ACT TOGETHER

Ashram Community Trust Issue 102 Autumn 2026
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May Weekend 2026, Foxhill, Cheshire

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CELEBRATING THE SEASON OF CREATION 2026



On a breezy Tuesday afternoon after the morning rain had cleared away, a small group from Falmouth & Penryn Christians Together Justice & Peace Group met in Tregoniggie Woodland for a time of prayer and reflection. While some wondered what the Season of Creation had to do with Justice & Peace, it soon became apparent that it had a lot to do with it! Especially as this year's theme is *Living Water* (based on the text from Ezekiel 47:9-12).

What follows is largely extracted from the resources provided by the *Laaudato Si* movement (which grew out of Pope Francis' seminal work on our responsibility for earth, our common home), and which were used as part of our reflective prayer time in Tregoniggie Woodland in Falmouth.

Each year from September 1 to October 4, the Christian family unites for this worldwide celebration of prayer and action to protect our common home. It is a special season where we celebrate God as Creator, and acknowledge Creation as the divine continuing act that summons us as collaborators to love and care for the gift of all that is created. As followers of Christ from around the globe, we share a common call to care for Creation. We are co-creatures and part of all that God has made. Our well-being is interwoven with the well-being of the Earth.

We rejoice in this opportunity to safeguard our common home and all beings who share it with us.

Reflection by Rev. Dr. Anne Burghardt, General Secretary of The Lutheran World Federation

"Ezekiel's vision of 'Living Water' invites us to see God's life-giving grace and sacramental presence flowing into places of desolation, renewing both creation and human community. In a world facing a severe ecological crisis, this river becomes a call to repent from systems that exploit land, water, and vulnerable peoples. Creation is not a commodity but a communion of interdependent life entrusted to our care. The witness of women theologians and faith actors on the frontlines of ecological crisis deepens this vision by naming how environmental destruction is intertwined with harm that falls hardest on women and girls. We recognize the unjust burdens many still carry in their daily struggle for water, health and survival. At the same time, we honour women's wisdom, agency, and resilience in protecting water and life. The Lutheran World Federation affirms that justice for creation cannot be separated from justice for people, especially those most impacted by climate change. The Season of Creation invites us to let God's living water reshape our communities into spaces of healing, equity, and hope, both tangible and eternal."

Between prayers and readings, we sang the worship song *Peace is flowing like a river:*

Peace is flowing like a river,
Flowing out through you and me;
Flowing out into the desert,
Setting all the captives free.

We also shared this year's Season of Creation prayer:

"Holy God, whose Spirit hovered over the waters at the beginning, we gather as part of your community of all creation, thirsty for your grace. We give thanks for the gift of water, the veins of our common home, that sustains the cedar and the whale, the pasture and the city. We are grateful for the local waters that nourish our homelands and our fellow creatures. We give thanks that in your well-watered garden, every drop is a sacred testament to your love.

Yet, we confess that we have treated this gift as a mere commodity. We have choked the seas with our waste and watched the warming tides rise in judgment. We lament the cracked earth of the drought-stricken and the salty tears of the climate refugee. Melt our frozen hearts, O God, and let the waters of repentance flow.

Lord of all Life, you promised that wherever the river flows, everything shall live. Stir in us a calling to care for the waters — to protect the watershed, defend the rights of water, and honour the dignity of the thirsty. May your Word be a spring within us, gushing forth for the healing of the nations.

May God our Father who brought water from the rock sustain us in the desert. May Christ our Lord who is Living Water refresh us for the work of restoration. And may the Holy Spirit carry us on currents of grace until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. Amen."

The Rights of Rivers

In 2017, the Whanganui River in New Zealand was granted legal personhood, recognising the river as a living being with rights and interests of its own.

In the UK, there have been a number of recent attempts to recognise Rights of Rivers (RoR). The first attempt in the UK, as far as we are aware, was Frome Town Council's proposal for a byelaw to protect the ecosystems of the River Frome and Rodden Meadow in 2016. In February 2025, Lewes District Council supported a Charter for the rights of the River Ouse, the first time a local authority has "supported and championed" the rights of a river.

(rightsofriversguide-final.pdf)

An Affirmation of Faith

We believe in God, who creates all things, who embraces all things, who celebrates all things, who is present in every part of the fabric of creation. We believe in God as the source of all life, who baptizes this planet with living water.

We believe in Jesus Christ, seen in the suffering one, the poor one, the malnourished one, the climate refugee - who loves and cares for this world and suffers with it. And we believe in Jesus Christ, the seed of life, who came to reconcile and renew this world and everything in it.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the breath of God, who moves with God and who moves among and with us today.

We believe in everlasting life in God. And we believe in the hope that one day God will put an end to death and all destructive forces.

(Lutheran Theological College, South India, adapted)

Final Blessing

May the God who sprung water from a rock, quenching the thirst of those who wandered in fear, spare us from the drought of a senseless life. May the God who flows from the wells of salvation, and who is Living Water to the foreigner, the stranger, and the unknown, keep us in peace. May the God who rolls on like a river, changing the course of the world with streams of righteousness that guide the Church's vessel in this world, empower us to work for transformation. And may the blessing of our merciful God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, keep us and preserve us in eternal. ***Amen***

We then retired to our home for tea and cake and chat.

Whilst we did not include it in our time of prayer and reflection, the following information on The Current Water Crisis was distributed to participants to read and pray about.

"The Current Water Crisis

Ezekiel's vision stands in sharp contrast to the reality of the water crisis we face. According to the United Nations UN News, 1.7 billion people lack basic hygiene services at home, and 2.1 billion people still lack access to safe drinking water - that is 1 in 4 people on the globe!

As climate change intensifies, and groundwater extraction increases, several countries are now reaching a so-called "point of water bankruptcy" (UNU), that is a condition marked by irreversible losses of natural water capital.

Although access to drinking water is a human right for all, the multifaceted water crisis disproportionately affects vulnerable communities, future generations, and non-human life that has no voice in political or economic systems. These are some of the many challenges:

- *Water becomes unaffordable for the poor.*
- *Impact on health of water borne diseases.*
- *Impact of industrial discharge of chemicals and other pollutants into rivers.*
- *Increasing water consumption fuelled by the datacentres and energy production required by our digital activities, including for use of artificial intelligence.*
- *Poor governance and corruption by companies and governments.*
- *Impact on food security of droughts, floods, storms and desertification.*
- *Salination of the soil due to sea level rise or overexploitation of aquifers.*
- *Violence over competition over scarce water supplies.*

These many issues are leading to migration, pushing people into exile, with loss of homes and culture.

The impact on ecosystems and biodiversity is devastating: according to the World Wide Fund for Nature, we are facing catastrophic declines in aquatic wildlife, with freshwater populations dropping by a staggering 85 % and marine populations by 56 % in the last 50 years (WWF).

From a theological perspective, this crisis reflects broken relationships — between humankind and God, within the human family itself, and between human beings and other living beings. Furthermore, it is of paramount importance to stress that water pollution has implications related to social justice and equity."

(Extracted from Season of Creationtide 2026 Resources)

Euan McPhee 8 September 2026

Celebrating Fairtrade Fortnight 2026



FAIR. EVEN WHEN NOTHING ELSE IS.

Palestinian farmers carry a rich heritage of land stewardship stretching back generations – growing almonds, olives, wheat and dates that are central to their livelihoods and their connection to the land. They also farm under occupation, facing restrictions on movement and access to land and water, alongside land confiscation, settler violence and the destruction of crops and trees. These pressures have intensified dramatically in recent years.

Despite this, farmers continue to tend their land, harvest their crops and produce food of outstanding quality, drawing on farming knowledge passed down through generations. With local markets increasingly strained, farmers rely more than ever on access to international markets, particularly on Fairtrade terms, which help them secure sustainable and dignified trade relationships and fair prices.

This Fairtrade Fortnight, our ask is simple:

Do it Fair – for Palestinian farmers, for planet, for fair pay.

YOU LOVE THE OLIVE OIL. HELP PLANT THE NEXT HARVEST.

Every almond and every bottle of olive oil begins with a tree. Some of Palestine's olive trees have stood for centuries, tended by generations of the same families. Yet across the West Bank, trees and agricultural land continue to be destroyed and damaged, while demand from farmers for new saplings is growing.

If you've enjoyed our almonds or our oil, you've already tasted what these trees make possible. Now you can help plant what comes next. A sapling planted today will become food, income and a connection to the land for years to come.

Find out more at https://zaytoun.uk/plant-a-tree/

“The last hope is the land we are living on” – farming under occupation in Palestine

What’s it like to be an organic farmer continuing to farm on the occupied and increasingly dangerous land of the West Bank, in Palestine? Lizzie Rivera speaks to one farmer to hear his story

13th August 2026



At the end of the next olive harvest, Haj Bashir, as he is affectionately known, is looking forward to eating Musakhan – a meal so rich in olive oil it will be dripping down his elbows. A dish his family can only afford to splurge on when the olives have just ripened and the oil is plentiful, around mid-October.

Olive oil is having something of a renaissance in the UK. We’re beginning to attune our palates to its diverse flavours and fully appreciate its health benefits. For Bashir Habaibeh, 70, in Palestine, olive oil provides a vital connection to the world outside the walls that feel like they are closing in on him.

Farming in the West Bank

Haj Bashir is chair of the Palestine Fair Trade Association (PFTA); he is also a farmer in the West Bank. He grows wheat, anise, sesame and lentils as well as, of course, looking after the olive trees growing on the 65 dunums (about 6.5 hectares) of land that have been farmed by his family for more than 200 years.

With Israeli settlements moving closer to this agricultural spot, he knows that land is at risk of being taken. That’s not his most immediate problem, though. The week we speak, roadblocks have prevented him from accessing the food market in Jenin, around 20 kilometres away. It means the tomatoes and pumpkins Haj Bashir’s family just harvested won’t be sold. Instead, they will likely end up as animal feed, at a financial loss, since the cost of growing the fruit and vegetables is higher than its value as feed.

Even on days he can make it to the market, Haj Bashir has to compete with imported products. He produced 700 kilos of anise this year and couldn’t sell it to any of the merchants for its usual price – they had already bought it cheaper from Syria, Egypt and Turkey. With no access to export markets, Haj Bashir eventually had to sell his anise to a merchant for no profit, but this time he was able to at least cover the costs of growing it.

From the West Bank to the UK

This is one reason why Zaytoun was created – to give Palestinian farmers access to a UK market. Zaytoun, the Arabic word for olive, imports Palestinian organic extra virgin olive oil and Medjoul dates as well as giant couscous (matfoul) and green wheat freekah. It guarantees farmers a pre-determined price for their produce and commits to the quantities it will buy, sustaining thousands of Palestinian families.

A grassroots organisation and social enterprise, Zaytoun was founded by four people who volunteered as human rights activists in the occupied West Bank during the October harvest of 2003. Upon their return, they promised to sell bottles of olive oil to friends and family. An impressive 22 years later, Zaytoun has become an established route to market with products certified Fairtrade and organic.

But the situation in the West Bank is highly volatile. Over the last three years, reports of assaults by settlers and incursions by the army have become more frequent, and the organic certifiers stopped coming due to security concerns. In 2024, Zaytoun had to remove the organic label from its olive oil bottles, risking its organic customer base.

It was their most challenging year in terms of supply chain disruption and increased transportation costs, as it was for most businesses operating from the West Bank. However, it was also their most successful because UK customers doubled down on their support. Every quarter returned a profit for the first time and Zaytoun was able to purchase more than £2 million worth of goods from producers, representing a 46% increase on 2023.

“It was just beyond anything we could ever have imagined,” says Zaytoun managing director, Manal Ramadan White. “There was a real huge surge in sales and social media following and just an outpouring of love and solidarity.”

Organic farming in the West Bank

Despite the lack of certification, the farmers continued to farm the wheat and the olives in line with organic principles. Organic to Haj Bashir means farming in the “traditional” way he was taught by his father, who was taught by his father before him – fertilising the soil with animal manure rather than imported chemicals. Haj Bashir insists that you can taste the difference with the intensity of the olives and the richness of the dairy.



Haj Bashir's wheat field, overlooked by Sanour; image c/o Zaytoun CIC

Farming more in tune with nature also helps farmers cope with Israel's discriminatory water policy, which heavily restricts Palestinian access to water. Normally the West Bank would not be a water-poor region, the main challenge is that the water supply is controlled by the Israeli government. Rivers, springs, and aquifers are diverted to settlements. To drill a well, permits are required. Haj Bashir says that to be granted such a licence is "a miracle". He explains that people sometimes drill wells without permission. "They find out and they destroy them. They physically come to destroy them," he says.

To counter the chronic water shortage around 90% of Palestinians in the West Bank have water tanks on their rooftops to harvest rainwater. Farmers also choose varieties of almond and olive trees that are rain-fed, while mixed-crop farming helps to retain water and nutrients in the ground. In the Jordan Valley where water used to be plentiful and they were renowned for their banana and citrus fruits, now only dates grow. The olive trees are incredibly resilient and can survive droughts but they are not immune to settler aggression. Latest figures from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) report that 77,000 trees have been damaged between January 2023 and April 2026.

Joy and fear at harvest time

OCHA data also shows that settler violence has trended upwards since 2023, and spikes annually at harvest time. The latest annual report from Zaytoun, covering 2024, documents that farmers were shot while bringing in their olives, and whole harvests were confiscated. It reports armed settlers setting trees alight, raiding homes, and diverting water.

"This year already the violence seems so much more extreme than previous ones, we can only hope that the harvest isn't going to be as bad as we fear," Ramadan White says. "Traditionally the harvest is a huge celebratory event in the calendar, with families and extended families coming together to help bring the harvest home. There is incredible hospitality and joy. However, these past few years communities are harvesting together in the hope of providing each other with some form of protection."

If they are able to reach their farms, that is. Already travel – whether to work, to the market or to see friends and family – for Palestinians living in the West Bank is risky. Journeys that usually take two hours can now take six. Petrol may or may not be available at petrol stations. Ramadan White speaks regularly with suppliers; a quality control specialist for the Medjoul dates has to stay near her place of work and away from her young children for up to three days at a time to reduce the risks the journey now represents. It's a story Ramadan White hears again and again. Because of this, she describes the produce that makes it to homes in the UK as "symbols of hope, despite all the odds".

The last hope

Haj Bashir and I speak via a translator and he welcomes me warmly. To my ear his tone seems even and his voice matter of fact as he describes the hardships and challenges the Palestinian farmers are facing on a daily basis. It's only when I ask how it feels to live under such conditions that he shares more.

"The burdens on the shoulders of the Palestinian farmer would be unbearable to most farmers around the world. In every village and community it's the same, we're farming in a prison."For the farmers in the West Bank, Zaytoun is one way to get through such walls.

"It serves both as lenses that see through walls, and oxygen to keep us breathing within them. It allows us to penetrate these walls and reach the outside world," Haj Bashir explains.

He says: "We're living from nothing. That's the challenge and we accept it. All of these pressures are designed to force us to leave. But we remain grounded in the knowledge that our cause is just… Being on the land, continuing to cultivate it, and witnessing its productivity provides spiritual and emotional satisfaction. The connection between land, justice and identity is what keeps us going.

"The last hope is the land we are living on"



Haj Bashir

https://wickedleeks.riverford.co.uk/features/the-last-hope-is-the-land-we-are-living-on-farming-under-occupation-in-the-west-bank-palestine

Congo Project Update

We have donated money to the Quaker Congo Partnership for the building programme but this update from Patricia who takes the lead in this country on the work of AWID. gives an overview of all the work of AWID.

Donations have ensured that cultivation of ground nuts, vegetables and citrus crops can continue in Abeka and Kigongo in September. This involves 15 to 20 families at each site. They should be harvesting in a few months. We're also planning further Literacy and Numeracy training for significant groups of women in the rural areas. They missed out on secondary schooling and they're very keen.

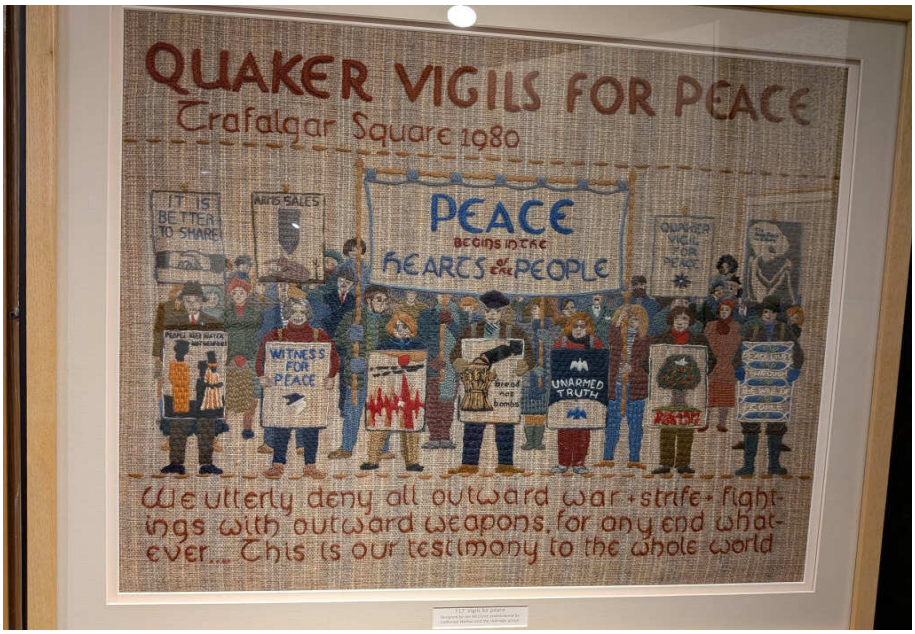
Fortunately, the news from our AWID project leaders, Mme Mado and Mlle Victorine, has been very positive in recent months. The AWID building is progressing well. The foundations and sanitation are in place and the walls are going up. Canalisation for electricity and water is installed.

One cohort of learners has completed the Tailoring training course, with certificates. Another Tailoring course is now under way for 6 months, with about 8 to 11 women in each group of learners. An award ceremony was held in July to present professional certificates to local midwives and AWID tailors recently supported by QCP UK funds. We were surprised and thrilled to see Mme Mado speaking about AWID at the event and broadcast on their regional TV. A local donor has given them a sewing machine to support their work. This is very encouraging

Receiving donations gives a huge boost of confidence and energy to our AWID project leaders in DRCongo. Mme Mado and Mme Victorine have consistently stepped up with project plans, budgets, delivery and reports. Fortunately, they are supported by Isidore Mwenebatu, the Coach and project manager. He was appointed last December with support from QCP UK and is highly skilled in rural development and women's development.

Given the extreme difficulties and challenges they are facing, the positive impact of this work on the women's lives is difficult to express. I can only say that we are all working as a team and it is undoubtedly your belief and support that has made it possible.

Sandra Dutson



One of the 67 panels of the Quaker Tapestry on display in Kendal.

Policing Protest

A few of the many pictures I've taken of police at protests

















Lincoln Amnesty International are asking people to write to their MP demanding that the Government cancel their NHS contract with Palantir. We list below some reasons for doing so.

No Palantir in the NHS campaign

Palantir - a US Artificial Intelligence company co-founded by controversial Trump donor Peter Thiel is in the news.
Last year, Amnesty published **this briefing** naming 15 corporations actively enabling Israel's genocide, unlawful occupation, and other crimes under international law. It called for immediate divestment from these companies, and for civil society and activists globally to campaign for their government to do so.

Palantir was one of them, as in January 2024, the company signed a deal with the Israeli Occupation Forces to supply additional tools and increase its "advanced technology provision" and warfare tools to Israel, facilitating the ongoing genocide in Gaza.

Palantir is also **entrenched in Trump's US Government,** supplying products and services for the Department of Homeland Security and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), to enable the tracking and surveillance of those being targeted for unlawful deportations and detentions.

In November 2023, NHS England signed a **£330 million contract with Palantir** to run the Federated Data Platform (FDP). This contract is due to be renewed in February 2027.

We object to Palantir's military and surveillance technology, currently used to commit genocide in Gaza, being used to handle NHS data.

Other reasons to cancel the contract-

Front-line NHS staff have criticised the platform as slow and inferior to existing systems. The contract undermines existing digital capability within the NHS – not only do NHS England staff have no control over Palantir's underlying code, the very people who have the skills to build in-house open-source alternatives are facing massive job cuts.

As highlighted in Parliament by Martin Wrigley MP in April 2026, the subscription-based contract provides zero software code to the NHS. All the software remains the property of Palantir so that at the end of the contract the NHS has no access to the system. This ensures a dangerous, permanent commercial lock-in (probably with ever increasing costs), leaves staff entirely dependent on Palantir personnel, and creates a single point of failure.

A public institution founded on the principles of care and equity should not outsource its data to a foreign private enterprise heavily tied to state-sponsored human rights abuses. This alignment directly mirrors statements by the then Chancellor Rachel Reeves, who rightly noted that the UK should avoid employing foreign corporations for vital services we can manage ourselves.

Trusts that implement the FDP risk inviting significant protest and disruption from patients and the public. This is worsened by the lack of clarity around patient opt-out rules. Many people would object to their patient records being available to Palantir if they knew, making FDP even less effective.

We urge you to take immediate action to end this contract by February 2027. We additionally request your reassurance that existing in-house NHS data systems are being actively reviewed and upgraded to ensure they can replace Palantir safely, ethically, and permanently.

Please include your name and address, as MPs tend to disregard correspondence from people who are not voters in their constituencies.

Helen Davies

Thoughts from Cerys

Nepal and some European recommendations on diets to be less detrimental to climate
Both of these are of the utmost importance in 2026.

Nepal is a very low emitter of global warming gases. Brick kilns are now being made more efficient and earthquake proof with lower emissions. About 81% of the population are Hindus and about 8% are Buddhist (Mahayana Buddhism.) Everest base camp is accelerating ice and snow instability due to vast quantities of LPG (liquefied petroleum gas) bottles being used, kerosine and urine, all of them increasing melting. Everest base camp attracts so many visitors that it is degrading the environment rapidly. Proposals to move it to firmer more stable ground are being considered.

Global warming and diet *
Locally grown is not necessarily low carbon. Choose eco labeled and organic to reduce climate impact (Sweden). Legumes are nitrogen fixing which saves use of nitrogen fertilizer (Finland). Choose vegetable oils including olive oil over animal fats. Choose foods from more sustainable production methods e.g.organic. Choose potatoes, pasta or other grains over rice. The only recommended drinks are tap water tea and coffee. The Flanders food triangle recommends up to three or four days per week of meat free meals. The Belgium government introduced a Sugar Tax in 2015. Germany's official dietary advice prioritizes a predominantly plant-based diet recommending that at least 75% of food intake comes from plant-based sources to protect both human health and the environment (Plant-based News). The German Nutrition Society DGE recommends reducing animal products in diet - meat consumption by 50% alongside limits on dairy and eggs, noting that reducing animal products has the single largest positive impact on lowering greenhouse gas emissions. It also recommends a daily intake of two portions of milk and dairy products, totalling around 400 grams per day. Portion sizes -choose two per day of milk or liquid dairy- one glass or cup approximately 200 to 250 ml, that's about quarter of a litre. Yogurt or curd one small tub of approximately 150 grams. Cheese -about 30 grams equivalent to one large or two thin slices.

So what we eat not only has an impact on our health but now it's even more necessary to protect the climate, to reduce methane and other emissions from animal foods and the tragedy of what has occurred in Nepal and the vast number of excess deaths in Europe including in England, due to intensely warm temperatures during this summer has emphasized that even more. I hope people will try to make an effort. What I respect about some of these specific recommendations from governments is that it is easier for people to follow very specific guidelines than just a bit more of this and a bit less of that.

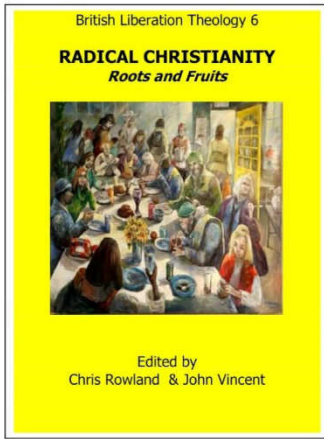
Greetings from Cerys

The National Emergency Briefing

The National Emergency Briefing (https://www.nebriefing.org/) is an independent public information campaign in the UK that calls for a prime-time, multi-channel televised broadcast to warn the public about the climate and nature crises.
Last November, ten of the UK’s leading experts briefed an invited audience of over 1,200 politicians and leaders from business, culture, faith, sport and the media.
The briefing set out the implications of climate and nature breakdown for health, food systems, national security and the economy.
We in the Tuesday Zoom Gathering have hopefully accessed a showing of this film in our local area over the summer. Now we are using online resources to explore ways in which we as individuals, Ashram members, and local worship groups can respond to its message and do our part to put this on the political agenda and make sure things change for future generations.
For our September, October, and November meetings we will be using online resources that have been collated by
https://www.tearfund.org/campaigns/climate-campaign/the-peoples-emergency-briefing.
Please follow us or join us if you wish. For a meeting link email pippah52@gmail.com we meet fortnightly.
Join us from 6th October 2026. *Phillippa Thompson*

Will Ros Norsworthy's Faithful City go on tour?

Many people will remember the remarkable painting by Ros Norsworthy that still hangs in the Burngreave Ashram and is greatly valued by the present users. Ros is an accomplished artist who has never sought publicity. She has no website or Instagram page but she has also has a house full of huge paintings and a very special set of eight panels that tell the Easter story shut away in a room at Sheffield's Victoria Hall.



Heidi and her husband Tony from Hong Kong, have been in the Methodist congregation at Victoria Hall for about a year. Their son is at university in the UK. They were fascinated when they heard about Ros's paintings and so Ros's partner Chris managed to get access to the room and turn the panels round so they could be seen. Heidi and Tony were amazed.



Heidi and Tony wanted to help Ros with some publicity so they arranged a photoshoot and interviews with Ros to record her thoughts about process and inspiration during the creation of the works. Heidi has written a detailed article which has been circulated in the hope that the panels may find a more appropriate home than the present location. Ros is hoping that Sheffield Cathedral may be willing to exhibit them and that they can be seen elsewhere.

This is the story of how the artwork came about. In 2008 Ros was asked to paint a screen depicting the Easter story for the coffee shop at the front of Victoria Hall to separate the seating from the worship space. The Church paid for the materials and Ros gave her time freely. She had been asked to paint the scenes as if the Resurrection were taking place in modern day Sheffield and to complete it in time for the bicentenary of Victoria Hall. The aim was to connect the biblical story with the history of Victoria Hall, its Christian witness and the everyday lives of people in Sheffield, reflecting the work and mission of the Hall.

For durability, the scenes were painted with oils on high-quality ply-wood, each panel measuring 4 x 8 foot. The series begins the night before Christ's arrest, and continues through the events of the Resurrection. Each painting is numbered in sequence, with the relevant Bible reference and each carries the message "I am with you always."
Ros says "My hope is that people will look beyond the physical screen, as though looking through gates into God's presence. I view my faith and art as radical. People often wear "blinkers" like horses, walking right past suffering without acting or acknowledging it. My goal is to break through that comfort, confront people with uncomfortable truths, and stir a sense of social responsibility regarding homelessness and addiction."

The paintings, all set in Sheffield, reflect the harsh reality of life around 2008, coinciding with the start of the economic recession. Ros sketched from real life then painted at home. She does not use photos. In one piece, a man pictured queuing for support actually died a few weeks later due to exposure and hunger – a tragic reminder that cold and poverty are fatal.

No 1. The Lord's Supper (Mark 14 v 22-26) As Christ shared bread and wine with his disciples so churches provide supper nightly at Eldon Street Car Park off West Street, Sheffield. All who have need are welcome.

No 2. The Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14 v 34 -36) is set in the Winter Garden, a beautiful glass conservatory full of indoor plants and trees. Ros said she felt anguish herself when she painted this, more than any of the other works.

No 3. The Arrest (Mark 14 v 72). Set outside Sheffield's City Hall. Peter, in the foreground, remembers Christ's words and broke down and cried.

No 4. The Crucifixion (Mark 15 v 21-41) Viewed from the fort at the top of Wincobank Hill, the industrial Don Valley can be seen in the middle-ground, the three crosses on the distant horizon. Christ's scarlet robe, no longer needed, is hanging from the column.

No 5. The Resurrection (Matthew 28 v 6) The tomb and awesome angel are depicted in the aptly named Peace Gardens. Ros used women in her family as models for the women who had such faith.

No 6 The Road to Emmaus (Luke13 - 24) When Christ appeared he was not recognised. Here he is pictured in the shadows of a doorway outside Victoria Hall looking with concern at a homeless refugee family.

No 7 Jesus Appears to His Disciples (Luke 54 v 36 – 43). The Sunday Centre in the lower hall provided a hot meal for guests in need. Jesus shows his wounded hands and the man opposite him spills his tea. With Christ all are welcome, even the dog.

No 8 I Will Be With You Always to the End of the Age (Matthew 28 v 20) Christ on Fargate at Christmas. He has opened his umbrella to give protection to all. He is with us and among us till the end of the age.

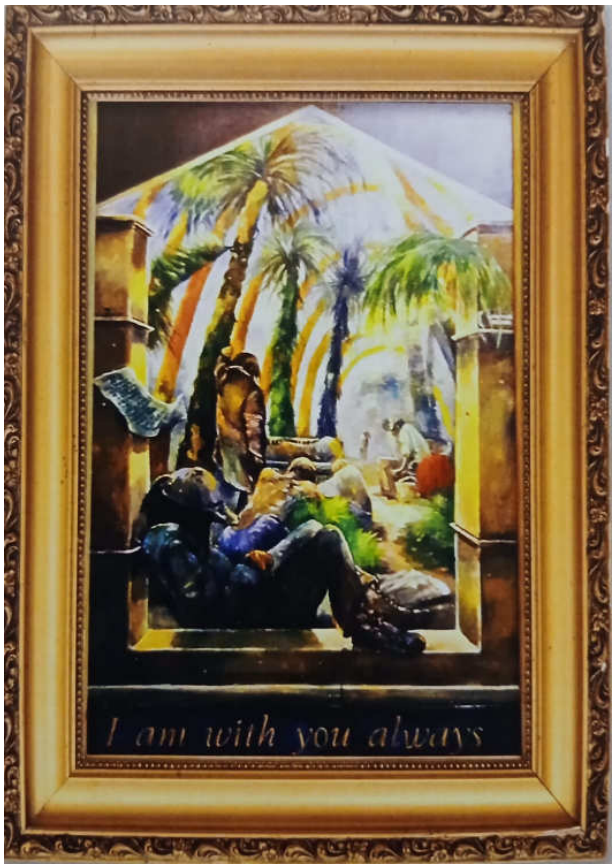


Heidi and Tony with some of Ros's other paintings including a picture of Wincobank Hill. As Ros's eyesight worsens painting becomes more difficult but her love, passion and faith persists and her high-quality oil paintings will last for hundreds of years.

Penny Rea



Picture 1



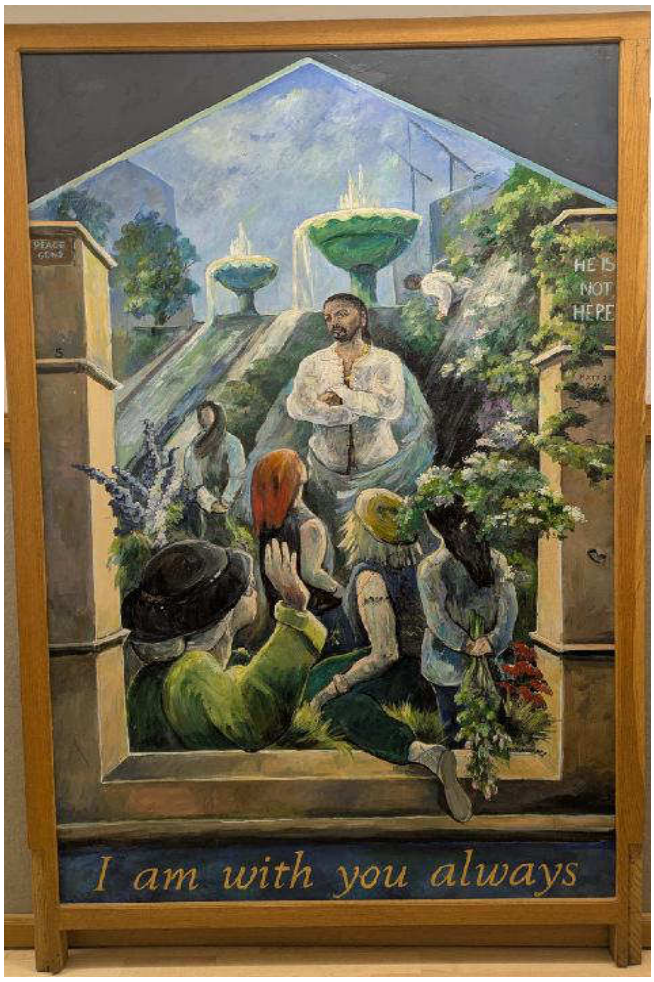
Picture 2



Picture 3



Picture 4



Picture 5



Picture 6



Picture 7



Picture 8

My life history!

On Wednesday 16th September I stepped down as a trustee of Spelthorne Rentstart, the local homelessness-prevention charity, at this year's AGM, having taken on the role when the charity was first founded in 1994. Quite a few members of Staines Methodist Church were involved in that process, and even though I have resigned there are still two SMC members with important roles on the board of trustees. I was finding all the frequent changes in regulations, and the expansion of the services we were able to offer, too much to get my head around so it seemed best to step down and make a place for someone younger and more in touch with the modern world.

So I needed to work out how and when to dispose of all the (paper) files of meetings and such like that I had at home to make a few shelves available for other things, but of course I find myself flipping through them and then getting engrossed in interesting items till well after bed-time, and one of these was the text of a talk about my connection with Rentstart that I had given about ten years ago. I remembered giving the talk but was amazed when I read the details I had included, both personal and historical, and wondered whether it might be worth sharing with a wider readership than the attendees at Ashford Congregational Church Women's Breakfast!

It began with some quotes:
The gospel is not a social club for like-minded people. (Sam Wells?)

Which of these three do you think was neighbour to the one who fell into the hands of the robbers?
- The one who showed him kindness.
Jesus said: "Go and do as he did". (Parable of the Good Samaritan)

"For when I was hungry you gave me food; when thirsty you gave me drink; when I was a stranger you took me into your home, when naked you clothed me; when I was ill you came to my help, when in prison you visited me." Then the righteous will reply, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and fed you, or thirsty and gave you drink, a stranger and took you home, or naked and clothed you? When did we see you ill, or in prison, and come to visit you?" And the king will answer, "I tell you this: anything you did for one of my brothers here, however humble, you did for me."
(Matthew 25, 35-41)

These are all statements that have challenged me in different ways, at different times, and this is an account of how I came over the years to the style of Christian discipleship that I try to follow.

I was brought up to be a Christian – I can't pinpoint any light-bulb event, any one moment, when I came to Christ. Up to the age of 18 I attended the church nearest to where I lived (in Hull) which happened to be Presbyterian. (The waiting list for the newly-built Methodist Church Sunday School nearby was too long for me!)

With the benefit of 11+, free secondary education, student grants, I was able to go off to university to study French and German, because that's what I was good at. I do have a clear recollection of sitting in church one Sunday and wondering whether the fact that I was good at languages meant that God was leading me to offer myself for training as a missionary, but meanwhile I got the grades to take me to the modern languages faculty of Manchester University and threw myself enthusiastically into both French and German and also some of the multiplicity of student societies that were on offer, most prominent among them for me being the Presby-Cong Soc. (where I met Peter Marshall, who was at that time Cong.) and later also the interdenominational SCM. These were both forums in which the members were looking for a way forward, it was a great opportunity to take time considering what God might be calling you to do in the future, in your real life once you had finished being a student. It was also a great time to be a student, a great time to be young – it was the sixties, when the general feeling around was that things were getting better, society was improving, becoming more equal. We were the generation that had benefited from the 1944 Education Act, and enjoyed free health care courtesy of the NHS, which was introduced shortly after we were born. Amongst the student Christian groups, in Manchester at least, we formed an ecumenical umbrella called the JCS – Joint Christian Societies – that organised events in addition to what the denominational societies did, and which we thought at the time would be the way forward, though apparently it had died out a few years later.

So what's all this got to do with Spelthorne Rentstart? Well I thought I would look back at some of the theological works that we had bought and read and talked about at that formative time of our lives. Climbing up to the top shelf in our front room the other day, I found the following three titles, amongst many others:

- *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel* (Paul van Buren) 1963
- *The Secular City* (Harvey Cox) 1965
- *Honest Religion for Secular Man* (Leslie Newbigin) 1966

So how was I going to 'live fully' in the world I entered when I had stopped, after nearly seven years, being a student? We were by then married, which put some constraints on what I might embark on, if we were to remain together. Peter was the first to secure a paid job, so I followed him to Bracknell, still wondering what I should be doing with my life. After a few weeks of rather depressing unemployment I received a telegram from the French department at Manchester University asking me to come back there to teach for a year, as Dr Whitehead had died in the first week of the new term! So for the time being the decision seemed to have been made for me, and I then continued with the teaching, at secondary level, for a couple more years, till I saw advertised the job of my dreams, as a Research Assistant in the library at the British Museum. Obviously, as a Presbyterian, I sometimes felt guilty about being paid to do something that I really enjoyed, but I carried on with it nevertheless until our first son was born, and I stopped work, of the paid kind, to look after him.

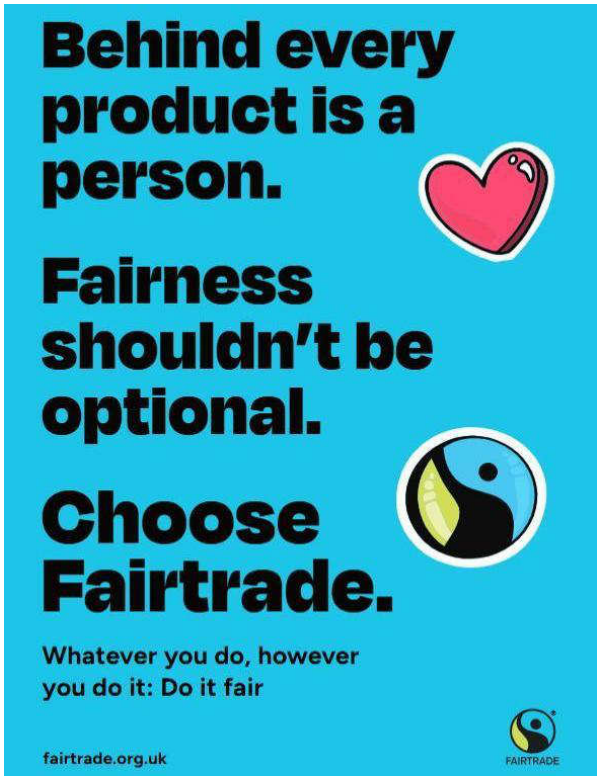
By then we were living in Staines and, there being no URC church in Staines, I had elected to join the Methodists. Methodism was founded - unintentionally – by the Anglican clergyman John Wesley, who studied in Oxford and eventually became a Fellow of Lincoln College. Although everyone at Oxford was supposed to be Anglican, most did not, it seems, let that interfere with how they led their lives; but John & his younger brother Charles, became members of a small group who had started to meet regularly in each other's rooms to study the Bible and pray. The other students made fun of them with names such as 'Bible moths', 'the Holy Club' and 'Methodists'. As they continued with their meetings and regular attendance at Holy Communion, they began to show a practical concern for the poor – in line with the second commandment – they visited prisons, they put aside some of their money to buy food, clothing and medicines to distribute among the destitute and started a school for the children of poor families. Wesley found he could live on £28 a year, so he began to give away the rest of his income. He spent the rest of his life as a preacher but the 'secular' concerns, if I can use that word, never left him. The day after he preached his last sermon, at a house in Leatherhead, at the age of 87, he wrote a letter to a young MP called William Wilberforce, MP for my home town of Kingston-upon-Hull, who had recently begun his long campaign to abolish the slave trade (and whose house, now a museum of the slave trade history, I was taken to regularly as a child). Wesley knew that it would not be an easy victory for Wilberforce, and wanted to encourage him '...Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils. But if God be for you, who can be against you?….' It is thought that these were the very last words that John Wesley wrote; he died about a week later.

Moving on two centuries, I encountered another Methodist preacher, at a weekend conference, by the name of John Vincent (who was President of Conference for 1989-90). He is a theologian, based in Sheffield, founder of the Urban Theology Unit, who saw his mission as pointing to the practical, indeed secular things that Christians should be doing. Christians are disciples of Christ, and his picture of how people can be led to discipleship is taken from how Jesus gathered the twelve and more around him. He did not start with the head, the brain, saying 'Believe this statement, this theology', he did not start with the heart, saying 'you must love me', he started with the feet, saying 'follow me', join me in what I am doing in the world – or at least in Galilee, or in Sheffield, or in Staines.

So, some tough models to follow – an 18thC clergyman and a 20thC clergyman, telling us to get out there and do stuff - so we're well into Methodism now, and at the Victorian Methodist Church some 40 years ago there was a Mother and Baby Club every Tuesday afternoon, at which we had speakers, and one week we were addressed by a representative from the Volunteer Bureau, who came to tell us about all the things we might consider doing once we had packed off our babies and toddlers to school. I can't remember all the possibilities she went through, but one that she described in some detail spoke to me immediately, as a former librarian. It was the Citizens Advice Bureau, where a big part of the job would be looking up information for the clients. So 5 or 6 years later I applied to train as an adviser, and carried on for the next 25 years! Quite early on, one of the other advisers became particularly concerned about the number of clients we were getting who were having great difficulty in finding somewhere affordable to live, because landlords had started to demand a deposit as well as the first month's rent at the beginning of the tenancy. My colleague's original idea was just to set up a fund which we could draw on to give them the money for the deposit. She approached Spelthorne Borough Council to ask them for a contribution (her husband at the time was a local councillor) but they said no, they would not give money for such a fund, but if she would like to set up a charity to assist such people in finding somewhere to live, they would be willing to partially fund it – and that's how Spelthorne Rentstart began!

My role was always a back-room one, guiding the committee and providing support where necessary to the staff, but I trust that this was an acceptable contemporary version of what Jesus told us to do towards the end of Matthew's gospel about giving a home to the stranger.

Linda Marshall



ASHRAM COMMUNITY TRUST
for christian life and action in the world

2027 DATES

7-9 May Community weekend Foxhill, Frodsham, Cheshire

1-3 October Community weekend Hinsley Hall, Leeds

COMMUNITY

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Articles for the Spring 2027 edition needed by April 15th

Contributions from members / associates who do not attend national Community events are especially welcome!

MEETINGS/ZOOM GROUPS

Please contact the convenors if you would like to know more about meeting or events. They are the local contact points for the Community.

Convenors

London – Linda Marshall - lindam@inbox.com
Saturday Meetings – Monthly on Zoom or in person

North-West – Sandra Dutson
smdutson@btinternet.com
Meetings bi-monthly on Zoom or in person

Community Zoom meetings fortnightly – Pippa Thompson – pippah52@gmail.com