



Churches Together Around Ludlow Newsletter

Autumn 2014

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Thoughts from David Roberts, CTAL Chair 2013-14

We live in a world of clashing ideologies, economies, political systems, and cultural histories. Whereas in the old days all that was foreign was 'over there' now it is right in our face. Furthermore, details of battles for sympathy and support are made instantly available world-wide by social media and the press, ever hungry for an attention-catching story. Where words are used, look at the language. It is so often exaggerated, inflammatory, calculated to resonate with traditionally-held prejudices, and designed to have an emotional appeal that bypasses the restraining influence of our minds.

We have been questioning why it is that highly intelligent young people whose parents have settled among us and who have received and flourished under our educational system have suddenly jettisoned all of that. Why have they become radicalised? "The challenge we face is to show young people who are vulnerable to appeals from terrorists that there is a better path to having their voice heard." It has been suggested that education is the way to confront the intolerant ideas that feed into intolerant violence, and that we need a greater understanding of the world's religions to uproot the thinking of the extremists.

That does not touch the overwhelming sense that many young people have, and not just those who are second- or third-generation immigrants, of feeling a stranger, an outcast, someone who has been rejected, and who does not belong.

'Who am I?' and 'where do I belong?' are fundamental questions. The religious and political extremists should not be the only ones giving an answer. Belonging, being

valued, being wanted, and having a role is something that should automatically be part of what the church gives, not by making a special effort but simply by being true to itself. 'I have come home' should be the response of those who come into contact with us.

To have a Churches Together group should make the message more powerful still. Everyone, and especially young people, should be able to see the life-enhancing effect of Christians being part of a greater whole, where we are all, as givers and receivers, committed to each other. How we negotiate our differences as brothers and sisters without falling out should speak powerfully. So should our togetherness as we give ourselves to being the mind and hands of Christ, reaching out with compassion to reconcile what has become separated and to heal what has been broken.

Churches Together Around Ludlow Annual General Meeting 2014

The CTAL AGM will take place at 8.45 on Thursday 6 November in the Methodist Church, Ludlow. This will be preceded by an Open Meeting about the latest *Ludlow under Pressure* report, starting at 7.30.

The AGM agenda is

1. Welcome and prayer
2. Minutes of the last AGM
3. Chair's report on the year
4. Treasurer's report on the year
5. Election of the new Chair and Vice-Chair
6. Election of the other officers
7. *Ludlow under Continuing Pressure*: response to the report
8. CTAL lunches and suppers
9. Christmas events
10. Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (18 to 25 January 2015)
11. Lent Groups
12. Quaker CTAL concerns
13. Any other business
14. Prayer and farewell

Ludlow under continuing pressure

Two years have passed since the publication of the *Ludlow under Pressure* report prepared by a group drawn from CTAL. The aim was to assess the impact of the recession, with its cuts to benefits and services, on the more vulnerable members of our community. The report was well received and a Steering Group was formed to monitor developments but also support projects which would attend to some of those in need. It has also sought to challenge policies which would impact more adversely on poorer people and increase inequality.

Tackling inequality at both global and national levels has certainly become a dominant theme for both politicians and church leaders. Inevitably any venture into 'political' territory by the church has met resistance. It happened all those years ago with *Faith in*

the City and an echo of the same arrogance was evident in the Minister for Civil Society telling charities to 'stick to your knitting'. He now has more time for his own!

On the evening of the CTAL AGM on 6 November an update report, *Ludlow under continuing pressure*, will be presented. Some great initiatives have been launched locally but a much greater commitment is called for by all church members and others in the community if there is to be significant relief provided to those suffering hardship. With more cuts in the pipeline the demand for help will increase. The task is beyond the small group who have held things together so far. All the projects require volunteer support. Come to the AGM and learn what has been achieved and where help is needed.

Michael Day

CTAL monthly lunches

For many years people from across the Ludlow churches have gathered once a month for an informal Friday lunch at the Methodist Church in Broad Street. People have taken it in turn to provide cheese, salad and fruit (plus hot soup in winter), with donations going usually to Christian Aid. Men and women from the town and the surrounding villages, from many different Christian traditions and with very varied life experiences, have met in fellowship to listen to each other, to explore the 'diversity of gifts' we are privileged to enjoy, and to face up to honest differences and preferences. It has been our experience that meeting in this way has developed deeper foundations for the different churches to be together and to witness together in a wider world and a local community that are increasingly challenging for us all.

Mike Beazley recently sent round to the churches an enquiry about people's preferences for the future of this opportunity for sharing. Following upon the responses received it has been decided to move this event to the last **Thursday** of each month, from 12.30 to 2.00, and to simplify arrangements by asking that people bring their own snack to eat as the buzz of conversation develops around the tables in the Garden Room.

This is not a closed 'club' but an open and informal event where all are welcome. It has almost always had someone to present a topical subject for reflection and discussion. Occasionally we have invited a person with special knowledge to talk on a theme such as dementia or Credit Unions or the Rockspring Centre or Fair Trade, but usually it has been one of our own number who has introduced his or her own special concern – interfaith dialogue, the ethics of church and personal finance, spirituality and religion, the *Ludlow Under Pressure* report, faith schools, assisted dying, voluntary groups in Ludlow, Israel/Palestine issues, Christians in Iraq, the media coverage of World War I.

So, an open invitation and no fixed agenda – but good ecumenical company, honest sharing of experiences and opinions, Christian fellowship. Why not make a note in your diary to come along – but not in December as it's Christmas Day on the last Thursday of that month!

Laurence Taylor

Christian Aid

It all began in the aftermath of the Second World War when Christians in Britain and Ireland were determined to help European refugees who had lost everything they possessed. Churches of all denominations joined in raising the grand sum of £29,000. Nearly seventy years, and many wars later, the organisation is still helping the homeless and poorest of the world's people to the tune of tens of millions of pounds a year. Help is given as emergency aid in disasters and also in long term development projects. It goes to people of all faiths and cultures and is channelled through partner groups already in action on the spot.

We have an active Christian Aid Committee in Ludlow. Our next event will be carol-singing and collecting in the town centre on the Saturday before Christmas. However, our biggest effort goes into Christian Aid Week which is the major ecumenical event of the church year. In 2015 it will be May 10–16. We are always in need of new collectors as the town and villages expand and some of our faithful regular helpers are becoming frail. It would be good to cover every house so could you overcome any inhibitions you may have and knock on a few doors? It is such a good cause and at the heart of the Christian gospel.

If you would like to learn more or join us locally contact me on 01584 873330.

Derek Longley

The Orthodox monastery on the Stiperstones

Not many people know of its existence. However, in the lee of the Stiperstones ridge a former miner's cottage serves as the monastery in the Romanian tradition where Fr Silouan lives, worships, thinks and writes, alone. The monastery was established between ten and fifteen years ago by Brother Aidan, who is an icon painter of world renown, and who has painted the iconostasis of the minute chapel. Some twenty-four of us from the South Shropshire Interfaith Forum walked on a glorious summer day from the Knolls car park, eschewing the opportunity to pick whimberrries, to the monastery of St Antony and St Cuthbert. The name brings together the monastic tradition of the Egyptian desert with that of Celtic Northumbria. The atmosphere was one of unhurried quietness where chickens and ducks were obviously at ease. Very different from the harsh days of winter when the monastery could be isolated for several weeks at a time. In addition to the small chapel there is a modern, round, Wisdom Cell with wattle walls and with a wooden tarred and felted roof supported by the timbers of seven local Scots pines. Heated by a centrally positioned wood-burner, it is a place for reflection and prayer. Over the door is an inscription from Proverbs 9.1 'Wisdom has built her house. She has hewn her seven pillars'. The idea is that in the ancient liturgy and scriptures of the church together with time spent in silence, meditation is the gateway to wisdom. It was agreed that this visit should not be the last.



Welcome from Fr Silouan in front of the tiny chapter house. That day a broadband relay station was being installed, to beam the signal to cottages in the valley (hence the lorry in the background). Fr Silouan compared this to the monastery receiving and disseminating the Spirit.



Left: In the Wisdom cell. Right: Icons on the south wall of the church, including St Cuthbert

David Roberts

Home-Start Shropshire working in Ludlow

Home-Start is a voluntary organisation, committed to promoting the welfare of families with one child or more under five years of age. Our volunteers offer regular support, friendship and practical help to families under stress in their homes, helping to prevent family crisis and breakdown. Up until the end of last year the charity was supporting on average 100 families across the southern part of Shropshire. Most of our referrals have come from health visitors who have suggested that parents would benefit from some extra help and re-assurance as they adjust to life with a young child. This is followed by a home visit by one of our staff to assess the need and decide the best way we can help. In most cases a volunteer is then introduced to the family and will follow up with regular, usually weekly, visits to the home. Often it is enough to just see a friendly face and

have some company, but there are times when the volunteer is able to give practical help with, for example, shopping.



The viability of Home-Start's work in South Shropshire has come under increasing threat over the last year, principally through the withdrawal of Shropshire Council funding for our core work of supporting families through volunteering. Home-Start in Shrewsbury and Home-Start in North Shropshire faced similar difficulties. After working for a while in partnership, the three schemes merged in April 2014 to form Home-Start Shropshire. The new organisation has been successful in securing funding to provide support for vulnerable children by professionals, but this has not helped to sustain the core work of our volunteers. Although a much-reduced level of funding has been maintained through grants and donations, and through local fund-raising, this has fallen far short of the level needed to fill the gap created by the loss of financial support from Shropshire Council and the local health authority.

As a direct consequence of this, Home-Start has had to reduce the number of families that we are able to support to about one third of the level in 2012-13. But the need remains high, and appears to be growing as local families face increasing financial hardship. This is evidenced in the number of referrals that we receive.

We have significantly reduced our overhead costs through re-structuring and rationalising administrative operations. We are waiting for the outcome of a substantial Lottery bid which, if successful, will secure funding to support and extend our volunteer work for three years from January 2015. We have recently launched a covenanting scheme for regular giving through which Home-Start can recover tax through Gift Aid. In this way a regular donation of £5 per month provides us with £75 of additional funding over a twelve-month period. We are also setting up a volunteer group to help us with fundraising. This has been awarded £5,000 from Santander from their social enterprise development fund. So all is not gloom and doom as we adjust to new challenges in 2014-15.

We would be glad to hear from you if you would like to help by volunteering, making donations, or fundraising. You can reach me through our offices at the Ludlow Mascall Centre, or directly by email to donovan.gibbons@gmail.com

Donovan Gibbons
Chair, Home-Start Shropshire

Does Ludlow need Street Pastors?

Ludlow is often described as the loveliest town in England, and many people choose to come here to live or as visitors. But there are many sides to Ludlow, as we know; our own *Ludlow under Pressure* report highlighted many of the issues that may surprise many visitors to the town. We are attempting to address some of those issues through schemes such as the Food Bank and Hands Together Ludlow, but there may be one side of Ludlow that few of us see: its night-time economy.

Those of us who are tucked-up in our beds by 11 o'clock probably have no idea what goes on in the town centre after midnight. I certainly wasn't aware until a chance conversation with our Community Police Officer brought some of his concerns to my attention. My immediate response (based on experience of other places) was 'sounds like a job for Street Pastors'. But is there really a job for Street Pastors here? Can we justify the costs and man-power in setting up a scheme in Ludlow?

The main trigger points would seem to be Friday and Saturday nights as the pubs close one after another. A few of us went to take a look for ourselves one Friday night. There was a little bit of alcohol-fuelled high-spirits around midnight, some broken glass, and a couple of people worse for wear, but no real trouble and not enough people around to warrant a full-blown Street Pastor scheme. Of course, that was only a snapshot on one Friday in September. We might have got a different picture on a Saturday night or on a warm summer's night. There was a police presence during the night, but one man on his own cannot do much except as a calming influence.



Back in May this year we held a meeting to listen to a representative from Ascension Trust (the organisation behind Street Pastors). Those who attended were impressed by the work that Street Pastors do, but not convinced that it was right for Ludlow. So I ask again: does Ludlow need Street Pastors? Perhaps the idea of sending out teams of Street Pastors every weekend is too much for a town like Ludlow; perhaps we would benefit from having a late-night chaplain who could develop a relationship with pub staff, night-

time revellers, and any police on duty.

We agreed to hold another meeting when we could ask various local representatives including the police and the local council to tell us more about their concerns. The police have been keen to talk to us again, but finding a date when others can talk to us is proving problematical, so watch this space! I am proposing to do a Saturday night reconnoitre soon, and I would also like to canvas opinion from as many people as possible. So if you would like to share your views with me please e-mail owens.redtails@gmail.com.

Mike Owens

Image: streetpastors.org/about-us-1/

Member churches

Ludlow Baptist Church	Mr Simon Lambourne 01584 874076	LudlowBaptistChurch.co.uk
St Laurence's, St John's, St Giles', Church of England	Venerable Colin Williams 01584 872001	stlaurences.org.uk
Living Waters Church	Mr Andy Summers 01584 879297	bluebox.talktalk.net/Living_Waters_Ludlow/start.html
Ludlow Methodist Church	Rev. Frances Biseker 01568 612406	ludlowmethodistchurch.org
Ludlow Quaker Meeting	Cynthia Prior and Colin Sheward (CTAL representatives) 0870 7656 980	ludlowquakers.co.uk
St Peter's Roman Catholic Church	Canon Christopher Walsh 01584 872906	cornmill.freeshell.org/stpetersludlow

Associated church

Elim Christian Fellowship	Rev. Tim Coles 01584 878634	ludlowelim.co.uk
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Editor's note: The newsletter welcomes expression of a range of views. Those expressed in articles are those of the contributors. They do not necessarily represent the position of CTAL.

For a large-print newsletter please use the version on the CTAL website, or for a printed copy contact any of the churches.

Contributions for the next newsletter should be sent to the editor, Wendy Bartlett, at wendy.bartlett@hmqquakers.org.uk. The last date for items for the next issue is 14 January 2015.

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