



### Reflection of the Month: "What can I give him poor as I am?"

Sr. Maria McGuire (DW) Daughter of Wisdom writes:

When the Angel Gabriel appeared to Mary at the Annunciation asking her to be the Mother of the Messiah we are told she 'pondered this in her heart' (Luke 1:26 cf). Mary would have known of the long-awaited Messiah as she would have known of the Prophecies relating to Him. No doubt all these passed through her mind as she pondered the Angel's message in her heart. Then came her answer! I often reflect on this pregnant moment in the world's history and imagine the whole of creation holding its breath awaiting on Mary's "Yes" and when she responded I again imagine the whole of creation heaving a great Sigh of relief? " Let it be done to me according to your word". (Luke 1:38 )



On the face of it her "yes" seemed a simple enough word, but when we reflect on this "yes" it would be of Messianic promise and a world redeemed for ever. We would all have a place in God's Heavenly City. Because of this heroic little word, Jesus entered our world, silently becoming a weak vulnerable babe born into poverty. God loved the world so much that He sent his only begotten Son (John 3:16) into a very broken world so Jesus would fulfil the plan of Salvation, redeeming and freeing everyone from the clutches of sin and the evil one.

Mary, The Theotokos, Woman par excellence became the Mother of our Redeemer. What an honour was bestowed on her that God chose her for this unique role no other could fulfil. She gave her whole heart and life to Jesus; tending his every need as a baby, looked for him when he was lost, rejoiced when she found him like any parent would. (Luke 2:48) Walked every step of the way with Him through his life even to the Cross. She was never absent from Him nor He her.

Mary as we know says very little in The Gospels but her presence speaks louder than words! She was a silent presence as she stood beside Jesus at the foot of the Cross. What was in her heart as she stood there seeing her beautiful Son bleeding and dying before her eyes and she a Mother could not wipe the blood from his face. How desolate she was as she stood quietly listening to him struggling to breathe and the effort it took for Him to say to John 'behold your Mother', and to His Mother ' behold your Son'. (John 19:26-27). And Simeon's words would echo in her heart 'a sword will pierce your heart. (Luke 2:35)

Like Jesus, Mary knew how to die to self out of her great love she had for her Son. She

the one Full of Grace, (Luke 1:28) the Woman Par Excellence in a unique way holds out her Son to us now to receive all the graces and gifts we desire. Will we open our hearts to receive Him, to love Him, to be the bringers of peace and joy into the brokenness of our world? Or will we miss the point and allow ourselves to be distracted by the world's materialistic and secular approach to the birth of Christ. He is our only way, our only truth and our whole life. (John 14:6)

God in his Wisdom holds out the greatest gift to each of us to 'be' His loving presence among people. By God's Divine Initiative we have the gift to be able to love. This gift liberates us from the 'I wants to the what can do' to reach out in love, mercy, and compassion towards our neighbour. What we do with this precious gift is our gift to God. Mary's heroic life of unconditional love shows us the way to her Son.

'Give Him your now and everyday"

Then we can say "Let it be done to me according to your word." (Luke 1:38) and so we can 'Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven' ( Mt 5:12)

## A place to go on Christmas Day

Premier.  
**ChristianRadio**

Christmas is a time of year when loneliness rears its head. For the last 3 years, Premier Christian Radio have been working to tackle this by making a dedicated list of events for people to attend on Christmas day, other than the traditional Christmas service, so they don't have to be alone.

If you're running a Christmas day lunch, a social or even some karaoke(!) for the people in your community, then make sure you sign your Church up to Christmas Alone 2016.

Planning something? Please complete the form and let us know.

Details will then be published into a map for all to access from 19 December 2016.

*Premier Christian Radio is a Body in Association of Churches Together in England*



## Crossing Barriers

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2017

Resources available to order or download

[www.ctbi.org.uk/weekofprayer](http://www.ctbi.org.uk/weekofprayer)

Photo: US Government work



## A Very British Nativity

UK's 'hostile environment' for asylum seekers highlighted by children in modern retelling of the nativity story ...

A [new film](#) released today highlights some of the challenges facing asylum seekers in the UK

through a modern retelling of the nativity story. This release comes the day after new figures from the Government were published revealing that in September of this year 37,958 asylum seekers in the UK were in receipt of accommodation and/or financial support of less than £6 per day.



Whilst primarily focusing on a young Mary and Joseph's efforts to find somewhere safe to stay in the UK, the film, '[A Very British Nativity](#)', also includes a cameo from the wise men who have ditched their trusty camels in favour of Micro Scooters. However, their mission to deliver gifts is quickly scuppered by an Immigration Enforcement Officer, who is concerned by the group's unspecified travel plans...

Martha, aged 8, who attends a Methodist Church and played Mary in the film said:

"Mary must have felt tired because she did so much walking with her suitcase and her baby. She would have been sad because she couldn't find a home and worried about her baby. I think people should watch this film. We all need to help people who have left their home because something bad has happened."

The film was produced by a coalition of four Church denominations in the UK: the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Church of Scotland, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church.

Director of the film and policy adviser for the Churches, Grace Pengelly commented:

"Our Churches are very concerned about the degrading treatment and challenges faced by asylum seekers in the UK. It is sometimes all too easy to forget that many seeking asylum have already experienced a great deal of trauma. Rather than providing the standard of care that we would wish for ourselves, many aspects of the UK's asylum system appear to add to the suffering already endured by those seeking refuge."

"Our hope is that in seeing this film people will be more aware of how hard this Christmas will be for some of the poorest members of our society."

'[A Very British Nativity](#)' launches the day after the release of the Government's quarterly migration statistics, which show that in September 37,958 asylum seekers received support from the Government's National Asylum Support Service, which means they qualify for accommodation and/or financial support of less than £6 per day. The report also reveals that so far in 2016, 45% of appeals made by asylum seekers were allowed, indicating that the system currently in place is struggling to adequately assess the needs of asylum seekers.

## CTE 2017 Leaflet

The 2017 leaflet about Churches Together in England is now available. The leaflet includes:

- A selection of highlights from 2016, including the Presidents' statement about *Thy Kingdom Come*.
- Some of our key priorities for 2017, including a major consultation among the member churches conducted by Theos.
- A list of member churches, including those who have joined CTE membership in 2016.
- Information and contact details for CTE staff.



Print copies of the leaflet are available, on request, through the [CTE Office](#), but please feel free to print and distribute from the [PDF version here](#).

The leaflet is a double-sided tri-fold A4.

## National Pentecostal Symposium 2016

The first National Pentecostal Symposium took place at Kensington Temple on Saturday November 26th. Several hundred Pentecostals gathered to hear papers on the history of Pentecostalism in the UK by Dr Andrew Davies of the University of Birmingham, on Pentecostal diversity by Dr Daniel Akhazemea of Christ Redeemer College, Pentecostals and ecumenism by Dr Anne Dyer of Mattersley Hall College and Pentecostalism and socio-economic and political engagement by Dr David Muir of Roehampton University.



The symposium papers illustrated the breadth and depth of Pentecostal experience and scholarship. The significance of the gathering was way in which it brought together the histories of both indigenous English Pentecostalism which reaches back to holiness roots in the nineteenth centuries and revivals in Wales and England in the early 1900s, and the history of Afro-Caribbean Pentecostalism which is largely a product of the post-Windrush era. It was also important because it allowed the Pentecostal traditions to introduce themselves to an ecumenical audience. It would not have been a Pentecostal symposium without roof-lifting praise, led ably by Emily Bolton and Noel Robinson and his band.

The symposium was followed by a celebration, led by the London Community Gospel Choir and CTE's Pentecostal President, Bishop Dr Eric Brown. The preachers included another CTE President, the Revd Canon Billy Kennedy and Pastor Penny Francis from Ruach City Church. During the celebration, awards for outstanding contributions to Pentecostalism in Britain were awarded to the Pentecostal historian Professor William Kay, to founder of the Ichthus Fellowship, Roger Foster, to the Revd Nezlin Sterling, a distinguished leader of the New Testament Assembly and Fr Olu Abiola, one of the pioneering leaders of African Pentecostalism in England.



The Revd Dr David Cornick, CTE General Secretary noted, '*One of the remarkable features of twentieth century Christianity was the growth of the Pentecostal churches and the emergence of the charismatic movement. We are delighted that the churches of these traditions are coming together to celebrate the gifts God has given them and to share their insights with their Christians friends from other traditions'*

In recent years, a quiet revolution has been taking place involving Pentecostals and their newer Charismatic religious cousins as they transcend cultural, ethnic and denominational boundaries to engage with each other, and in Christian mission together in local communities and national life. Spearheading this development has been the National Pentecostal Leaders Forum operating under the aegis of Churches Together in England through a Pentecostal Presidency. The current CTE Pentecostal President, Bishop Eric Brown, said, '*we live in a world and a country where human difference is difficult to manage and so it has been heart-warming to be a part of a project that shows that with the right spirit our God-given diversity can be a strength, not a weakness'*

## **Churches call for the UK government and UN General Assembly to act on Aleppo**



The UN has warned mass starvation in Aleppo is a real prospect if aid is not allowed in. As the city comes under further bombardment and food is about to run out, Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Sikh and Hindu faith leaders call on the UK Government to act.

Joint Statement Calling for the Urgent Delivery of Humanitarian Aid to Aleppo:

*We, UK faith leaders, jointly call on the UK Government to act to support the urgent delivery of aid to those besieged in Aleppo.*

*In eastern Aleppo, an estimated 250,000 people, including 100,000 children, have been cut off from food and medical supplies since August 2016. The UN warns that there will soon be no food left in the besieged part of the city.*

*This is an ancient city which has been home to people of many faiths, we pray for all those still in the city and call for action to preserve the lives of the people of Aleppo.*

*The situation is now desperate, yet the UN is still being prevented from delivering desperately needed aid to the besieged civilians. It seems a very real possibility that the world could stand by whilst 250,000 people are facing starvation.*

*As faith leaders we bear witness to the suffering of all those in the city of Aleppo. We call on the UK government to take action at an international level, including in the UN General Assembly, and to provide practical support to facilitate the delivery of aid to civilians in the city.*

*The UK can lead the way in alleviating the terrible suffering of the people of Aleppo, we pray that action is taken to come to their aid.*

**Signatories:**

- Muslim Council of Britain, Harun Khan, Secretary General
- Baptist Union of Great Britain, The Revd Lynn Green, General Secretary
- Church of Scotland, The Rev Dr Richard Frazer, Convener of the Church and Society Council of the Church of Scotland
- Hindu Council UK, Sanjay Jagatia, Director
- Methodist Church, Revd Dr Roger Walton, President of the Methodist Conference
- Rachel Lampard, Vice President of the Methodist Conference
- United Reformed Church, The Revd John Proctor, General Secretary
- Sikh Council UK, Mr Gurmel Singh, Secretary General
- Mohammed Kozbar, Director of Finsbury Park Mosque
- Lewisham Islamic Centre, Imam Shakeel Begg
- Reform Judaism, Rabbi Laura Janner-Klausner, Senior Rabbi
- Liberal Judaism, Rabbi Danny Rich, Chief Executive

## CEDO for Oxfordshire Post

Churches Together in Oxfordshire is looking for a new County Ecumenical Development Officer (CEDO). This is a half-time post (18 hours a week) and the officer will work from the office of Churches Together in Oxfordshire and travel as necessary to locations within and outside the county of Oxfordshire.



More information:

[http://www.cte.org.uk/Articles/484308/Home/News/Jobs/County\\_Ecumenical\\_Development.aspx](http://www.cte.org.uk/Articles/484308/Home/News/Jobs/County_Ecumenical_Development.aspx)

## The Community of St Anselm – 2 Posts

The Community of St Anselm is an Acknowledged Religious Community in the Church of England, founded by Archbishop Justin Welby in 2015 as part of his first priority: the renewal of prayer and Religious life. We draw together Christians aged 20-35 from all over the world, and any branch of the Christian family tree, for a year of living a shared life or prayer, study and service to the poor.

Now in our second year, we are recruiting two new members of the Community's core team:

### **Dean of the Community of St Anselm**

Along with the Prior and Sub-prior, the Dean will complete the Community's Council (senior leadership team), share critical responsibilities within the Community's life and have oversight of many of its core charitable and operational activities. The post holder is an ex-officio member of the Community and will order his or her own life in accordance with the Community's Rule of Life.

### **Prior's Clerk**

As a member of the Community's Core Team, the Prior's Clerk will support the ministry of the Prior in a fast-paced, small-team environment and engage with Core Team, Community Members and members of Lambeth Palace staff to ensure smooth Community operations in both administrative and pastoral activities. The role will also require commitment to confidentiality concerning sensitive information about Community Members and discretion concerning the Archbishop's wider ministry, of which the Community is a part.

More information:

[http://www.cte.org.uk/Articles/485612/Home/News/Jobs/The\\_Community\\_of.aspx](http://www.cte.org.uk/Articles/485612/Home/News/Jobs/The_Community_of.aspx)

## **Churches speak out against the Benefit Cap**



Churches say Benefit Cap is "damaging" and overwhelmingly targets families with children:

- [New Benefit Cap statistics](#) show that 19 out of 20 families whose benefits were cut have children.
- Only 14% of families affected claimed Job Seekers Allowance and were expected to look for work.

- Churches representing more than 800,000 people in the UK have said that it "cannot be morally acceptable to leave children without enough to live on"

Today's Government statistics on the Benefit Cap reveal that over a quarter of a million children have been affected by the Cap since it was introduced in April 2013.

Additionally, the majority of families affected were accepted as not being able to work due to illness, disability or caring responsibilities.

The Baptist Union, the Church of Scotland, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church have spoken out against the Benefit Cap. Speaking on behalf of the joint Churches, Paul Morrison, Policy Adviser said: "*It is clear that the Benefit Cap overwhelmingly targets children - 19 out of every 20 families whose benefits had been capped have children.*"

The current Benefit Cap – the limit on the total amount of benefits a family can receive - is set at £26,000 per year. For a family to need such high levels of benefit they tend to live in a region where high rents drive up the Housing Benefit bill. Currently around half of capped households are in London.

Read more:

[http://www.cte.org.uk/Articles/486023/Home/News/Latest\\_news\\_articles/Churches\\_speak\\_out.aspx](http://www.cte.org.uk/Articles/486023/Home/News/Latest_news_articles/Churches_speak_out.aspx)

## **Service of Hope strengthens Cumbria's ecumenical county status**

A service of Hope and Expectation has heralded the strengthening of Cumbria's designation as England's first ecumenical county.



Hundreds of people gathered at Carlisle Cathedral for the Advent Service, during which the Salvation Army became the latest denomination to officially sign a new Declaration which signals closer working practice.

It came five years after leaders from the Methodist, United Reformed and Anglican churches joined together to sign a Declaration of Intent, signalling moves to work more closely together in mission.

Since then the partner denominations – along with five other companion denominations - have been working together towards the ecumenical God for All vision that: *By 2020 every person in Cumbria of all ages and backgrounds will have had an opportunity to discover more of God and God's purpose for their lives, so that they will discover more of Jesus and the Good News and become followers of Jesus within a Christian community.*

On Sunday afternoon the Salvation Army became the fourth partner denomination, signing a new Declaration of Covenant Partnership, allowing ministry to be more easily shared across the county.

Major Drew McCombe, Divisional Leader of The Salvation Army's

North West England & North Wales Division, said: "For the Salvation Army the signing is the next intentional step in joining in partnership. Having signed the letter of companionship in the south of the county, to now join the whole of the county gives a great opportunity to further engage and to further strengthen the unity and the mission.

"The God for All initiative is one of the main reasons why the Salvation Army should be a part of this; it's a God thing."



The Rev'd Richard Teal, Chair of Cumbria Methodist District, said: "This service was hugely significant. It is five years since we made our first signing and during that time we've moved mountains to get to where we are today.

"It is so important that we are together as Christians in the county as we spread the Gospel of God's love and spread his kingdom across Cumbria. We are much stronger together than we are if we act separately."

The Rev'd Sarah Moore, Area President of the Cumbria Area of the North Western Synod of the United Reformed Church said: "This is a really significant moment and gives us all a further green light to push on with God for All, as we look to make the reality of God known to as many people as possible in Cumbria.

"There was a fantastic turn out for the service and it was really heartening to see so many people join together from churches right across the county. Now I pray that we continue to see those closer working relationships continue to grow as we work towards the creation of mission communities."

The Rt Rev'd James Newcome, The Bishop of Carlisle, said: "The service was a really historic moment, not only for the county but for the whole of the country. It's a sign of our absolute commitment to each other as Christians to take the Gospel into the whole of the county.

"We could hardly feel more encouraged and to make the signing on Advent Sunday when we're thinking about the coming of Jesus was a wonderfully appropriate time to do this. Everybody has been so warm, enthusiastic and friendly; it augurs very well, indeed, for what lies ahead."

The Covenant Partnership applies across the whole county and so makes sharing of ministry easier, though with no binding requirements.

Each signatory of the Declaration committed themselves and their churches to:

- seek out every possible opportunity for joint initiatives especially for God for All, at local and county level in mission to all the people of Cumbria.
- work together to equip both lay and ordained ministry whenever possible, and to share that ministry wherever appropriate.
- continue the work of developing strategies whereby we optimise the use of our church buildings for the benefit of communities throughout the county.

Leaders from the Religious Society of Friends in Cumbria, the Roman Catholics, the North Western Baptist Association and the Church of Scotland signed a letter of companionship, affirming their commitment to pray for those churches who signed the Declaration and to work in mission with the denominations at a local and county level where possible.



For more on God for All visit [www.godforall.org.uk](http://www.godforall.org.uk)

## And finally ...

### New Ecumenical Advisor appointed for the Archbishop of Canterbury

The Revd Dr Will Adam, will be the Ecumenical Advisor to the Archbishop and combine the role with being the Ecumenical Officer at the Council for Christian Unity:

<http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/5810/new-ecumenical-adviser-to-the-archbishop-of-canterbury-announced>



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