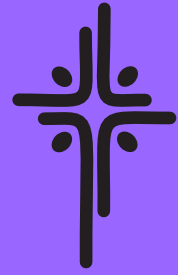


Central

United Reformed Church



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2009 Journey

Journeys are funny things. Some are exciting, adventurous, enjoyable, memorable...others may be troublesome, frustrating and many other things which make you less than happy with fellow travellers or the car in front. All that careful planning and then....?

Over Advent and Christmas we hear many stories of journeys.

Familiar words from Luke's Gospel, 'So Joseph had to leave Nazareth in Galilee and go to Bethlehem...' provide the only comment on the journey so we have little to tell of the long and arduous trek in then days leading to the first Christmas Day. We don't know if all went to plan although we might assume that Joseph and Mary expected to find accommodation at the Inn or somewhere once they reached their destination. Some of you may have been following the Radio 4 reconstruction of the journey by donkey from Nazareth to Bethlehem. The original donkey just wouldn't start and didn't leave base camp in Nazareth. Donkey number two managed the journey as far as the West Bank check point – at which stage the travelling reporter was permitted to cross the border but not the donkey because the donkey's papers were not in order! Eventually the journey was completed on Day 11 with donkey number five. So a journey not quite as planned but they did reach their destination.

The shepherds made a journey but as the fields were close to Bethlehem presumably they didn't have far to travel.

The Magi also made an epic journey – we don't know where from or how many travellers there were. But they travelled to Jerusalem and, receiving a commission from Herod, continued on their way to Bethlehem. Their plan was to return to Jerusalem but they were led to think again and so avoided making their report to the king.

Life is a journey and we now start our journey through 2009. You may have plans for that journey – maybe firm plans with arrangements already in place or maybe the plans are just dreams at present.

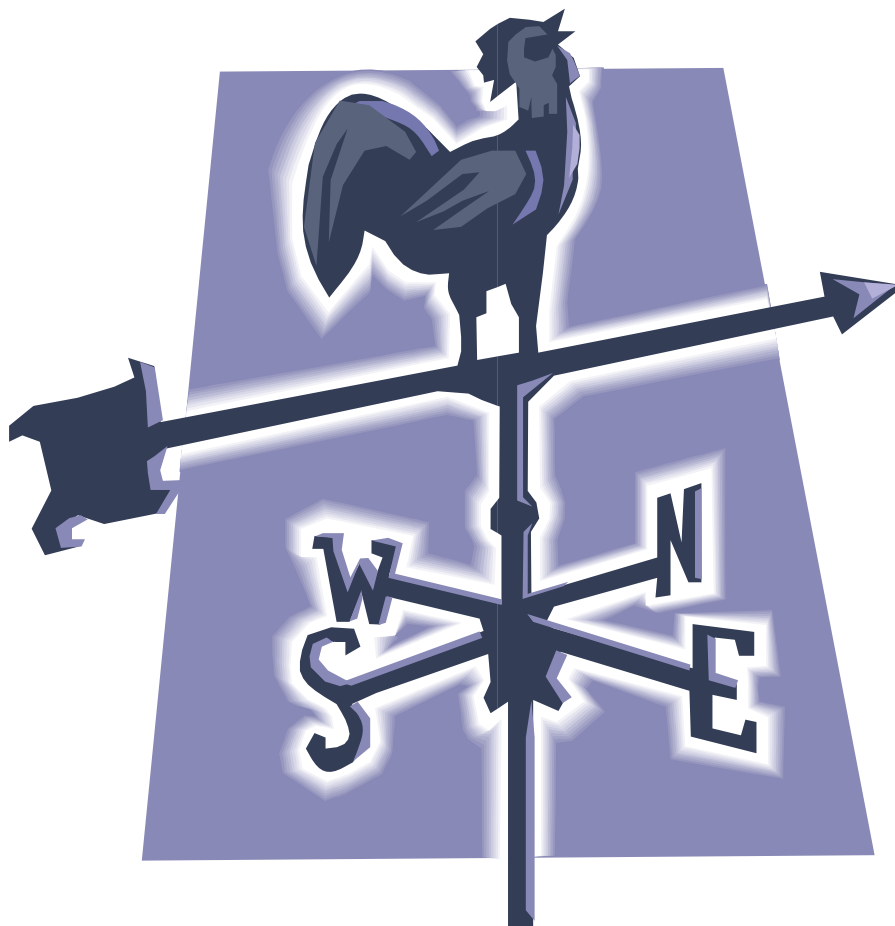
During Advent one of our lectionary readings was from 2 Samuel 7 and we heard how God intervenes in our lives – and in our plans – so that even the best planned journey may suddenly take an unexpected turning. Are you ready for that in 2009?

The church, too, is planning ahead for 2009. I wonder what path we shall be led to follow and what goals we shall seek. I hope you will journey with us in all we seek to do and make our Christian journey this new year exciting, adventurous, enjoyable, memorable....

Last year the Olympics were seldom out of the news and rowing is one sport in which we in this country often achieve a measure of success. Someone once the Christian journey to rowers rowing with their backs to their goal and facing the coxswain who directs and encourages them in their endeavour; as in the race referred to in Hebrews 'we must keep our eyes on Jesus, who leads us and makes our faith complete'.

As you keep your eyes on Jesus may your journey through this New Year of 2009 be one of great joy and encouragement – even if by the Grace of God you do have to change your plans.

Geoffrey



Resolutions

May I start by wishing you all a very happy New Year.

Each New Year I find my biggest decision is whether to make any New Year Resolutions or not and unless I know of something that I am determined to do come-what-may then I am not particularly good at keeping them. I heard of someone whose New Year Resolution was to finish off what they had started, which I'm sure we would all feel was admirable. So they started with the sherry bottle and finished that and then moved onto the whisky bottle and But, seriously, I think we can all find something that we have started to do and not finished but there are also some things which we know we will never finish but rather than never start or give up we need to keep going. The latter category includes our knowledge of the Bible and in particular the teachings of Jesus and the guidance of Paul for the early church. We know that in order for these to be real and relevant to us we must read and re-read them but we so easily give up because something else comes into the picture and demands our time and attention.

The URC has recognised that as a Church we are much less biblically literate than previous generations seemed to be and has addressed this by developing the Vision4Life material and this, to me, seems to be a very appropriate resolution for Central to adopt for the New Year. I am proposing therefore to make use of the Vision4Life material with the Tuesday afternoon group during February and also in the Home Group which will start in February in North Anston but I hope that we are able to support at least one more home group as we journey together on this new adventure. But these groups will only prosper and flourish if there is regular and committed participation and a willingness to explore and share.

So as we start the New Year with a Vision for Life may we resolve to continue on our journey of discovery of the bible, become more committed to Jesus by learning from him, and be guided and encouraged by Paul as we start to understand more how the early church grew and developed and dealt with the issues of daily living, just as we do.

May God bless us as we continue to read his word and seek his guidance.

Bob

How does Central tick?

Central ticks with a beating heart and a determined spirit - of that I am sure, and it comprises a group of people who enjoy worshipping together but also enjoy being together in worship, and worship means more than attending the service each Sunday morning. I cannot adequately describe Central as a building where people meet to serve God or a group of people who have chosen to meet at the location we all know as Central, for it is more than that. Central is the people of God who have formed this fellowship of believers who live in various parts of Sheffield and further afield but who see their collective mission as being directed from this convenient location in Norfolk Street but who carry all the aspirations and challenges of this fellowship wherever they live and work.

Now these are just my post-Christmas thoughts and would need to be refined if they were to be used as anything other than a preamble to what I now want to say, but I am constantly amazed at the energy and dedication of so many people who in their different ways combine to make Central the centre of Christian love which I know it is. I know that we don't all always agree with each other and there are times when we don't always seem to get on with each other as we might and most of us have a bit of a grumble from time to time, but beneath all this, which I feel is superficial, is a depth of concern and commitment to each other and to the work of God to which we all feel called.

So how do we summarise the year which has just flown by?

First of all I feel it is appropriate to remember those we have lost during the year. In April we lost Dorothy Murphy, a much-loved long serving member who has been a loyal and dedicated member for many years. In July we lost two members, Mary Charlesworth and Gladys Cowlshaw. Mary had been unwell for some time and had finally moved to East Grinstead to be near her two nieces who were her nearest and very devoted relatives and she had settled well in her new surroundings and died peacefully. Gladys had also been unwell for some time and had latterly been well cared for in the Cambron House Nursing Home at Bramley which was near to her daughter and family but she started to fail around last Christmas. In September we lost Angela's mum, Lucy Booth, after a long period suffering from dementia. Prior to this illness Lucy had been a regular attender at Central but for the past eight years she had required full-time nursing care at Moorend Place. In November we lost our good friend George Shemeld after a brave fight against lung cancer.

But during this year we have been able to report a number of new arrivals and

early in the year we celebrated with Jennifer the arrival of Letitia, and then later in the year with Nikki on the arrival of Misha, and a sister to Zuna. In the summer we learned that Janat had given birth to a daughter, Kayla, and Sylvia and I had news to celebrate in October when our daughter Debbie gave birth to our first grand-daughter, Anna.

We also have a number of new friends coming along to worship with us on a regular basis and I hope that sometime in the New Year some may feel the time is right to come into membership.

For the first six months of the year we had Philip Baiden with us as part of his final year ministerial training and I personally enjoyed him being at Central both as a student and as a colleague. We used the opportunity to try something different at Easter when, if you recall, we reversed the layout of the church on Palm Sunday with worship led from the steps near the partition. On Maundy Thursday we changed the layout and had worship 'in-the-round' and then on Easter Day we resorted to the conventional layout but retaining the Palm Sunday furnishing to remind us of the pilgrimage journey of Holy Week. Philip was also very keen that we sampled the provisional material for Vision4Life and, based on the enthusiasm which this generated, we subscribed to the Vision4Life project and this will start to develop during the next few months.

The Growth Group which was started in 2007 continued to meet during 2008 and generated more new ideas some of which were put into practice during the year. The first was to hold a Bereavement Service and this took place on May 1st. It was a short service with an opportunity for worshippers to light candles in memory of loved ones and the response to the service was sufficiently positive for us to plan a similar service in January. Another suggestion from this group was to have an Advent Calendar with windows to open on each of the days when coffee was served and for us to use a brief opportunity to share something of the Christmas story to friends who had come in for refreshment.

This has been the first full year of the Mission and Care Group to which we belong and we have met quarterly with friends from Dore & Toley, Michael, Meersbrook, Gleadless, Emmanuel, St James and St Luke's, and we have been able to share our stories and see how we can support each other in both prayer and also in practical ways. We held a coffee morning one Friday to support Meersbrook in their fund-raising for their new church and, after an appeal from us for help at our coffee mornings, we now have three friends from these churches who are on our serving rotas. We hope that further links will develop as we get to know each other better.

We continued to hold some of the events which had been so successful previously, including Snooker Snax, Summer Snax, and the Model Rail & Bus Exhibition, and we hope that these will continue in 2009, along with other activities which may be new.

And I could go on!

Each one of us would write this summary very differently because we each see things from our own perspective and there is no way that I can adequately compose a complete summary of the year in the life of Central. But what my reflections have reminded me is that Central is vibrant and energetic even if some of you don't necessarily feel that way yourself. There is a lot done by a lot of people to make things happen the way they do, to make Central 'tick' and I appreciate all that is done by all who play their part to the full. I started to summarise all that happens by mentioning names but the danger in that is that I will fail to mention everyone and all that they do, but please accept my thanks in this very general way, on my behalf, and on behalf of the whole church, for the part you play in the life of Central in whatever capacity you are able to serve.

When I first came to Central one of the things which impressed me immediately was the value placed upon prayer and the belief in the power of prayer as I am convinced that this is the source of power and energy which we require as followers of Christ. I was delighted when I knew that there was a Prayer Tree in place which is activated immediately there is a pastoral concern reported and which spreads very rapidly around a significant number of church members. This is a powerful phenomenon and is something which can involve each one of us and I would encourage us all to be involved. Equally I would encourage you all to join in any of the Prayer Gatherings which take place at Central but more than that to spend time in private prayer on a regular basis for the church and for God to give guidance and his blessing.

The answer therefore to my original question – how does Central tick – is by the power of prayer giving us energy, enthusiasm, commitment, direction and support, through the love of Jesus and the blessing of the Holy Spirit, and I pray that God will continue to bless us in this way through 2009.

Bob



Joint Service in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity – Monday 19th January at 7pm

The decision was taken at the recent Churches Together council to hold a service on Monday 19th January, commencing 7pm, to take place at Central and to invite the sculptor Jean Parker to be our guest speaker. This will coincide with the exhibition of her alabaster sculptures, entitled Bald Sculptures, on the subject of the grieving process, which will be on display in the church sanctuary during January.

Please make a note of this date and let's make this a well supported joint service at the start of the New Year.

Bob

Carol Singing to the Housebound – Thursday December 18th.

Thank you to all who came and sang. There were two groups initially, one starting at Jasmin Court and then going to sing for Dorothy and Harry Bagguley, while the other group sang for the good folk at the Linley's followed by Geoff and Jean Wood. Both groups then joined forces at the home of Joan and Jack Shaw and then proceeded to the Manse firstly to sing to Mary and then to just sing together, assisted by mince pies and mulled wine. All in all we sang ever carol in the Bethlehem Carol Sheet at least once.

Advent Calendar

The Advent Calendar was opened each day from 2nd to the 20th December as planned and this seemed to meet with approval and, in some cases, amusement and discussion. The subjects shared during the 15 occasions were: Advent itself, the Advent Wreath, Christmas Cards, Christmas Tree, Decorations, Mince Pies, Santa Claus, Yule Log, why we should Teach the Children, Christmas Cracker, Angel, Star, Boxing Day, Wassailing and the 12 Days of Christmas. No-one seemed to mind the short interlude at 11am each morning and perhaps we can think how this opportunity could be used more regularly. Your comments and suggestions would be welcomed.

Mission and Care Group

The next meeting of MACS (Mission and Care Sheffield) is Wednesday 14th January at St James' URC commencing 7.30pm with refreshments served from 7pm. This is open to any members of Central and it would good for a greater number to represent our church. At this meeting Rev Dr Jim Coleman, the Synod Development Officer, will be present.

Bereavement Service – Thursday 22nd January at 10.30am

A special service will take place in the church for those who wish to remember a loved one. This will be a service lasting no longer than half an hour and will take place during the week when the church will be open to the public to see the display of sculptures as part of the 'Good Grief' exhibition.

After the service there will be tea and coffee served and we hope this will allow the opportunity for friendships to be made and for those with little or no church connection to be helped on their journey of faith.

Bob

Good Grief Sculpture Exhibition

The exhibition will be open to the public 10am – 3pm Monday 19 to Saturday 24 January. Other dates in January are available for private viewings or related church services for interested parties. For information and bookings please e-mail the church on info@centralurc.org.uk or ring 2721089

Jean Parker, the artist, is a member of a United Reformed Church in the Midlands. She has a family of 4 children. She trained originally as a teacher and only later as a mature student for 4 years at Coventry University gaining an M.A. where her affinity for sculpture and gift as a modeller and carver soon became apparent. She works in stone, clay and bronze. Her themes are universal. Religion, psychology and personal relationships provide an endless source of inspiration expressed in both figurative and abstract forms.

“Jean Parker’s work has a meditative, focussed quality which is rare at any time... to deal with the vulnerability of the human spirit” - Mandy Havers

This exhibition is her personal testimony of her journey through breast cancer.

It covers the 8 stages of grief:

Denial, Disbelief, Questioning, Anger, Depression, Acceptance, Healing and Peace.

Everyone goes through these stages when faced with any sort of loss, of health, of a loved one, of a job, home repossession and so it is very relevant to many people in the current crisis as well as those bereaved.

The exhibition comprises of 8 alabaster life-sized heads, 8 small terracotta heads, 8 small bronze resin heads, photographs and a DVD about the process of how Jean developed the sculptures.

Jean will be taking part in a question and answer session during the service at Central URC, 10.45am Sunday 18 January and again in the Churches Together Service for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity at 7 pm on Monday 19 January at which all are welcome. She will also be holding a workshop on the afternoon of Tuesday 20 January. The workshop has limited places so booking is essential. There will also be a Bereavement Service led by Revd Bob Heathcote in the Church at 11am Thursday 22 January to which all are welcome.

If you would like to help with stewarding on private viewings or on the open week please see Elaine Flaherty.



Dear Friend,

It's Christmas Eve and what better way to enjoy these special few days than in the knowledge that you have brought great joy to the life of a needy child this Christmas.

Your shoe box gift is a powerful reminder to underprivileged children around the world that they have not been forgotten this Christmas.

Smiles in Montenegro

This is certainly the case for Sergei, Spasoje and Silvia and their two other siblings, who live in a small apartment with their parents in Podgorica, Montenegro.

Like so many others who will receive shoe boxes this Christmas, the gifts were a special treat for these five children who would not usually receive presents. Silvia, aged 7, was thrilled with her set of colouring pens and began using them straight away.

Likewise, when her 6-year old brother, Stefan, spotted a toy monkey in Spasoje's box, it was love at first sight. His brother kindly let him keep it and Stefan clung tightly to the monkey from that moment on.

The smiles on the faces of these children was matched only by the look of contentment on the face of their Mother, who knows that this year her children will not have to experience a present-less Christmas.

New Slant on Gaining Eternal Life

Jesus was asked by a very rich young man “What good thing must I do to receive eternal life?” Jesus set out quite clearly what was required. The young man found the requirements too onerous and went away very sad. Well I have read two articles recently which would make it easier for him. All he would have to do is sing a lot and go to church services at least twice a week to help him on his way!

Heart Research UK planned a week-long campaign in December “Sing For Your Heart” in order to get people to sing and boost their health. Hundreds of experts from all over the world met recently at a two day conference to discuss the health benefits of singing. Apparently singing is an aerobic activity which increases oxygenation in the bloodstream and exercises major muscle groups in the upper body. It reduces stress levels through its action on the body’s endocrine system, which is linked to our sense of wellbeing. It helps cut the risk of heart disease, boosts the immune system, increases life expectancy, reduces wrinkles from exercising facial muscles, expands your chest muscles and straightens your back and shoulder muscles.

Then a study of 92,000 women aged between 50 and 80 over 8 years finds that attending at least two services a week cuts the chance of dying by 20%. They were all Christians and were from all denominations. The differences in death rates of such women could not be explained away by factors such as social support provided by church or that religious people lead healthier lifestyles. “There is something going on there that we don’t understand”, said the researchers.

We all know that there has been a lot going on for two thousand years for Christians of all denominations that we don’t understand. So, why not get healthy and sing for all you are worth and get to church services twice a week as another step towards eternal life!

Albert

Journey with a Purpose

A few weeks ago, when the country was being inspired to 'do things' to raise money for Children in Need, a resident at the Linley Homes, Mrs Edith Harlow, took up the challenge and decided to ask for sponsorship for the number of times she could walk round the drive at the Linley's. Not to be outdone, several other ladies chose to join her, including May Turton and Brenda Crinson from Central and Gwen Wainwright from Michael Church. Together they raised the very commendable sum of £154, which represented both effort and enjoyment on their part!

Well done!

Thanks

Mrs Gladys Hallows wishes to thank all the people who are supporting her during her illness. She is really grateful for the cards, messages, phone calls and visits that she receives, and knows that the prayers of many people are with her during difficult times.

It has been good to see her when she has managed to come to church on Sunday mornings.

The Bible – something to ponder

253 Roman Catholic Bishops from around the world gathered at the Vatican in the autumn to discuss just one topic – the Bible. From providing Scripture and interpreting the Bible to encouraging churchgoers to engage with its message, the Word of God was at the heart of the discussions. And the Bible Society was there.

The General Secretary of the fellowship of Bible Societies addressed the Assembly, telling them that Bible Societies are currently working on **646** translation projects around the world – seeking to serve the whole range of denominations. He explained how the Bible Societies are driven by the needs of more than 300 million people world-wide who still wait for even one book of the Bible in their first language.

‘Divine’ Inspiration

Divine Chocolate, the fair-trade chocolate company which is 45 per cent owned by a co-operative of cocoa farmers in Ghana, is ten years old. You can now find Divine chocolate in most major outlets - and Christian Aid has played its own part in the success story. In 1993, the liberalization of the cocoa market in Ghana meant that farmers were able to set up a co-operative to trade cocoa. It was called Kuapa Kokoo and soon developed a reputation for honesty and efficiency. By 1997 it had 25,000 members and voted to set up a chocolate company in the UK. It therefore needed some brave investors.

In Jubilee 2000 Drop the Debt campaign, Christian Aid joined The Body Shop in investing in this. The Department for International Development guaranteed a bank loan and in October 1998, Divine Chocolate’s first bar was launched. The chocolate market in the UK is worth £3.4 billion and is dominated by three companies that control 80 per cent of it. It was therefore a challenge to get products onto shelves. Christian Aid called on its network of committed individuals in 1999 and hundreds of supporters handed ‘Stock the Choc’ postcards into their local supermarket managers: Divine secured its first national listing.

Ten years on, Kuapa Kokoo has 45,000 members in 1,200 villages. It has used fair-trade ‘social premium’ payments of US\$150 per tonne to sink hundreds of water wells, has built seven schools, funded mobile medical clinics and an imaginative range of income-generation schemes such as cultivating giant snails - a delicacy in Ghana - crushing palm kernels to produce palm oil, and soap-making. But the real success is that Kuapa Kokoo is a robust and inspiring democratic business, trading 35,000 tonnes of cocoa (six per cent of Ghana’s output) and with an international reputation for quality.

Sophi Tranchell, managing director of Divine Chocolate Ltd, says ‘Divine wouldn’t be what it is today if Christian Aid hadn’t had the courage to invest in this fledgling company and if the fantastic supporters hadn’t gone out of their way to ask for Divine chocolate and to tell their friends and family about it. We want to thank you all for playing your part. We promise to carry on creating delicious chocolate from Kuapa’s cocoa, and hope you will continue to make a real difference by spreading the word.’

Taken from Christian Aid News, Winter 2008

Margaret Riley

From Billericay URC ‘Messenger’

Commitment for Life reports from their partners in Zimbabwe

Father Brian MacGarry writes:

‘ Here, we are pretty near the end of the queue for help with 9.5 million people facing hunger by the end of the year. Still, I couldn’t find much to buy in the supermarkets just now. Only the foreign currency shelves had anything on them, so my Z\$150,000 or so was useless. In case you aren’t bored stiff with talk of our record hyperinflation, the biggest bank note is Z\$50k, about today’s price of a loaf of bread, if you can find any. Inflation was around 15 – 16% per day in August, meaning prices multiplied by 10 in that month. If it hasn’t accelerated since then, that is only because they can’t print Z\$ fast enough, and not for lack of trying.

Still, we try to keep our little food relief scheme going. I know I am repeating myself, but every time I say it, it has been true: the need is greater than ever. The country has something like 2 – 5% of the grain seed and fertiliser needed to feed us all and it is needed when the rains come. We had the first preliminary showers this week, so we can expect the real rains to start a day or two after the new moon – say end of October.

What Christian Aid is doing to help for the future

Christian Aid has released emergency funds to provide seeds for farmers in Zimbabwe’s Midland province. The grant of more than £50,000 will provide 118 families and three primary schools with seed and conservation farming techniques for a year. Midland province is one of the worst affected regions of Zimbabwe: UN assessments show that it is on the brink of a severe food crisis.

‘The timing is key’, says William Anderson, Christian Aid’s country manager in Zimbabwe. ‘We are nearing the planting season for the next harvest and unless we seize the window of opportunity people will have no food. We will see people dying of starvation’.

The UN has warned that half of the country’s population will soon be in need of food aid and medical assistance. John Holmes, the UN’s humanitarian chief, called for urgent measures to provide seed and fertiliser for next year’s harvest to avoid millions more people becoming reliant on aid. Christian Aid is providing

special drought tolerant seeds. These will be combined with farming techniques that preserve water and improve the soil's capacity to retain water. CA has been using these techniques in Zimbabwe for some years now – in parts of Matabeleland farmers have improved their yields by up to 50%.

'Soil is the main asset of 80% of the people in the communal areas so unless proper land management techniques are used, the cycle of poverty will never be broken', says Mr Anderson. 'That is why this type of intervention is so crucial for the immediate and long term benefit of the farming households we work with'. The funds will also provide nutrition for those living with HIV and alternate sources of income by the sale of surplus produce.

Good news for later, but.....A news item, from November

The UN Food Agency says it has started cutting rations to four million people in Zimbabwe. The World Food Programme says it has had no response at all to its \$140 million appeal to feed Zimbabwe. WFP warns that food will run out entirely by January, unless fresh support is provided as it takes six weeks to reach rural areas. Up to half the 10 million population will need food before the next harvest is expected in April, donors say.

A Prayer, remembering the people of Zimbabwe

'Hear the Good News of the Kingdom', we say, but there are those who cannot hear because their world is filled with the sounds of suffering and for them there is only bad news.

And so we remember those to whom we are called to bring Good News: those for whom each day brings more bad news; those whose relationships bring not love but misery; those whose work is not an expression of their talent or skill but a battle to provide for themselves and their dependants.

We remember those who are deprived of the essentials of life; who live in poverty so desperate it is hard for us even to imagine; who live with pain and sickness because no medical help, is available to them; who have to rely on their children to be their providers.

We have heard Good news; let us share it, and let us work to ensure that the news we bring is truly good.

Refugee Council Updates

3 - 16 December Asylum and refugees made the headlines as The Chief Inspector of Prisons reported on failings at Oakington detention centre, the High Court ruled that the Home Office should review its blanket policy of not allowing asylum seekers to work, the Home Office decided not to appeal an important country guidance case for Zimbabwe and a campaign for free English lessons for asylum seekers was launched.

- A report released by the Chief Inspector of Prisons, Anne Owers, into Oakington detention centre found that half the detainees do not feel safe, that the use of force has increased and that staff is inadequately trained. Staff were unaware that one detainee had been there for two years. The accommodation, in particular the detainee departure unit, was in an unacceptable condition, and the detainees lacked adequate welfare support.

Donna Covey, Chief Executive of the Refugee Council, called the report's findings "depressing and disturbing", especially in the light of the Refugee Council no longer having a presence at the centre.

"We have grave concerns about what is happening to people now that we are not there to provide that independent support."

- The Home Office will not be appealing the Asylum and Immigration tribunal decision on a recent country guidance case on Zimbabwe, which found that anyone who is unable to demonstrate support for or loyalty to Zanu-PF or the regime is at risk on return to Zimbabwe. Decisions will still be made on a case-to-case basis.
- A test case could see more people seeking asylum allowed to work after a judge ruled that the Home Office needed to review its blanket policy of refusing permission to work. The claimant in the case was an Eritrean man who had been waiting for a decision on his asylum application for seven years. Mr Justice Blake ruled that a blanket ban was 'unlawfully over-broad and unjustifiably detrimental to claimants who have had to wait as long as this claimant has'.
- The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) has launched the A Right to a Voice campaign to persuade the UK government to reinstate free English lessons for people seeking asylum. The campaign will build on existing voluntary support to help people learn English.

Alan Tuckett, Chief Executive of NIACE, said: "Newly arrived asylum seekers who

begin to learn the language from day one are more likely to learn quickly and efficiently and therefore be able to work and contribute to the economy when permitted to do so.”

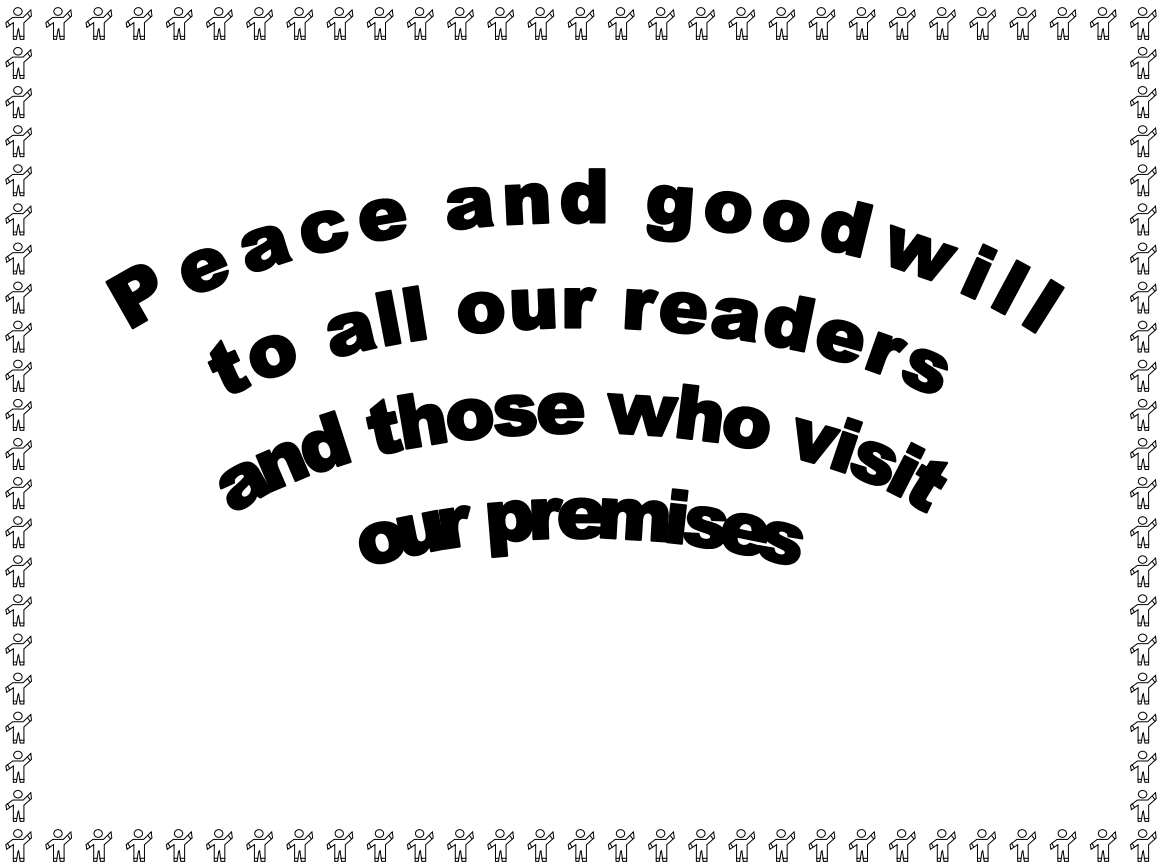
- A survey of 172 local authorities in England and Wales found as many as 389 young people who had gone missing from care homes. Six councils said that they did not keep track of the data, meaning the total figure could be higher. More than a quarter of the missing children are unaccompanied asylum seeking children, sparking fears that they have been targeted by traffickers after arriving in the UK.
- A report by the think-tank Centre for Social Justice, founded by former Conservative leader Iain Duncan-Smith, recommends that refused asylum seekers should continue to receive housing and financial support for up to six months before they are removed. The report also says that people who are refused permission to stay in the UK but are also unable to be returned should be given a temporary licence to work.

Mr Duncan-Smith said, “The policy of making asylum seekers destitute is mean and nasty and has not worked.”

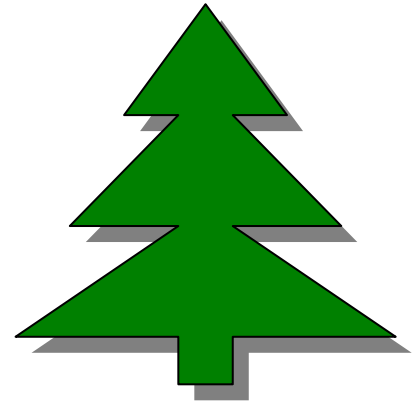
- A woman who had suffered rape and torture in Cameroon and was detained by the Home Office for six months has been awarded £38,000 in damages by the High Court after a judge ruled the Home Office had failed to ensure a medical examination took place before the woman was detained. The rules state that those who may have been victims of torture should not be held in detention. Judge Kenneth Parker QC said, “Detention is stressful for anyone, whatever their past experience, but torture survivors are particularly vulnerable to increased mental illness when detained.”
- The European Commission has proposed to reduce pressure on popular entry states such as Malta or Greece by delaying transfers of people seeking asylum back to the country of entry delayed by six months. Current rules state that asylum applications must be dealt with in the first EU country a person arrives in.

The changes will also allow EU countries to suspend the transfer if they are concerned that the person will not receive adequate protection or access to correct asylum procedure in the country of entry. The EU Justice Commissioner, Jacques Barrot, said that the EU should “provide higher standards of protection and a more level playing field” and “ensure that detention is used only in exceptional cases”.

- The Times ran a feature on the confusion many healthcare workers have over allowing refused asylum seekers access to free healthcare. In April 2008 the High Court ruled that refused asylum seekers should be entitled to free healthcare, but many have difficulty accessing it as health professionals and patients are confused over what they are entitled to.
- Refused Congolese asylum seekers lost their appeal against deportation in a ruling at the Court of Appeal.
- Fiona Mactaggart told BBC Radio 4 that thousands of Zimbabwean refugees are “trapped” in the UK, unable to go home or work here. “What I’ve been asking the government to do is give them the right to work – nothing more, nothing less.”
- A plane with 49 refused asylum seekers on board was refused permission to land in Kurdistan. One passenger reported that refugees “were harming themselves to get off the flight.”



The 12 days of Christmas



- 1st day Partridge in a pear tree
True love refers to God and his son Jesus
- 2nd day Two turtle doves
Old and Testaments
- 3rd day Three French hens
Faith, hope and love
- 4th day Four calling birds
Four Gospels
- 5th day Five gold rings
First five books of the Bible.
- 6th day Six geese a-laying
Six days of creation
- 7th day Seven swans a-swimming
Seven gifts of the Holy Spirit
- 8th day Eight maids a-milking
Eight beatitudes
- 9th day Nine ladies dancing
Nine fruits of the spirit
- 10th day Ten lords a-leaping
Ten commandments
- 11th day Eleven pipers piping
Eleven faithful apostles
- 12th day Twelve drummers drumming
Twelve points of belief in the Apostles' Creed.

Prayer Focus

Week One – As we come to the beginning of another **New Year** which is so far untrodden, consider the challenges that it will bring to us, both in our own lives and as a church family. There is much to give us pause for thought in this newsletter: situations both at home and abroad – some so immense that we feel they are beyond us, others much easier to address. Pray that we may never feel overwhelmed - because God would not do that to us. Pray that we may do our bit to help wherever and whenever we see the need as we make our footprints in 2009.



Week Two – Whilst next week is the time when the church will be open to the public to come and look at the **Bald Statements Sculpture Exhibition**, we will be able to study them for ourselves during this time. Remember the reason why they were created and pray for all those people who can identify with the feelings that they express. Pray that they may come to the final one and feel the attainment of peace that it expresses.

Week Three - Earlier in the magazine we were reminded that this is the **Week of Prayer for Christian Unity**. The service is at Central and we will be making good use of our exhibition. Jean Parker will be sharing something of what led her to create her **Bald Statements**. Pray for the fellowship that we will share with the other city centre churches at this time.

Also on Thursday there will be a **Bereavement Service** using the sculptures as the focus. Pray for those who come to share in this time that they may see the hope that is there for all those who have faith in Jesus.

Week Four – This Sunday many of our church family are to share a meal at lunchtime. This will be good time of fellowship away from Central when we can chat whilst eating food that has been prepared by someone else, with no washing up! Pray for this time and for the other opportunities that are available for us to meet, learn and discuss our faith.