



# ACT TOGETHER

**Ashram Community Trust**

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*before the floods - Karumadi*



*180° view after the floods-, which reached the bottom window sill*

## Kerala Update

Visiting Kerala again after fifteen years, thirty six since I first went to live there as a young man, it was impossible to not see great change. All India is changing, so they tell me. Kerala especially - that was obvious.

There has been a building boom. Townscapes are filled with multi-storey apartment blocks, and along the back roads - mansion after luxury mansion is seen. Upper class churches compete not just for the elaboration of the church structure itself but for the monumental staircases leading up to them. Having realised the ill wisdom of concrete roofs that soak in heat and then radiate all night, new houses are now built with reflective, red roof tiles. Meanwhile older buildings are retro-fitted with odd looking shade canopies made from corrugated tin.

The roads are unmistakeably improved, better finished and furnished, just as well given the volume of traffic they now cope with. Big towns are often grid-locked, we detoured through the country several times to avoid Kottayam completely. Towns have expanded and often merge into each other. There are new by-passes and dual carriageways.

The Greater Kochi area is a big sprawling city. Formerly discrete satellites like Aluva, Kalamasseri and Ernakulam are as one. Indistinguishable concrete canyons of bright electric, glass faced buildings & enormous advertising billboards. Atop all of this is the massive new Greater Kochi elevated metro railway, much celebrated as a project delivered on-time (four years) and on budget (don't even ask). It's the famed Indian economic growth (the

world's fastest growing economy soon), under a liberalised, globalised financial policy, with foreign investment coming in, and in Kerala especially, the continued benefit of huge remittances from workers in the Persian Gulf. Generations of Kerala people live their whole lives in the Gulf now.

I asked if the amount of building work and general economic growth going on had benefits for the dalith (former outcaste/untouchable castes) community. Some said that a lot of that work was being done by incoming contractors from Bengal or Bihar. Nonetheless I saw clear signs that the material conditions of the poorest Kerala people had improved. On trips into Kuttanad (the Backwaters), to villages I was very familiar with, I saw that every house had been upgraded from wood & coconut thatch huts to breeze block and pan tile roofed houses. Very many had mobile smart phones and connectivity. People shared their flood pictures with me by blue tooth. This is a sure sign that there was a degree of discretionary spending available now. More people had scooters, fridges and gas stoves, & jobs in town. Our CSI dalith churches had new porticos and vestries, they had PA systems with microphones, amps, speakers and mixer desks. In marginal areas where rice paddy fields intermingle with higher ground I saw several places left uncultivated. That would have been unthinkable in the squeezed economic conditions of thirty five years ago. Now I heard that farming these acres was "no longer economic". Day labour is the largest cost in paddy cultivation. Overall I think that by most economic measures inequality in Kerala has increased considerably in the last thirty five



years, and at the same time, the standard of living of the poorest has improved.

In August 2018 the once a century flood came to Kerala. Hundreds of people died - drowned or swept away. Landslides wiped away productive land in the hills. In Kuttanad, with enormous areas of rice cultivation areas, people lost a complete four month cycle of rice production. Water entered homes and ruined furniture and household goods that could not be shifted high enough. We saw a fridge parked on the verandah of a dalith community house - done, useless. Not life and death but idiomatic of setback across the community.

I heard uplifting first hand stories of cross community mobilisation, the rescue of people from the flooded areas and then provision for them in emergency camps where they had to stay for a couple of weeks. I heard complaints of government inaction in the aftermath.

My friend Aleyamma asked me and my circle to provide some financial help to flood affected dalith communities. Her background is development & social justice work with dalith people in Kerala - her own people. She took the responsibility of dispersing the funds collected and went about it very systematically. She identified flood affected communities in Kuttanad and purchased rice, oil and sugar to distribute to 120 of the poorest households in each area. I saw the long lists of names and signatures of recipients. She also identified 96 individual people who needed direct cash help - these were people from flood affected areas who had urgent needs. Also she helped meet costs of people with urgent medical help, or to replace household goods, especially cooking equipment and bed arrangements, and to provide rebuilding material.

I had asked Aleyamma to maintain detailed records of the dispersal of funds and this was done. On my last day in Kerala we were joined by Aleyamma's daughter Dolly who did sterling work pulling all those records together. For those of you who remember Aleyamma's husband Rev. KJ John, the sight of Dolly, her specs on, surrounded by paperwork and working diligently through it, would have sparked vivid memories of the great man himself.

The total amount sent for distribution was £ 4738.65 - Indian Rs 4,36,173.

The village areas supported in Kuttanad were Manjadakari, Vennatakad, Karumadi, Vempala, Budhanoor, Pandanad, Chengalam, East & Prayar, Mannar, Valanjavattom & one location for which I cannot quite decode Mrs John's handwriting.

Name	Address	Signature
1. Antony Davayya	Ottakkappilamavu	Antony
2. Mathew Isaac	Kaipadam	Mathew
3. Willson	Pallipattampu	Willson
4. Ammini	Pallipattampu	Ammini
5. K.P. John	Kochupattampu	K.P. John
6. K.P. Joseph	Kochupattampu	K.P. Joseph
7. Thommy Peter	Kochupattampu	Thommy Peter
8. Moly Isaac	Kochupattampu	Moly Isaac
9. Jonesh	Kochupattampu	Jonesh
10. Absaham K.J.	Kalleppattampu	Absaham K.J.
11. Aneesh	Kalleppattampu	Aneesh
12. Shibu	Kidangalazhy	Shibu
13. N.E. David	Kidangalazhy	N.E. David
14. Sunny	Kalathipattampil	Sunny
15. Sanesh	Kalathipattampil	Sanesh
16. Tharayadil	Tharayadil	Tharayadil

Direct cash assistance to individuals: Rs 107500  
Rice, Oil, Sugar: Rs 94335  
Household Goods: Rs 122000  
(Cooking vessels, plywood, light bulbs, cleaning materials, books & pens, cupboards, folding beds, buckets, cups  
Medical Expense: Rs 56000  
Expenses (eg Carriage/Loading): Rs 5644

Funds Used: Rs 385479

Balance remaining: Rs 50694  
(When I left Aleyamma was in discussion about supporting a

medical camp at Mandikarry with the remaining money - this would enable less mobile people in this relatively isolated community to access medical help without the need to travel into town).

Aleyamma & a number of people we met asked us to convey their thanks to all those who generously helped with financial contributions.

Just as the economic conditions of Kerala have changed so have the political conditions. On the surface the opposing forces had familiar names - Communist Party of India (Marxist - China friendly), Communist Party of India (Leninist - Soviet friendly), Congress (Mahatma Gandhi, Nehru, Indira, Rajiv, Manmohan Singh etc), Kerala Congress (Rubber!), BJP (Hindu nationalist - Narendra Modi). Underneath what had gone missing, especially from the left forces, was proper wholehearted, grassroots engagement in politics.

One of the great challenges that used to face social development activists was that the dalith people were already occupied with politics - through parties or trade unions or youth associations or womens organisations.

The social development activists had to be pretty sharp to get any attention or trust from their target communities. Some were. Some weren't. Now that buzz of grassroots radicalism has gone. I was told the politicians have to pay people to come on a demonstration. In some areas the political contest is down to the capacity to mobilise violent street gangs. During our visit we lost a day due to a state wide strike, declared in protest at the murder of two Congress party workers in the north Kerala.

I was told that many people are totally cynical about politics now. I was told that their taste for idealism had waned. Social justice actors find it even harder to get any traction with the people they hope to organise. I was told that there was no new generation of principled, motivated, radical young people coming forward to get involved. A nascent dalith people's political party puts up posters and conducts meetings, yet I heard some of our battle-weary dalith friends asking hard questions about it, and remaining to be convinced. People said - globalisation has prevailed, capitalism has won. Young people see their future in the big city - like Greater Kochi, or the Gulf. "They never come back" one old activist said to me. The day we left Kerala Aleyamma's grandson Jishin, the physical embodiment of Rev KJ John, flew off back to Dubai, to a precarious position from which he hopes a future for himself will emerge.

I don't intend to convey negativity. In Kerala, as elsewhere, conditions are changing so fast that old forms of radicalism have to be re-evaluated, old models for social change rethought. We contemplated the ubiquitous smart phones in our hands and asked ourselves how the workers could own the means of production of such things, even with the awesome potential for inter-connectivity they bring.

At Manjadikarri I asked about the 30 acres of land that Rev KJ John and his SEDS co-workers had, during the 1970s, been able to place in the hands of the dalith community. Good news in that they held that land, farmed it and benefitted from it year in year out. However the perceptive local church worker



pointed out the dalith people differed from other poorer caste communities in their reluctance to use that capital foundation as security for the next level of economic development. He said they lacked the support they needed from their own community organisations in terms of contacts, training and encouragement to develop an entrepreneurial mentality, to press on. Other groups, also from the economically marginalised part of society, had been able to do it and the daliths were getting left behind.

My friend Aleyamma is still that lively, sharp, perceptive and principled woman many of you know, but getting older - 77, living alone, she is sometimes a little absent-minded & not up for long car journeys. She mourns the loss of her middle son Gibson (Roy) whose passing last year was painful. Her eldest son Denison works away while daughter Dolly is happily married with kids to a CSI vicar. It was great to see how Dolly has developed into an independent, organised and motivated woman, developing her capacity as a church leader - focused on her religious faith (she challenged me about Buddhism and the historical Buddha's decision to leave his wife and family when he felt like it).

Aleyamma's vital, energetic spirit takes her to churches and church communities, preaching, and organising where opportunities for her idealism present themselves. For example last year the Indian Supreme Court in Delhi handed down a judgement insisting that all women be allowed to go to a famous temple in the Kerala hills (this right had been denied them). Two brave women took up this right and visited the temple under the protection of a big police operation. This provoked a violent backlash from Hindu fundamentalists both in Kerala and outside. In the days that followed 5 million

Kerala women formed a human chain the full length of the state - nearly 400 miles - in support of those two women and in support of women's rights generally. Aleyamma led a small group of women from her area into that magnificent, inspirational chain.

*David Turner*

# Seeing is believing!

*18 April 2019, Kyiv, Ukraine*

I've just remembered that in a moment of foolishness, I agreed to write an article about my time as an international election observer, which explains my current presence in Ukraine.

This year marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my involvement in UK elections. I've been an activist in every election in the UK since those first steps as a leaflet-er and canvasser in the 1969 local elections. At one time or another I've done everything from being a local activist, agent, candidate, city organiser, writer of enough leaflets to fill a library, to being a national campaign strategist and author of the national local elections' manifesto.

In the last 20 years, I've worked with left-of-centre political parties and movements in emerging democracies throughout the world from El Salvador to Egypt, from Bosnia to Botswana, and from Macedonia to Mongolia. For obvious reasons, I can't reveal details about the nature of that work. The less obvious reason is that, in a number of those countries, it is a criminal offence for a 'foreigner' to provide 'political or electoral advice' and I prefer to avoid being detained or thrown out of the country.

I have always had high ethical standards in the conduct of elections. I think I hold the unique position of being the only person in the UK who has initiated investigations which have led to the criminal convictions (including imprisonment) of candidates from all three major UK parties.

Thus it was that my combined interest in elections and in high standards led to me being invited to become an international election observer about 12 years ago. There are a number of organisations which provide election observation throughout the world. I prefer to observe with those which have agreed/negotiated access to all parts of the election process, high standards, robust evidential and analytical methodologies and a commitment to fair and impartial reporting.

In Europe, I have usually been a short-term observer (usually in-country for 8-10 days, unpaid but with

allowances good enough to cover all travel, accommodation, food expenses etc) with OSCE/ODIHR. (Organisation for Security & Co-operation in Europe/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights). You can read more about this – and even about how you could become an observer – at <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections>. Information about the current Ukraine EOM is at <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/ukraine/407660>.

I just love the fact that I don't know where I'm going to be sent in the country until I arrive. I end up in parts of countries where I would almost certainly not have chosen to visit even as an adventurous tourist. I seem to have a particular attraction for being deployed to areas being destabilised (for example, adjacent to South Ossetia in Georgia, the Crimea in Ukraine, Transdnistria in [or, rather, not in] Moldova.)

In-country detailed briefings and familiarisation days can never prepare you for Election Day observation itself when you can be leaving your hotel (or even a bed in someone's house in some rural areas) from 05.00 to be at a polling station at the same time as the Precinct Election Committee (PEC) to observe them set up and open. This will be followed by visits to another 12-15 polling stations for 30-40 minute observations and then to the final one to watch closure, observe the count, completion of the protocols, and the packing of materials. You are then required to follow the PEC officers, with all the election materials and a police officer on board, on their journey (often over wretched, pot-holed, icy, dark roads for an hour or more) to the District Election Commission to observe the tabulation. By 06.30 the following morning, you often question your sanity as you try to stay awake. And then it can be 4 hours on, 4 hours off, until the process is completed.

However, earlier this year, I was a long-term observer in Moldova for 6 weeks. This is more like a job, but with 12 hour days for 6 days a week, living and working with a partner who you've never met before.

In 2014, I was The (ie the only) International Election

Observer for the Island of Sark – an interesting experience where I directly communicated with more than one-third of the total electorate during my observation. Outside of Europe, I've been an observer at 4 elections in Somaliland over the last decade. As I'm now semi-retired, and a glutton for punishment, I hope to do more short-term and long-term election observation throughout the world.

These election observations concentrate on evaluating the performance against clear standards. Certainly, the professionalism of the officials and party representatives has improved dramatically in most countries over the last decade.

But, in some countries, political parties are not like UK political parties. They are directly controlled or influenced by specific business/oligarch or diplomatic (ie another country) interests. Post-election – national and municipal – you will see deals being done between previous election competitors which are all about sharing the economic spoils or delivering the strategic political objective (for instance, destabilisation of a neighbouring country). Sometimes these arrangements are directly related to organised crime. (For example, last month I was in Kherson where the directly-elected mayor has effectively been side-lined by organised interests elected to the council who are acting in their own interests. Last year, a municipal officer, who was whistle-blowing on what was actually happening, was attacked with battery acid, and later died from her injuries).

Whilst in Moldova this year, I started investigating how it could be that one party, as predicted, took 65% of the vote on the national PR (residents permit) list but that two independent candidates, unknown and who had done no campaigning, each took 65% of the vote in the constituency first-past-the vote-election of Moldovan citizens in Transdnistria. As the investigation continues, suffice it to say that the two individuals had both been (unelected) ministers in a former socialist government before 2009, both worked for the company which had transported voters from Transdnistria to Moldova to vote...and I now have footage from two of the buses which show people being told how to vote...having each been paid \$20 to do so. This was the way in which the (Russian-backed) Transdnistrian authorities and biggest business (oligarch X) have arranged to secure their own influence in the Moldova Parliament.

As Churchill suggested, democracy might be the least-worst option. However, I sometimes think that some places might be better off with a benevolent dictator... like me!

There have been many interesting experiences, including:

- watching people determinedly queue to vote in a -20 January blizzard; our exit was delayed for 3 days when the airport ran out of de-icer and, for obvious reasons, couldn't fly any in!
- the Chair of a District Elections Commissions refusing me admittance to the building in to which the election materials had just disappeared. Fortunately, I had lodged my foot against the door but, after a firm exchange of views for about 15 minutes, she indicated to the security officers that they should physically remove me. I reached in to my pocket and took out my notepad and pen and quietly asked her to spell her name. "Why?" she asked. "*So that when I produce my report for the international community, your name will be spelled properly.*" I got in.
- watching a group of some 50 men – the leader carrying an old machine-gun – from a minority group march into a polling station and forcibly remove the ballot papers from the box and then stuff their own ballots
- observing election bribes being given in municipal elections. The elector would meet the agent outside the polling station, be given a mobile phone which would then be taken inside and a picture taken of the completed ballot paper. When the phone was given back with proof that the elector had voted the right way, a reward would be given. The report of this observation led to a change in the country's election law prohibiting photographs being taken in polling stations
- watching young men piled on lorries racing from polling station to polling station turn multiple-voting in to an Olympic Sport, when the election controls were not robust
- listening to a young lady explain to me why she was using bleach and lemon juice to remove the ink (indicating that the individual had already voted) from people's fingers. "Well, my friends and I had a henna party last night and we're just removing the henna now." Mmm...henna only went on the index finger!?
- spending all night in a bitterly cold unheated theatre in mid-winter, watching every vote being individually shown to all 15 members of



the PEC before being counted. I was just losing the will to live when, just after 06.00, a disputed vote led to a fist-fight between a number of PEC members leading the count being abandoned until the following day

- spending much of the night sitting on the dirt floor in temperatures exceeding 30C, whilst the complex open-list vote is conducted under candle and oil-light
- watching people walk miles through the desert before sunrise to queue to vote before the temperature exceeded 40C
- due to an administrative mix-up, missing my place on a 17 seater plane flight to Nairobi,

with the next available seat being in 2 weeks' time. It was only then that a hyena-defying drive to Berbera and a flight to Mogadishu became the least-worst option. Lovely beaches in Mogadishu; nobody on them! When you are in the most dysfunctional country in the world and you realise that someone has taken the trouble to erect signs warning of sharks and mines, you tend to take it seriously!

Long may they continue.

*Howard Knight was a founding member of Ashram Community House, Sheffield in 1971.*

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## Liberty, Equality and Fraternity

I have mentioned at previous meetings a bimonthly newsletter I receive from a very impressive community support organisation called TO7, founded in 1983 by a minister of the French Protestant Church. My first copy was sent to me a couple of years ago by overseas member Donald Henderson, and as soon as I had read it I took out a subscription. You can see for yourself what the charity does by going to [www.tomirail.net](http://www.tomirail.net).

The reason for this article is that the autumn issue was delayed – otherwise I could have shared the information with members at the October Weekend – and I think readers will be interested in the reason for the delay. When it did arrive it contained an enclosure headed, in my attempt at translation:

ON THE POINT OF GOING TO PRESS WE RECEIVED A COMMUNICATION FROM THE EGM\* WHICH WARRANTS THIS DELAY

*\*EGM –États Généraux des Migrations – an organisation bringing together individuals and hundreds of local and national NGOs*

The background to this was a pair of trials in August and September 2017 when two individuals were given suspended prison sentences of 2 and 4 months respectively for giving assistance to destitute asylum seekers. With assistance from individuals and NGOs, these sentences were appealed and finally reached the highest court in France.

The text of the insert continues:

### Repeal of the offence of solidarity.

Fraternity has finally been recognised. Common sense has returned to the highest level of the State. Citizens who showed solidarity are now waiting for the MPs and the government to repeal this part of the Law on Asylum and Migration.

The “solidaires” were right to show solidarity. And there are many of them: some personalities in the media, certainly, but equally, thousands of citizens who have taken migrants into their homes, who are helping with their everyday needs, who are getting involved all over the country. Despite the atmosphere of repression, 37% of the population already said they were prepared to assist migrants (in a poll by the *Nouvel Observateur* magazine). There will be even more of them now that the crime of solidarity has been transformed into the duty of fraternity.

Liberty and Equality: FRATERNITY is not a gimmick or a cherry on the republican cake, it is the constitutional principle that helps to guarantee the first two!

I found this snippet of news refreshing at a time when so much at home and abroad seems so depressing, so I hope it will have the same effect on other readers of ACT Together.

*Linda Marshall*

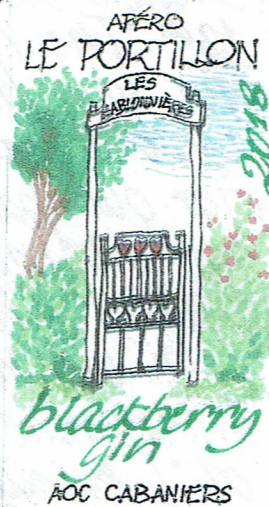


# HENDERSONS' PROGRESS - life in rural France or how not to brew cider - from Advent to Shrove Tuesday

2<sup>nd</sup> Dec In church there was a super Advent presentation by the children. They held up 4 Advent candles. The 1<sup>st</sup> was for love; it went out because there is so much hatred in the world. The 2<sup>nd</sup> for Peace, went out because of wars everywhere. The 3<sup>rd</sup> for Faith, went out. Then the 4<sup>th</sup> candle HOPE steadfastly stayed alight and relit the other 3. Monday was our 2<sup>nd</sup> CAROL Study session on the encyclical 'Laudato Si', this one on climate change. Claudine served drinks in compostable paper cups, upsetting Jean-Pierre who thought washable plastic was more environmentally friendly. We bottled our liqueurs. The fermenting cider tastes promising - very.



Neighbours from Lucas came by saying they had 3 stray Ouessant Sheep & asking if they were ours. Later we learned they had come from beyond St Barthelemy - all of 6 km.



On the 13<sup>th</sup>, the last flight of migrating cranes passed over

Friends, Geoff & Ines had an amazing Ceilidh at their place. A group of accordion, fiddles, tin whistle, drum & guitars played jigs. A French woman fiddler did a parody of "Le petit Papa Noël" & an English guitarist sang a brilliant anti-Brexit ballad about the prejudice & pettiness of it all. Our fermenting grape juice went wobbly - floating yellow dust - flowers of yeast - DANGER! Filtered & added sulphite (aaargh!) then yeast - Fingers crossed.



In the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of Advent we bottled our pommeau ... & our cider.

At Christmas we sang old French carols with friends & neighbours. Jean Louis sang a curious sailor's Xmas song solo. Bruno & Farah have set up their amazing Provencal Xmas crib with crowds of miniature figures from village life - peasants, artisans, soldiers & farm animals.



1<sup>st</sup> Jan. We took mini fagots of firewood, candle & vindépine to our neighbours (basis of childhood first footing in Manchester) & were given a comic strip book of Lucky Luke by Pascale. We have decorated the house with hearts, strawstars & holly from the forest behind.



5<sup>th</sup> Jan. Jean Claude brought back the ram we had lent him & Manu despatched it very humanely with a stunner, skinned & hung it in the stable. We all consoled ourselves over this sad event with the last mince pies & our home made cider which Manu & Jean-Claude declared excellent.

12<sup>th</sup> The Mairie invited the village to the communal hall for long political speeches by the mayor, the president of the intercommunalité & the NRP. We were rewarded for our patience with muscatel & superior nibbles and our internationally known artistic neighbour Sylvie & her partner Thierry invited us for a sophisticated apéro.

14<sup>th</sup> we had our 3<sup>rd</sup> Landato Si study on parish environmental initiatives (look up on [cafed.org.uk](http://cafed.org.uk)) at Danielle & Paul's house. It went off unevenly, only save that to get there the short way we had to squeeze through a gap between woodpiles & Fr René, being portly, had difficulty getting his prunch through.

By now we had run out of cider & decided to try making more by adding yeast to 20lt of our copious stock of pasteurised apple juice (bottled by Mary).

For the week of Christian unity we had a service in Busserolles church with a group of 4 Russian Orthodox who are setting up a community. Sadly they didn't speak much Russian but sang quite beautifully in church Slavonic. We showed pictures of the parish in Chernogolovka (look up on [hram-chg.ru](http://hram-chg.ru)) & the links we had once with the parish of Saint Mary's in Oldswinford. We went to the 'Café associatif' (community café) recently started by a couple, Céli & Hubert, in Saint Estèphe.



3 for an evening of ordering & sharing organic seeds. It was a convivial moment but with lots of serious talk. 3rd Feb All neighbours except Bruno came for Jacquie's birthday. We had 2 cakes (Jacquie's & Katerina's amazing creation which was much admired) Jean told us about collecting Birch sap in the spring. We'll try it.

We found the 2nd lot of cider to be quite tasteless - a total flop.

In Piégut a group of hippy enthusiasts led by a friend Adrien, have opened a minimalist café plus display & sale of local crafts & a hostelry in the old Dubocq photography shop in the main square.

They call it 'La Suite du monde' (the world to come?) & have land where they are planting fruit trees & cultivating using animal traction (a donkey).

About this time Paulette, our neighbour, was badly pricked by a hedgehog hibernating in her potato store in her barn.

Monsieur Camut, nearby who has kindly given (?) us his antique mincer (coupe racine) for chomping up apples for pressing has had a number of his sheep killed by a dog & has contrived to burn down his woodpile when sawdust caught fire while he was bonfiring.

Ulla & Ulrich came by on electric bikes (which Ulrich put together) & invited us over. They are incredibly inventive & resourceful, make almost everything themselves & even grow oranges in their greenhouse.

Discussing the cider problem Ulrich thought that it might work by adding fresh apple peelings (where the yeast is) to the pasteurised juice. Which we did.

In Piégut, the van, parked by the church refused to start. Decided to hitchhike home (2km) - The first vehicle to come by but going in the wrong direction was the post van with Sandrine our genial postwoman.

She seemed about to turn round to take me home (must be totally against the regs.) but I declined being sure of a lift. However of the 5 cars that passed including a British registered Jag. no-one stopped except 2 cheerful



4 young men in an old van with no room. I think they thought I was ill, lost or maybe crazy. Having, as we thought, fixed the problem we took the van to control techniques (not)



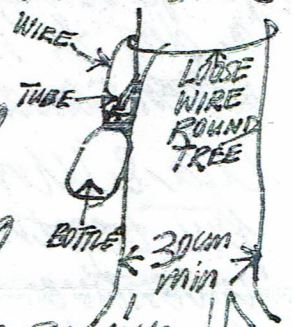
When it came to the test David couldn't start it & we spent a pleasant enough afternoon sitting by the roadside in mildly warm sunshine watching the world go by. Finally we got it to go & without stopping the engine had to be tested (it passed) & drove home. Now the willows are turning green & the magnolia white with flowers. Daffodils

have replaced the snowdrops.

Found the cider made with apple peelings is quite yuk & went into mild depression but then slightly consoled by the wine which went really well.

The greenhouse is filling with little pots of sprouting seedlings to transplant out later & on the greenhouse floor onions, leeks, carrots, potatoes, lettuce, broad beans are all well up.

Shrove Tuesday Jean showed how to tap Birch trees for sap by drilling a hole at an angle upwards & inserting a tube (4/10 mm dia). Found that if you drill where the bark is thick & rough a lot of sap leaks under the bark & gushes out lower down necessitating hugging the tree & apologising. So drill where the bark is thin & smooth & hammer in a bung at the end.



Found the sap goes well with our seabuckthorn syrup. Had pancakes for supper & decided to give up chocolate for Lent.

Dear Jenny

I hope this account of our life doesn't seem too irrelevant to life today.

I hope too you're well & are planning radical things!

Looking forward to your contribution to 'Act Together'.

Love Donald & Jackie



# Alison Boyd

Alison's funeral on 24<sup>th</sup> January 2019 and the Remembrance Gathering that followed, gave a snapshot of an unassuming person, who was musically talented, had many interests, who helped and encouraged others and who had a passion for justice. It's not right' was a phrase Valerie, her mother, often heard Alison use. She had a twin, Alan, a sister Jeanette, and another brother John. Alison died on 5<sup>th</sup> January, after being diagnosed 3.5yrs earlier with ovarian cancer.

I met Alison when she came to Sheffield to do the Study Year at Urban Theology Unit in 1985. She lived with me for a while and I remember her coming downstairs with her knitting – a grey jumper that she was making for herself. Knitting was one of Alison's trademarks.

Alison became a member of the Sheffield Eucharist Congregation. In the 'Green' edition of Community Worship, Alison and others produced a 'New Litany for the Eucharist Congregation', and then with the 1985/86 Study Year, compiled, 'The Eucharist of the Feminine'. The well used orange booklet, Cooking Together, still used at Community Weekends, was put together by Alison and me.

Alison was a founder member of New Roots shop, where she and I were responsible for promoting and developing the sale of Traidcraft goods. Alison joined Ashram and was minute secretary in the early 90's, in the days of Committee Meetings, rather than the General Meeting. Through Alison, her mother Valerie joined Ashram, and is still a member living in Sunderland.

Alison's musical talents, included playing the cello – a hefty instrument she used to take around on the bus – and singing in various socialist choirs. In Sheffield she was involved in a Credit Union, Pitsmoor Youth Housing Trust – set up by David Peck for young people coming out of care - , and

Welfare Rights. Alison liked hiking and regularly joined in the 'Peck' walks into the Peak District.

Alison moved to Nottingham in the mid 90's and her paid and voluntary work reflected her interests – Oxfam, Welfare Rights and Credit Unions, and a shared allotment. She came to the local Ashram group, which met in Leicester. Alison took most things in her stride, but as a trousers and T-shirt person, she was thrown out of her comfort zone when she had to buy a dress for her brother John's wedding.

Alison met her partner Adam in Nottingham. He was a translator working from home. In 2009 he became a translator for the United Nations at the International Court of Justice at The Hague. It was a big step for Alison to leave the familiar, but she rented out her house in Nottingham and moved to The Hague. She learnt Dutch, played the cello, taught English as a foreign language and joined a choir. Eurostar provided easy access to the U.K. to see family and friends and vice versa. The chemo treatment limited Alison's activities, but she knitted herself a hat for the winter chemo sessions and kept in touch with friends by email and phone.

Alison and Adam got married in October 2016 in Sunderland and moved back to live in London the following year. Alison undertook a writing course and at the Remembrance of her life, her sister Jeanette read a short story she had written – which of course included a

reference to knitting. A choir made up of people from the 3 Socialist choirs in which Alison had sung – Sheffield, Nottingham and London – sang as well as 'Rosa's Lovely Daughter' – a women's singing group which Alison was a member of in Nottingham. People at the Remembrance Gathering had travelled some distance to be there, reflecting how much Alison's life had touched so many.



*Margaret Mackley*



Valerie Boyd has sent in one of her daughter's creative writing pieces. Alison wrote several flash fiction stories in the couple of years before her death on 5 January 2019. She was inspired and encouraged to find her writing voice following a residential creative writing course she attended at The Ted Hughes Arvon Centre in West Yorkshire.

## The Primrose Season

'Here comes the Primrose King' they would say as he arrived early at the fruit, vegetable and flower market on dark mornings with crates of spring colour to sell.

The first time I saw him I bought potatoes, cabbage and a punnet of blackberries. He called me 'Princess' and winked as he counted out my change; my back tingled with his gaze as I walked home, my shopping basket full on my arm.

The Saturday he invited me to the dance he gave me pink anemones for my hair.

I chose lilies for our wedding. When I lifted the box lid, the scent escaped in a hot rush and I blushed at their white perfection.

He filled our garden with primroses, and I cut off the shrivelled heads so they would flower again.

Our first summer he brought home trays of unsold strawberries and tomatoes. I made pastry, my wedding

ring tapping against the glass rolling pin. A sweet, red, jam and pie season.

On our first anniversary he gave me a posy of purple violets, gathered tightly amongst heart-shaped leaves; red roses on our second. A quiet apology for the third.

I took all the packets of seeds from the shed and planted them randomly. I watered faithfully, smiled at the neighbours over the fence. I borrowed gardening books from the library, read about seasonal planning for floral cover, and imagined living in a remote cottage surrounded by meadows full of cowslips.

I chose lilies for his funeral. It wasn't the primrose season.

Yesterday at the market, I heard someone calling 'Who'd like a bunch of cheerfulness?' and couldn't make sense of it. I looked up and saw buckets of bright-scented yellow narcissus, and I could no longer tell if they were the colour of happiness or of grief.

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## Day's Income Appeal Thank you



The community's Day's Income Appeal in 2014-2015 helped Joliba Trust, a tiny charity working in Mali, to establish livestock passage routes. As land that was formerly pasture was cultivated, it made it increasingly difficult for livestock herders to graze and move their cattle without damaging crops. Joliba worked to help communities agree on and clearly mark cattle passage routes.

"I have witnessed countless conflicts between cattle herders and the owners of fields....(which) are creating hatred between farmers and nomads. I have also witnessed cases of injury done to the herders and to the farmers. The marking of passage routes has removed a thorn from our feet" *El Hadj Ousmane Barny ( Village Chief Dioungani Peuhl*

"...Even if the herder pays damages it can never be enough for the lost harvest. This frustration has created hatred between our people..... The best solution is what Joliba has done...to make a marked route.." *Moussa Guindo Councillor, farming community*

"The marking of the route is greatly welcomed by the women. My shepherd son was the victim of a beating when the animals accidentally began grazing in a field. Now we have a proper route which is large enough. I thank Joliba and their funders. We have never received any help before. Joliba had greatly aided us Fulani women." *Aita Barry, Head of Kaoral Assn*

# Ashram Community Projects Fund

## New Roots – Zero Waste Bid

Bid for a total of £241,62


### Includes:

- £131,91 of items
- £71,06 of delivery fee
- £38, 65 taxes

### The items:

- 5x 2.5qt ProKeeper containers + scoops (£13,81 each)
- 5x 4qt ProKeeper containers (£11.50 each)
- 5x 4.4oz scoops (£ 1,43-1,91)

### Votre commande

Continuer »	
Articles	£131.91
Livraison 	£71.06
Droits de douane	£0.00
Taxes	£38.65
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>(GBP) £241.62</b>

#### ProKeeper 4 qt. Flour Container

★★★★★ (13 Reviews) | Write a Review | Q & A: 9 questions / 19 answers



#### ProKeeper 2.5 qt. Grain Container

★★★★★ (7 Reviews) | Write a Review | Q & A: 2 questions / 6 answers



To be ordered through: <https://www.containerstore.com/>

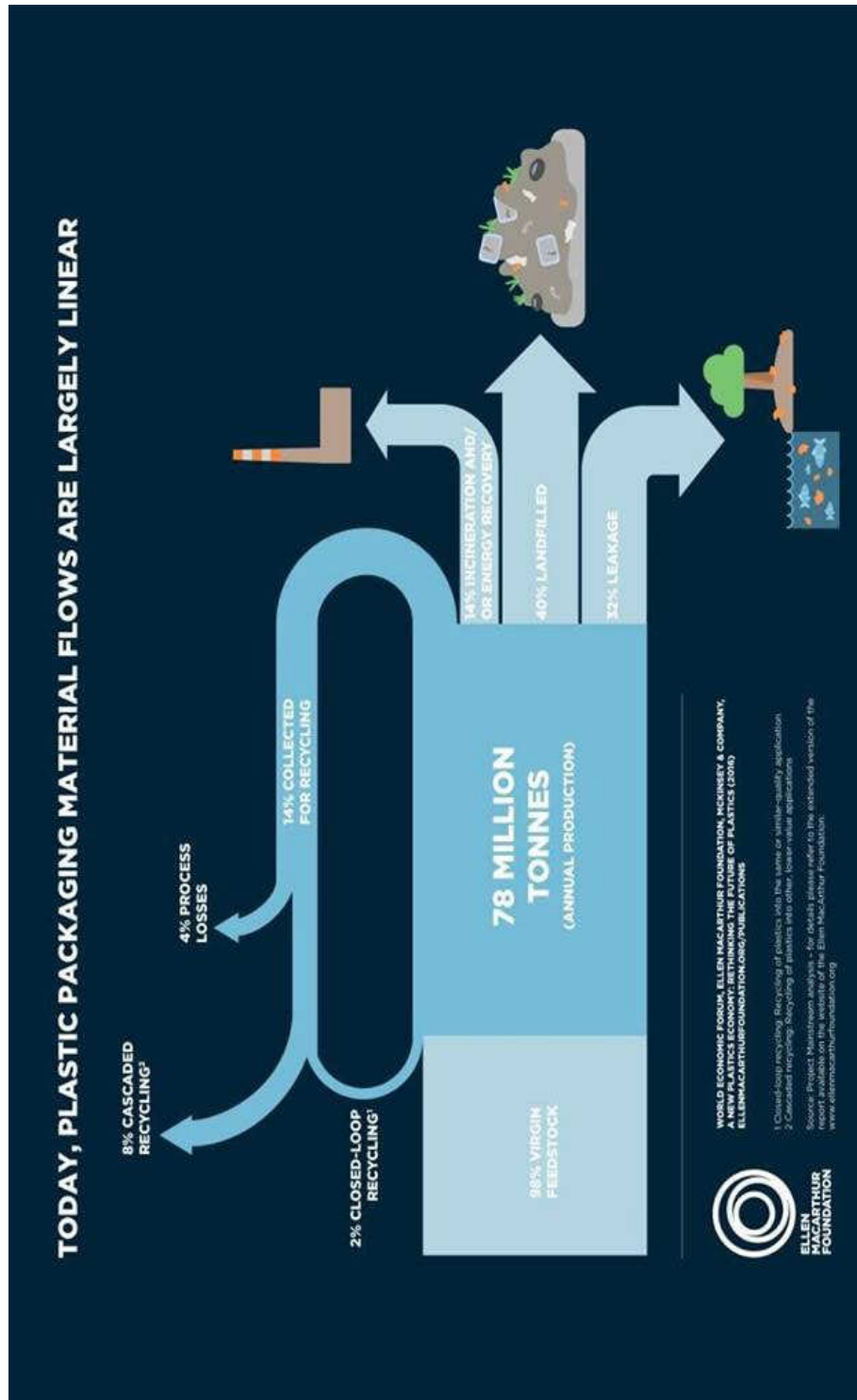
### Why this bid?

As written in the third edition of the New Roots: Shop for Justice leaflet, “the prime purpose of New Roots ... is to promote a fairer, more caring and a more sustainable world.”

Single-use plastics are a world-wide issue. In 2016, out of 335 million metric tons of plastics produced, half has been destined for single-use products (source: earthday.org). Although we recycle nearly all sorts of plastic in the shop through our partnership with Recycling Revolution, it is extremely rare when our customers actually bring back the plastic bags which we use for to package wholefoods. Sheffield City Council’s recycling scheme does not recycle this type of plastic, which therefore ends up in landfills, or makes it way to the ocean. According to earthday.org, “32% of plastic packaging produced annually is left to flow into our oceans... By 2050, this could mean there will be more plastic than fish in the world’s oceans.” And this is just one of the issues linked to plastics. The decomposition of plastic into tiny particles is harmful to nearly all types of life. We believe single-



use plastics are a serious issue, not only in terms of their conditions of production, but also because of what happens once they are discarded. We also believe that reducing our use of these plastics corresponds with New Roots' and the Ashram Community's aims and values. Going Zero Waste has been one of the topics most frequently brought up by our volunteers at Open Meetings, which testifies to its importance and relevance for the New Roots community. Yet going plastic-free is a heavy and costly decision. We have already stopped packaging our cakes in plastic bags, but more should be done. Switching to plastic containers which last for decades, and compostable brown bags would be another step forward. As gravity dispensers are very expensive and difficult to accommodate with the current layout of New Roots, we have set our minds on containers with food which could be scooped out of them. This would allow people to bring their own containers or use paper bags instead of plastic ones. We hope that the Ashram Community will support our endeavour to cut down on single-use plastics.



## Fairtrade and Traidcraft News

I managed to get premises for my annual shop in Middlesbrough last Christmas – a huge relief after the trauma the year before. The situation with Traidcraft was very unclear, but I knew that craft producers were most likely to be the losers in any closure or change, and I had the experience and the funds so we went for it. The premises had only just been vacated by Boyes – our local department store, which was downsizing to the outside of a bigger shopping centre - but they took with them the heating (it was an open fronted store!), and the electric sockets, and there was no wall! But with the combined skills of all my helpers we got it looking creditable and were able to open for four weeks and take over £30,000. Volunteers roped in friends to fill gaps in the rota and students from the University helped on Saturdays. It was wonderful not just to be welcomed back by our regular customers but new ones who were delighted to find somewhere they could shop



ethically. The centre manager came in to shop too and agreed that ethical shopping is certainly on the rise! He asked us to open an extra day before Christmas offering a rent free week afterwards to unpack - a first for us, but helpers brought their families and in two days everything was packed, dismantled, returned, and the space left squeaky clean – we even shared celebratory buns before goodbyes until next year and the drive home!

## Traidcraft

**Traidcraft plc**- continues to trade – mainly foods, with some crafts imported by other Fair Trade companies. In the summer the Gateshead warehouse will be sold and future orders will be processed by a fulfillment centre-negotiations I understand include the commitment to pay a living wage. The staff of twelve will move to an office in Newcastle.

**Traidcraft Exchange** – our charity continues unchanged- and has had two remarkable successes this year.

**Who Picks My Tea Campaign** -we have just succeeded in getting the six big British tea companies ( PG Tips, Tetley's Typhoo, Clipper and Yorkshire ) to publish details of the Assam tea estates they buy from. This knowledge gives tea workers more power in their negotiations for better wages and working conditions. The situation in Assam is truly shocking -

- The tea pickers are paid just 137 Rupees a day (£1.50) when the national minimum wage is 300 Rupees. They are among the lowest paid workers in India
- The number of women in tea estate areas dying in childbirth is 404/100,000 live births - the worst figure in India ( The Indian average is 167)
- More than a third of India's trafficked children come from Assam.

The tea estates were set up by the British in colonial

times, with adivasi people brought in from other parts of India to work as bonded labourers, where their descendants are now trapped.

*The campaign researchers found a culture of surveillance and control by the estate managers - tea workers are told what to say to visiting auditors and fear the loss of their jobs and homes should they speak out about leaking roofs, the lack of sanitation, poor schooling, and lack of medical care.*

Nevertheless workers have shown great courage in campaigning for change with local supporters in marches, cycle rallies, meetings and even hunger strikes. Stephen Lakra, President of the All Adivasi Students Assn. of Assam told Traidcraft Exchange:

“Thanks to the support of tea drinkers in the UK [and around the world], we now know where the tea our parents and sisters pick is sold. That means we can ask British brands to ensure the standards they have promised are met. Thank you!”

**Brexit Campaign** The Exchange also succeeded in getting the British government to agree that that producers from the 48 least developed countries will continue to have duty-free access to the UK market after Brexit. This will safeguard the livelihoods and businesses of thousands of people in countries like Tanzania, Bangladesh and Uganda. We now need the same assurance for other poor countries like Ghana and Sri Lanka. Add your voice at

<https://action.traidcraft.org.uk/brexit-trade-mp-action>





## She Deserves £1.82/day

Fairtrade Fortnight this year focussed on cocoa farmers in West Africa who produce more than half of the world's cocoa. A typical farmer in Cote d'Ivoire lives on just 73p/day, half of the UN poverty level. Now cocoa prices, fixed in London and New York, are plummeting and chocolate companies are making massive profits.

For the women the situation is even worse. They may plant and harvest on the farm, look after children, carry water, collect wood, cook and clean for the family, and transport the cocoa beans to market but they are likely to see even less money for their work.

A living income of just £1.82/day would enable farmers to afford the essentials of a dignified life- clothing, medicine and schooling. These aren't luxuries - they should be a human right. We need your help encouraging many more people to switch to Fairtrade chocolate and your support for a petition demanding that the UK government makes trade deals work for the poor – please add your voice at <https://action.fairtrade.org.uk/page/37866/petition/1?ea.tracking.id=gskh9xyy>



## The difference a plough can make....

At the start of Fairtrade fortnight I was invited to a very special lunch in Saltburn - a joint fund raiser for the Mary Thompson Fund for local destitute asylum seekers and the Ploughwomen's Fund. In the thank you letter we received from Just Trading Scotland who administer the Plough Fund they say



"Thank you so much for all your efforts in raising £300 through your Ploughwoman's lunch. It's hard to realise just how much that will mean to women farmers in Malawi. This means that 5 women will now have a plough.

The sheer labour of growing rice, especially if you only have a hoe to till the land, and no means of transport, is staggering. Tilling fields with a hoe can take 3 weeks and must be back-breaking work. Having a plough also means that one can get one's fields ready much quicker. The ground bakes so hard that ploughing/tilling can't start till the rains come and if they are

late, then the growing season is shortened. The quicker the preparation, the longer the growing season, the better the yields.

As you probably know, the ploughs will not be given them for free. They will pay for them in instalments and as the money comes in, so other women will be able to buy a plough. So 'your' ploughs will continue to multiply and to help more and more women be able to turn their farms into going concerns, be able to think about owning more animals, and a cart, being able to put more into their families and their education at the same time as lightening their work loads."

Cyclone Idai missed the rice farmers of N. Malawi, but they are having to cope with another drought. The ploughs we have funded and the irrigation pumps they have recently been able to buy will make that easier.

From my bookshelf

**The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate. Discoveries from a Secret World** by Peter Wohlleben. You'll never look at trees in the same way again - easily readable but absolutely mindblowing.

**Waiting for the Last Bus** by Richard Holloway - full of humanity, beauty, wisdom and compassion

**Our Place - can we save British wild life before its too late?** by Mark Cocker - an elegy for a beloved landscape, an anguished lament, a manifesto and a call to arms.

Jenny Medhurst 16

# Prophetic Action and Acted Parables

Talks and Groups at the May 2019 Weekend

## **Community Projects and Kingdom- David Bown**

It is not falling in love with a Jesus which is almost human like the rest of us, but it is living out in every possible way Christ's whole idea of the Kingdom of God. One such way is through projects, their purposes and their work. When that is achieved a Christ-likeness is not only apparent, it is a reality. A reality with a spiritual quality that knows no bounds and neither questions its inclusiveness or its authenticity.

## **Neighbourliness – Nirmal Fernando**

The Ashram Community is a collective of individuals covenanted to six commitments which are all a “following of the way of Jesus”. Today in effect we are a dispersed community with most members living individually beyond proximity of each other and we interact primarily with non-community mainstream society. The presentation will be based on the parable narrated by Jesus at Luke 10:25-37 where the neighbourliness of an individual in unexpected social circumstances is skilfully depicted. It will also set out the key features of the parable and suggest how they can be remembered and enacted today.

## **Socially Engaged Theatre /Art – Sam Humphries**

“Socially engaged” is a new term in the world of the Arts, offering the medium of art in free expression, to individuals and communities struggling to find a voice for various reasons. I will be looking at this in relation to the Gospels and to the world today.

## **Neighbourhood Projects and Kingdom -Ron Ram**

The Association of Bridge Building Churches together with the Ashram Community are writing a book on intentional discipleship communities. We see these as being small free-standing Christian groups that have a significant intentional purpose which involves working with people who are outside the Church. In this way we hope Christian understandings about the world can be shared more effectively than they are at present and play a real part in shaping the way the world works. I believe the book is a prophetic contribution to our time. Intentional communities will of course work within neighbourhood contexts. We are basing the book on twelve stories, all of which are neighbourhood based

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## Wider Service Fund

Every Spring when Ashram Community members are filling in their membership forms, they have the chance to make a donation to the Community's Wider Service Fund. The Fund is intended to support projects outside the Community which are proposed by its contributors, and chosen by them at the October Community Weekend.

In recent years we have supported:

2016

Spelthorne Rd “Start” Homeless Project £500  
Chorlton Central Church Homeless B&B £200  
London Catholic Worker Homeless Project £200  
Friends of Zion Churchyard, Attercliffe £200

In 2018

Ashram Day's Income (Friends of Monza, Zambia) 2017 top-up £165  
Franklin's Wood in memory of Frank Medhurst £300  
London Catholic Worker Homeless Project £200  
Fair Food Fund, Teesside – provides Fairtrade rice from Malawi to destitute asylum seekers £200

Please consider joining the group by making a contribution when completing your membership  
Thank you

*John Vincent, Secretary, Wider Service Fund*



# Acted Parables and Politics

The churches have assumed that the problems of our time can be dealt with in the same way that politicians, planners, industrialists and sociologists attempt to deal with them – from the top, from the outside, in global terms, in generalisations, in theories. Consequently the churches become in so many instances merely one more form of oppression, one more way in which global generalities are loaded onto disparate, irreconcilable local situations, one more way for people to escape the reality of the concrete, to be present in their head rather than their feet, to avoid real politics and pretend at politics. How this alien style has got control of denominational departments, denominational leaders, local, national and World Council of Churches would require a book in itself to unravel. But it is all based on the same fundamental error- the assumption that Christianity has to do politics and exercise power in the same way that everyone else does; which in turn is based on the assumption that there is no basically alternative and Christ-centred way of doing politics, no political way which is native to Christianity itself.

I believe that the Christian technique or way is essentially political. I believe also that it is essentially distinctive and alternative to other ways.

To me the Christian way is above all the way of the acted parable or prophetic sign. Readers of the Bible will be familiar with the acted parable. Basically it is three things. First it is acting out a story doing something which speaks louder than words. Secondly it is doing an action which demonstrates something which is really true for everyone, everywhere. Thirdly it exposes false views of reality. It is thus meant to achieve three ends. First it is meant to tell people what is really going on. Secondly, it is meant to give people a chance to change, or see a new way and to take it. Thirdly it is meant to expose false commitment and show the true and false as irreconcilables.

A good example is in Mark 11.1-11 – the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, riding on an ass. First, the entry was meant to tell people what was really going on – that the new 'king' was 'ruling' his kingdom by reversing all previous values, expectations and hopes. Secondly the entry also gave people the chance to change, to see the new way of the kingdom, and to take it. Thirdly, it exposed the false hopes of the religious and political leaders.

Hence the entry was a proclamation in action of what Jesus and the kingdom stood for; it was a dramatic embodiment of something too big for words. Secondly it was a representation in miniature form of the truly great - the kingdom which would ultimately apply to everyone, everywhere; and it gave people the chance by jumping on a small action to participate in some way in a final and ultimate reality. Thirdly it exposed the true obedience and the false obedience; and the ways into them.

There is another aspect to the acted parable. It is an enacted

parable of the kingdom. It therefore embodies a reality which in a sense already exists in the world, wherever God's righteousness is done. But it also embodies the kingdom as a reality which does not yet exist, which is a future event. The acted parable translated into a specific, momentary act or situation the reality of God's kingdom - a reality which is 'already here' and also 'not yet here'. The acted parable is a trial run, a preview, a dress-rehearsal for the kingdom. It drags the reality which is already there in the wings out into the open; and it brings the reality which will happen in the future right now into the present.

Naturally, the acted parable has strong elements from this reality-in-the-wings and this reality-to-come. There is triumph for Jesus, joyful disciples, Hosannas to David's son, glory to God; there is a new political reality, replacing Rome and the Jewish rulers; there is peace, happiness, the cries of children, the obedience and co-operation of nature ( the donkey, palms); there is the impossibility of denying the event ( if they remained silent, the stones would cry out, Luke 19:40) All of these factors which belong to the final scene of God's triumph, the *eschaton*. All of them have barged their way in, before their time, in the entry story.

But, equally important, the acted parable has strong elements determined by the limitations and characteristics of the time and situation. It is an embodiment of the alternative reality and the future reality within the confines and restrictions of the place in which it is acted, the people who are around, and the possibilities of the particular time. Thus, there is the 'accident' of the presence of the Galileans in Jerusalem for the festival, who made up the crowd, 'going before and coming after', there is the confusion of the disciples, the determination of Jesus to play his own cards and not be determined by the situation. All of these factors make the acted parable of the entry a special, limited, 'historic' event.

All acted parables are like this- the calling of the Twelve as a symbolic representation of themselves as tribal heads of the new Israel; the disciples shaking off dust from their feet as a sign of God's rejection; the casting out of devils indicating the presence of a more powerful Spirit; the imitation of Jesus' deeds by his disciples; plucking corn and eating it on the Sabbath to show the Law was replaced; fasting or not fasting as Jesus's mood dictated; giving up possessions and having things in common as a demonstration of their commitment and witness to each other.

Acted parables are thus 'political' statements. They are actions directed at contemporaries, embodying and pushing forward the alternative reality of the community disciplined to the kingdom. They do not hit politics head on, but rather sideways. By themselves being political actualities, they 'call' politics to be different. By themselves actually existing, they show that the call is not really ludicrous, and the at the possibility really can exist.

John J. Vincent, *'Into the City'*, Epworth Press 1982 pp583-55



# Parables of Jesus: Context and Reception

**Friday 7- Sunday 9 June**

We are hosting a three day programme on 'Parables of Jesus: Context and Reception' from Friday 7 - Sunday 9 June 2019. Sessions will be held at Sheffield Ashram houses, Burngreave Ashram, Ashram Centre, Urban Theology Union, member's homes and/or outdoor locations in Sheffield. Food and accommodation will be provided free of charge, while donations are welcome.

**Parables in Context and Reception:** Often a parable is taken outside the context in which it was said, to whom it was said, why it was said, and how hearers and readers would have understood it then, and understand now. Further, several modern Bibles have given 'name titles' to these parables, absent on early manuscripts, which often colours recipient understanding and interpretation. For example 'good' does not appear in the text of the parable commonly titled 'Good Samaritan', giving a moral dimension absent in the narrative. This exercise will try to understand the spoken words recorded in relation to 'delivery' and 'reception' and also 'explanations' given by Jesus. In relation to that, the understanding and interpretation by individuals today will follow these sessions.

## Suggested Parable Passages

1. Luke 8:1-8 (Mark 4:1-9/Matthew 13:1-9): to people while on a specified mission
2. Luke 8:9-18 (Mark 4:10-20/Matthew 13:10-23): explanation to disciples
3. Luke 10:25-37: to a lawyer
4. Luke 15:1-10: to Pharisees and Scribes
5. Luke 15:11-32: to Pharisees and Scribes
6. Luke 16:1-13: to disciples
7. Luke 16:14-31: to Pharisees
8. Luke 17:1-10: to disciples
9. Mark 4:21-25 + Luke 8:16-18: to disciples
10. Mark 4:26-34 + Matthew 13:24-33: to disciples
11. Matthew 13:34-43: explanation to disciples
12. Matthew 13:44-52: to disciples
13. Matthew 25:1-30: to disciples ( as at 24:1 & 26:1)
14. Matthew 25:31-46: explanation to disciples

## Requests

1. Please confirm interest/attendance at the full programme or part of it;
2. Select one or more passages from the above for your presentation/s- you may also suggest/use other passages;
3. Suggest other venues if hosting can be arranged; and
4. Please reply ASAP and publicise if you can.

Many thanks

Nirmal Fernando,  
Sheffield Ashram Group



# LONG TERM VISION

John Vincent

Talk at the Community Weekend, 7 October 2018

In ACT Together for Autumn 2017, in my 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Address, I outlined what I think Ashram Community has specially concentrated on. Now, I want to try to suggest a few implications for the next five years or so!

## 1. A SECULAR JESUS

In Ashram, we persist at fundamental theological questions. But always they start with Jesus, and with a human, not necessarily religious Jesus.

Today, Gospel studies are very diverse, but the human Jesus is a current factor. Jesus refuses to be Messiah/Christ, and calls himself Son of Man/Son of Humanity. He invites others not to believe in him, but to follow him. He concentrates not on Heaven hereafter, but on this worldly Heaven, on earth. He launches not a Church, but a Kingdom of God.

I would like us to have a theological working party to work at this. I've so far got seven chapter headings for a book on it, with Albert Schweitzer's phrase, As One Unknown as the title. Anyone interested please write or phone.

## 2. INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY

Intentional Community is one of the current July Ashram/UTU Summer School themes (meeting on July 9<sup>th</sup> 2019). But we need some new inspiration and ideas.

The early church is emerging as essentially an Intentional Community. The word ekklesia does not mean "ecclesiastical organisation", but a group of people called out of society for some special task. More like a Community than a Church. In the July project, so far, we have a few pieces on Intentional Community in different New Testament books, plus a few pieces on outstanding historical instances. Ashram Community obviously belongs here.

But what does it mean, to be an Intentional Community? We need much more work at it!

## 3. INNER CITY PROJECTS

New Roots is developing in new ways under the 2018-19 Team of five Co-ordinators. Burngreave Ashram is now four sets of 2-person flats. What do these new factors mean for our life and work?

I'm suggesting we use the February General Meetings in Sheffield alternately at New Roots and Burngreave Ashram, giving ongoing thought to both, and inviting all their members and residents to join in. We have some excellent members in both, full of ideas. Let's join with them and they with us

For the record, I'm also proposing that the July Community General Meeting be on Forward Planning, serviced by a small Long term Planning Working Group. Who would like to be on this?

## AND ....A COMMUNITY FOR LONERS?

A new item has emerged. Are we not very largely a Community for Loners? And if we are, what could this mean for our future?

Ashram Community's present Membership of around 40, plus its present Associates of around 35, are very often single people. We need to heed and respect the unique kind of Community which this group of otherwise Loners or at least single people, have created. It is special and unique to what we are.

This is too big a topic to develop here. But I think it is worth each of us putting some ideas into the common pot. ACT Together has had some very good articles by individual members on their Discipleship. Please write yours!

Responses, please if you are moved. Either a word or a letter to me, or a piece for ACT Together.



Urban Theology Union

## DIPLOMA IN THEOLOGY AND MISSION

September 2019 – June 2020

The UTU Diploma in Theology and Mission was from 1972 to 1999 the pioneering programme that provided a unique experience of theological and vocational training, linked to the realities of the city, and developing new theological and biblical studies which influenced profoundly the several hundred who took the course, often through the famous UTU Study Years.

Now, twenty years later, we have revived the course to suit 21<sup>st</sup> century needs, and offer a new programme of Theology and Mission work. Characteristics are:

### Method

The Method of the Course will be collegial, with all members participating, and guest resource lecturers joining the group as appropriate. The staff/student group will constitute a learning colleagueship, within which each participant will learn group methods but also pursue their own personal interests, and contribute research and writing relevant to them.

Areas to be covered will include bible study, contemporary theology, personality temperaments, urban theology, liberation theology, discipleship, rule of life spirituality, public theology, social and political development.

The aim is to facilitate the development of each participant's own personal theology and mission.

### Dates and Times:

The Diploma Group will meet at UTU monthly on the following Mondays from 9.30am to 3.30pm:

<u>Autumn 2019</u>	<u>Spring 2020</u>	<u>Summer 2020</u>
16 September	20 January	18 May
21 October	24 February	15 June
11 November	23 March	
16 December	20 April	

### Overnights

Overnight stays at Ashram Community Houses are available on Sunday and/or Monday (B&B £10)

**Staff Co-ordinator:** Rev. Dr. John J. Vincent

Cost: £100 from student for books, materials, work packs, library and UTU membership  
£100 from local Church or Community for UTU costs  
£100 from Denomination or Circuit/Deanery/District for Development Fund

NB Ashram Community has already paid £1,000 up front, which will cover 3-5 Ashram Members costs  
Please write to John if interested, or enquiring for fellow member



## 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](mailto: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

### 2019

7-9 June Parables of Jesus, Sheffield  
8-9 July UTU 50th Anniversary and Ashram/UTU Summer school, Sheffield.  
13 July General Meeting  
4-6 October Community weekend, Unstone

### 2020

29 February General Meeting, Sheffield  
8-10 May Community Weekend, Middleton  
9-11 October Community Weekend, Unstone

## COMMUNITY

Community Office: John Vincent  
7 College Court, Sheffield S4 7FN  
T: 0114 243 6688  
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Ashram Press: 7 College Court  
See Website [www.ashram.org.uk](http://www.ashram.org.uk) for publications

Ashram Community Trust is a Registered Charity  
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Website [www.ashram.org.uk](http://www.ashram.org.uk)  
administrator: [kathclements@ymail.com](mailto:kathclements@ymail.com)

Act Together editor: Jenny Medhurst  
[medhurst@phonecoop.coop](mailto:medhurst@phonecoop.coop)  
Articles for the Autumn 2019 edition needed by Sep 15<sup>th</sup> Contributions from members/associates who do not attend national Community events are especially welcome!

## HOUSES AND PROJECTS

Multifaith Chapel and Library, Burngreave Ashram,  
80-86 Spital Hill Sheffield S4 7LG – Tel: 0114 270 0972

New Roots Shop, Basement Speakeasy and Residents' flat  
347 Glossop Rd Sheffield S10 2HP  
Tel: 0114 272 1971

Community Houses: 77 and 79 Rock St  
Sheffield S3 9JB – Tel: 0114 272 7144  
Tel: 0793 201 7929 (Nirmal Fernando)  
6 Andover Street Sheffield S3 9EG  
Tel: 0791 092 2462  
27 Hallcar Street, Sheffield S4 7JY  
29 Hallcar Street  
80 Spital Hill, Sheffield S4 7LG  
86 Spital Hill, Sheffield S4 7LG

## 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 – Monthly Meetings

**East – A46**- Twice Yearly meetings

**London** – Linda Marshall – 01784 456 474  
Saturday Meetings – Monthly

**North-West** – Josie Smith – 01706 841 532  
Meetings bi-monthly 11-2 at Luther King House Restaurant, Brighton Grove, Rusholme

**Sheffield** – Tamara Donaldson– 0791 092 2462  
Gatherings - second and fourth Mons,  
5.30 – 7:30pm in member's homes or Community Houses. See 'Burngreave Ashram News', quarterly

**North-East** – Jenny Medhurst Tel: 01740 630475 – Meetings as arranged