

# Central

United Reformed Church



# GOOD GRIEF

---

How many times do we use this expression I wonder? For me, it's something that trips off my tongue so many times and so easily. I don't suppose I'd ever really thought what it meant in real terms. Grief is a dreadful state to be in so how can it be described as 'good'?

As I journey through the grieving process, I can't think I would ever describe any single part of it as 'good', quite the opposite. It is unbelievably difficult and quite the most devastating, saddest and toughest part of my life so far. And yet, as we have seen in the exhibition of sculptures in church this month, grief **can** be described as good provided we go through the various processes and don't get stuck in any one of the emotions for too long.

Jean Parker, the sculptor, experienced breast cancer three years ago and the exhibition depicts her journey through the process. She has made a video explaining her feelings, showing the small maquettes she made to express what was happening to her emotionally during the course of her treatment. She is so positive by the end of the video but has obviously travelled through the valley of the shadow of death emotionally. She is just anxious to share her experience with other folk in the hope of assisting them to deal positively with some of the darkest moments in their lives.

Before I sat down to write this article I was at church. Bob conducted a service for people who have been bereaved, and although there were only a small number of us I think, without doubt, we have all been touched by what we have seen, both with the video and the sculptures. I can't speak for anyone else - and I can't decide where I am on the journey either! Certainly I have been in many of the places Jean has been and I think I am going in the right direction, but I have to say that it has helped me to realise that I am not abnormal and that there is no time factor in the process.

We as Christians are so very fortunate, for whatever journey we are on, we know that we don't travel alone, our Heavenly Father is always with us, weeping with us, holding us, guiding us and at times, carrying us when we are unable to carry on. A verse in the Bible has helped me on my journey – 'The eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms'. Deut.33.27

So, if you haven't already visited the exhibition and watched the video, please make the effort to do so. It can be related to so many aspects of life and it might just be something each one of us can draw upon when the going gets really tough.

***Ann Hammond***

## ***The Bald Statements Sculpture Exhibition***

---

Throughout January we have had on display the sculptures which formed the Bald Statements exhibition and these have brought a mixed response which is perhaps not all that surprising. The theme of the exhibition has been the grief process and thus some of the sculptures are not pretty and are not particularly comfortable but they do tell a story and do express the emotions which most of us go through when we are coping with grief and loss.

During the time the exhibition was open to the public it was interesting to hear what people felt about the exhibition. Most people when they first studied the various sculptures were uncomfortable at what they saw and were sometimes quite shocked by them but once they had seen the DVD with Jean Parker (the sculptor) expressing her journey as she coped with the diagnosis and treatment for breast cancer then their understanding changed. It became clear very quickly that it was essential to see the DVD and then take the journey through the sculptures to gain an understanding of what they were trying to express.

Judging by the number of positive comments written in the visitor's book it is clear that the exhibition has proved to be helpful to a lot of people and it has reinforced my view that it was very beneficial not just for those who had been bereaved or had suffered a major illness. It is clear that the sculptures also spoke to those who had lost their job, who had lost a good friend, and who had lost faculties as they had grown older.

My only sadness was that Jean Parker herself was unable to be with us as planned due to her being ill with pneumonia but she sent a lovely card expressing her own sadness at not being able to come along and I have taken photographs of the exhibition to send to her together with my thanks and the thanks of the church for allowing us to have this exhibition.

I would like to thank everyone who played their part in the exhibition by being stewards, to David for sorting out the necessary equipment for the DVD to be shown during the service on the 19<sup>th</sup>, and particularly to Elaine for making all the arrangements necessary for this to take place.

**Bob**

## **Joint Service in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity – Monday 19<sup>th</sup> January at 7pm**

---

The pattern of this service was very different from what had been envisaged due to Jean Parker being ill and not being able to come to Sheffield but I am enormously grateful to Bishop David who offered to share some thoughts with us linking the theme of the sculpture exhibition with the subject of Christian unity. As I had originally planned for much of the service to be an informal interview with Jean I chose instead to show the DVD of the sculptures and then for us to reflect on the thoughts which this generated.

Bishop David then took us on a journey as he first identified the themes of the sculpture exhibition, from denial through to peace, and then he related each of the eight emotions to the ecumenical movement with particular emphasis that the journey is not always linear but sometimes feels more like a game of snakes and ladders with steady moves forward and occasional major slides backwards, just as can be the journey dealing with grief.

I know from the many comments which came my way that this service was enjoyable, meaningful and deeply spiritual, and we were very blessed to have had the experience and the wisdom of Bishop David which he was willing to share with us.

I hope that we have in some way helped the ecumenical movement in the centre of Sheffield take another step forward and I would like to thank all those from Central who came and worshipped that evening.

**Bob**

## **MISSION & CARE GROUP**

---

The Mission and Care Group meeting on Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> January at St James' was very well attended and was a most enjoyable experience. There was a real feeling that we were starting to get things together and it was good to share our news and our thoughts about mission. Kathryn Redfearn (nee Swift), who is Church Secretary of St James' chaired the meeting and gave us an update of their activities and mission opportunities in their multi-faith environment and it was too good to hear all that was going on in Pitsmoor and how St James' was a real community church. We also had present with us the Synod Development Officer, Jim Coleman, and amongst other things he enthused about the various TLS courses and strongly encouraged us to look at what was on offer and maybe consider doing one of the TLS Lite options together as a MAC group.

The next meeting of the Mission and Care Group will take place at St Luke's Lodge Moor on Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> April, at 7.30pm, with refreshments served from 7pm. All are welcome.

## **February Services**

---

The service on February 1<sup>st</sup> will be conducted by Brian Worthington but it will not include communion. Instead we will celebrate communion on February 8<sup>th</sup> when our minister Bob will be leading worship.

On February 15<sup>th</sup> both morning and evening services will be conducted by our minister Bob and following the morning service there will be a Church Meeting in the Norfolk Room. The evening service at 6.30pm will be the last of our monthly evening communion services of the current pattern and it would be fitting for there to be a good congregation on this occasion.

On February 22<sup>nd</sup> Margaret Dale will lead worship as Bob and Sylvia will be in Cranleigh at their grand-daughter's baptism service.

## **Bible Journey**

---

Each Tuesday, from 10<sup>th</sup> to the 24<sup>th</sup> February Bob will be leading a Bible Journey at 1.30pm in the Norfolk Room. This is a continuation from what was undertaken on October and December but we will now start to look at the books of the Old Testament from Genesis onwards.

## **Vision4Life**

---

The Vision4Life material is now starting to become available and a study group will take place on alternate Monday evenings starting February 16<sup>th</sup>. These will be at 8pm at the home of Jo and Andy in North Anston and will be led by Bob. If anyone is interested in joining this group please see Bob or Jo and we can then discuss travel arrangements.

## **Junior Church**

---

By popular demand there will be from time to time a short presentation by Junior Church staff and/or members at the end of the morning service so that we can celebrate all the good work which is taking place within our Junior Church. As I have explained to Dawn and other teachers the pattern of our morning service has now so evolved that there is the opportunity for them to rejoin us towards the end of the service and share with us what they have learned and discovered without any major changes to our pattern of worship. Hopefully this can thus be used flexibly and creatively and I am looking forward to the first such presentation for quite some time.

**Bob**

## Marmalade etc. 2008

---

The sale of marmalade this year totalled £142.50.

The charities that have benefited are:-

The Leprosy Mission, Fair Trade, the Children's Hospital, Bluebell Wood Hospice, Macmillan Nurses, Meersbrook Church, ASSIST, our church fund

The sale of scarves comes to £25 so far. This was split between Assist and the Church fund.

The Beetle Drive in November raised £93 for The Leprosy Mission and a cheque for £227.30 which includes personal donations from members was sent to The Leprosy Mission on 5<sup>th</sup> January.

Thank you to everyone.

Christine Holland.

*(I think that thanks must go to Christine for all the effort she puts in to her marmalade making and scarf knitting that has created this wonderful total – Ed)*



## Small coin collection

---

The amount collected up to last Sunday is £173. We are very grateful to Alan and other tin shakers who encourage us to part with all our weighty copper and other coins. It is quite amazing just how much comes in in such a short space of time.

Well done all!

---

## What is a grandparent? Taken from papers written by a class of 8-year olds

Grandparents are a lady and a man who have no little children of their own. They like other people's.

A grandfather is a man, & a grandmother is a lady!

Grandparents don't have to do anything except be there when we come to see them. They are so old they shouldn't play hard or run. It is good if they drive us to the shops and give us money

When they take us for walks, they slow down past things like pretty leaves and caterpillars.

They show us and talk to us about the colours of the flowers and also why we shouldn't step on 'cracks.'

They don't say, 'Hurry up.'

Usually grandmothers are fat but not too fat to tie your shoes.

They wear glasses and funny underwear.

They can take their teeth and gums out.

Grandparents don't have to be smart.

They have to answer questions like 'Why isn't God married?' and 'How come dogs chase cats?'

When they read to us, they don't skip. They don't mind if we ask for the same story over again.

Everybody should try to have a grandmother, especially if you don't have television because they are the only grownups who like to spend time with us.

They know we should have snack time before bed time, and they say prayers with us and kiss us even when we've acted bad.

A 6-year-old was asked where his grandma lived.

"Oh," he said, "She lives at the airport, and when we want her, we just go get her. Then when we're done having her visit, we take her back to the Airport."

Grandpa is the smartest man on earth! He teaches me good things, but I don't get to see him enough to get as smart as him!

## Lucky Dog

---

**Anyone who has pets will really like this. You'll like it even if you don't and you may even decide you need one!**

Mary and her husband Jim had a dog named 'Lucky.' Lucky was a real character. Whenever Mary and Jim had company come for a weekend visit they would warn their friends to not leave their luggage open because Lucky would help himself to whatever struck his fancy. Inevitably, someone would forget and something would come up missing.

Mary or Jim would go to Lucky's toy box in the basement and there the treasure would be, amid all of Lucky's other favourite toys. Lucky always stashed his finds in his toy box and he was very particular that his toys stay in the box.

It happened that Mary found out she had breast cancer. Something told her she was going to die of this disease . . . in fact, she was just sure it was fatal.

She scheduled the double mastectomy, fear riding her shoulders. The night before she was to go to the hospital she cuddled with Lucky. A thought struck her . . . what would happen to Lucky? Although the three-year-old dog liked Jim, he was Mary's dog through and through. If I die, Lucky will be abandoned, Mary thought. He won't understand that I didn't want to leave him. The thought made her sadder than thinking of her own death.

The double mastectomy was harder on Mary than her doctors had anticipated and Mary was hospitalised for over two weeks. Jim took Lucky for his evening walk faithfully, but the little dog just drooped, whining and miserable.

Finally the day came for Mary to leave the hospital. When she arrived home, Mary was so exhausted she couldn't even make it up the steps to her bedroom. Jim made his wife comfortable on the couch and left her to nap. Lucky stood watching Mary but he didn't come to her when she called. It made Mary sad but sleep soon overcame her and she dozed.

When Mary woke for a second she couldn't understand what was wrong. She couldn't move her head and her body felt heavy and hot. But panic soon gave way to laughter when Mary realized the problem. She was covered, literally blanketed, with every treasure Lucky owned! While she had slept, the sorrowing dog had made trip after trip to the basement bringing his beloved mistress all his favourite things in life. He had covered her with his love.

Mary forgot about dying. Instead she and Lucky began living again, walking further and further together every day. It's been 12 years now and Mary is still cancer-free. Lucky? He still steals treasures and stashes them in his toy box but Mary remains his greatest treasure.

Remember . . . live every day to the fullest. Each minute is a blessing from God. And never forget . . . the people who make a difference in our lives are not the ones with the most credentials, the most money, or the most awards. They are the ones that care for us.

If you see someone without a smile today give them one of yours! Live simply.

Love seriously. Care deeply. Speak kindly. Leave the rest to God.



# A Prayer for Gaza

O God our prayer today is more like an inarticulate cry and our hearts ache.

We saw a man in Gaza weeping beside his three little dead children - innocent beauty now bloodied in death

A massacre that started on the eve of Holy Innocents Day claims more and more women and children's lives.

UN schools bombed, where families had sought refuge; the people of Gaza with nowhere to run.

They are imprisoned under a harsh siege, bombed by the most sophisticated new weapons and then attacked in their own streets and houses.

O God where can they find refuge. No one has listened to their suffering for over 60 years.

O God of the oppressed and suffering we see you in the wounded of Gaza - we hear your cries of pain - we share your tears. May we never be silent in the face of such pain.

O God may world leaders at last hear the cries of the children and the suffering of Gaza.

May the siege be removed. The gates be opened. May they be allowed to have food, water, medicine, human rights, dignity, justice, democracy.

O God hear the cry of Gaza.

May freedom come - may healing come - may hope come.

May they be treated as we would like to be treated.

And we pray for the people of Israel because there will be no peace for them until the occupation ends and the siege is over - no peace for them until justice comes to Palestine.

And we pray that peace will come soon and that each person will recognise the value of the other and Israel and Palestine become a Holy Land once more.

**Amen.**

# From The Chair and Trustees of Assist Sheffield

---

## Urgent appeal for funds

As a supporter of Assist, you already know of the work we do helping refused asylum seekers in Sheffield, and your contribution to this work is what has made it possible. What you may not know is that our work has grown over the last two years and we now support around **70 of the most destitute refused asylum seekers**, mostly with welfare payments (usually £20 a week) and some with accommodation, either with hosts or in our four houses.

We also run an advocacy service to help our clients access support they may be entitled to, or move their claims forward. And our help desk every Wednesday gives general advice and guidance to many more than we are able to help financially, by signposting them to other agencies, helping them to fill in forms, or even to make sense of all the paperwork they receive.

We also campaign as individuals about the plight of asylum seekers at every opportunity.

In 2008 -09 we will have spent around **£130 thousand** on this work. About half of this was from grants, and the other half from donations from our many supporters. But like everyone else, we have been hit by the financial crisis, and for us the effects are particularly desperate. Much of our grant funding ends before March 2009, and we have seen our donations reduce significantly in the last two months.

Our direct payments to destitute asylum seekers cost us **£1300 a week**, and running our small office and paying our administrator costs around another £500. On top of this we pay the costs of four houses for asylum seekers, as well as small grants to volunteers who take asylum seekers into their homes. We also provide bus passes for some of our clients. It would

be impossible to carry on all our work without an office or a paid administrator to back up our 50+ volunteers. We are therefore faced with the deeply distressing need to reduce the amount we give to our clients in grants, while aware that even the current £20 a week is inadequate. Next financial year will bring even tougher decisions unless we can raise a significant sum of money.

We need to raise a further £15,000 to maintain our welfare payments at their current rate until the end of March, and at least £70,000 over and above our regular donations in 2009-10 to carry on our work at anything like the current level of activity. We are working hard to raise some of what we need through grants and events, but all funders are hard pressed.

**Please can you help us?** We recognise that this is a very hard time, both for peoples' income and also for all the other charities that deserve support. But your help and the efforts of our committed volunteers have enabled us to build up a strong support system for these destitute and desperate people among us, who otherwise feel friendless. Please help us to keep going.

**Please don't forget Gift Aid.**

## **Central's Help**

---

Shirley Newman and I continue to meet with those Failed Asylum seekers who come for their £20 aid each week. We would be delighted to receive any donations either financial or in kind to help make things easier for them. Gifts of basic toiletries – toothpaste, brushes, razors, shaving cream etc are always welcome and accepted with gratitude when we have any available.

## Refugee Council News Review

---

The Refugee Council's News Review rounds up media coverage of issues relating to refugees and asylum for anyone who wants to keep up to date with the latest developments.

17 December - 5 January

A Refugee Council report revealed how UK border controls in other countries risk sending refugees back to danger, church leaders condemned UK asylum policies in their Christmas messages, a Refugee Council volunteer won an award for her campaigning and a new film will be based on the true story of two asylum campaigners.

### **Refugee Council report reveals border controls place people in danger**

A Refugee Council report, *Remote Controls: How UK border controls are endangering the lives of refugees* shows external UK border controls are placing people in danger.

A wide ranging series of interviews, coupled with fieldwork in Turkey, one of the common transit countries to the UK, revealed that UK border controls may result in refugees being sent back to the country of persecution. Officials employed by the British government and stationed out in transit countries are briefed to stop people coming to the UK without proper documents, despite the fact that refugees are generally unable to get documents from the governments that persecute them. These officials, and the airline personnel who work with them, have no method of identifying those who desperately need to get to safety.

Donna Covey, Chief Executive of the Refugee Council, said: “We have no idea how many people we are sending to their deaths, by stopping them from getting on a plane, or by refusing to let them leave a country without a visa.”

## **Refugee Council volunteer wins award**

Refugee Council volunteer Yeukai Taruvinga has won the Campaigner of the Year award.

Yeukai, a refused asylum seeker who has been previously detained, has been volunteering with the Refugee Council using a number of her skills particularly in support of work around the issues destitution and permission to work.

Yeukai wrote about her experiences seeking asylum in Britain from Zimbabwe in The Guardian.

## **Church leaders condemn UK asylum policy in Christmas messages**

The Bishop of Bradford and the Archbishop of Wales were among those religious leaders who condemned government policy in Christmas speeches.

Speaking about those families living in destitution, the Archbishop of Wales, Barry Morgan warned: “A country is ultimately judged by what it does with its poorest people.”

## **Australia opens off-shore detention centre**

A detention centre for refugees has been opened on Christmas Island by the Australian government, 1,000 miles off the mainland coast.

Graeme Innes, Australia’s human rights commissioner said he thought the centre was a “very inappropriate way to treat people who, whilst not obeying all the rules of Australia, have come from very traumatic and difficult situations in countries overseas.”

## **Kindness Offensive work for refugees**

A group of four housemates in London distributed tonnes of toys and food this Christmas. Calling themselves the Kindness Offensive, the friends have previously distributed 25 tonnes of food to destitute refugees, as well as organising a trip to the Moscow State Circus for someone and persuading Yamaha to donate a guitar to a boy.

One of the group, David Goodfellow, commented: “Meeting asylum-seekers has opened up our eyes to a shocking world. These people are forced to live on handouts because they are not allowed to work. The handouts they do get often lack some of the most basic items that we take for granted like nappies, toothpaste or condoms. And all of this is happening right under our noses or outside our front door.”

## **BBC investigation reveals nearly 140 missing children**

Concerns over protection for trafficked children have been raised after a BBC investigation found 138 children, many from abroad, had gone missing from social services in the East of England in 2008.

## **Sea crossings to Italy continue over winter**

Over the Christmas period, over 1,700 people arrived on the Italian island of Lampedusa. According to UNHCR, many are refugees from Eritrea and Somalia, who cross by sea in terrible conditions via Libya and the Mediterranean.

Laura Boldrini from UNHCR told The Independent: “The percentage of asylum seekers among the new arrivals is getting higher and higher. Italy received 25,000 asylum seekers in 2008, and many of those came from across the Mediterranean. Libya has no asylum system to guarantee the protection of people in need and has not signed the Geneva accords on asylum.”

## **Many refugees are living in unsafe housing, charity warns**

The Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture has warned that many refugees housed in private accommodation are living in unsafe, insecure and unsanitary conditions.

In one case a mother and her two young sons have been living with an infestation of bedbugs and rats for over six months.

Sonya Sceats, Policy & Advocacy Officer for the Medical Foundation, said: "The Government is not getting value for money from its contracts with private landlords. They set out very high standards and these standards are simply not being met by these providers.

"The UK is party to treaties that include the right to an adequate standard of housing; the sorts of examples we're talking about fall short."

## **Shelter for refugees opens in Calais**

Temperatures in Calais have dropped so low that the Calais authorities have given permission for a shelter run by local charities to provide food and warmth to refugees in the area.

## **Local asylum campaigners' story to be filmed**

Two campaigners who organised lookouts and warnings of dawn immigration raids on their Glasgow housing scheme are to have their story brought to the big screen.

*Kingsway* will be made by Ken Loach's company Sixteen Films and feature campaigners Jean Donnachie and Noreen Real as its heroes.

Mrs Real said: "I feel very happy about it, but we were only doing for asylum seekers what we would do for any neighbour that was being treated the way they were being treated."

## **Sheffield City of Sanctuary**

---

### **Home at last – making sanctuary a reality in Sheffield**

An event to share creative methods for welcoming and including people seeking sanctuary in your organisation.

Wednesday 4th March, 2pm-5pm  
Sheffield Quaker Meeting House, 10 St James Street, S1 2EW

The event will include short presentations from organisations in different sectors which have found innovative ways to involve refugees and people seeking sanctuary. There will also be opportunities to share your own examples of good practice, and to build links with other local organisations to enable partnership working.

Representatives of all local voluntary, statutory, faith and private sector organisations are welcome to attend. Attendance is free, but please book your place in advance by contacting us.

---

### **We stopped deportation of Abdulmajid and the Thulambo family**

Abdulmajid Hassan Ismail's deportation to Sudan has been stopped. His last minute reprieve [Abdulmajid was at Heathrow airport when the Home Office granted a judicial review] happened due to the pressure put on his MP and the Home Office by supporters, and he has asked us to forward his thanks.

Priviledge Thulambo and her daughters were seized from their home in Sheffield to be deported on December 29th . This was stopped on the day by an application for a judicial review, but we still have work to do to ensure the family are released from Yarlswood and allowed to return to Sheffield.

Email: [ [savethethulambos@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:savethethulambos@hotmail.co.uk) ] or join the facebook group for more information.

## **Bicycle maintenance workshops at Brambles Housing Co-op**

First Wednesday of the month, 3pm onwards, 82 Andover Street, Burngreave. 'Bring your broken bike and we can fix it together. If you don't have a bike we can try and fix one up for you.

.Donations of bikes / bits of bikes also very welcome!' **(This is the important bit for us!)**

For more information \*contact Jeff on 07931 355 071\*

## **Food for Thought and Voices in Exile**

Sheffield Conversation Club publication Food for Thought contains recipes from asylum seekers and refugees in Sheffield from countries such as Afghanistan, Burma and Zimbabwe.

\*Voices in Exile is a collection of poems written by refugees and asylum seekers with poems also by River Wolton, the Derbyshire poet laureate. Costs are £3.50 and £5 respectively plus £1 P&P.

Please email [ [conclubpublications@googlemail.com](mailto:conclubpublications@googlemail.com) ] with your address and the number of copies you would like. Cheques should be made payable to Conversation Club and sent to John Baker, 1 Carr Bank Close, Sheffield, S11 7FJ

\* (I have a copy should anyone wish to see what it has to offer – Ed)

# Prayer Focus

**Week One – Poverty and Homelessness Action Week** is from Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> January to Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> February. **Get Fair** is a new alliance of charities and faith groups, from Save the Children, Oxfam and Help the Aged to Church Action on Poverty, Housing Justice and the Muslim Council of Great Britain. They have come together with the simple message – it's time to Get Fair. Pray this week for all those for whom life is not fair, for those who are trying to do something and those in power who can do something.

**Week Two** – Take time this week to think about **all the things that take place within our fellowship**. Look at the Sunday leaflet as a reminder. They will be a mixture of worship, learning, caring for our people and those who come in from outside, and looking after our building. Together they make up what we are all about. Pray that we will all do our best in supporting in any way that we can. It is wonderful how a little effort can make quite a difference to others.

**Week Three** – Because of the space we have available at Central we are privileged to be able to share it with groups who are working with people who need support. This is particularly so with the **Dementia Café** which is held on the third Friday of each month. This provides an opportunity for carers and the cared for to come into a safe and welcoming environment where they can talk to others. This is a very special offering of friendship – pray for all those for whom this provides a lifeline of support and for those who provide it.

**Week Four** – This is the week of Shrove Tuesday and Ash Wednesday as we come to the beginning of **Lent**. Let us remember the significance of this time in the calendar of the Church and pray that we will use the time to prepare ourselves over the coming weeks for the sadness and triumph of Good Friday and Easter Day. How will you prepare?

