



ACT TOGETHER

Ashram Community Trust

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Contents

Page 2. Barton Moss Protector Camp	Sandra Dutson
Page 5. Maternal mortality: it's time to get political.....	Andrew Weeks
Page 7. Letter from Hebron	Dave Havard
Page 9. New beginnings at New Roots.....	Joe Thompson
Page 12. Chingari Bazooka	Bhopal Medical Appeal
Page 12. Middlesbrough Traidcraft Shop.....	Jenny Medhurst
Page 13. "I intend to bring the waters of the flood over the earth."	Linda Marshall
Page 14. Challenging Evil with the power of love.....	Donald Henderson
Page 15. Me and this Jesus.....	Chris Bullock
Page 17. How I came into Ashram.....	Ian Parker
Page 18. Inner City Retreat.....	Anne Littlefair
Page 19. To Follow the way Revealed in Jesus.....	John Vincent
Page 20. Task and Vision Groups - the new Ashram Governance.....	Andrew Weeks
Page 23. Life Changing Rubbish.....	Lorraine Jones
Page 24. Radical Christianity Summer School.....	John Vincent

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BARTON MOSS PROTECTOR CAMP

Back in November I went to what would be the first of many visits to Barton Moss protector camp in Salford. The camp was established to try to prevent or slow down exploratory drilling for coal bed methane and shale gas and at least to draw attention to a wider public of the dangers of that and any consequent fracking.

Barton Moss is about 11/2 miles from where I live in Eccles. Fracking has serious environmental impacts on land-use, water and air quality because of the actual process involved. There are also very reasonable fears that this could be the beginning of industrialisation of the countryside on a large scale not fully clear but entirely possible with the present support of the government for fracking as a solution to our energy crisis.

However my main motivation for joining in with some of the action was the strong feeling we should draw a firm line about prolonging the dependence of the world on fossil fuels and all consequent implications for climate change. Fracking for me was along with Arctic drilling and tar sands oil extraction clearly one step too far. I was profoundly inspired by some of the actions of Greenpeace about the Arctic drilling situation. I was involved in a training session with 'Turning the tide', a Quaker group involved in training in non-violent direct action. This was because some of us felt the moment had come when concern about climate change was being so sidelined, ignored or misrepresented arguments via the usual democratic and media channels were not getting through. There is real urgency in the need to change our ways, as individuals, locally and globally if this unique and precious world is to sustain life.

The final spur to involvement was Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines. I know a C Aid worker who was involved in the Aid operations following the typhoon. I was receiving her bulletins giving a very

graphic idea of the situation there. I was much touched by the C Aid prayer below, written to express solidarity with the Philippines following the typhoon and whilst the climate change talks in Warsaw were taking place and following the impassioned speech and fasting of the Filipino representative there.

God who hears.

We shout out, not holding back.

Calling for the madness to end.

For the bonds of carbon dependency to be loosened.

For those oppressed by greed to be freed.

For the yoke of economic primacy to be broken.

For those in parched and flooded places to have their needs satisfied.

What I have seen on most of my visits to Barton Moss is a group of dishevelled campers, and a motley group of people many local or from Greater Manchester and a huge police presence, vanloads of Tactical Aid Unit. We all mill around at about 9am before the usual convoy of lorries arrive at the end of what is a small country lane leading to the site. There are a few businesses, farms and other buildings so access for vehicles is allowed but surely it was never intended for the large tankers, cranes and trucks currently making their way almost daily just to serve one drilling rig.

Increasingly as we started to walk down the lane towards the site I felt we are up against 'principalities and powers', my interpretation in this situation being the power you get when those in positions of authority, those with wealth and wishing to generate more, and the police combine to suppress, oppress those who have won the arguments but are vulnerable. It is like a long invisible line behind police and trucks, Local

Authority, National Government, possibility soon of international trade agreements and behind it all 'big money, big business'. All most of us do is to walk very slowly but continually being harassed by police to walk faster, keep the pace quicker.

I have been most shocked by the numbers of tankers filled with water behind me, at least I think non hazardous on side means water. It is used I understand to keep the exploratory drill cool. The drill seems to command quite a lot of water, around 3 or 4 tankers a day. If fracking takes place much more water will be needed, along with a cocktail of seriously toxic chemicals.

I am not sure if you ask people in any of the areas in this country recently flooded whether water is 'non hazardous' they would agree. In the Philippines over half a million people lost their homes because of the typhoon before Christmas. Even more have seen their homes damaged and have lost all their chickens, pigs and crops.

If fracking is allowed this has the potential to pollute our water in ways that would affect millions of people. The floods have revealed no-one can be sure what water will do, where it will go in extreme weather events, predicted to be ever more frequent and extensive with increasing climate change. A friend living in the Thames valley, though not actually flooded was not able to use her loo, washing machine or bath. 'Water, water everywhere but not a drop to drink'. Endangering our water supply is not a risk that should be considered.

I usually take an Amnesty water bottle so I can have a drink and this is a reminder that throughout the world protest, however legitimate, is often met with extreme violence. I would not compare the actions most of the time of our police force with those in some more repressive regimes but I think we are not just at the beginning of a slippery slope but part of the way down it.

This situation is one which is highlighting a huge imbalance of power and it also reveals a major

difference in definition of the word 'crime'.

Amongst the thought-provoking notices and signs along the stretch beside the campers vans and tents there is one that reads 'Crime stoppers arrest bloke with drill'. This contains the gist of the battle going on. Whose idea of 'crime' is prevailing? What is legal is sometimes profoundly immoral. A few people, vulnerable in many ways, standing in non-violence against all those with power, status and wealth. We do not consent to be frogmarched toward climate change nor are we sleepwalking but are fully alive to what is happening here.

After each visit I write up a kind of reflection on the visit, parts of which have been drawn on above. What now follows is part of what I wrote after one visit when there was a 'lock on' involving 4 people, right in the middle of the path and so blocking it, a more extreme piece of direct action.

They were sitting on the ground, their arms in long bits of piping stuck together in some way. They were clearly not comfortable and were getting colder. Someone brought hats, big coat to wrap around and their companions offered encouragement of various kinds. One or two sat in the circle made between them. We had a brilliant concert from a singer leading those of a mind to join in with a whole range of 'protest' songs. Some had drums and despite the cold, two hours passed in a very peaceful, cheerful way at least for those of us free to move around. There were a few young children, several dogs and the police simply withdrew, waiting possibly our move or waiting the return of the special 'protestor removal unit' required to do the unlocking.

As ever I was interested in the diversity of those involved in the act of protection, the level of support and general creative approach to making this stand. As time went on the folk locked on were brought chairs without legs as someone had cut them off so they had some protection from the cold ground. Then a table top was placed in the middle, with plates and even a rather lovely pot of daffodils. The singing grew stronger and it really

felt the whole action was a demonstration of the strength of theatre, music, camaraderie, simplicity in the face of another kind of power that of big trucks, big business supported by politicians and police.

Various kinds of food began to appear. One woman with a small child did not feel able to be part of the action walking in front of the convoy. She was concerned it was not a sensible thing to teach her 3 year old it was ok to walk in front of such big trucks. However she had made two big pots of delicious hot food and plates of buttered bread. A little later someone else appeared with a few trays of hot chips. I am not sure if the people locked on received any but they may well have done so if some of their companions fed them. By this time the police the 'protestor removal unit' had arrived so we were moved further down the lane. They needed a 'sterile environment' for their work. The uses of language in all this never ceases to amaze. Several protectors tried to explain how the use of the word 'sterile' was quite bizarre in this situation.

Our singer now led us once more in singing, there were silent moments as people remembered the folk being freed. Their courage and humour was remarkable. The atmosphere was distinctly party like, and indeed one child, informed he was now to leave and pick up an elder sibling from school pleaded he did not want to leave the party!

The convoy was delayed for several hours. I do not know the 'faith' positions of most of the protectors. However I do think that their commitment, their willingness to leave all brings home to me what discipleship is about. The incident above had for me moments of sacrament about it because of feelings and understandings about the land, the shared meal, the shared conversations and concerns.

I was invited recently, via Christian Ecology link, to take part in the Radio 4 programme 'Beyond belief', an opportunity to reflect further on my involvement. All those of us involved as well as walking in front of the trucks try to communicate to wider audiences what this is all about. Getting out the message is a fundamental part of the action. I find because my picture been circulated via various media in connection with the action I am constantly being asked about my experiences.

On my way to record my bit for 'Beyond belief' I reflected in a way the programme could, maybe should, also be called 'Before belief'. It has been through getting involved in the protector action I see so many things in a clearer way.

Women's World day of prayer this year was written by the women of Egypt. It was entitled 'Streams in the desert', yet another reminder of how vital water is. It contained these words: 'In Hebrew the word for well or spring and the verb to see is the same...The water is like a mirror.'

On one visit I asked for a moment to share a reflection. Part of what I shared from a hay bale were these words by Mahatma Gandhi.

'Let the first act of every morning be to make the following resolve for the day:

I shall not fear anyone on earth

Shall not bear ill will toward anyone.

I shall not submit to injustice from anyone.

I shall conquer untruth by truth.

And in resisting untruth, I shall put up with all suffering'.

We are part of a chain of witnesses.'

The exploratory drilling phase is now at an end so the next phase of action is to prevent the actual extraction via the planning processes, with the difficulty the Government is continually tweaking and weakening the rules.

Sandra Dutson

Maternal mortality: it's time to get political

A Weeks

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Women are not dying because of diseases we cannot treat. They are dying because societies have yet to make the decision that their lives are worth saving.

Prof Mahmoud Fathalla MD, PhD
Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Assiut University,
Egypt

Nigeria has the 47th highest gross domestic product (GDP) worldwide and is the world's 8th largest exporter of petroleum. It has a maternal mortality ratio (MMR) of 800/100 000 live births. In contrast, Sri Lanka is 78th on the GDP list but has an MMR of only 92. Among the wealthy countries, Sweden has the 20th highest GDP and a MMR of 2, while USA, despite being the richest country in the world, has a MMR of 17.^{1,2}

If we are to reduce maternal mortality worldwide, it is crucial that we understand the reasons for the wide variation in MMRs. One would expect that the MMR would correlate with the prevalence of major complications of pregnancy, but such complications occur in a remarkably constant 15% or so of pregnancies throughout the world. Nor does the MMR correlate well with a country's wealth as the examples above show. What is, however, highly predictive of a country's MMR is the quality of its health services. Comparing each country's MMR and healthcare quality (as defined in the World Health Organization World Health Report of 2000) shows the two to be closely correlated (Figure 1).^{2,3} 'Quality of health care' is used here in its holistic sense—not just as a measure of the best the country can provide in its large teaching hospitals and private clinics but how effectively good quality health care reaches the country's poorest in rural areas well away from the capital. It also takes into account the health services' effect on the nation's health, the way the health workers treat individuals on a personal level (as regards dignity, confidentiality and client orientation) and the fairness of financial contributions.

The UK provides a classic example of the importance of the effect of a good quality health service on maternal mortality rates. It is no coincidence that the major fall in its MMR coincided with the launch of the NHS in the 1940s which provided free care for all at the point of delivery.⁴ The quality of maternity care also improved greatly at this time as blood transfusions and antibiotics became available. The NHS made these advances available to the many and not just the privileged few. Conversely, the recent crisis at Northwick Park Hospital in London shows how quickly maternal mortality rates can rise if the quality of maternal care deteriorates.⁵

The impressive second report on the South African Confidential Enquiries into Maternal Deaths emphasises the pivotal role of health services in reducing MMRs.⁶ Of their ten key recommendations, all but one relates to improvements in the health services rather than introducing new procedures or therapies. They recommend speeding up access to services (better ambulance services and referral systems), service development (better contraceptive/abortion services and improved antenatal screening) and improved quality of care (written protocols, optimising levels of staff and equipment, blood transfusion, partogram use and effective anaesthetic services). The one recommendation that is not directly health service related is the final one that calls for the empowerment of women.

If tuberculosis is the disease of poor housing, and gonorrhoea a 'social disease', then surely maternal mortality is the classic example of a disease of poor health services.

For those of us trying to reduce maternal mortality from a medical perspective, we will be unable to achieve fundamental change without a massive improvement in health services in those areas of the world that are currently poorly served. Indeed, as exemplified in the title of the *BJOG* 2005 supplement on the developing world, much of the research on

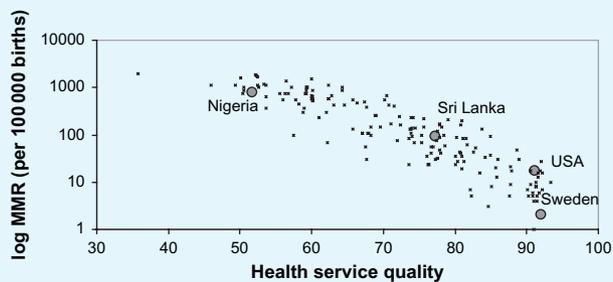


Figure 1. Correlation of MMRs (per 100 000 live births) and overall health service quality (data from WHO 2000 and WHO 2004).^{2,3}

reducing MMRs is focused on ‘the art of achieving good outcomes with few resources’. We may develop low-cost solutions that punch above their weight (e.g. misoprostol), think of creative ways of providing low-cost health care (e.g. women’s groups or nonmedically trained surgeons) or debate the priorities for improving the health services (e.g. ambulances or audit). However, it is clear that the impact of these will be small without massive improvements in the infrastructure of the health services. Also, these will only be obtained through political change.

Shiffman and Okonofua,⁷ writing in this month’s *BJOG*, address the state of political priority for safe motherhood in Nigeria and discuss ways in which pressure can be placed on politicians to produce change. They argue that a number of factors have come together to ‘open a policy window’ for the reduction of maternal mortality in Nigeria. These relate to the arrival of democratic government in 1999, increased pressure from both Nigerian and international organisations and a new commitment from within the government. However, they point out that in order to take advantage of this opportunity, the numerous safe motherhood groups need to amalgamate into a single powerful force, local and regional government need to take maternal mortality seriously and central government has to provide additional resources. They argue that if we are to take advantage of this policy window, then the maternal mortality advocates must come together to ‘transform their moral and technical authority into political power’. They end with a call for safe motherhood advocates to develop political as well as medical solutions to the problem of maternal mortality.

The call for political action is not new, but it deserves repeating. For physicians involved in the safe motherhood movement, it is too easy to retreat into medical research, away from the unfamiliar and often dirty world of international politics; yet, it is there that we need to go to achieve real change. The article by Shiffman and Okonofua, together with the South

African confidential enquiry report, offer a blueprint for the way in which political change can lead to the much-needed reduction in maternal mortality throughout the world.

What can governments do? Fundamentally, governments need the ability to *finance* an effective maternal health service. To achieve this, global and national changes are needed. Globally, this requires fair international trade agreements and a solution to the brain drain. National prerequisites are political stability, good economic and financial management of the country’s wealth and an end to corruption.

Second, governments need to promote *high-quality care*, especially in rural areas. This will take decentralisation of care systems, a regular supply of well-trained staff and consumables and national and local audits to critically evaluate the service. In addition, if we are to achieve real reductions in the MMR in countries with high rates of unsafe termination of pregnancy, safe termination services will need to be provided.

Finally, women need to be able to *access* this high-quality health care. This means free health services located in rural areas, effective transport systems and, in a wider context, education and empowerment of women to enable them to make decisions for themselves. Disempowered women too readily accept poor health and poor quality health care.

Achieving this list will be no mean feat. But, if we rely on medical advances to deliver reductions in maternal mortality, then we will be waiting for a long time. Political action is needed, and it is needed rapidly if we are to achieve the ambitious targets set in the Millennium Development Goals for 2015. ■

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Letter from Hebron, Palestine



Dear friends in Ashram,

Some of you may not have heard of our recent sudden move to Hebron. An opportunity arose and we grabbed it. Last time I tried to visit Arwa's family in Hebron I was denied entry at the Allenby Bridge by Israeli officials for "security reasons". They would not give the real reason nor tell me when I might be allowed in again. As you know I am a pacifist and no threat to anyone.

On 11 February my mother in law received a phone call from the local Israeli police asking me to be in court in Jerusalem in 2 days time. No reason given. I assumed I was being called as a witness but it could have been any of the 7 assault complaints I have lodged with the police there (none of which have been acted upon).

Anyway we decided this would give me an opportunity to enter the Israeli border. I had 7 hours to make a decision, talk to my headteacher, pack a bag and book tickets. As you can imagine some important things got left behind in the rush! Walking through Jerusalem the next day I could not quite believe that I am here again. In the event the court case was cancelled but that's a whole other story.

Arwa stayed behind to pack the house and sort things out but she is here now. We have found a flat very close to her parent's house which is ideal for us. I am very busy painting these days. There has been a lot of problems from Jewish settlers on her family land and we want to be close to give them support. On 5 January this year Jewish settlers moved onto their almond orchard with bulldozers and containers. The family protested but were removed and one cousin was arrested. The settlers uprooted all the almond trees on the first day and announced their intention to begin archaeological digs.

On the 5 February they moved onto the cherry orchard and removed most of the cherry trees. The family owns the large piece of land that they have 4 houses on but these 2 pieces



have been rented since 1949. They planted and have tended all the trees since then. The land is owned by an Islamic Waqf (religious foundation) and leased to the Jewish religious foundation on a 99 year lease which has now expired.

At that time Jewish and Muslim Palestinians lived peacefully together in Hebron and the Abu Haikal family rented from their neighbours as did the al Bakri family. The largest part of this land is a Jewish cemetery. In 1984

settlers arrived with caravans on the al Bakri piece of land across the road. The settlers have tried many times to seize the Abu Haikal land but have been stopped by the family up to now.



This time the Israeli government has made the decision to allow archaeology on the land and they will probably allow settlers to build on it next year. There is a military barracks and 2 observation posts on the Abu Haikal land already and now that these 2 pieces of land have been fenced in our family are surrounded on all sides by Jewish soldiers and settlers. Clearly the intention is to drive our family from the top of this hill altogether but they will not move.

Things are very tense in Hebron these days with the collapse of the peace talks. A large number of Palestinians have been killed in recent weeks in the West Bank and Gaza. There have been lots of protests everywhere and on Monday an Israeli police officer was shot dead in Hebron. There are many road closures and border closures anyway because it is Passover and even more because the army is searching for the killer. The Israelis have used the so called peace talks as a cover for a huge amount of settlement expansion and very many Palestinian homes and buildings have been destroyed.

Just last week Jewish settlers were authorised by the Ministry of defence and the Israeli High

Court to move back into the al Rajabi house which they stole with false papers. This is in the centre of Hebron near Abraham's Tomb and will cause a lot more problems for Palestinians in that neighbourhood who already face continuous violence and harassment from settlers. Almost every day Israeli soldiers shoot tear gas at Palestinian children on their way to school. They also detain very young children accusing them of throwing stones whether or not they threw anything.

If you would like to support our friends in Hebron you are invited to join our Facebook group Save Tel Rumeida where we are posting photos, films and stories. Contact me if you want to be on my email list for updates at deacondave777@gmail.com. Any who are able to are very welcome to come and visit us. We already had a group from Sheffield Palestine Solidarity Campaign come for a tour around. Please pass on the stories of what is happening in Palestine to all your friends and acquaintances. Please support the BDS campaign. I think it is only from international pressure and prayer that anything will change here. Let us pray that God brings peace and justice very soon to all the people of Israel and Palestine.

Deacon Dave (Harvard)



Dave, Arwa and olive tree

New beginnings at New Roots



Big things are happening at New Roots. For over 25 years, the little green and yellow shop by the university has been selling veggie and vegan snacks, and Fairtrade and organic groceries; for over 25 years, animal rights activists, community organisers, and anti-capitalist dreamers have been meeting and gathering in this little hub. Since September, the two Joes have taken over from Grace Vincent in the running of the shop, and alongside a new generation of shop volunteers, they have started to make some changes to the shop.

The most notable change consists of a rebranding and renovation of the shop, which saw the construction of new fruit and veg shelves, and the destruction of a wall which has opened the shop floor up more to the general public. This has cleared space for a bike-blender, which provides low-carbon smoothies/milkshakes whilst giving customers the ability to blend it themselves.



Other innovations include the making of a rainwater flushing toilet, the launch of a seminar series in the downstairs Speakeasy, the New Roots New Rhymes

hootenanny gathering, and sowing seeds in the garden in preparation for the summer season. The New Roots Speakeasy is also becoming the meeting location of choice for a number of local and student organisations such as People and Planet, Student Eats and many more.

New Roots has also recently launched Sheffield's first ever cycle-powered veg box scheme. Having enlisted 15 crazy new cycle volunteers, a veg box team has been assembled which currently provides over 20 veg boxes a week to the people of Sheffield through nothing but the power of the bike and trailer. The initiative provides customers with quality organic produce once a week or fortnight, with an emphasis on local and seasonal food. Whilst still in its early stages, feedback has been overwhelmingly positive so far! We're keen to demonstrate what a bike can do, with a dream of all food being delivered by bike one day. If you can do it in hilly Sheffield, surely you can do it anywhere?

Veg Box
to your doorstep,
delivered by bike!

"half of the total carbon dioxide load generated by food - from farm to table - comes at the consumer end, mainly in getting it home from the store"

Order your weekly, cycle-delivered veg box of tasty, organic, seasonal vegetables today!

Visit www.newroots.org.uk/veg-box for more details

We are a not-for-profit shop. All our proceeds go to support Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Sheffield!

new ROOTS

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0114 2721971

A stylized illustration of a bicycle. The front wheel is replaced by an apple, and the rear wheel is replaced by a pear. The bicycle is black with a white outline. The background is a light, textured surface.

Another project that is underway is 'Abundance'. Abundance is an already-existing project run by Grow Sheffield, which harvests fruit and veg in Sheffield that would otherwise go to waste - that apple tree in the city centre, the pear tree that the neighbour doesn't have the energy to pick on his own, the blackberry bush in Endcliffe park. The food that is harvested is then sorted and distributed to homeless shelters, schools and other places around Sheffield. Funding for the project runs out at the end of March, and those who have been running it to date will be moving on. As a result, the New Roots community are looking continue the project in conjunction with the Abundance group so that the project can keep developing.

The shop is continuing in the radical tradition that Ashram inscribed into its original philosophy and ethos. The shop is a home for the vibrant volunteer base and general New Roots community, a place to imagine how the world could be, meet interesting people and campaign for change. Through the products it sells, the message it promotes (window displays and otherwise) and the activities it organises, New Roots is attempting to bring change

to Sheffield and world around it. What does the kingdom of God on the streets of Sheffield look like? We don't know... But we're keen to pursue it!



New roots, New rhymes - evenings of free-range local musicians and vegan beer



66 New Roots is really, really good ☺☺

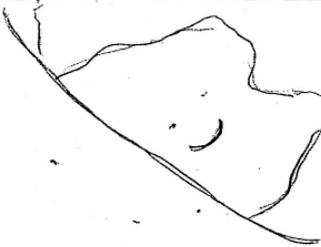
- a local customer

66 New Roots is, like, the best! ☺☺



"Shop for justice" at...

New ROOTS

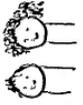


New guide book!

What is New Roots?

New Roots is a friendly, not-for-profit shop, run by volunteers. We sell vegetarian and vegan snacks, fairtrade and organic wholefoods, and local, organic fruit and vegetables.

JoJo (managers)



But New Roots is MORE than that!

New Roots is a community of locals and students with shared passions...

For sustainable living

For people and planet before profit

For the planet and its future

For delicious locally grown produce

For a more fair and just world

The STEAKEASI down at New Roots

- Come and eat!
- Come and meet!
- Play the pinno!
- Check out our library!

Hire it for your meeting or gathering today! - ask in-store for more details

And where do the profits go?

New Roots profits...

- support asylum seekers in Miraflores in Sheffield
- fund "free meals" in Burngreave

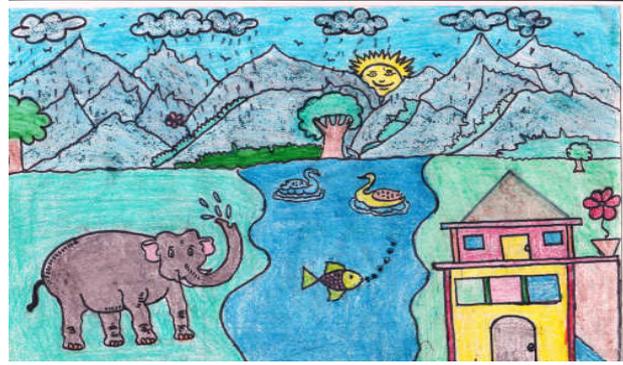
Oh, great!

WHAT ELSE GOES ON AT NEW ROOTS?

- Pedal-powered smoothies!
- New Roots New Rhymes! (community gathering, charity event)
- vegbox scheme
- veg box
- community garden
- special needs seminars!
- With rain-water foil

Thank you from the kids of Bhopal!

This year's Day's Pay is supporting the Bhopal Medical Appeal(BMA) which helps both the adult victims of the gas explosion 30 years ago at the Union carbide factory, and those that are now being born disabled because poisons from the factory are contaminating the drinking water. While the campaign for justice from Dow (the current owner of Union Carbide), continues, the children are treated at the Chingari clinic funded by the BMA. Despite grave disabilities they have a



Water up to waist near Lakhan's house- by Minakshi

mischievous sense of fun. They thought that newspapers were full of boring news and decided they could 'tell better news' and produced their own paper, the Chingari Bazooka!

Stories of monsoon rains and flooded homes, cricket matches and traffic accidents, weddings,

therapy and the frustration of waiting for long promised water pipes- are interspersed with vibrantly coloured drawings - often joyful pictures of the natural world.

We have permission to share some of those pictures - so here the children say thank you on behalf of some of the 500 children on the clinic's waiting list who will now be able to have therapy through our our Day's Pay.



Middlesbrough Traidcraft Shop

We had another nail biting fight to get premises for our 28th Christmas shop (while last year's shop stayed empty). We'd opened when there was a tidal surge at 5pm one November night which put out the electricity in the town centre for 6 hrs. Fortunately I'd just closed my electric shutters, which were the only front door, and unlike the bosses of Boots and BHS was able to get home!

We had lots of happy customers and helpers and took £32,000 in 5 weeks!



“I intend to bring the waters of the flood over the earth.”

Genesis 6,17

In 2012 the name of the town I have lived in for forty years was changed from Staines to Staines-upon-Thames, in order to make it sound more up-market and attractive to visitors and businesses. In 2014 it received its comeuppance for such arrogance, not to mention the many suggestions by local residents that it should be further changed to Staines-under-Thames. My BRF Bible study notes for 3 February included Genesis 2, 5-6:

“When the Lord God made earth and heaven, there was neither shrub nor plant growing wild upon the earth, because the Lord God had sent no rain on the earth....A flood used to rise out of the earth and water all the surface of the ground.”

Unfortunately, once He had the idea of sending rain on the earth, He forgot to turn off the flood-water rising from below, so a few days later, looking out of the window by the desk I was sitting at, I could see



the water bubbling out of the drains on the opposite side of the road and pouring across towards our side where, mercifully, the drains were still operating the right way round and carrying the water away. In another few days a small lake had appeared in our kitchen garden. We shall see later in the year whether sitting in water for several days will improve this year's strawberry crop.

By this time we had had severe flood warnings by telephone from the Environment Agency, a ring at our door just before midnight from Sussex Police, working on behalf of Surrey Police, to see if there was anyone vulnerable in the house and to inform us that we could use the toilets and showers at the local Leisure Centre if necessary. Fortunately, we have the key to a friend's house, and had already been using their facilities for a while, but portaloos

started appearing all over the place and sandbags were at a premium. I just used sacks of manure that were waiting to be spread over the vegetable patch, but fortunately they weren't actually put to the test in the end. We had carried bottom-shelf books and papers upstairs and spent an hour lifting the piano onto bricks to raise it further above the floor.

We live about four minutes walk from the river, and at the nearest point is a Victorian church whose grounds give access to the towpath, so I went down there most evenings to see how far the water had risen. It eventually flooded their cellar, and the

splendid vicarage nearby ended up as an island in the Thames, from which the vicar and his family had to be ferried by boat. A friend whose house was similarly not flooded inside but surrounded by thigh-deep water discovered that a pair of waders from the local angling shop cost £59.99.

It was a very strange couple of weeks – though for some people that is extending to six months or more in temporary accommodation. Some people with houses on the riverbank were not flooded, whereas houses a quarter of a mile away had to be evacuated. Roads became impassable in unlikely places some distance from the Thames and many people could not get to work or to hospital appointments despite trying a variety of different approaches. A large riverside hotel was only accessible by boat, so some staff were ferried in every day to make arrangements for relocating guests and events. Primary school classes were given space at Royal Holloway University of London. Owners of 4x4s suddenly became popular when they made repeated journeys to deliver sandbags

and rescue people from their flooded homes. I was able to put the Ashram commitment for sharing to the test by taking my bag of dirty washing some 20 miles on the train to Liz Urben's in Streatham, where the London Group have their monthly meetings, and receive it back clean and fresh at the end of the agape.

It was strange, too, being the centre of attention for a while. We received messages of concern from all over the place. My mother's ninety-seven-year-old cousin rang from north London to see how we were and say how sorry she was that she couldn't do anything to help. We had two phone calls from France, one from Donald Henderson, one from my brother, who said he just had to ring after listening to the news on French radio, where they had said: "... and now, over to our reporter in Staines" (but in French).

As ever, I guess, the situation brought out the best and the worst in people, but mainly the best, by all accounts. The worst was the row of cars parked on a main road because the owners' road was inaccessible, all of which were vandalised one night, but the best could run to several pages. The owner of several large hotels around Heathrow made one of them available entirely to people who had been

evacuated and had nowhere to go. A part-time church café extended its hours and offered free meals to flooded residents, with food donated in overwhelming quantities by those who had been more fortunate. There is no Sikh community to speak of in our borough, but generous help, both in goods and practical assistance, arrived un-announced from a Gurdwara somewhere in West London, leading to a sentence I cherish from the local paper: "The support network grew around them, with food deliveries coming from Khalsa Aid, the Salvation Army and many other organisations."

Of course, all this relief work does not alter the major long-term problems many are encountering, those who had just finished a substantial refurbishment of their home, at huge expense, only to find it three feet deep in water a week later or those who were about to exchange contracts on the sale of their house in order to move to another area for work or family reasons. For me, all I really need now is for the many deep potholes that have appeared in the roads to be mended asap. But it was a salutary experience to live through something over which we human beings had so little control.

Linda Marshall

Challenging Evil with the Power of Love

Once, in the 90's, I came to an Ashram weekend with a visitor, Svetlana Shevchenko. She was a Russian-speaking Ukrainian who worked with the group Miloserdiye in Chernaglovka. Miloserdiye is a project for support of children and adults with handicaps, and their families. Ashram sent some money (a Day's Pay).

Jacque and I visited a lot and made many friends in the small group of volunteers, parents and children. They came from all parts of the Soviet Union - Byelorussians, Ukrainians, Russians, Kazak, Lithuanian.....It was (a) very difficult time because the economy had more or less collapsed, wages weren't being paid. But we had lots of fun. A

fantastic cultural life mixed with occasional bouts of drunkenness! I met an American on the dilapidated bus on the bumpy road from Moscow. He had come to live in Chernaglovka. with his wife in a flat like everyone else. He said "They told us that this was the Evil Empire. They were lying."

June 22nd, the anniversary of Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union, is celebrated as the day of memory of the dead of the war. The local military base sends a field kitchen into town which distributes kasha and tea to everyone, local choirs sing and children dance. Speeches are made. Then a diminutive figure in a red army uniform gave his testimony. Karp Abramovich had been a doctor

with a partisan brigade In the chaos of the early part of the war there were no supplies. He collected berries to make medicines to save his comrades from scurvy when the winter came. The he said "We must never forget our internationalism. We must never forget that we did not fight against the Germans. We fought against Hitler and Fascism."

I could go on giving examples of collaboration between people of different nationality and of the sadness produced by the fall of the Union. Lithuanian who could no longer easily visit family now being integrated into Western Europe. You most often hear of the Soviet Union in terms of Stalinist terror, fear and persecution. Yes it was so and there was massive corruption, but there was another side of fraternity and communality. As in Yugoslavia all that is being replaced by a flag waving nationalism and in the Ukraine people are forced to decide to which side they belong.

We happened to be in the Balkans in 1991 blundering around in our van on our way to Istanbul and back. At Suceava in N.Romania on the campsite there was a busload of folks from Moldavia. On it it was a couple, he was Russian, she Moldavian. They looked so happy. Next year with the fall of the Soviet Union, Moldavia fell into ethnic chaos. I wonder what happened to them?

Later in Skopje at the bus station a young man in Yugoslav army uniform, sitting at a table with his parents who looked like simple peasants- on their faces despair. He was being sent up north to fight in Croatia. Did he ever come back? In a café we heard singing - what sounded like fervent nationalistic songs. On the camp-site that evening

there was a sombre atmosphere but a folk group was playing cheerfully and lots of folk, many young people, were quietly dancing in a circle, holding hands. It seemed like the last dance. Then the next day in Pristina, (a) cavalcade of cars flying the double eagle flag of Albania and blowing their horns - quite intimidating. In the North in a bar between Novy Sad and Subotica we met two men who told us they were going over the hills into Croatia to fight. Shortly afterwards there was the massacre in Vukovar. What I wonder became of them? I had kind of put all this behind but now in Ukraine the nightmare begins again.

I think of Sveta and also Valodya Karavenenko and Valya Stolko, members of the group in Chenoglovka and in mixed Russian-Ukrainian marriages. I wonder how the crisis is affecting them. I have written to the group to say how I feel. I think the West has alienated many Russians by gobbling up the more digestible and profitable bits of the old Soviet sphere and have taken advantage of the weakness of Russia in the chaos following the collapse of the Union. The West should instead have tried to make an arrangement with Russia to incorporate all the Eastern European lands in to a new World order. Seen from Moscow things seem so different and many people in the 90's hoped that something new would emerge.

This week I came across a saying of Jean Jaurez:
"We must not have regrets for the past, nor remorse for the present. We must have an unshakeable hope for the future."

Donald Henderson, France

ME AND THIS JESUS

How do I see Jesus, what prevailing image(s) come to mind when Jesus' name is mentioned and how has my perception of Jesus changed over time?

The theologian Marcus Borg begins his book "Meeting Jesus again for the First Time" by stating

"We have all met Jesus before. Most of us first met him when we were children. This is most obviously true for those of us raised in the church, but also for anybody who grew up in Western culture. We all received some impression of Jesus, some image of him, however vague or specific." He goes on to say

that these childhood images are retained by many people into adult life and that the two most commonly recurring images of Jesus are his role as divine saviour and secondly his reputation as a teacher.

I grew up in a Christian environment , regularly attending Sunday school and church services and I generally held what I would call a fairly conventional image of Jesus as the Son of God, as a personal saviour, as a teacher and healer. I remember having a picture on my bedside table which depicted Jesus dressed in blue and white and with long blondish hair, a rather westernised romantic Victorian ideal of Jesus which stuck in my mind and there was a caption underneath which said something like “I come to Jesus Christ that I may follow him faithfully as Lord and Saviour”. So I regarded discipleship in terms of an individual personal commitment rather than in any communal sense. At the same time growing up as a teenager in the 70s I was quite attracted by a very different image of Jesus as a kind of cultish hippie rock star as portrayed in the hit musicals “Jesus Christ Superstar “ and “Godspell”.

So the Jesus I grew up believing in was largely the product of Christian doctrine and teaching, if anything the Christ of faith rather than the Jesus portrayed in the gospels. But how do I see Jesus now? Although my background is non-theological , over the years since coming to Sheffield and studying at UTU I have read and thought a great deal on Jesus and his mission and on discipleship and indeed encapsulated some of these reflections in many a sermon. Marcus Borg describes 4 key elements in the personality of the pre-Easter Jesus and I shall try to list what I feel are some of the most significant aspects of Jesus’ life and personality as follows:

Jesus the inaugurator of the Kingdom

Jesus proclamation that the kingdom of God is immanent in the world, in peoples’ lives, is the core of his mission and purpose. In Luke’s gospel he reads from the text in Isaiah and identifies himself with it. Jesus has become the embodiment , the

incarnation of the living Word of God. Throughout the gospels he conveys something of the essence of this mysterious entity by telling stories-parables- and carrying out other symbolic actions.

Jesus as a prophetic figure

Jesus was in the line of the great prophets of O.T. Israel: he started out as a follower of John the Baptist, himself a successor to people like Elijah, and probably learned a lot from John. Like all great prophets Jesus had a vision of a better and different kind of social order; he was always criticising the religious/political establishment and getting into hot water with the authorities. Ultimately he was like many prophets before him rejected and done away with.

His relationship with God

I believe Jesus had a very personal intimate relationship with God; he often referred to God using the Aramaic word Abba which means Dad in English. Whether Jesus was the son of God is rather debatable as this phrase came into prominence after Jesus resurrection when he was deified in the liturgy of the early church in the manner of certain Roman emperors after their death. Jesus was very much a spirit-filled person as Borg says, being influenced and motivated by the Holy Spirit throughout his ministry.

Created a community of like-minded disciples

Jesus called into being a movement of individual followers who would go around preaching and healing and experience communal life together through sharing and mutual support. One of the key aspects of Jesus ministry was the fellowship around the table, having meals together at home and as guests in the homes of others. This community of disciples would continue to function after Jesus’ death, forming the nucleus of the infant church and bringing others into it.

Angry young man

There is this general perception of Jesus as a mild inoffensive person who liked to avoid conflict,

summed up in the phrase “gentle Jesus meek and mild” which is far from the whole truth. Certainly Jesus showed plenty of compassion towards the people to whom he ministered but he was full of righteous indignation at the injustices he saw around him and the doctrinaire attitudes of the religious leaders. He was often quick to chide his own disciples at times when frustrated at their lack of understanding. Perhaps the clearest example of his “anger” is the occasion of the throwing out of the money changers from the Temple in Jerusalem.

Teacher of alternative wisdom

The gospels often refer to Jesus as someone who taught with authority unlike the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus opened peoples’ eyes to the new reality of the kingdom through his telling of parables and frequent usage of short pithy sayings eg. No-one can serve two masters he says which on one level seems obvious but Jesus is inviting his hearers to think what other situations this could refer to. The Pharisees taught a conventional kind of wisdom telling people what to believe and how they should behave but Jesus tried to show people an alternative way of looking at the world and treating other people.

The Jesus as I perceive him now is rather different from before. Then I perhaps regarded him as a quasi-mystical person shaped by centuries of church dogma and belief. Having studied the gospels more it becomes clear that Jesus is very much a man of his own time, a product of his Jewish background and culture but someone rebelling against the conventions of his society and inviting people to discover new ways of living and relating.

Chris Bullock

How I got into Ashram

I have come to realise over the years that things didn’t always happen in the way I remember them, but in my memory it goes some thing like this.

First picture is from about 1974 when I was a very young deputy housefather, working for Langley House Trust in Dorset. The House Parents I was working with were Methodists, and let me read their copy of the Methodist Recorder when they had finished with it. My eye was caught on more than one occasion by an angry letters from one Roy Crowder, writing from Ashram House, Andover Street, Sheffield. I think this was the first time I came across the word Ashram.

The second picture, from 1975, is of me finishing reading John V. Taylor’s book *Enough is Enough* in a launderette in Upper Parkstone. The washing is still going round and round, so I have ample time to read in detail the last chapter where the author lists organisations within which those seeking to live a simple lifestyle may find support. Ashram Community is one of those mentioned.

The third picture is either late 1976 or early 1977, by which time I’d moved to Leicester and was a student probation officer. I’m in the kitchen of my modest terraced house on a Sunday morning listening to a precursor of the ‘Sunday’ magazine programme currently on Radio 4. There’s an item about a group of people celebrating the Eucharist over a meal in a Chinese restaurant in Sheffield. Somehow the link is made in my mind with the two previous pictures, and I decide to make contact with these radical Christians in Sheffield.

If you want to hear about a visit to UTU over the weekend of Palm Sunday 1977 under false pretences, my first meeting with David Dale (he told me where I could put my sleeping bag), my request to John Vincent for a cooling off period, and my attendance at the October Weekend of 1977, which involved a telephone conversation with Liz Urben, a beige Citroën Dyane, and a one hour wait by an M1 slip road in Luton, you will have to ask when you next see me.

Ian Parker

Inner City Retreat

A group of approx. twelve Ashram people gathered over 3-6 April 2014, for a packed programme of study, worship, meditations, reflection & hospitality.

We met at walking-distance Ashram Community houses, & at Burngreave Ashram. We studied, particularly around the Kingdom of God, discussed, reflected, worshipped & prayed. Oh, and we ate together quite splendidly!

On Day One we noted that the Gospel of Mark tells mostly of the actions of Jesus, rather than his teachings. Jesus went to where there were sinners, sick people, the marginalised & oppressed, & this indicates that we should go to the inner city. Celtic Christians speak of "thin places", such as Iona, where the division between Heaven & Earth is very much diminished. The inner city is not a "thin place", but rather a "thick" one! This is Ashram's place.

On Day Two we studied the Kingdom of God further. After an excellent lunch by Nirmal, we took some direct action on the garden at 77 Rock Street. Then Chris Bullock led us in "Contemplative Walking & Talking", & this was for me a powerful time spiritually, as well as jolly hard on my Fenland legs – unused to hills!

We went to Burngreave Cemetery, where are buried some of the approx. 250 people who died in the Sheffield Floods of 1864, caused by the failure of the new Dale Dyke reservoir. Then we walked up (& I mean UP) to Park Wood Springs, & the Sheffield Community Forest Garden. The Interfaith Tree was in good health, the Gorse was in golden bloom, the views over Sheffield were glorious & some wonderful conversations were held.

On Day Three Grace took us to the New Roots shop in the West of the city. This was her particular project for the first quarter-century of its' being, & now is being further developed by student volunteers Joe Davis & Joe Thompson. They have an interest in low-carbon technologies, hence the bicycle-powered smoothie maker, development of the outside space including roofing catching rainwater to flush the outside loo, & weekly veg box deliveries by bicycle.

After a moving Community Eucharist, we returned to Burngreave Ashram for a new look at the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem, & saw that Mark 12:34 makes it clear that you don't enter the Kingdom of God just by talking about it. The gospel is to be done.

Day Four was a Sunday, so I joined in the worship at Pittsmoor Methodist Church, before we all met at Burngreave Ashram for Cafe Church. After an exceptionally good lunch by Tamara, Sandra Dutson talked to us about Fracking, & her experiences in protest camps.



Grace, John, Nirmal, Sandra, Sally, John, Helen and Chris

Then suddenly, the uplifting & transformative (for me, anyway, & for the gardens at 77 Rock Street!) Retreat was at an end. Old friendships had been renewed & new ones made, ideas had been discussed & insights into the Kingdom of God had been grasped, & ways of living out God's will were being undertaken. And lots of fun had been had & wonderful food eaten! It was brilliant, & many thanks to all the people who helped towards its success, especially John & Grace.

Anne Littlefair

To follow the Way revealed in Jesus

The General Meeting on October 12th was a fascinating and important occasion in terms of our Community self definition.

At two previous General Meetings we had discussed the weakness in the first line of our Community Commitment:

We commit ourselves
To hold to the truth as it is in Jesus

Already, in "Journeying with Ashram", by Helen, Eurig and myself (2005) we had commented that "Hold to" could sound like holding onto something despite everything, and that the "Truth as it is in Jesus" might sound too dogmatic (pp8-9).

Then earlier that year, we had proposed two changes. First we wanted to move away from "Hold to" and substitute "Follow", which sounded much more open - and much more akin to our ethos in Ashram. Second, we concluded that we needed a wider and more appropriate phrase than "the Truth as it is in Jesus" and proposed that we consider "the Way, Truth and Life of Jesus"

Then on October 12th Eurig came up with an alternative "the Way revealed in Jesus". So we voted, with 10 in favour of the new phrase, and only 6 in favour of the previous proposal, and 2 in favour of no change. So we now have:

**We commit ourselves
To follow the Way revealed in Jesus**

I think this is great for at least four reasons.

First it takes us back possibly nearly a century in early Church history from John's Gospel in John 14 verse 6 in AD 100-120, to the earliest followers of Jesus in the Acts of the Apostles, possibly AD 35-40 if our guesses are correct. In Acts 9.2 Christians are described as "those of the Way" and in Acts 19 verses 9,23, Acts 22 v 4, and Acts 24 verses 14,22, the Christian movement is called "the Way" - and in 24 verse 14 it is "the Way which some call a Sect." So welcome Ashram to the earliest description of our movement - "the Way".

Second the new phrase recalls that we are a people who are followers of an open-ended movement or dynamic happening in the world, which we do not invent or possess - and "Way". Our only guide is the many, many ways of Jesus, and our own attempts to follow, on the shoulders of those who have tried it before and try it now in many, many ways.

Third to say that "we commit ourselves to the Way revealed in Jesus" draws attention to the fact that the rest of the Commitment is in fact not a bad summary of what the Way of Jesus was for him and can be for us -

*support each other
challenge evil with love
offer the Kingdom
work for the new community of creation
risk ourselves in sharing*

This is the way of Jesus isn't it? And we get into it what bits of it we can in our own contexts.

Fourth. We are a community of followers, not a collection of believers. "Follow" is our word, or "Disciple", not "Hold to", or "Believe". We don't have a list of things we have to believe, but a path we chose to follow. And for that, each one has their own responsibility - and their own privilege to chose what beliefs, if any, they adopt or hold to, to support their following.

As a theologian, I conclude - Not bad, Ashram!

John Vincent

THE NEW ASHRAM COMMUNITY COMMITMENT

**We commit ourselves -
To follow the Way revealed in Jesus,
To support each other in good and ill,
To challenge evil with the power of love,
To offer the Kingdom on political and
economic witness,
To work for the new Community of all
creation,
And to risk ourselves in a lifestyle of
sharing.**

TVGs: the new way to share responsibilities in Ashram

Over the 45 year history of the community, there have been many different ways of sharing responsibilities within the community, and the system continues to evolve. 2 years ago a major change was made to the community governance structure with the introduction of 'Task and Vision Groups'. This article will explain the reasons for the change, how they fit into the long term evolution, and how they should work. The changes that have occurred over the years are well documented in '*A Lifestyle of Sharing*' (John Vincent, Ashram Press 2009). Many will remember the old '**committee meeting**' system where many of the more established members of the community spend Saturday afternoon working their way through a huge agenda which invariably spilled over into the evening session. This was unpopular with the committee members (as they missed the traditional Saturday afternoon walk) and created a sort of hierarchy within the community.

Furthermore, in order to preserve transparency, much of the discussions at the committee were discussed again at the general meeting on the Sunday of the weekends. For many, the weekend became one long committee meeting. You may feel that with its Methodist links, community members might have felt very comfortable with that. But most come to the weekends to escape the endless meetings that seem to pervade their everyday life and want instead to spend the time chatting and learning from each other. Furthermore, the Charities Act also came along which required that we had trustees, and that would have created a further committee within the committee!

So in 1997 this was all changed and the business of the community was handed over to the '**General Meeting**'. This essentially placed the committee business into the hands of the whole community. To make this manageable, the meeting was split into bite sized sections

(named after sections of the commitment) and spread throughout the weekend. The trustees, who hold legally responsible for the charity, met separately to cover essential matters of finance and property.

The new system worked well and led to increased transparency and accountability, and ensured the involvement of the whole community in decisions. But it was not without its problems. These included:

- Business started to take up much of the weekend – not just for the committee members but now for the whole community
- General meetings could be inaccessible to visitors – those who had been around for a long time tended to speak most (as they knew the system and the issues) with little time to explain the intricacies to newcomers. Fear of overrunning sometimes meant that at times we had to hurry through the agenda, leaving little time for discussion before decisions were made.
- The meetings could be very boring, especially for visitors. At their best, the weekends are hugely stimulating and enthralling – but no-one wants to join a community which spend much of its time together discussing changes to their rule book or the costs of repairs to a community project roof.
- Personal issues sometimes arose that were not suitable to be dealt with at the general meeting – but it was unclear how else to deal with them. As the officers didn't meet separately, these were being presented to the trustees. This highlighted an uncertainty amongst the community as to the roles of the general meeting, the trustees and the officers.

But how should we change this? Clearly, the trustees group was still needed for legal reasons. But could we not improve the general meeting system so as to remove some of the problems and at the same time clarify the management structure of the community?

In February 2011 the officers and trustees met together in Liverpool to discuss alternatives. After a day of much head scratching, coffee and biscuits, they came up with the model shown in the picture. The diagram had started simply as a way of clarifying the structure of the community. But at that meeting the concept of **Task and Vision Groups (TVGs)** developed. It was felt that if the community meeting was split into 4 groups, each addressing an area of community life, it could have several beneficial effects:

1. It would allow members to dig deeper in a specific area. Being in a small group would allow each of us to ask the detailed, searching questions that we might not feel able to ask in a large group.
2. It would give members a chance to get involved with an area of our interest, whilst leaving the remainder to be done by others.
3. It could well be more democratic, allowing the newer or quieter members of the community to have more access to decision-making. This might allow fresh insights and ideas to come to the fore.
4. It would distribute the officers amongst the groups, producing a less hierarchical management structure for the community.

In May 2011 the community agreed to the changes which were used for the first time in the meeting of October 2011.

How do the new Task and Vision Groups work?

The groups are broadly based on the areas of the community commitment, which splits quite

neatly into 4 groups. Time will be made in each community meeting for the groups to meet together. There will also be a second period later in the weekend for them to report back to the rest of the community and for their plans to be agreed by the Community General Meeting (which remains the governing body of the community).

We envisage that members will join one of the TVGs and stay within it for 2-3 years so as to 'dig deep' on the area and develop some expertise. Each group will also choose an individual to co-ordinate their work. It will not be necessary for each group to keep minutes (although they may wish to), but their report back to the rest of the community following their meeting will be included in the general meeting minutes for future reference.

Each group has a small number of set tasks which have to be done each weekend (e.g. setting dates and topics for future weekends (Spirituality TVG), or ensuring absent members are remembered (Lifestyle TVG)). These tasks will be included in the general meeting agenda. But beyond that, the group is free to define its own agenda and discussion topics.

The four groups are:

1. Action ('Offering the kingdom; community of all creation')

This TVG will examine how the community works within the world in terms of projects and campaigns.

2. Spirituality ('Hold to the truth')

The spirituality TVG co-ordinates the spiritual life of the community. This includes worship and epilogues at the weekends, the prayer manual and retreats. It also includes the general arrangements for the weekends.

3. Lifestyle ('Support each other; lifestyle of sharing')

The lifestyle TVG looks at how the community communicates and works together. This includes membership and branches,

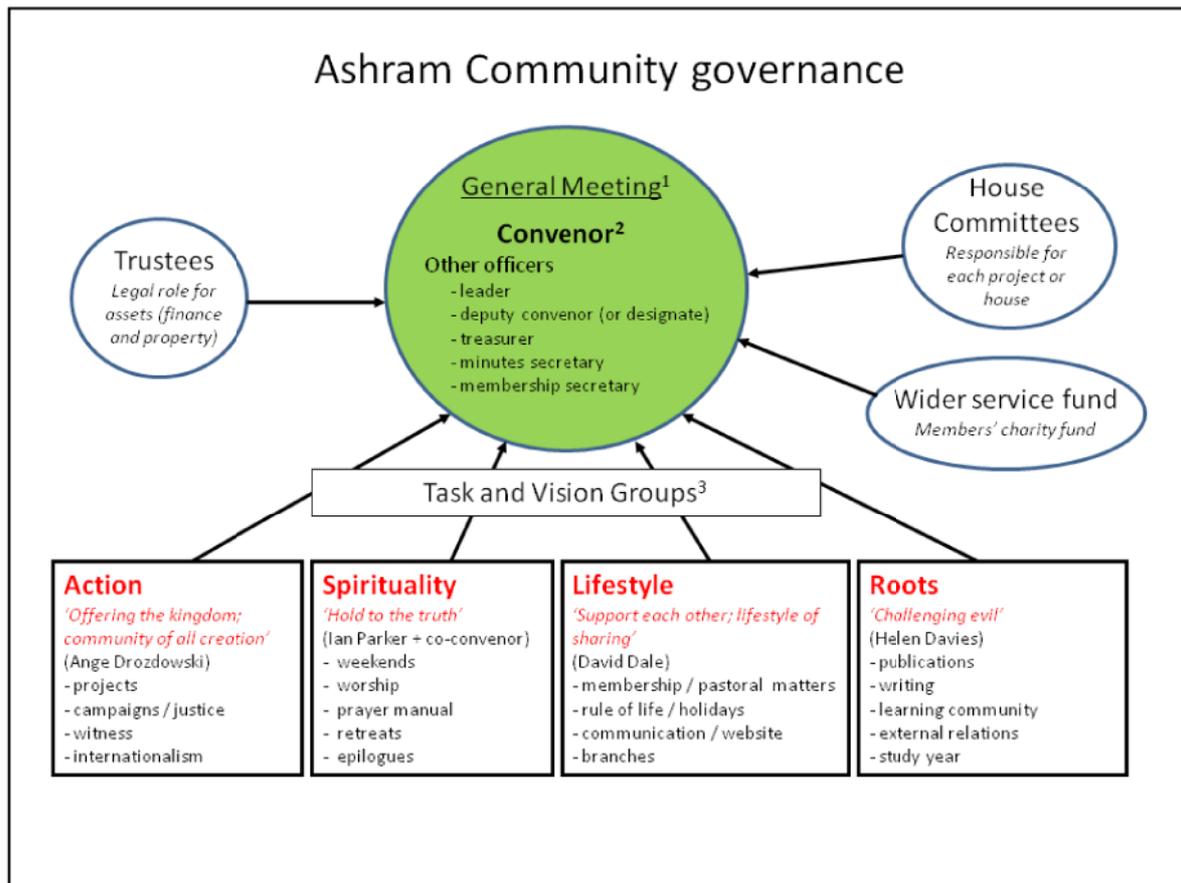
communication between members, *Act Together*, website, holidays and rule of life and any pastoral matters that have arisen.

4. Roots ('Challenging evil')

Finally the Roots TVG looks at the community's biblical and spiritual roots and how these are communicated to others through the study year, publications and writing.

The TVG systems have been tested over the last couple of years to see how the system is working and whether it is achieving its aims. The Ashram Community has always evolved in response to its members' wishes and needs and this is another example of this. Feedback is very welcome and can be sent in writing or brought to the community meetings at the next weekend.

Andrew Weeks
Ashram Convenor (2012-14)



NOTES

1. The General Meeting is the main decision-making body of the community. The officers are appointed by the meeting to facilitate its work. The officers may also make decisions on behalf of the community in between meetings if urgent action is needed (except on finance and property which are the trustees' role).
2. The convenor acts as chair of the community for his/her 2 year tenure (acting as convenor designate for a year prior to, and as deputy convenor for a year after, their period of office). The role not only involves convening meetings but acting as organiser, overseer and 'glue' for the community.
3. Task and Vision groups (actually 'working groups' according to the constitution) meet at weekends and report back to the general meeting. Each member joins one of the groups for 2-3 years so as to get 'stuck in' to the detail of the area.

Life changing rubbish!

My sister Karen lives in Kefalonia and therefore she usually buys me Christmas presents that can be sent easily by post. For Christmas 2011 I received an attractive silver-coloured coin-purse. Knowing my interest in Fairtrade and similar activities and in recycling, Karen had also enclosed a leaflet which explained that the purse was made from the ring-pulls from drinks cans, thanks to a charity called The Philippine Community Fund.

It also gave the charity's contact details and website address so I was able to find out more.



In 1996 Jane Walker was on holiday in the Philippines. Wandering off the tourist route in Manila, she was confronted by a huge mound of rotting rubbish on which children as young as 4 years old were searching for pieces of plastic, paper and glass to sell to a recycling agency in order to buy food. Jane discovered that the children were desperate to attend school but that their parents could not afford the uniform necessary for them to attend State school. Without an education, these children faced a lifetime of slaving through rubbish – containing human and medical waste – for 10 hours a day for the equivalent of £1.50 a day.

Jane started a day care centre next to a squatter colony in an open cemetery in Navotas, which she funded herself for 6 years. Realising that the needs of the children were beyond her own financial resources, she registered the charity PCF in the UK in 2002 and in the Philippines in 2003.

Since then PCF has worked with people in the most depressed areas of the Philippines to help them towards economic development and independence through education, nutrition, medical programs and spiritual care. The charity has schools in Navotas and Tondo and also sponsors children to attend State school and college.

They also run adult literacy classes. All school children are provided with breakfast, lunch and weekly food parcels. Their medical clinics

provide healthcare for the schoolchildren and their families, a birthing clinic in Tonto and have trained 50 women from the community as health care workers.

Training in handicrafts, jewellery-making and basic electronics enables even the poorest parents to make a range of beautiful products from recycled materials and collects and segregates 6 tonnes of “clean” refuse, proving a good income for 30+ adults.

Which brings me back to the purse. I began collecting ring-pulls and encouraged friends and neighbours and people at church and Ashram to do the same. Every so often I send a parcel to PCF in Southampton for shipment to Manila. I haven't kept a detailed record but estimate that in just over two years I have sent approximately 4kg of ring-pulls. One purse takes 160 ring-pulls, which weigh about 50g, so this equates to around 80 purses-worth.

The range also includes handbags of varying sizes and, more recently i-pad covers, all in various colours. In addition there are items made from crisp packets and juice packs and toothpaste tubes and jewellery made from recycled magazines.



I encourage you all to continue collecting ring-pulls (the UK charity also collects toothpaste tubes but not crisp packets currently) but as I am unlikely to be attending Ashram meetings in the future, please send them direct to PCF, whose address is below. Why not encourage your local café to collect them too?

For details of the full range of products and for more information on the continuing work of the charity to change the lives of some of The Philippines' poorest inhabitants, contact:PCF, PO Box 294, Hedge End, Southampton SO30 2YD Tel: 01489 790219 email info@p-c-f.org website: www.p-c-f.org

Lorraine Jones

Radical Christianity Summer School In Sheffield 2014 Monday- Wed 8,9,10 July

Ashram's first Summer School this year will return to one of its historic themes- developing or relaunching Christian Radicalism.

The School is being sponsored by -

- ⤴ The Institute for Socio-Biblical Studies at the Urban Theology Unit
- ⤴ The Study and Research Group of the Ashram Community
- ⤴ The St Mark's Centre for Radical Christianity

So far we have assembled colleagues who are already well known to book readers and followers - Chris Burdon, Helen Davies, Philip Davies, Bryan Eyles, Nirmal Fernando, Leslie Francis, Noel Irwin, Ian Lucraft, Andrew Parker, Alan Powers, John Rogerson, John Vincent, Ian Wallis

Evenings and overnights will be at Ashram Houses and Burngreave Ashram. Daytime sessions will be at Urban Theology Unit, Teaching Suite, Victoria Hall Methodist Church.

For the latest information contact ashramcommunity@hotmail.com / Tel: 0114 244 7278



HOUSES AND PROJECTS

Burngreave Ashram: 80-86 Spital Hill Sheffield
S4 7LG – Tel: 0114 270 0972
Ashram Centre/New Roots Shop:

347 Glossop Rd Sheffield S10 2HP
Tel: 0114 272 1971

Community Houses: 77 and 79 Rock St
Sheffield S3 9JB – Tel: 0114 272 7144

6 Andover Street Sheffield S3 9EG
Tel: 0791 092 2462 (Tamara)

BRANCHES

All Members and Associates are attached to one of five Regional Branches. Please contact Secretaries if you would like to know more about meeting or events. The Branch Secretaries are the local contact points for the Community.

SECRETARIES

Midlands – Chris & Lorraine Smedley
Tel: 0115 9288430 – Monthly Meetings

London – Linda Marshall – 01784 456 474
Saturday Meetings – Monthly

North-West – Josie Smith – 01706 841 532
Meetings as arranged.

Sheffield – Grace Vincent – 0114 243 6688
Gatherings fortnightly – Mons, 7 – 9:30pm

North-East – Jenny Medhurst
Tel: 01740 630475 – Meetings as arranged

DATES

2014

- 8 -10 July Radical Christianity Summer School, Sheffield
- 12-19 July Ashram Holiday, Lyme Regis
- 26 July General Meeting, Nottingham
- 3-5 October Community Weekend Unstone Grange

2015

- 28 Feb General Meeting Sheffield
- 8-10 May Community Weekend Middleton, Manchester
- 9-11 Oct Community Weekend Unstone Grange

COMMUNITY

Community Office:
178 Abbeyfield Road, Sheffield S4 7AY
Tel: 0114 243 6688/244 7278

Ashram Press: As above
See Website www.ashram.org.uk for Publications

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