

Reflection of the Month: Formation and Motherhood



This is a reflection from a new mother, about formation, Mothering Sunday and Mary the Mother of Jesus.

Growing up, I've been surrounded by the example of incredible women, my godmothers, aunts, cousins, sisters and friends. And as a Roman Catholic, I've always had two mums: my own lovely earthly and biological mum, and Mary, the mother of Jesus,

Last year, as I became a mum for the first time, I felt closer to Mary than ever in her humanity. Waddling into work at eight and a half months pregnant and struggling up the steps to my office filled me with a deep respect for Mary traversing the 100 or so miles to Bethlehem on a donkey. Ouch! I was more in awe than ever of Mary's readiness to accept God's plan for her life. I also wondered whether, in Mary's 'yes', she knew that she would eventually become a mother to more than just her baby.

A few weeks ago, I was asked to complete the Facebook 'Mummy Challenge'. For those of you not familiar with Facebook or the task, I was challenged by a friend to upload five photos that made me proud to be a mummy and then in turn to nominate five other 'mummies'. Two things did not sit well with me when I read the instructions. Firstly the word 'challenge' which evoked a sense of competition (my baby's cuter than yours etc.) something I try to avoid when it comes to bringing up a child. But secondly, and rather insensitively, the exercise required me to single out of my friends the women who had given birth to children.

Imagine this: Jesus' mum Mary logs into Facebook. She finds that she too has been nominated to take part in the 'Mummy Challenge' and this is what it asks: Upload five images that make you proud to be a mummy. I wonder what those images would be. Mary knew when it was appropriate to put Jesus in the spotlight so maybe she might share one image of the Wedding at Cana. Similarly, she may have uploaded a couple of snaps of some other miracles, a healed leper or the feeding of the five thousand. Alternatively, she might, have chosen snapshots of her son's first steps, the day he began his apprenticeship with Joseph, his first smile. How about a cute close up as she cradled the new-born Jesus in her arms? Yet maybe the most bittersweet image Mary might choose would be the one where she stands at the foot of the cross and becomes a mother to many, as she hears the words 'dear woman, here is your son' (John 19:26) for in this moment, Mary's motherhood reaches out beyond one man to all of his followers.

I didn't nominate any other women to the Facebook challenge for lots of reasons. I know women who are mothers many times over yet have never given birth, women who have lost their children and who have so much love stored up in their hearts. Women who bring people together and who are lynchpins of their faith communities. I know strong women of compassion and kindness, of warmth and humour, gentleness and constancy, women who have never had the chance to call a child theirs. Gifted women who are carers, providers, role models of inspirational faith yet no one calls them 'mum'. As Mary herself proves, motherhood extends further than and is not exclusive to having one's own children.

On 6th March, Mothering Sunday, there will have been women sat in pews around the UK who may feel the day to be exclusive to those who have given birth. If this is the message we perpetuate then we miss the point. Mothering Sunday and Mothers Day seem to have merged into one big pink and rosy festival when actually Mothering Sunday is a day to return to the faith community or mother church that raised you. This Mothering Sunday, my first as a mum, I decided to dedicate it to ensuring that all of the women in my church community realise how important their presence and example has been to my own formation as a woman and as a mother.

Hannah Currin, Lay Chaplain at St Gabriel's RC High School, Bury.

Boring but beneficial: a constitution for local groups



Churches Together in England has published a long-awaited [pro-forma constitution](#). Designed for Churches Together groups, it is also suitable for more flexible, mission-focused groupings.

Jenny Bond, responsible for Training, Resourcing and Events at CTE said: 'A good constitution describes how you operate. It does not require you to jump through unnecessary hoops. It allows you to do what you want to do, allows for future growth and protects you in various different ways. Our pro-forma offers guidelines and tells you to change it to suit your own circumstances.'

Churches Together and similar groups are encouraged to compare their constitutions against this new one. And if you can't find yours, you will find that creating one is now quick and easy.

Public Art Brings Easter to Life

In conjunction with the Bridport Arts Society, Churches Together in Bridport and District plan to display fourteen 'Stations of the Cross' at various locations throughout the town of Bridport and West Bay in West Dorset this coming Holy Week and Easter.



The Stations of the Cross depict various interactions Jesus had along his final journey to Calvary. Fifteen local artists have produced the various stations, each set against a different local backdrop and many using contemporary figures. Part-funded by a grant from the Diocesan Aldhelm Mission Fund, each 'station' is painted on a 3 foot by 3 foot canvas.

The route begins at St Swithun's Church, North Allington and weaves its way through the centre of Bridport, then makes its way along South Street, and down West Bay Road, with the stations displayed in front of a variety of different premises. The fifteenth station, the Resurrection, will be on display in St John's Church, West Bay on Easter Day after the 6.00am Dawn Service on the East Pier.

On Good Friday 25th March, the Bishop of Salisbury, Nicholas Holtam, will lead an 'Ecumenical Walk of Witness' along the entire route beginning at St Swithun's at 11.00am. At 2.30pm there will be a reflective service outside on Harbour Green at West Bay (or in St John's Church, if wet), lasting until 3.00pm.

The various artists have found fresh spiritual depths of meaning. Val Corgan, who painted the seventh station, 'Jesus falls for the second time', says, "I was intrigued by the brief for this work because of the need to include a recognisable background as well as putting any figures into modern day dress. In painting this piece, it has therefore occurred to me that modern day struggles are much the same as they were in Christ's day. In today's society there are many 'crosses to bear'."



Vice Chairman of Churches Together in Bridport and District, the Reverend Philip Ringer, who is co-ordinating the project said, "These artists have really taken on board the brief and have made truly splendid interpretations of the various 'stations'. I am sure that many people will want to come at some time during the display period to admire the quality of the work. We are looking forward to the Bishop being with us on Good Friday."

For more information email the [Reverend Philip Ringer](mailto:Philip.Ringer@ctc.org.uk) or telephone 01308 425774

Churches Combatting Modern Slavery Questionnaire

YOUR VOICE!
Complete Survey

Did you know that in 2014 just under a quarter of those being referred to the authorities as potential cases of trafficking were from Africa, a few score more than those referred from Asia. Startling in the gender division of reporting was that of the five hundred and seventy nine individuals referred from Africa three quarters of them were female. Either as minors or as adults. That is four out of five adult instances of trafficking in the African community was a woman, and where children were involved a rough marker was two out of every three instances of 'trafficking in minors' were girls.

Churches Together in England has just launched a new initiative to address the wider impacts of Modern Day Slavery and Human Trafficking in our wider communities. In a project being driven forward by Dr Carrie Pemberton Ford (from the [Centre on Applied Research on Human Trafficking](http://www.appliedresearchonhumantrafficking.org)) churches in the Pentecostal tradition, are being invited to take part in a nationwide survey on their encounter with Human Trafficking, both here and in their wider international networks. Of particular interest in this project, is to understand the impact on women and the girl-child in our local, faith and Transnational communities – and to look at some of the ways in which our churches might redress some of the challenges which are currently leading to the exploitation and violence against women which is being currently endured.

And of course it isn't just women, men and boys from Africa are involved. Across the globe trafficking is a form of super exploitation which is undermining our hopes to building a fairer, more just world for all, and for expressing the hope that Christ brings to all of us, to love our neighbours as ourselves, and to treat everybody with justice, kindness and respect. Last year across Britain over 2,300 people were reported as having been trafficked for exploitation in the sex industry, in labour exploitation, in various forms of child exploitation as well as in Domestic Servitude.

Have you any tool-kits, great examples of good practice in building Human Trafficking resilience in your community? We would love to hear from you – jump onto our Facebook page to share or drop an email across to our research team lead by [Dr Carrie Pemberton Ford](mailto:Carrie.Pemberton@ctc.org.uk)

Have you developed liturgical resources, hymns, prayers, sermon ideas which can assist other

ministries as sister congregations seek to come up to speed with the best examples of response being pioneered by sister congregations? We all need each other's help in this area which is only now being understood in terms of its reach, presence, and exploitative power. Again don't hesitate to share these on the closed Facebook page where we plan for a rich conversation to develop.

Would you like to host a meeting, a small seminar, or be part of one of the larger regional meetings being planned for Birmingham, Bristol, Manchester or Leeds in the coming weeks? Keep yourself up to date by checking the [CTE web site hub page](#) or looking at the [Facebook page](#).

We are seeking to understand what the experience of our churches, our wider membership and our leadership is of Human Trafficking and Modern Day Slavery as it impacts on our wider communities. So PLEASE be a part of the change and take the 10 minute survey we have built – to bring as many voices as we can to the table. And once you have taken in remember to SHARE the love and send the survey link to other church members, leaders, and colleagues.

We are walking fast to get up to speed with the challenge, thank you for your participation, and your prayers and your contribution – [Take the survey NOW!](#)

Commemorating 'Reformation 1517' in England

A Statement from the [Presidents of Churches Together in England](#) who represent the Western traditions of the Church, The Most Revd and Rt Hon Justin Welby (Archbishop of Canterbury), H.E. Cardinal Vincent Nichols (Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster), The Revd Dr Hugh Osgood (Free Churches Moderator), Bishop Eric Brown (Pentecostal President) and Billy Kennedy (The President nominated by the New Churches, the Religious Society of Friends (ie the Quakers) and the Lutheran and German-speaking Churches).



Their statement is issued with the prayerful support of the Orthodox President, HE Archbishop Gregorios of Thyateira and Great Britain

Setting the tone

As Presidents of Churches Together in England we encourage all churches in England to mark the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation in 2017 with sensitivity as we acknowledge our unity in Christ. We have learnt over the past century that unity is achieved by walking together, and we have grown in communion, friendship, reconciliation and healing. During this anniversary we want to be able to listen to the truth that is in each other, to hear our different stories, and build bridges of deeper understanding and respect.

Speaking at the Inauguration Eucharist of the General Synod of the Church of England in November 2015, Fr Raniero Cantalamessa, Preacher to the Papal Household, said, 'The Christian world is preparing to celebrate the fifth centenary of the Protestant Reformation. It is vital for the whole Church that this opportunity is not wasted by people remaining prisoners of the past, trying to establish each other's rights and wrongs. Rather, let us take a qualitative leap forward, like what happens when the sluice gates of a river or a canal to enable ships to navigate at a higher water level. The situation has changed dramatically since then. We need to start again with the person of Jesus, humbly helping our contemporaries to experience a personal encounter with Him...Justification by faith, for example, ought to be preached by the whole Church – and with more vigour than ever. Not in opposition to good works – the issue is

already settled – but rather in opposition to the claim of people today that they can save themselves thanks to their science, technology or man-made spirituality, without the need for a redeemer coming from outside humanity.’

Setting the scene

The course of the English reformation was long and complicated, whereas in most of what is now Germany and Switzerland it was sharp and short. That means that the anniversary of Martin Luther’s 95 theses on 31st October 1517 is but one date in a long English history which lasted from Henry VIII’s break with Rome in 1532-36 to the Restoration Settlement of 1662. As religious wars convulsed Europe, Protestant and Catholic reformers alike sought with integrity and faithfulness to bring the church closer to the will of Christ. As they did so they lent shape to what became modern Europe. During England’s long reformation, streams of Christian life that we now call Catholic, Anglican and dissenting, were all present, and have been shaped by what they experienced.

We acknowledge with sorrow that during the years of the English reformation our ancestors in the faith inflicted unspeakable violence on each other. We rejoice, however, that by the grace of God we have learnt to look at that history through the eyes of each other’s martyrs, to appreciate their integrity, courage and self-sacrifice, and above all their faithful witness to God. As we commemorate the 500th anniversary, we want therefore to acknowledge both the good that came out of this period of our history, and also the pain inflicted and the scars that remain.

We therefore urge the churches in England to keep this anniversary together in the spirit of five ‘Rs’

- **Rejoicing** – because of the joy in the gospel which we share, and because what we have in common is greater than that which divides; and that God is patient with our divisions, that we are coming back together and can learn from each other.
- **Remembering** – because all three streams of the Reformation have their witnesses and one church’s celebration could be another’s painful memory; and yet all believed they acted in the cause of the gospel of Jesus Christ for their time.
- **Reforming** – because the Church needs always to grow closer to Christ, and therefore closer to all who proclaim him Lord, and it is by the mutual witness of faith that we will approach the unity for which Christ prayed for his followers.
- **Repenting** – because the splintering of our unity led us to formulate stereotypes and prejudices about each other’s traditions which have too often diverted our attention from our calling as witnesses together to the mercy of God in proclamation and service to the world.
- **Reconciling** – because the call to oneness in Christ begins from the perspective of unity not division, strengthening what is held in common, even though the differences are more easily seen and experienced.

In national and local events, whether together or separately, we pray that our churches may honour each other and give thanks for our growing friendship and fellowship in the Gospel.

Hope in Higher Education

Releasing the potential of the Free Churches to work with universities, students and communities



The number of young people in Higher Education has been growing whilst the number of young people in churches is in decline. We’d like to invite you to explore the opportunities for working with the HE institutions in your community and engaging

with the students who attend these institutions.

The Forum offers interactive workshops led by practitioners and thinkers, where your experience and ideas will make a significant contribution. More importantly, however, the day will allow time to explore the issues that are important to all our churches: mission, evangelism, building communities, justice, opportunity – and, encourage participants to shape the agenda for strategic development.

The day is for anyone whose role involves them in mission, evangelism, working with young people, engaging with Theological Colleges, building community – and, of course, those who work in HE as chaplains, student workers, staff or students.

We are most fortunate to have Professor Les Ebdon as our keynote speaker. Les is the Director of Fair Access to Higher Education, former Vice Chancellor of Bedfordshire University and a Baptist Deacon and Lay Preacher. He will be drawing on his varied experience and speaking in a personal capacity about the issues facing Higher Education. In 2015 Les was named by Debretts as one of the 10 most influential people in education.

The Forum is free to attend and will take place on Wednesday 4th May from 10.30am - 4.00pm at Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church. Registration is essential as places may be limited.

[Click here for further information and how to register.](#)

Please contact [Sarah Lane Cawte](#) if you have any questions.

The Queen and the King she serves

'A very simple, memorable message. Brilliant!'

How are you planning to use The Servant Queen to start conversations about Jesus with people in your community? Hope Together say they are getting amazing feedback about The Servant Queen and the King She Serves. Here are two comments – one Methodist, one Baptist.



'The Queen's birthday books I ordered have been delivered today... They are absolutely wonderful and more than once moved me to tears – not an easy task usually. I am sure they will be highly valued by everyone who receives one, and they contain a wonderful, very simple, memorable message. Brilliant!'

'Our minister just read the Queen book and it reduced him to tears. He's going to quote from it on Sunday and order lots for our HOPE outreach in the summer.'

Please note: more information will be available soon of school resources that link the book to the curriculum, and for groups of churches wanting to plan a street party over the celebration weekend 10/11/12th June 2016.

You can preview the book in a short video which you can show to your church, home group, or Churches Together group: <https://vimeo.com/157486311>

Click here to order copies of The Servant Queen:
<https://www.cpo.org.uk/range.aspx?range=4971&cat=3750&prod=V4971BT>.

Paid Part-Time Internship Vacancy



An opportunity has arisen for a motivated, proactive person to work alongside the Free Church Education Officer as an intern in order to gain valuable experience, working in the interface between faith groups and educational provision in a varied and interesting role. This position would be ideally suited to a recent graduate, someone undertaking part-time study or someone returning to work. The position is currently vacant and we hope that the person selected will be able to start work as soon as possible after appointment.

The intern can expect to gain experience in a range of settings, some focused on working with members of the Free Churches Group and others with key contacts, including the Department for Education.

There will be opportunities to develop the skills required in many roles. There are also opportunities to observe some higher-level meetings, with member churches or with the Department for Education, for example, and to work with a range of organisations in the church and voluntary sector.

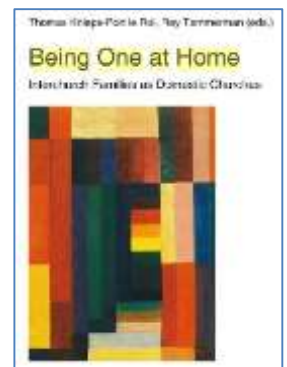
The intern will assist the Education Officer and will take day-to-day responsibility for some projects, under the supervision of the Education Officer.

Further information: http://www.cte.org.uk/Articles/462565/Home/News/Jobs/Part_Time_Internship.aspx

Being One at Home

Interchurch Families as Domestic Churches

Edited by Thomas Knieps-Port le Roi and Ray Temmerman



Book review by Bishop Christopher Foster:

This book of essays, from north American and European contributors, explores the experiences of married couples who belong as individuals to different Christian denominations ("interchurch marriages"). A number of the papers, edited here by Thomas Knieps-Port le Roi from the University of Leuven, Belgium and Ray Temmerman, a Canadian Catholic, were originally gathered in what came to be known as interchurch families' 'Domestic Church Project.' The intention is to provide sound evidence of the reality of interchurch families as domestic churches, and enhance the nourishment and contribution of their gift of unity to and within the churches of which they are members, and through those churches the wider Church.

This collection offers intriguing theological insights into the role such couples may play in modelling and moving towards unity between denominations, and articulates how the pain of interdenominational division is expressed in their marriages and family life. The book is divided into two sections – the first offering experiential approaches to the subject, the second providing further theological thought, drawing interesting parallels between the nature of marital commitment and the nature of the commitment that exists (or ought to exist) between denominations as they aspire to healthy unity within their individuality and diversity.

The book returns regularly to the particular problems experienced by Catholic / Protestant or Catholic / Orthodox couples who are unable to receive Holy Communion together in the same church. There are moving accounts of how their unity is lived out, and how the pain of this is worked through. The emphasis on Holy Communion is directly relevant where the couple includes one person who is either Orthodox or Roman Catholic. The issue of communion is

obviously less relevant to marriages where couples belong to different strands of Protestantism, where there may nonetheless be similar practical and emotional challenges to belonging in two churches. Similarly, a lot of the theological discussions about the sacramental nature of marriage may not be quite so applicable to marriages between couples of different Protestant denominations. Marriages between a Christian and someone of a totally different faith tradition fall outside the book's scope.

Reading this book has made me reflect more deeply on how the pain of impaired communion between the denominations is particularly poignant for interchurch families. Having read the book I will be newly sensitive to how I engage pastorally with such couples, reflecting with them on how I might best affirm their unity in faith even when Holy Communion cannot be shared. And although there is conviction expressed in this book that the unity in faith modelled by people in interchurch marriages has much to teach the church, I would also want us to take great care not to place the burden of the quest for unity between denominations only on their shoulders.

Christopher Foster

Christopher Foster is Anglican Bishop of Portsmouth and presently Convenor of Churches Together in England.

And finally..

Two updates on staff in the national network ...

Elizabeth Joy at Churches Together in England is standing in for Joe Aldred who is on Sabbatical for Pentecostal and Multicultural Relations: elizabeth.joy@cte.org.uk. Elizabeth continues her work for Churches Combatting Modern Slavery-Human Trafficking.



Paul Rochester has now taken up his post at the Free Churches Group as the General Secretary: paul.rochester@freechurches.org.uk
Paul is a Pastor in the Church of God of Prophecy and previously worked as a Civil Servant.
http://www.cte.org.uk/Articles/459754/Home/News/Latest_news_articles/Rev_Paul_Rochester.aspx



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