



ACT TOGETHER

Ashram Community Trust

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Our fragile home, which the space station can circle in 92 mins and whose 16km thick atmosphere protects and enables all of life

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COP26 FROM THE GROUND UP - REFLECTIONS 2021

This was a series of zoom sessions on various themes related to the environment held over 3 days April 22nd -25th 2021.

Each session started with footage from around the world of groups out on the streets giving their messages and also a summary of the 'Care and justice' policy which established the ground rules for all sessions.

These were to:

- Respect each other.
- Encourage participation.
- To make no assumptions about people and their situations.
- Not to be defensive. To be prepared to listen and learn.

It would be good if those ground rules were followed in all political debate and decision making!

I attended 4 events and the final assembly so will share now some of my gleanings from the sessions.

1. Making connections, Fossil Fuels. Forests and Land rights.

There were speakers from Mozambique, Brazil and Biofuelwatch in UK and USA.

The disturbing thing to me was how often deforestation is linked to carbon offsetting, so in fact a form of 'greenwashing'. Carbon offsetting is used as way of 'reducing' carbon footprint by aviation and iron and steel companies. This may even be subsidised as with Drax as the wood is given the status of a renewable resource. The kind of trees used are also often grown in monoplantations so resulting in soil degradation. The trees grown mean indigenous people are often displaced.

2. Aviation- a whole range of issues were highlighted in this session.

- This is a social justice issue as most flights are taken by a few wealthy people yet impacts are felt by poorest. In UK 15% people take 70% all flights.
- The use of planes for deportation.
- Greenwash. All sorts of claims are made that aviation can be made more sustainable but alternative fuel development is either not developed or very limited and as already highlighted biofuel issues are linked to deforestation and displacement of local people as in Paraguay. Claims that airports are zero carbon but discounting impacts of the flights themselves.
- People from several different campaigns talked about their specific campaigns. One shocking thing emerged that pilots can find it difficult to speak out because of gagging clauses in their contracts.
- It was recognised this was an area of work where Just Transition principles need to be followed so those made redundant were involved in finding alternative employment and training. Apparently pilots pay for their own training which is expensive so they incur debts. Also not just jobs at airports are affected but eg in Edinburgh overseas tourism especially for the festivals gives lot of local employment.
- Some policies are becoming clearer eg frequent flyer levy was agreed as the most just way to ensure the costs of flying were increased to help reduce demand. 65% people supported this at the Citizens assembly on Climate change in the UK in2020.

3. Militarism, climate change and global dissent

Several strands of concern were shared.

- i) How often activists are criminalised, labelled terrorists or killed. Environmentalists have been killed in Columbia, Honduras, India and the Philippines.
- ii) Dr Stuart Parkinson from 'Scientists for global responsibility' outlined the ways in which military equipment had a carbon footprint.
 - Military technology industry.
 - Land use for military bases etc.
 - Direct impacts of war and linked impacts eg fires, deforestation., healthcare
 - Post conflict construction.

He explained it was hard to put an exact figure on the carbon footprint as the military is exempt from reporting its carbon footprint.

The concern is that military spending is increasing. This is a misuse of money and expertise when both should be directed at addressing the climate emergency.

Brian Logan from Scotland spoke of his involvement as an activist. A lot of fuel is used on troop movements. The link between military and oil is clear as protecting oil supplies by the military is seen as part of energy security. There is a need to change ideas about security.

There was then discussion about the need for 'arms conversion'. At the level of companies and factories that means switching to more environmentally friendly products. Egs the Lucas Plan, the Bremen Defence conversion in Germany between 1992 an 1997. More recently the switch to making ventilators though then staff returned to former 'defence' jobs.

There are advantages to workers in converting to green sectors as there would be more jobs. Apparently the same amount of money can create more jobs in clean energy, healthcare and education.

Any conversion needs to be planned to avoid injustice and workers would need to be retrained. There was a need to link with Trade Unions and have technology students involved.

There was discussion re Nuclear Power. It was argued there is such a close link between civilian and nuclear industries there are real dangers in pursuing this source of power. Nuclear weapons if used would have a catastrophic impact on the climate.

Some key thoughts I took from this session:

- The military carbon footprint needs measuring as well as the contributions made by Aviation and shipping recently announced by the government.
- Looking in more depth at how a Just transition would be needed in this area of 'Arms diversion'. Trade Union involvement would be very important.
- Understandings of what is meant by 'security' need checking out and often changing.
- The uses of nuclear power for military and civilian purposes are closely linked.

4. Faith for the climate

There were a variety of speakers, from different faiths and different countries.

We heard first from speakers from Bangladesh and Fiji. They were explaining the impacts of sea levels on their countries. Saline impacts on agriculture and the unpredictability of rainfall and access to drinking water were highlighted and eventually the actual disappearance of their land under water with consequent loss of home and livelihoods. The distress of this was very clear and also the

injustice of this situation when countries worst affected have contributed least in terms of pollution and carbon.

The speaker from Fiji also said some Faith narratives are unhelpful and can stereotype and demonise other communities.

The call for 'loss and damage' funding was made very clear. When areas are damaged beyond repair and there are climate impacts that are beyond the capacity of natural and social systems to adapt those costs are additional to any adaptation and resilience measures. An example was given of coastal regions under water so relocation and job re-training will be needed.

We then divided into breakout groups to look at the following possible areas of action highlighted by:

1. The Young Christian climate network walk/pilgrimage to Glasgow.
2. The 2 asks from CAFOD about no subsidies for fossil fuels and loss and damage new finance,
3. Faith for the climate 'Big Green week' in September.
4. Action around G7 meetings in June.
5. Crack the crises 'Wave of hope'.
6. Mobilising by learning from Trade Unions and using ways of organising so we get people on board and make sure inequalities and racism do not affect 'who is in the room'.
7. Just transition emphasis.
8. Recognition of ecocide as crime under international law.

I joined the group looking at the walk/pilgrimage idea. We reflected on the understanding of pilgrimage. It evoked many deep thought and feelings around our interconnectedness, being in touch with the earth, solidarity. We recognised walking was a practice often linked to protest as with civil rights marches. It is possible to choreograph walks so special note is made of the geology, history of the route and impacts on the climate. There can be an encouragement to collect items on the way or note issues raised by the landscape. There may be links between the sacred and circular. Walks can be a mixture of faith, art and politics. There is a tension between the urgency of the issue and the encouragement of a slower pace as we walk.

Key dates were highlighted. I have joined up to the YCCN walk and hope to join in some stretches and also 'encourage' tributaries' in the Manchester area. There are other ways support is needed. The walk arrives in Manchester Sept 10th from Sheffield and leaves Manchester on September 13th heading for Leeds

The DSEI arms fair is in London September 14th -17th. but more action may be local either before or during that time.

The Great Big Green Week is from Sept 18th -26th.

Some final thoughts:

- There is urgency about this.
- The campaigning around 'loss and damage' finance is significant especially maybe for Faith Communities.
- No more fossil fuels but also no false solutions.

<https://www.carbonmap.org/#intro>

<https://greatbiggreenweek.com/>

<https://faithfortheclimate.org.uk/getting-ready-for-cop26>

<https://www.yccn.uk/>

Sandra Dutton

Earth day

Since the winter lockdown started to ease, Bunyan Meeting has met for worship a couple of times in the church garden. It's a beautiful space, a haven in a built-up area, and our open-air worship is one of the blessings we want to carry with us from the horrors of the last year into the future.

Last Sunday, it was All Age Worship, and we asked each person to bring a stone with them. During the service, we painted our initials or names on the stone, and brought them forward as an act of prayer.

The stones came from the havens of our lives, from our gardens or the riverside, the places where we touch the earth, and know we are part of God's creation. Genesis 2 puts this into words. God took some clay, or soil, for which the Hebrew word is 'adamah' and made a human being, for which the Hebrew word is 'adam'. It's hard to convey the similarity in the words in an English translation. Most versions don't even try! But some talk about a 'groundling' made from the ground, or a 'human' made from the 'humus' (a gardener's word for soil).

However you say it, there is a very close link between the human race and our earth, our planet. We are made by the same God, and made from the same 'stuff'. It's a profound insight, rooted in Scripture.

At our service last week, we thought hard about ground under our feet. Bunyan Meeting was founded in an apple barn in an orchard, on the rich, fertile soil that forms on the sedimentary rocks which cover most of South East England. (It'll be different for you, of course. But the rocks under your feet will have formed your landscape, and shaped the lives of the people who live there.)

Bedfordshire is built on clay. If you travel into London St Pancras by train, on the way you will pass through miles of clay pits and quarries. And when you get into London you will see where all that clay has gone – turned into millions of bricks to build Georgian Squares and Victorian Terraces as the capital spread outwards.

But Bedford town lies on older rock. The River Great Ouse, winding its slow way to the Wash, has cut through the soft clay to reach deeper, further back in time. These earlier sedimentary rocks take us to an era of warm, shallow seas, where ammonites and sea urchins drifted downwards over millennia as they died, to form layers of limestone, which would eventually turn out to be excellent building material. You can see it in the houses and bridges in surrounding villages. We are shaped by a landscape formed through aeons, out of warm sea and hard rock, volcanic fire and seismic shift.

But we can reach even further back than that. We and the earth, this stone and our flesh, contain elements that were forged unimaginably in the birth of stars.

One of these evenings, go to a garden or a quiet place, stand on the good earth; feel it beneath your feet. Look up at the night sky, stars, galaxies, things far beyond our understanding, held in God's power. Know that you too are God's creation. Look, and wonder.

Janet Wootton



Chose the world you want

It was inspirational to meet some of the farmers behind our food and clothes during Fairtrade Fortnight this year. They were excited and thankful for the benefits that Fairtrade gave, especially greater control over their lives – but also very clear that they were already facing the climate crisis and we need to take urgent action. “As a matter of justice and a matter of science, action on the climate crisis cannot be delayed any longer” Chair of Fairtrade Africa at the Global Climate Ambition Summit in December. And we can't expect farmers who didn't create this crisis and don't earn enough to meet their basic needs to absorb the costs of adapting to and mitigating the damage of the climate crisis.

Sustainability is essential to Fairtrade and farmers are required to improve soil and water quality, manage pests and waste, avoid harmful chemicals, and reduce greenhouse gases. Millions of trees have been planted, biogas is replacing firewood, terraces capture rainwater, coffee pulp is used as fertiliser, solar energy dries beans and fruits, and rice grown using permaculture reduces methane emissions.

But the challenges are huge - by 2050 half the land currently used to grow coffee will no longer be suitable, half of the regions in W.Africa where most of the world's cocoa is grown will be too hot, and there'll be a drastic decline in banana yields in 10 major countries. But persistent poverty in farming communities will leave them unable to respond to climate disasters and lead to further environmental degradation. We saw what was already happening in 'tropical' Central America – a ten year drought, followed by forest fires, and then the utter devastation of hurricanes Eta and Iota last autumn.

But there was a great story of hope. Five years ago a Fairtrade coffee co-op in Honduras facing the coffee rust fungus, irregular rains and prolonged droughts caused by the climate crisis, decided to diversify into growing the more resilient and price stable cocoa. They invested their Fairtrade premium into setting up nurseries to grow 1.2 million grafted cocoa plants and 300,000 canopy trees for shade. These are now bearing fruit, and the co-op has built a XOL chocolate factory which is run by twenty young women. In a region with a hyper macho culture Fairtrade's commitment to gender equality has born amazing fruit!



Young women running the chocolate factory at COAGRICSAL, Honduras

It was also good to hear Cathryn Higgs, Head of food policy at the Co-op say **“We have a moral imperative to act:** this issue (the climate crisis) is bigger than any of us. The science is clear, now is the time for business and Governmentto show leadership...It's only by coming together and collaborating and co-operating for a fairer world that we can make a difference.”

It's great to see how much can be achieved by farmers who are working together to protect their livelihoods and their, and our, environment. They need us to buy their products but also to help their voices to be heard. Fairtrade is working with businesses, policy makers and government to protect the most vulnerable, and especially this year, to influence the British Govt to encourage and persuade other Govts at COP26. We, by choosing Fairtrade products when we shop, are sending a powerful message of the world we want - one where farmers are paid fairly for their work so that they have the opportunity to fight the climate crisis RIGHT NOW.

‘Don't abandon the fight for social justice and climate justice for our people – keep going! Climate justice is also social justice..... being able to say we are human beings. Join the Fairtrade cause; it is both the bridge and the vehicle that will transform the well-being of the families of small-scale producers. There cannot be climate justice without justice in the market for our products. Nicaraguan coffee farmers coop SOPPEXCCA

For more information see the uploadable very readable Fairtrade report 'Climate of Crisis: Farmers, our Food and the Fight for Justice' All the events including the farmer meetings during Fairtrade Fortnight are available at <https://www.fairtrade.org.uk/choose-the-world-you-want/on-demand/>

Jenny Medhurst

So what can we do?

Bamboo handled toothbrushes in a cardboard box, is better than a plastic handled toothbrush in a plastic bubble. Buying soap in a cardboard box, not in a plastic wrapper, and avoiding sodium tallowate from animal fat. Faith in Nature soaps and saponified olive soap are now widely available. Independent health food shops, Holland and Barrett shops and even Waitrose have 1 or more of these available, and online ordering from Holland and Barrett, and TheVeganKind online supermarket, have some availability* Where possible mouthwash is best bought in glass bottles with metal cap, rather than plastic tops and containers. TheVeganKind supermarket has the better type of mouthwash.

What we eat has a big impact on global warming, and is the biggest way most of us can reduce adding massively to global warming. Vegan food is not contributing so much to global warming, since cattle and sheep, and pigs and chicken, all add to negative global impact. TheVeganKind supermarket now supplies "Omnipork" a product which apparently tastes and has a cooked fragrance of pork, but is formed of 4 plant foods, and like pork needs fridging and using up rapidly. Beans, peas, lentils and chickpeas are legumes and are good forms of protein, with fibre and micronutrients, and because they fix nitrogen, they do not need fertilisers. Tree nuts such as almonds, hazelnuts and walnuts, because they grow on trees are beneficial to the climate.

So I would ask people to stop, think, consider and reflect, on ways that they can reduce plastic use, and move away from animal food dependency and animal food addiction. The Vegan Society and Viva can give advice on healthy vegan diets.

Greetings from Cerys.

From the Editor: Don't forget Fairtrade please when you cut out plastics -Traidcraft sells plant-based plastic free shampoo bars and hand-made olive oil soaps from Palestine. So we can ditch plastic, support producers and avoid plantation palm oil. Traidcraft sweets and some of its chocolates are now in home compostable packaging. It sells a range of vegan foods including organic lentils and chick peas from India.

Look for Fairtrade nuts too - cheap cashews often come at a price borne by women in India, who process more than half the world's crop, crouching all day on small stools, hitting the nuts with a baton, unprotected from the acidic shells, the dust and bad backs.

If it's almonds you're after Zaytoun sells rain-fed organic Palestinian almonds, It takes ~3.5l of water to produce a single almond, and more than 80% of the world's almonds are grown in drought- stressed California, on industrial farms which are bad for bees and biodiversity. Palestinian family farms are using regenerative agriculture to mitigate the effect of the climate crisis and with Fairtrade are recapturing the imagination of the young,

This species of monkey (Sinhala: *rilawa*; toque macaque; *macaca sinica*) is endemic to the Sinharaja rain forest, just nearby. They often frequent our village in troops. We found this baby alone, and distressed. Very rarely, a baby can get separated from its mother, who always carries it around on her stomach. We searched the forest for the mother or a troop, but found none. Since this baby cannot survive on its own without milk, she's now one of our home-community. Hardly living in her cage, she prefers to roam around the house and garden, but sleeps at night cuddled to Sิริyalatha the woman head of house, I believe to feel safe and secure. She is called *chuti nangi* (little sister), and is fond of clinging on to the belly of a young woman in our home-community who is heavily pregnant. They say, that's because she senses the presence of the baby. I won't rule that out, given the advanced sensibility of animals to nature, including at times of crisis, far surpassing that of many humans, manifested in 2004's Tsunami, and the present pandemic. She, has just come off being bottle-fed, and got on to solids as well, and will be with us until she steadily develops the skills to select and gather food from our neighbouring forest plots; then one day she will sensibly feel confident to fend for herself and leave us on her own accord, to live in her natural habitat, the Sinharaja rain forest.

- Nirmal Fernando, Thundola, Sri Lanka, May 2021





Arwa Abu Haikal Havard (1973-2021)

Activist, Business Woman and Friend

Many friends in Sheffield and beyond have been shocked and saddened by the news of Arwa's death from Covid 19 on Thursday 4th March in Hebron, Palestine.

Arwa lived in Sheffield in the Pitsmoor/Burngreave area from 2008 with her husband Dave. She returned to live in Palestine in 2014 but returned regularly to visit her friends in the UK, coming on one occasion to celebrate a friend's wedding. While living in Sheffield Arwa kept very busy. She was never one to idle away her time. She was an activist with the Palestine Solidarity Campaign attending meetings and demonstrations, inspiring us with her experiences of life under occupation. She spoke about her family and home in Tel Rumeida, Hebron and the difficulties of life there- the destroying of her family's olive trees and the constant alien presence of soldiers. She was a supporter of Sheffield Palestine Women's Scholarship fund and Northern Women for Palestine and gave heart felt presentations in Sheffield, Saddleworth, Bradford, Stockton and Manchester. She translated and read her mother's poems about life in Palestine and also write her own. She wanted us to understand what life is like for Palestinians and speaking about her experiences in public took an amazing amount of courage.

She set up as a massage therapist while in Sheffield, giving loving care to her clients and was employed as a

lunch time supervisor in local schools. She worked for 'Forever Living' where her skills as an astute business woman were obvious and she was very successful in their Middle East section.



Back in Palestine she continued her life-long activism- sitting in front of a bulldozer to prevent the destroying of olive trees by settlers on the family land and organising activities and trips for children traumatised by living under occupation.

She was surrounded in Hebron by a loving family who she loved dearly: her mother, father, sisters and brothers and a growing number of nieces and nephews. I remember shopping with her in Sheffield for gifts to take back to her family, a full day's task!

It is as a loving, loyal and supportive friend that many of us who knew her will remember her best. She had an extraordinary capacity for making and keeping friends. Her generosity of spirit, her

warm smile and her exuberance for life will live on in the memories of those who were privileged to be her friend. She loved people and gave of herself in all interactions from market stall owners to Members of Parliament.

Arwa loved Sheffield and always felt a part of it, even when living away. She will be greatly missed.

A Virgin giving page has been set up in her memory by Sheffield Palestinian Women's Scholarship Fund. All

donations will go to scholarships for women in the West Bank –a cause dear to Arwa's heart.

Ashram memories of Arwa

Rushing, Helping, Talking, Going, Coming, CALM, New, Energetic, Interesting, Companion, Charged, Joyful, Smiling, Interested. Sharing, Wishing New Things

Pippa Thompson

I met Arwa on an Ashram Weekend a few years ago, which was held in Cliff College. I have both worked professionally and as a volunteer in the field of Inter-Faith engagement, and was very comfortable meeting a Muslim sister.

Arwa was a wonderfully warm, welcoming and engaging woman, and we got on like the proverbial house on fire. When it was time to take our leave of each other and our Ashram friends - always my least favourite part of an Ashram Weekend - Arwa and I embraced, and she said she hoped we would meet again. I told her I hoped so too, adding the Arabic word, "Inshallah", which means, "God willing", a fairly common phrase to use amongst Primitive Methodists like myself. Dear Arwa was astonished, and delighted, to hear a Christian sister use the term in Arabic. She said she had never expected to hear such a marvellous thing, and we both laughed and embraced each other with great love and understanding.

To my deep regret, we never did meet again, though I often thought of her, and was always glad to hear news of her via Ashram. Now we shall not meet again on this Earth, though I look forward to being with her in Heaven, one day.

Anne Littlefair



Palestinian breakfast, St John's Church Egglecliffe, Fairtrade Fortnight March 2016 With Arwa and Maureen Rigg Chair of Stockton Fairtrade Partnership

On Arwa's last visit to Greystone in 2016 she spoke at meetings in Middlesbrough and Stockton describing life in Hebron and made a lasting impression on her audiences..

She described the tense and deteriorating situation, the danger of standing in front of the bulldozers, and the daily killings. I was amazed by her positivity, courage and steadfastness. She said the feedback from her audiences gave her hope, as did the growing strength of the BDS campaign.

Please do support the scholarship fund set up in her memory if you can. (Without medicines and respirators Gaza had only been able to protect its citizens by enforcing a long lockdown. Poverty has overwhelmed the state with thousands of daily labourers unable to work and 80% of the people without enough to eat.) The students in Gaza struggle to study remotely, with power and internet cuts worrying them more than covid. They're forced to study and sit exams at night, despite the cold, and often by the light of a mobile phone. And without the practical training many of their courses demand. The Scholarship Fund is supporting the most vulnerable students and giving them that most precious thing – hope.

Palestine UPDATE

As I write war has broken out between Israel and Gaza following forced expulsion orders in the Sheikh Jarrah area of Jerusalem. In the West Bank tomato crops and olive trees have been uprooted wheatfields burned, and Palestinians are afraid to travel for fear of being targeted by armed settlers who have the full protection of the army. Nevertheless they are steadfast and resilient - demanding the equality, justice, dignity and freedom needed for a lasting peace - and our solidarity *can* make a big difference.

If you can -

- Inform yourselves, follow and repost using these hashtags: [#SaveSheikhJarrah](#) [#GazaUnderAttack](#) [#FreePalestine](#)
- Donate to M.A.P. (Medical Aid for Palestine)
- send a letter via the MAP website to your MP and the FCDO,
- and support Palestinian livelihoods by buying their (Zaytoun) products.

Jenny Medhurst

Rosaleen Sutherland-Waite (1921-2020)

Paul Sutherland-Waite, a committed member of the London Agape Group, would like to share the story of his mother's long and amazing life, and has chosen the following obituary (slightly amended) which was written by one of Rosaleen's yoga students, Swami Vandadananda, for *The British Wheel of Yoga* members' magazine.



Rosaleen was born in Portadown on 16 January 1921. Her father died of flu when she was only four years old. Growing up in Portstewart not far from the Giant's Causeway, she had a strict Presbyterian upbringing.

She won a music scholarship at the age of 15 from the London Trinity School of Music, to study in Belfast, and became a very accomplished musician, playing piano and harmonium.

Rosaleen married Spencer in February 1944. Her husband was a Captain in the 5th Airborne Division and landed at Arnhem. Their son Paul was born in 1958, by which time Spencer was working for the UN, doing engineering projects. This took the family from 1968 to 1970 to Turkey, Taiwan and Jamaica. In Taiwan Rosaleen taught English language. She said she felt at home in any culture.

The family moved to Oxshott in Surrey in 1960 and then to Leatherhead in 1985. Sadly Rosaleen's husband passed away that same year and Rosaleen lived the rest of her life in the town.

She loved playing piano and played until the end of her life. At her home the piano was always open with the music notes ready. Playing piano for children's ballet classes, she often talked of her love of these times. She was also a nursery school teacher and had an amazing affinity with children.

Her yoga classes lasted two hours and consisted of meditation to start, then asanas, a short lecture on a subject of Patanjali and eight limbs of yoga or chakras, or any other yoga topic of interest. At the end of each class there was always a super relaxation led by Rosaleen or held in total silence. The students were all very curious to see what Rosaleen would be wearing. She was always completely colour-coordinated and for each class she wore a yoga outfit in a different chakra colour. She did not easily tolerate black or grey yoga outfits, saying that we ought to wear clothes that reflected the rainbow colours. She was famous for having her toe nails painted each in a different colour of the rainbow.

Her yoga students were like her family. We loved her good sense of humour. The 'yoga family' organised many of her birthday parties, with the last party celebrated together with a group of students at the age of 98.

(The original magazine article included a photograph of this event, which included Paul S-W resplendent in evening suit and bow tie, but it was unfortunately not clear enough to be reproduced here!)

There were also different occasions when the students gathered around her, like pre-Christmas lunches or dinners in various London restaurants. She was very elegant with an eye for colour, she loved people and was generous with her time. She also entertained at her home, organising lovely evenings. She touched so many lives and transformed many of our ideas.

She departed from this world on 17 April 2020. Her funeral was simple because it was during lockdown, with only 10 people attending. If not for that there would have been huge crowds at her funeral. She was a people's person and her laughter was very infectious. We shall always remember it and her beautiful smile, her kindness and generosity of spirit.

What I have Gained from the Covid-19 Pandemic

I have been fortunate during the pandemic in so many ways: living in a place where the incidence of covid has been very low, being part of a small, caring community in which people have done a tremendous amount to support others in the community, receiving money from pensions and having savings so no loss of income, not being on my own but in a loving relationship with a person that I enjoy spending time with, having some beautiful walks just minutes from my house - and being surrounded by open space, close to the sea with the most amazing views. And that's just for starters!

I have gained the opportunity to participate in meetings and conferences, including Ashram ones (and even watch some funerals) that I would not have been able to attend due to distance and therefore the time and cost of travelling to the mainland. I had resisted Zoom and online meetings, in fact I thought I didn't have the facility on my computer to participate but someone had come to help fix some issues I was having with it and showed me that I did indeed have the technology - it just needed activating! I'm now able to be more involved as an Ashram Trustee than I had for the previous 6 years. Audio and Video services which were recorded meant I contributed to and shared in the Christmas Eve service here for the first time. It was normally in the church at 11.30 pm on Christmas Eve and I chose to spend that time with Brian. In 2020 I recorded my contribution beforehand and was able to view the completed service at a time more convenient to me.

I have also gained a new way of selling fair trade. Early on in the first national lockdown last year, I put an article in the church newsletter which I produce every month (and which I have continued to do throughout the pandemic, sending to most people by email and a few by post) saying I had stock and could

offer to deliver goods to people in Tobermory (which I did on my daily permitted exercise walk). I contacted a few people who had bought from me in the past and for whom I had email addresses and sent a list of the stock I had. Then people started asking if I could order goods for them, some of them were in Tobermory but a few were elsewhere on the island so I either arranged delivery or people collected from outside my house. In some cases I used Royal Mail and customers were happy to pay the postage charges.

I now have a number of people who order every month, some have said it is better for them as they weren't always at church on the Sunday I had the stall and therefore missed out. I send an email every month with a list of current stocks and reduced prices for any items reaching or exceeding their Best Before Dates. I even created my own Mini Catalogues for Christmas, one with cards and wrapping paper in my stock form the previous year with reduced prices and one with selections from the Traidcraft range. These were emailed to my regulars but they were also given the link to the Traidcraft online catalogue so they could order from that through me as well. I did the same at Easter. Also for Christmas, inspired by the hampers of local produce being offered by a local shop, I purchased a couple of empty hamper boxes from them and offered my customers the option to build their own bespoke fair trade hampers for giving to friends or family on the island. They chose what they wanted to include from the catalogue and I ordered the goods, made up the hampers and delivered them. I didn't come up with the idea until a short time before Christmas, so didn't get many orders but I will certainly be offering it again this year.

The result was that my sales for the past year have more or less equalled that of the previous year and, because of having to write-off less stock (or to sell at a reduced price)

because it had passed its Best Before Date, I achieved a slightly higher profit level which I have donated to Traidcraft Exchange and to other charities aimed at the relief of poverty both locally and overseas.

All this has meant I have not had to tie up a lot of money in stock or spend so much time packing goods up, transporting them to church or other venues, setting up and taking down the stall and then lugging the stock home, unpacking and putting back on the stockroom shelves - often for takings of less than £20! I plan to continue this method of selling even when I am able to hold stalls again and will restrict these to specific events/periods such as Fairtrade Fortnight, Easter and Christmas.

So, whilst I would not, of course, have wished for the pandemic and all the hardship and loss that it has meant for so many, I am grateful for all the changes it has brought about for me. Sometimes we only make changes when we're forced to and then end up saying "if only I'd done this before!"

So, even if it's been a difficult year for you with regard to finances, study, seeing family (especially for those who have had to wait to see new babies), illness for you or your family or perhaps the death of people close to you, I'd encourage all of you to reflect on what you have gained from the past year however small.

Lorraine Jones

Ashram connections!

I guess what you are about to read is just another reflection on the effects of Zoom on our current situation; see what you think!

On Saturday morning 10th April I 'went' to a Zoom party organised by Traidcraft, as a thank you to their Fairtraders for keeping going throughout the past year in some imaginative new ways, to keep their customers supplied with the fairly-traded items they needed. It was a national gathering and there was just one other person there that I knew – Lorraine Jones in Tobermory. Unfortunately we couldn't 'get together' at the time because when we were split up into chat rooms they organised the participants into local areas so Staines-upon-Thames didn't quite make it to the Isle of Mull.

However, Zoom has enabled the 'London' Agape Group to welcome regularly our most distant members, Nona and Euan in Cornwall. At one of our meetings a while ago I mentioned – I forget in what context - a little recipe book I had been using for decades, published jointly by Christian Aid and

Traidcraft and as it happens co-authored by Hilary and John Ranford, a couple I knew in Staines. I gave its name – Recipes for Change – and Nona said immediately that they also had a copy and were still using it.

Finally, when a message came round from Sandra that there was space left for more articles in this edition of Act Together I had just been attending a webinar on Climate Change and Interfaith Action, part of the COP 26 Coalition "From the Ground Up" weekend of events, and what did Sandra say in her email? - "I have just been to some of the sessions of 'COP 26 from the ground up'"

So my question is this: do I move in very limited circles intellectually even if not geographically, or is Ashram, though small in number, still on the front line in a variety of contemporary issues? Answers on a post card please, or maybe a survey of opinions at our next national gathering.

Linda Marshall

Good Friday Walk of Witness 2021 - Reflection

It all began in a garden. A place of amazing beauty, of unimaginable biodiversity. A place where one was close to God and close to nature. But perfection was not enough for us humans. That innate curiosity which drives our questing was our undoing. We simply could not leave well alone – and thus began our journey from Eden into an uncertain world. Separated from God, no longer earthed in Creation, our souls search for meaning, for purpose, for a place to call home.

Eons later, in another garden, a Palestinian teacher and healer cast himself onto the ground in agony. *Let this cup pass from me!* Where were his friends? Where was his family? Did the trees that surrounded him recall the fruit of that first garden? No tempting fruit this time, only the temptation to escape the bitter fruit of pain and death that beckoned. *Nevertheless, your will not mine be done.*

And so it was, that ignominious death greeted the one who spoke of himself as way, truth and life. Death outside the city walls; death on a waste dump, a place where festering filth was deposited. Things that people had no further use for; just as they had no further use for one who had nothing but love for them. Impaled on the broad, sturdy timbers of a tree.

It was a tree that was the first undoing of humankind. A tree whose fruit enabled one to discern good and evil. And now we see a tree that is the focus of human evil, yet provided the means for our salvation.

There is another garden which awaits. A garden where a cool, calm cave hewn out of the rock waits to receive a broken body. A garden where a promised miracle awaits. A garden not yet visible as we, blinded by grief and tears, are unable to see the final act of our redemption. But wait....!

Prayer (from the Methodist Worship Book, p.263)

Almighty and everlasting God,
whose Son Jesus Christ is the resurrection and the life;
set his passion, cross and death
between your judgement and our souls,
now and in the hour of our death,
and bring us, with the whole creation,
to the light and glory of your kingdom;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Euan McPhee, Falmouth Methodist Church

They have taken the Lord

I am sure that I am not alone in feeling that churches often try to rush our belief in the resurrection at Easter; any hesitations or doubts and we are in danger of being labelled a 'Doubting Thomas'. In contrast, the four gospel accounts are very open about the struggles and doubts of the disciples and the confusing path that they share on the journey to belief. One of my lockdown projects last year was to explore and write about these passages.

'They have taken the Lord' has just been serialised by BRF (Bible Reading Fellowship) on their website. Each of the five chapters has six sections and questions for reflection. With the disciples, we journey from the despair and confusion of the empty tomb and rumours of resurrection, through wrestling with doubt and new understandings of who Jesus is, to meeting with Jesus in Galilee and the implications of Jesus' commission for us today. We then, as Jesus is again taken from the disciples, explore the meaning of the

Ascension. Also, in a society where the Lord seems to have been taken from the lives of so many people, we consider how these passages might help us rediscover Jesus in new ways in our own lives. The five chapters can be freely downloaded at:

<https://www.brf.org.uk/product/they-have-taken-the-lord-part-1-easter-day/> ;

<https://www.brf.org.uk/product/they-have-taken-the-lord-part-2-doubt-and-belief/> ;

<https://www.brf.org.uk/product/they-have-taken-the-lord-part-3-galilee/> ;

<https://www.brf.org.uk/product/they-have-taken-the-lord-part-4-commissioned/> ;

<https://www.brf.org.uk/product/they-have-taken-the-lord-part-5-lost-and-found/>

Stuart Buchanan

ZOOM Gathering

Programme and dates JAN 2021 – JULY 2021

Since October a group of about 10 to 15 Ashram friends have been meeting every two weeks via Zoom for a Gathering and to support each other in the, all to, isolating “lockdowns”. We have a programme of liturgy and news sharing and discussion of a topic chosen by a member. In January a programme was drawn up based on a discussion I had with Neville on power and politics and how disenfranchised I personally was beginning to feel and the sense of powerlessness due to the current political climate. This was at the time of the election in the USA and non elected politicians or political advisers making decisions instead of government here in England. (What a difference 3 months makes?)

The topics we were led in discussion on were:-

Politics “The levers of power”.

Democracy Alternatives

Gospel Snaps

Inequality in the UK.

Global inequality

Brexit & its consequences for communities and individuals. Loss/Grief issues experienced through Brexit, in relation to identity and belonging.

As each was defined by a different voice the direction the discussion took was diverse. We also learned about each other through these sessions. Using Zoom had to be a structured and disciplined way of sharing our thoughts and many felt this was useful as people were heard who may not be in another forum. We didn't all have to attend so people could dip in and out but there was a core group of about 9 at each session. We met fortnightly on a Monday at 6.30pm

Zoom Gathering May – July

We are continuing until at least July with 3 sessions taking place through different days of the week at **7pm** to give those who can't make Mondays the opportunity to see what we are about. These will be in weeks commencing-

31 May **Monday**, Nona and Euan – Life in Falmouth, 14 June **Tuesday**, Margaret Mackley - My City Centre Church. **Week commencing** 28 June, 12 July, Day and date to be confirmed.

If you would like to receive the programme and the link then please email me.

Pippa Thompson, pippah52@gmail.com

The Future of Ashram – some thoughts

As a community we have committed ourselves to disposing of the properties which we own. Some of the proceeds of sale will be needed to clear the debts which are being incurred by those properties whose income does not cover necessary expenditure. But it is likely that at the end of the process there will be a significant amount of money. How should this be spent?

One of Ashram's 'Objects' as a charity is "The promotion of religious and educational study and research . . . " and one of its 'powers' is "to provide facilities for religious fellowship and training;" It has recently been suggested that Ashram should think of itself from now on as a 'Community of Action Theologians.' This notion could well be a fulfilment of our Objects by continuing our practice of residential weekends.

After many decades when our weekends were generally in buildings providing basic accommodation on a self-catering basis and we were able to charge around £40 or £50 per head, we are now considering using conference centres where the charges are around £150 per head and rising. We have always been able to subsidise those who could not afford the full rate, and offer 'first timers' a free weekend.

It occurs to me that our new found wealth, (if indeed it materialises!) could be used to ensure that all action theologians, however impoverished, who wished to attend our weekends, could in future be subsidised to do so. This could be a means of involving in theological reflection those from the bottom of society who are not normally present at academic conferences, and often have insights which those in more comfortable circumstances fail to notice.

These are just my thoughts at the present; it could just be that as Weekends Secretary I am looking for a bigger weekend fund to spend! If anyone is interested in taking over the role of Weekends Secretary, which I have now done for about five years, please get in touch!

Ian Parker 25/5/21

Hi from John Barnabas,

I have been in quarantine and self isolation since March of last year. I am still walking in Handsworth park and sit by the lake. I write poetry and listen to radio 3.

As for the future of Ashram I personally think the Community is at a crossroads and seriously has to decide if it is a community of relationships and support or of buildings and their upkeep. If you are to attract new people you must have a vision and offer something radical and Jesus centred. It has to be something that spiritually nourishes and is uplifting. It has to be fun and not a chore. Also listening and discernment.

I hope to see you or link by phone to Zoom in May or Ashram Holiday in September or Gathering in October or in 2022. I need more social interaction and a hug.

*SHALOM John Barnabas
A sanctuary of PRAYER.*

Ashram as Action Theologians

By John J Vincent

The three opening Sessions of the Community weekend of October 2020 were taken up with three papers –

1. Looking Back: How We Got Houses and Projects (John Vincent)
2. Where Are We Now? (Pippa Thompson)
3. A Mother House A Possible Future (Ian Parker)

Pippa argues that we take people and resources for the buildings. She asked, 'Does Ashram want to be Landlords or Action Theologians?'

I had shown the value of buildings, but we now are not in a position to use and sustain – or need – them. So Pippa's alternative – Be Active Theologians – picks up other alternatives in our tradition, and also present initiatives we can concentrate upon.

These first thoughts on Ashram as Action Theologians come in a time when buildings are not needed to support it. How much can we do via Zoom?

1. Action Theologies. A Plan and some programme Possibilities. May 2021 Weekend? Appeal for items and offers from the Membership
2. Basic Introductory Course. "Looking for Something" (An old title)
3. Radical Jesus. With John and others, on the basic Jesus text. Also revive "Pocket Radicals" on *Discipleship and Community*?
4. Writing Group. Carry forward existing "Takes on Jesus" series of booklets. New titles to be arranged for series. Then Group study on booklet when it is published.
5. Publications. A Community group to pick up possible new volumes. Ron Ram as resource. Use of other publishers.
6. Social media. Programmes and groups using apps and podcasts. Group to develop social media resources.
7. Review of current literature, publications and media sources put forward a "Way forward in a Changed World".
8. Political dynamics, of Community involvement in models. Try new ways.

The Spring 2021 weekend would have the weekend to look at these possibilities. As it develops, the Action Theologian emphasis will empower and lead to new action by Ashram Members – as has happened with our publications so far. Ashram press publications so far had their origin or support or interpretation in actions of members.

Now the Ashram Theology needs new –Action. And even new Projects and Buildings –so don't exclude them as a possibility!

The article below indicates being "Action Theologians" is already part of our history. The article came after conferences of UTU and Ashram in 1974 and 1975. It might have some useful guidelines for 2021.

ACTION THEOLOGIANS by John J. Vincent

As a start to theology action based, we might consider a piece in *Stirrings Essays. Christian and Radical* (Epworth Press. 1976). Pp.1 Theology Arises from Action. Theology is basically about things, which happen to people: it is stories, so therefore what we need is people doing things, so that they might tell stories about their happenings afterwards. 'It is what Christians do that tells us what they are' (Donald Tytler). Religious belief is only one aspect of religious activity. The most distinctive things that Christians do are to engage in 'secular worship', that is, 'offer to the glory of God, in the name of mankind, the "matter" of man's secular existence'. The story of liturgy is 'affirmed' in action, and 'speaks through action'. Here, *concepts*, verbal symbols which aim to be part of a control system, are less useful than *images*, which are 'content to be part of the communion-relationship'. We need metaphors, not models. The gospels offer us a mass of myths, parables, and stories crying out for sacraments and quasi-sacraments.

Thus, we see the future of theology as 'reflection after revelation'. There is a more or less implicit agreement that Christian theology does not happen when theologians get together and share their beliefs, but rather happen when theologians get together and share their experiences. As Tytler says 'what we need is not new ideas so much as new energy' – and 'the dynamic quality of story and liturgy' give this. Thus 'doing theology' is Christians sharing their stories – the specimens, models and paradigms out of which they have made their meaningful life. 'Theology is not a description of timeless truths, but a description of what goes in Christianity'. The Bible does not theologize; it tells stories. Stories, 'creative, true and healing myths' are what biblical men lived by, and what we need to live by (John Davies). Some striking recent words of Walter Hollenweger may be quoted as a further instance of this point of view: 'Taken seriously, this offers a real possibility of discovering methodology of theology in an oral culture where the medium of communication is – just as in biblical times – not the definition, but the description; not the statement, but the story; not the doctrine, but the testimony; not the book, but the parable; not the *summa theologica*, but the song; not the treatise, but the television programme.'

In the Conferences we reflected on the way in which *stories precipitate gospel*. In the gospels there is a process; first an activity of Jesus; second, an activity of the disciples; third, there are social and personal effects and results; finally, society's assumptions are upset and new social patterns emerge. Then someone comes and writes it down. But the records are secondary to these things happening. The world had been turned upside down. We have neglected the relation of gospel to church history. If there is no story to tell, then there is no need for theology.

Every Christian develops theology in, from and for their own history. So we must get on creating the history – it could be gospel. All we must do is get back into making the story. John Davies declared that 'Radical theology will be assessed in terms of its effectiveness in enabling theological practitioners'. Theology should be 'enabling practitioners', that is, giving people the tools with which to do theology. For this 'doing theology' cannot be done in an academic setting; it can only be done where people are experiencing the tragedies, joys, confusions, deceptions and triumphs of actual faith-life. In passing, this itself means a new assessment of *when* theology is best done and *where* the theological expertise of the churches should be located.

All this adds up to a new regard for *testimony*. What Christians can be heard to be *doing with their stories* is significant. What they might do with them might be:

- 1) To act in the light of them
- 2) To worship or act communally in the light of them
- 3) To tell stories or give witnesses and testimonies about the way the truths contained in them actually 'work' for them.

Our Easter Conference in 1973 determined that it would be our main concern for 1974 and 1975 to find out how theology and gospel were actually being used in some specific situations. In this sense, belief is a consequence of religious activity. Personal testimony and religious story precipitate theological propositions.



Members and Associates

We invite anyone interested to request details about becoming a Member or Associate from the membership secretary, Sandra Dutson:

smdutson@btinternet.com

Members and Associates are listed in the 7-day cycle Community Prayers

Projects and Commitments

Ashram Press – Radical Christianity, Gospel Study, Discipleship, Community

Study and Research- projects on Community and related issues

Homeless and Asylum Seekers - Residence and Community for people in need

Multi-faith - mutual activities and projects open to all faiths

DATES

2021

October 8-10 Ashram Weekend Frodsham
July Day meeting tba

COMMUNITY

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Articles for the Autumn 2021 edition needed by Sep 20th .

Contributions from members / associates who do not attend national Community events are especially welcome!

HOUSES AND PROJECTS

For current information about Houses and Projects in Sheffield please contact

John Vincent
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E: ashramcommunity@hotmail.com

BRANCHES

All Members and Associates are attached to one of five regional branches. Please contact secretaries if you would like to know more about meeting or events. The branch secretaries are the local contact points for the Community.

Secretaries

Midlands – Chris & Lorraine Smedley
Tel: 0115 9288430 – Meetings temporarily suspended.

East – A46- Twice Yearly meetings

London – Linda Marshall –01784 456 474
Saturday Meetings – Monthly currently on Zoom

North-West – Josie Smith -
ashram1967js@gmail.com
Meetings bi-monthly on Zoom

Sheffield – Tamara Donaldson – 0791 092 2462

North-East – Jenny Medhurst Tel: 01740 630475

Community Zoom meetings fortnightly – Pippa Thompson – 07918 757068.