met over 70 years ago, in our local Methodist Church in Bolton, and became almost inseparable friends. The war sent us off in different directions, and we next met in 1949, at the Methodist Conference in Liverpool, when we were both ordained into the ministry. After that, our ministries led us into different parts of the country, and we met only once, when the years between rolled away as if they had never been.

I thought of John when I was going through my Christmas card list to decide how many cards I would need this year. Many of the names on that list are of people whom I have not seen for many years. We write to each other at Christmas, but not, usually, at any other time.

I like sending Christmas cards. I try my utmost to select "real" Christmas cards, and I send them to old friends with a prayer, and as an assurance. "We have never forgotten you, and all the times of blessing that we have shared". And I like receiving cards from friends old and new. There is an old hymn which says "Though sundered far by faith we meet, around one common mercy seat"

The Star Centre Building Fund appeal ("Blue Bucket") raised £175. Thank you!

On 2nd November, we welcomed Sarah and John, our new Youth Workers, and we look forward to seeing them often as they go about their work.

At the special meeting on 4th November, there was a unanimous vote to proceed towards the founding of an official Local Ecumenical Partnership (LEP) with St Christopher's. Some concerns expressed at the URC meeting are being followed up. St Christopher's had a meeting on Sunday 23rd November.

The joint Christmas Fair on 29th November was too late to be reported on in this issue. Thank you to all who helped and all who supported this occasion - the results will be reported in the Grapevine

Special events:

Sunday 14th Christingle Service at the URC, 10.30 am. We would welcome everybody on the previous day (Saturday) to help to make the Christingles and to enjoy mince pies and coffee. This is also our **Gift Sunday** for the Salvation Army. Gifts for Teenagers please, vouchers would be very acceptable.

Monday 15th Carol Supper at the URC commencing at 7pm, with a "Bring and Share" supper, and items by the St. Christopher's bell ringers.

Wednesday, 24th Crib Services at St. Christopher's, and at St. Andrew's, both at 4pm. There will also be Midnight Communion, commencing at 11.30pm, at St. Christopher's and St. Andrew's.

Christmas Day Family Communion at St. Christopher's, and Family Worship at St. Andrews, both at 10am.

The next "Community Film evening" will be on **Saturday 27th December**, at 2.15pm, when the film "Prince Caspian" will be shown. The last film evening was a great success, with 80 people enjoying the film which was a replacement for "Prince Caspian"

Wednesday, 31st December Watch Night service at St. Christopher's starting at 11.45pm

For the regular Sunday services, alternating between St. Christopher's and Warden Hill URC, see the back cover. *Bill Farrell*

At 2.30pm (doors open at 2.15pm)

**The Chronicles of Narnia
Prince Caspian (PG)**

**Free Entry - Family and Friends Welcome
Refreshments available**

**URC in CHELTENHAM MORNING PRAYERS
11.30am – 12noon EVERY Tuesday at Warden Hill**

Date	Readings	Prayer Issues
2 December	Psalm 104 Mark 1 1-8	West Midlands Synod The Moderator & Synod Staff Urchins & Toddlers' Club Prayers for the world
9 December	Psalm 105 John 1 6-8, 19-28	The Windermere Centre Work of the Salvation Army Prayers for the world
16 December	Psalm 106 Luke 1 26-38	URCiC Ministers Christmas and New Year Services Prayers for the world
23 December	Psalm 107 Luke 2 22-40	Christmas Open Door World Peace
6 January	Psalm 108 Mark 1 4-11	Tewkesbury Area, Abbey & Methodist Church Prestbury Junior Church World Council of Churches
13 January	Psalm 109 John 1 43-51	Ashchurch/Northway Area Links with families living at distance Prayers for the world
20 January	Psalm 110 Mark 1 14-20	Conderton, Overbury Area Rural Ministries Ministry of music in the Churches Prayers for the world
27 January	Psalm 111 Mark 1 21-28	Broadway, Stanton Area Tourism Warden Hill Urchins Prayers for the World

Community Film Night - Saturday 27 November



What is a Grandchild ?

What is a grandchild ?
Well may you ask !
It's a song in the heart,
It's a funny clown mask,
It's an ache in the back
And swings in the park.
It's crumbs on the floor,
And a cry in the dark.
It's kittens and tadpoles,
It's jigsaws and snap,
It's scissors and paste,
A squirm in your lap,
It's a quivering lip
And a hot, clutching hand.
It's a stake in the future ;
The hope of our land.

Kindly submitted by Pat Gregory.

PLEASE NOTE. PLEASE ENSURE THAT ITEMS FOR THE FEBRUARY 2009 ISSUE REACH THE NOMINATED CONTRIBUTORS OR THE CHURCH OFFICE BY TUESDAY 13 JANUARY.

DISTRIBUTION DAY IS SUNDAY 25 JANUARY 2009

St Andrew's

‘JUMP FOR JOY’



songs

Sunday 21 December

9.30am – 10am

Informal Short Service for all the family

stories



This will be a regular service on the third Sunday of the month