



ACT TOGETHER

Ashram Community Trust

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May Weekend 2024 at Swanwick

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Christians Aware Summer School at Parcevall Hall - a personal view



We gathered in the Hall which looks like it has stood forever in the beautiful Yorkshire Dales, but the limestone knoll called Simon's Seat on the opposite side of the hill reminds us that God works on a different timescale. We are here to learn about "Care for Creation in World Faiths", and this we have been doing, with talks from Gurmuk Singh, Jayaraj Nambier, and Revd. Olwen Crookall-Greening (a senior Buddhist monk)

Gurmuk Singh talked mostly about Sikh faith and history, and when questioned generally replied with a parable. The most profound one for me was the true story of how one woman back in 1730 went into the forest and hugged a tree to prevent it being cut down to make a palace for the local ruler. She was cut in half along with the tree. The next day over 300 villagers were out hugging trees. They were cut down as well. But then news got to the local ruler who stopped the building. 240 years later the locals were out hugging trees again, this time to save the forest from a company wanting to make tennis racquets.

Jayaraj Nambier on Hinduism: The greeting "Namaste", which we may be familiar with, means the God in me greets the God in you. To the Hindu, everything is sacred as it contains a part of Krishna (the creator God). Later I read that "The unity underlying life is so complete and pervasive that when we inflict suffering on the smallest creature, we injure the whole" Eknath Easwaran on the Bhagavad Gita. Jayaraj also reminded us when questioned that the Sikh religion is very similar to the Hindu religion as it is an offshoot of Hinduism. This sounds similar to the way in which Christianity grew out of Judaism.

In between these talks we had another visitor, Jon Swales, to talk about Creation Theology (not the same as Creation-Centred theology!) in which he talked about creation as a cosmic temple designed for worship. He spoke of how faith, temperance and contemplation were set against consumerism, capitalism and individualism. We must grieve for what we have lost, and what will be "We need to love and look like Jesus". He was also encouraged to talk

about his work at the Lighthouse Project in Leeds where damaged adults find a place of love and safety.

Revd Olwen Crookall-Greening based her talk on the book *Weeds Flourish, Flowers Wither*, which was written in 1250. Several people seemed to be having trouble following, so I asked "Is it like running out of the door saying 'the sky is falling' and finding weeds flourishing and flowers fading in the garden. She nodded. I think she was talking about the ultimate nature of reality. Can't be sure. But want to explore a bit more.

Our final talk was from Ellen Teague, who had had computer glitches and had resurrected her original talk on the papal encyclical *Laudate Si*, which we were surprised to hear was not all written by Pope Francis but approved by him. The Pope had meant *Laudate Si* to be acted on throughout the church but Ellen commented it was hard to find a Bishop who had read it! There is now a sequel, *Laudate Deum*, which is available online as is *Laudate Si* for those who want to know more. Ellen also talked about her own experience of various COP meetings , encounters with Sean McDonagh etc.

An unscheduled talk from Mark Coleman gave us a quick glimpse of the joys and perils of dedicated environmentalism. He reminded us that activists need community support!

In between talks, we had some profound Bible studies led by Stephen Skinner. with time to grapple in small groups with some important questions related to creation. I was surprised to hear that someone had devised 9 ways to love the planet ranging from Aesthetic to Utilitarian. Stephen also quoted Thomas Berry "It is not an environmental crisis, it is a crisis of ourselves." That fitted in with the ideas of Hinduism and Buddhism, I felt. We also had some times of worship with music from Ali Bullivent, concluding with a creation-centred Eucharist.

Jane Skinner taught us how to do Ikebana, with some startling results, and also led a session on Art and Faiths with some stunning slides to accompany her talk.

There were also outings, all of which I missed, so herewith a report from Euan

Nona Wright



St Mary's Church Embsay (Ecochurch Gold Award holder)

A short drive from Parcevall Hall brought us to the unassuming Victorian Gothic church of St Mary. The church members had moved well beyond the simple business of changing

lightbulbs to ensuring that creation care was part of everything they do. That includes aiming to achieve net zero by 2025! As Parish Environment Officer Diane Linford stated "We have a small but very active Eco Group here at St Mary's and have the strong support of our vicar and congregation. We do feel that caring for Creation is embedded in the life of our church community." For me what was most impressive is the extent to which the St Mary's Eco Team are involved in outreach to other churches and groups to spread the message about practical creation care. What lovely people! What inspiring vision! A most uplifting visit!

[Gold-Eco-Church-Award_updated.pdf \(stmaryembsay.org.uk\)](http://stmaryembsay.org.uk)

Growing with Grace Organic Vegetable Growers

Quaker Chris Hart, one of the founders of Growing with Grace in 2001, was our guide for our visit to this organic vegetable grower near the village of Clapton. With nearly 2 acres of glasshouses, they are able to grow a range of protected crops over most of the year and supply around 300 veggieboxes a week to customers within a 40-mile radius as well as having a farm shop. We learned that organic produce is very labour-intensive and competing with supermarkets means they struggle to remain profitable – which probably explains the slightly dilapidated state of the site. Their dedication to environmental sustainability was undoubtedly - and the vegetables looked good, too! [Organic Veg Box Deliveries Serving The North West \(growingwithgrace.org.uk\)](http://growingwithgrace.org.uk)

Settle Stories – Change Lives Through Story

Just off the main square in Settle was the vibrant hub of the visionary operation Settle Stories. Set up by Sita Brand, the aim of the organisation is to recognise and promote storytelling as a key way of engaging people in a lively way. Training is offered and high-quality video facilities help record story-telling by well-known as well as ordinary people, and via the internet can reach a worldwide audience. Their operation is firmly underpinned by the principles of equality and inclusion. Whilst one might question how this visit fitted in with the theme of the summer school, the take-away message must surely have been the power of story-telling, and how that might be employed in the quest to navigate around people's prejudices and engage them in eco action. [Settle Stories - The Home of Adventurous Storytelling](http://settlesstories.org.uk)

Euan McPhee





Downdykebushing Coast Path, Manorbier

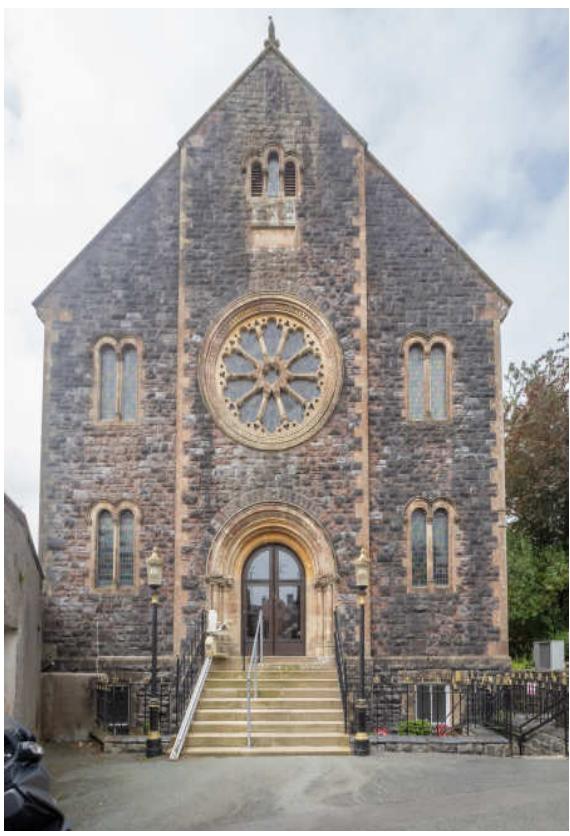
Another Holiday in Wales

In preparation for our journey to Narberth at the beginning of September, we (Peter and Linda Marshall) had booked rail tickets well in advance, to leave from Staines Station at 11.53, arriving eventually at Narberth Station, after changing at Reading and Llanelli. The arrival time should have been 17.45, just in time for the evening meal Ian Parker would be preparing. So just to be on the safe side, Peter checked the progress of our first train on Saturday morning, only to find that it would not be going as far as Reading because of some sort of problem with the track beyond Wokingham. So what then?

Well first, panic, then work out an alternative route to Reading.... Peter is the one for that, and he came up with the alternative route which involved a bus to Heathrow Terminal 5, then the Heathrow Express to Heathrow Central where we had to change to the Elizabeth Line as far as Hayes & Harlington, where we could get a train to Reading which should, and did, arrive at 1.43pm, just an hour and a half to wait for the next train, which would, and did, take us to Newport for 4.23pm. At 4.41pm there was a train which should have been going to our destination of Narberth, but there was some sort of problem on the line beyond Carmarthen, where we arrived at 7.01pm and waited for almost an hour till they found us a replacement minibus. Although we didn't arrive at our destination of the Copses holiday residence at Narberth Bridge until about 8.45pm, some 3 hours later than planned, the minibus journey was a good ending as there were only two other passengers on board and the driver was very friendly and local and could tell us details of the area we were just about seeing through the windows. He could also drop us off nearer to the Copses than we would have been had we arrived by train.

It wasn't just the railways though; both the drivers on the holiday – Ian Parker and David Dale – had journeys with delays and detours that you may hear of later. So there seems to be a message emerging here that **future Ashram holidays should not take place at the beginning of September in Wales**, particularly if I remind you of last year's in Barmouth, also in Wales, when those of us coming by train had to delay our arrival by one day because of a rail strike, resulting in a bus replacement service on the day we did travel because works on a bridge had begun, and a further unplanned bus replacement on the homeward journey because a lorry had crashed into a bridge, which resulted in us crossing the border between Wales and England on the top of a double-decker bus, with spectacular views all around but further delays in where and when we had to change trains to get back to Staines.

And then in 2022 we had arrived on time at Birmingham International to find no mention of the Transport for Wales which was to take us to Aberystwyth. Anxious enquiries at the information desk revealed that the line had sunk into a hole and directed us on a train to Stafford(?) from where another train took us to Shrewsbury. There we waited on a platform for about an hour and a half, as there were no trains to Aberystwyth. We were directed from platform to platform and eventually a train arrived. At least this one took us to Wales but gave up at Machynlleth where all 200 passengers were de-trained and nobody knew what was happening. After 20 minutes I decamped to the Ladies and a double-decker bus drew up. By the time I emerged the bus was full but we managed to squeeze up the stairs with our luggage to the two remaining seats. Peter sat next to a very attractive and talkative young lady going home from London to Aberystwyth. The bus dropped us outside the Wetherspoons, giving us a handy place to wait while David Dale drove the 20 miles to pick us up as we had missed the last bus to take us closer to our destination.



But now back to 2024. On the Sunday morning Chris Bullock and I decided to go to the local Baptist Church for their 10.45 am service. It took some finding as it was at the end of a fairly narrow alleyway off the high street, and when we did discover it we were amazed as it looked like a cathedral rather than a non-conformist chapel, and was more than 200 years old. We were told over coffee after the service that in those days only Anglican churches could be built on the main road, hence this one still being hidden to visitors. It also had its own burial ground behind the church because non-conformists could not be buried in the local parish churchyard. Having introduced ourselves to people who welcomed us over coffee, I was impressed when on the way back to our residence on Monday afternoon I was greeted by a man I did not immediately recognise till he said I had been at their gathering the day before, and wasn't I the Methodist from Staines! A similar coincidence happened for me and Peter on the Sunday afternoon, when Ian Parker had taken me, Peter and Chris Bullock in his car to the nearby seaside town of Saundersfoot. At the end of the afternoon we were leaning over a wall above the harbour watching the boats coming in and out when the person standing next to me asked how we were doing and it turned out to be the

passenger I had been sitting next to on the minibus that brought us to Narberth from Carmarthen on the Saturday night.

Moving now to coincidence number three. As there were only six of us this year (those already mentioned plus JJV) we couldn't just allocate the evening meal preparation to one person each day, so we shared it in various ways as the week progressed and Peter and I did Monday and Tuesday. For Tuesday we had chosen the "Cheese and Bean Savoury" from the ACT publication **COOKING TOGETHER** from 1995, edited by Alison Boyd and Margaret Mackley. Then on Thursday I was discussing with David what we might do for dinner that evening and he brought out his 1977 copy of "Vegetarian Cookery" – 500 recipes 60p – of which I also have a copy at home. Flicking through the pages I noticed a recipe I had often made in the past which, although called "Savoury Roast", was almost exactly the same as the Cheese and Bean Savoury plagiarised by ACT in 1995!



Black Pool Mill, Claddow Ddu, Blaenau Gwent

Talking of meals, David kept up the tradition of treating us to a reading of something related to our visit between the first and second courses of the evening meal and this time, as usual, he had found something entirely appropriate: "Poems from Pembrokeshire", one of a pamphlet series celebrating the spirit of a place. He had contacted the Museum in advance to see if they could suggest anything and this is what they had provided him with. The first one he read to

us was "The Landsker Line", which fitted perfectly with the small town of Narberth where we were based, as it is on the line which marks the boundary between the northern part of Pembrokeshire which is Welsh speaking and the southern area where English is the first language.

Narberth is very conveniently provided with shops that sold all that we needed for our various meals, but also has a large variety of local independent businesses that kept the high street area looking attractive as well as interesting. There were, for example, two shops with the environment in mind, one called "Planetamica" offering "All your daily essentials" "With the environment in mind"

The one at the other end of the high street was called HAPPY PLANET GREEN STORE and I went in to ask them about it. There was one person on duty, who said she was the only actual employee and she shared the week with the woman of the couple who had founded the business in 2018. It was going well, with a few customers from the holidaymakers but plenty from local residents, which had made it fairly easy to organise deliveries during lockdown. Their loose fruit and vegetables looked very fresh!



But Narberth has more than shops; there is an art gallery, a museum, the old Town Hall, which has been turned into a retail outlet, but one where visitors are welcome to browse around without necessarily purchasing any of the mainly decorative items they have on display. Most of the group visited the museum on one day or another and we all found it very interesting and well presented, especially the Victorian Parlour where recordings were playing of the sort of music the piano players in the family might have played for the others to sing along to. I was certainly tempted to sing along to the ones I recognised.

We were fortunate to have two very accommodating drivers who could take the pedestrians to locations in the area from which we could do a circular walk back to the parked car. On a showery Wednesday morning Ian took me and Peter to Blackpool – yes really! It was the name of an ancient disused mill which had only recently been renovated and turned into “Black Pool Mill heritage dining restaurant”. We didn’t stop off to try it out, but set off on a very peaceful walk through woodland with nothing but bird-song in the background and a well-signed lookout point with views to the coast. There were a few picnic benches in a less wooded area where we could sit protected by trees from the rain that was passing by, and then finish the route back to the car.

The same afternoon we were treated to another car ride, this time by David, to the village of Manorbier, which has an enormous and very impressive ruined Norman castle, but we could only admire that from outside as another “short walk” was planned using a section of the Pembrokeshire Coast Path. The instructions were selected by Peter from a sheet in a folder at the residence, but he didn’t tell us that it came with a paragraph, in red, headed SAFETY FIRST, with a list of half-a dozen risks to look out for. It was supposed to take an hour and a half but it took us over two hours! However, it was incredibly beautiful and varied, with changing views of the bay and its very blue water and smooth sandy beach, then the really scary section on a narrow sandy path half way up the cliffs and finally back through some farm land to the car park and where David drove as fast as he could to get back in time for the meal being prepared by Ian. Looking at the walk instruction leaflet afterwards I was amused to see the names of some of the places we had passed by on our way, such as Parsons Piece on some land above the cliffs and Priest’s Nose for the point where the cliffs went out into the sea at the end of the bay.

Thursday was forecast to be wet from about midday so I went into the town to buy a few items needed for dinner and came back in time to avoid the worst of the rain and we started some preparation for the evening meal. Then I kept dry by getting out Peter’s laptop to update this article which was already underway. We finally all had dinner at an earlier time, which works better for John, then Peter and I went out for a walk in the dark into town as it was no longer raining. We just walked around admiring (and photographing) the various old buildings and I found myself being guided into a small and rather noisy pub – not my sort of thing. But it turned out to be very much a local venue, with rather loud music in one area but just two men playing darts in the other, where we sat down and were soon greeted by a regular in very much the way that we might be greeted when arriving at a church for the first time. The conversation went even better when Peter was able to say he had a Welsh grandmother, and his hand was shaken as he was welcomed into the clan, as it were. (I know that’s not the right word but we can’t remember what he called it.)

On Friday morning, very early, we heard the departure of Ian – the one who is so good at organising things – because he had to be sure to get home in time to conduct a wedding on Saturday, but he and David had sorted out what would still need to be done with things like the Ashram Weekend Box that

comes on holidays as well as Weekends and we relaxed indoors while waiting to see what the day’s weather was going to be suitable for. As we’re approaching the cut-off date for ACT Together articles you will have to ask us at the next Weekend how things went on Friday and Saturday and whether any of us arrived home at the expected time.

Linda Marshall

PS Amazingly, the trains back home on Saturday each followed their timetable to the minute and got us to our destination dead on time!



Linda, St Andrew's Church, Narbeth

Thoughts from Cerys on the Epistle of James, and How Not to Age

The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text, by Peter H. Davids. -1982 The Paternoster Press, Carlisle.

p 40 Christology-the author views Christ mostly as the resurrected Lord. There is an absence of a "theologia crucis", a son- of- God Christology or a saviour Christology, which is why Luther dismissed the epistle as valueless. Theologia crucis seems to be Paul's narrative in his epistles.

p 41 The depiction of Christ is of the leader of the church whose sayings provide guidelines- the exalted Lord in the heavenly realm in whose name the community is baptised, who channels healing- the coming Lord and judge who shall make real God's justice in the church and in the earthly realm. It can be described as an early form of Christology and is distinctly un-Pauline. Early Christianity had many diverse narratives, and powerful individuals like St Paul enforced his own view expelling many other understandings of Christ. As such Christianity tended to develop a one-sided view, and the vision of St James the Just was ignored largely. Was this a mistake?

Jenny, I hope this little article is a thoughtful informative narrative, which maybe one or two readers shall find useful to reflect on. Greetings from Cerys.

I became vegan by June 1992, and before that I was vegetarian by September 1986. Over 14 years ago I went to a lecture given by the Medical Research Council. After the lecture a consultant from Addenbrookes hospital said that his diabetic patients enjoyed better health on a vegan diet, and he recommended such a diet to better control their diabetes. Nutritional research is developing rapidly, though there is a tide of misinformation to confuse and bewilder people.

How not to Age- Michael Gregor, MD, bluebird books for life 2023.

Glycemic Load per serving on p 60

Low up to 10. beans, chickpeas, split peas, fruits, lentils, whole grain bread

Medium 11-20 Oatmeal, spaghetti, brown rice, sweet potato, white bread

High over 20 Breakfast cereals, dates, white rice, white potato, raisins.

- The aim for better health is to reduce blood sugar spikes by eating foods low on the glycemic index, and by not eating foods high on the glycemic index.(p 582)
- Those who eat meat have up to 50 percent higher insulin levels in their bloodstreams. The differential effect of plant versus animal protein has been attributed to their contrasting amino acid profiles.p 583)
- Protein restriction is the only intervention that blocks every one of the eleven ageing pathways, yet the prevailing dogma in our society is to eat more protein (p 573)
- The higher the animal protein intake, the higher the mortality rates, whereas the higher the plant protein, the lower the mortality rates. (p 237)
- Milk intake appeared to increase bone and hip fracture rates, as well as shorten people's lives. Canadian new dietary guidelines now includes an emphasis on plant-based food intake, along with the removal of the dairy food group.(p 581)
- branched-chain amino acids (BCAAs) are mostly found in meat, including chicken and fish, dairy products and eggs. This may explain why animal protein intake intensifies insulin resistance and is associated with higher diabetes risk, whereas plant foods tend to have the opposite effect.(p 582)
- vegans are often found to have the lowest odds of diabetes.

The science is becoming much more detailed, with better frameworks of explanation.

Greetings from Cerys

"Thank goodness we can still export"

September 2, 2024

This year the Medjoul date harvest in the Occupied West Bank of Palestine has started a little earlier than expected. Higher than usual temperatures around Jericho have accelerated the ripening process allowing growers to start harvesting nearly 2 weeks earlier than last year – a welcome head start to the season.

However, the situation for farmers and workers remains challenging. Movement restrictions are still in place, similar to last season. Workers often face long waits at checkpoints or have to take longer routes to reach their work. Despite all these difficulties, Medjoul growers and suppliers continue to adapt to the unpredictability around them. They are committed to operating as efficiently as possible to deliver the new harvest.

For some, the season has begun very tensely. In Fara'a refugee camp in Tubas, where recent airstrikes have tragically claimed lives, many workers were unable to leave in order to reach their work further south in the Jordan Valley at the start of the harvest. Some suppliers have had to arrange for accommodation for dozens of workers near their factories to help them avoid travel in this precarious time.

In Al Auja (10km from Jericho), a natural spring serves as a vital water supply for surrounding communities. However, we are hearing that young armed settlers regularly appear to obstruct access to the water, either by diverting the spring, or wasting collected water, or simply by scaring people away from the source.

With no opportunity to sell in Gaza and increasing dangers of working and travelling in the West Bank – compounded by a local economy that's on the brink – our date suppliers face severe threats. In this context, foreign markets are even more crucial. As one supplier puts it, “ **Movement is difficult and perilous. Things have never been more frightening or uncertain. The local economy is on its knees. We are better off than so many though. Thank goodness we can still export.**”

They don't know how long they'll be able to continue. In the meantime, the ability to harvest, sort, pack and export is providing employment to workers and bringing in much needed income to thousands of families, offering a vital lifeline for these communities.

Trade is a lifeline. #BuyPalestinian

Zaytoun CIC





Fairtrade news

It's the 30th anniversary of the first Fairtrade foods reaching supermarket shelves - Green & Black's Maya Gold chocolate, Clipper tea bags and Cafe Direct ground coffee. (Resistant supermarkets apparently only buckled when lobbied by vicars bearing till receipts (Christian Aid's idea for emphasising our spending power and where we would choose to take it!) Now there are over 5000 different lines- from cotton buds and flowers to wine and wellness products- and as a result

2 million farmers and workers are in greater control of their lives, but there's a whole lot more to do!

- 58% of the farmers in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire growing the cocoa for our luxury chocolates are living below the World Bank's extreme poverty level.
- Only 5% of the tea produced as Fairtrade is sold at the Fairtrade price.
- Farmers are getting only 3% of the cost of a cup of coffee in a coffee shop.

But there's good news !

In a YouGov poll 69% UK adults said that they had bought a Fairtrade Marked products this year, 85% think farmers should receive a stable and fair price for the products they grow, and sales in 2023 generated £23million in premium payments made directly to producers, so that they could invest in their businesses, communities and climate resilience projects.

Tea

"Which" has just published the result of a blind tasting test of everyday teas, in which the Co-op 99 Fairtrade blend came level for taste with Yorkshire tea , which was twice as expensive, and was preferred to Twinings, the most expensive tea. So paying a Fairtrade price which enables producers to farm sustainably and provide education, healthcare and

other benefits to their communities is possible with lower prices to consumers.

Nyeri Chai Farmers Association Update.

The Spring ACT described how these Kenyan tea growers won a court battle to increase the basic price for tea across Kenya. They also fought for a reduction in processing fees, so that they could keep more of their profit.

Now this inspirational group is campaigning for safer collection procedures, and a change to governance in the industry- limiting directors' terms in power, introducing gender quotas and banning the use of proxies in elections, to ensure that profit and power are distributed fairly throughout the supply chain.

Stockton-on-Tees

A group of local knitters created an amazing post box



topper in Yarm for the start of Fairtrade Fortnight this month. Pictures of the topper with a cup and saucer, biscuit and teabag, bottle of wine, pineapple, chocolate bar, bananas, a cup of coffee and bag of coffee beans, bees and a jar of honey, surrounded by leaflets explaining Fairtrade has been proudly shared on the town Facebook page with over 1000 members - a very successful way of spreading the Fairtrade

message!



Two of the knitters were at an event in our local library where the Mayor, as the first citizen of the Borough, was presented with our Certificate of

renewal of status as a Fairtrade Borough. Children from a school in central Stockton which has long been committed to Fairtrade went back to school with their certificate, buzzing, but puzzled too - Fairtrade is such a part of school's ethos that they couldn't understand why anyone would buy un-Fairtrade products!



Bethlehem Bauble peace lights

Blown by Muslims, Painted by Christians, Shipped by Israel.

Made from recycled glass and providing much needed Fair Trade employment where the tourist industry has collapsed.

Profits will pay the artisans to teach a new generation of glass blowers and painters, ensuring a legacy of craftsmanship and goodwill.

Humble dove and olive branch tea lights serving as a reminder of our shared humanity, supporting people who live in the place where the story of Christmas begins.

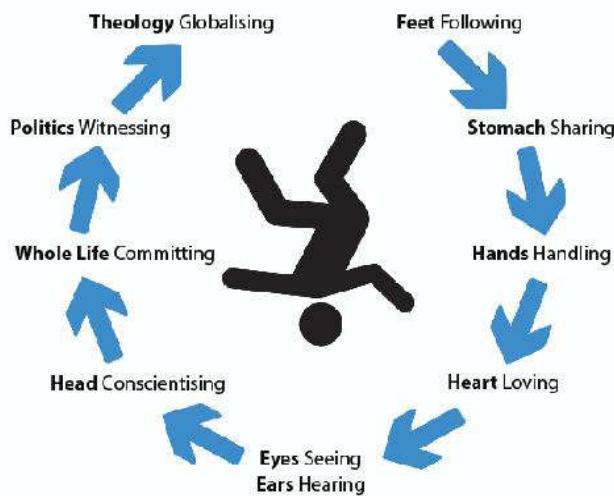
(The baubles are £25 each from me, available in turquoise or deep blue, and are each packed in a box with a printed address label so that they can be safely sent anywhere in the world. Useful as night light holders or vases throughout the year)

Zoom Gathering – Alternate Tuesdays 7 pm

For this latest session we have been back to basics exploring the Upside Down Model of Discipleship as proposed by John J Vincent, (2013). *Christ in the City (The Dynamics of Christ in Urban Theological Practice, Sheffield: Urban Theology Unit)* (Vincent, 2013,60-62). You will find the original version in the above book. A suggestion for us could be to find out what, if anything, has been said in your District or Diocese about the new emphasis on Discipleship.

Pippa Thompson

The Discipleship Cycle



Vincent, John J. (2013). *Christ in the City (The Dynamics of Christ in Urban Theological Practice, Sheffield: Urban Theology Unit)* (Vincent, 2013,60-62)

11

The origins of the Ashram Community Commitments

as remembered by Ian Parker

The original form of the Ashram commitment came from some words in the Eucharist Congregation liturgy. We'd spent ages thinking we ought to be more intentional about our annual commitment like the Iona community, and were devising ever more elaborate grids and convoluted things, and then someone who must have been a member of the Eucharist Congregation said 'don't the concluding words from our liturgy sum it all up?' and everyone went 'Yes! that's it!!' and all the other work on a commitment was jettisoned.

But as to who wrote the Euch Cong liturgy, you'd have to ask someone who was around on 4th November 1973 when it was first done at the Peacock restaurant. It is in the original (1977) edition of Community Worship, but it doesn't say who wrote it. John I think was responsible for the extra questions on each section that are printed on the annual commitment sheet.

“And whatever you ask in prayer, if you believe, you will receive.”

(Matthew 21:22):

Will Disciples Receive Everything They Ask For in Prayer? Should Disciples Ask For Things Beyond Their Need in Prayer?

This stems from a productive zoom meeting of the London Ashram Group on Saturday 17th August 2024. Linda suggested discussing Matthew 21:22 in relation to instances of unanswered prayer. So, I thought that I should share with our community at large, my views on the verse and the issues it raises.

This statement attributed to Jesus is best read in context of its preceding Matthean verses, and its Markan parallel at 11:12–14 and 20-24, which I set out below, quoted from the *Society of Biblical Literature’s English-Greek Reverse Interlinear New Testament* 2010.

Mt. 21:18–19

18 Now early in the morning, as he was returning to the city, he was hungry. 19 And seeing a single fig tree by the road, he went to it and found nothing on it except leaves only. And he said to it, “May there be no more fruit from you *forever*, and the fig tree withered at once.

Mt. 21:20–22

20 And when they saw it, the disciples were astonished, saying, “How did the fig tree wither at once?” 21 And Jesus answered and said to them, “Truly I say to you, if you have faith (*pistin*; self-confidence) and do not doubt, you will do not only what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, ‘Be lifted up and thrown into the sea,’ it will happen! 22 And whatever you ask in prayer, if you believe (*pisteuontes*; with self-confidence), you will receive.” (Emphasis added).

Mk. 11:12–14

12 And on the next day as they were departing from Bethany, he was hungry. 13 And when he saw from a distance a fig tree that had leaves, he went to see if perhaps he would find anything on it. And when he came up to it he found nothing except leaves, because it was not the season for figs. 14 And he responded and said to it, “Let no one eat fruit from you any more *forever!*” And his disciples heard it.

Mark 11:20–24

20 And as they passed by early in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. 21 And Peter remembered and said to him, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered!” 22 And Jesus answered and said to them, “Have faith in God! 23 Truly I say to you that whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be lifted up and thrown into the sea’ and does not (*mē*; A primary particle of qualified negation, qualified subject to the act, not the word) doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. 24 For this reason I say to you, whatever you pray and ask for, believe that you have received it, and it will be done for you. (Emphasis added).

The context of this statement attributed to Jesus arises from a dialogue between Jesus and his disciples, in context of a destructive act ascribed to Jesus, where he curses a living organism because it cannot satisfy his needs, naturally being out of season. The act does not give Jesus what he needs, and it deprives others from satisfying their needs when it is season for natural fig bearing. We know that Jesus was in the habit of similarly cursing with destructive results on others from childhood, but later remedying (for instance see Bart D Ehrman and Zlatko Pleše ed. “The Infancy Gospel of Thomas”, *The Apocryphal Gospels*, pp. 11, 13, 17, and 19). Further, he was not different during his ministry; for instance see Matthew 23:13–16, 27, 29, 33 and 35; and Luke 6:24, 25, and 26.

However, despite his hunger given even to cursing, Jesus here states a presently accepted scientific

reality; the power of mind over matter and energy; when saying that one will receive whatever one asks for provided it is sought without the slightest doubt of receiving it. This is proven and named the “placebo effect”, at least in relation to self-healing.

(See: https://www.health.harvard.edu/newsletter_article/the-power-of-the-placebo-effect).

Incidentally, the reverse is also true; that is, if one does something usually causing self-adversity, with an unfaltering self-confidence that no harm will occur, adversity usually does not follow. The resurrected Jesus is attributed to have expressed that truth to his disciples at ascension saying: “they will pick up snakes. And if they drink any deadly poison it will never hurt them...” (Mark 16:18).

Further, where there is doubt and lack of confidence, Jesus could not do such extra natural works, such as in his home village Nazareth (see Matthew 13:58; and Mark 6:5). That indicates that effectiveness of exercise of mind power is dependent on the power relation between forces; hence, the resultant is not always what one wanted.

Most importantly, in relation to discipleship practice, it is clear in the two passages above, that Jesus is here not asking his disciples and giving them the freedom to ask for things that they do not need for discipleship. In fact, the entirety of the narratives on Jesus, shows a demand for letting go of that material in discipleship, and taking only as needed. Jesus' specific praying instructions are in the Lord's Prayer, which entails only five petitions: for (i) the Father's will do be done; (ii) the kingdom to come on Earth; (iii) sustenance sufficient for the day; (iv) forgiveness of trespasses; (iv) avoidance of temptation; and (v) deliverance from evil. It is also significant that the ensuing, Mk. 11:25–26, emphasis on non-trespassing: “And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your sins. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your sins”.

Whether one deems it a sin or not, one of the greatest trespasses is to ask for, get, and store beyond one needs materially, including in money. That to me is greed, the very root of the pathology of neoliberalism destroying the human, and the Earth today!

Nirmal Fernando, Thundola, Ittakanda, Sri Lanka, August 2024

Ruth Bird

When I was in Sheffield Cathedral on Monday I tried to establish whether our good friend Ruth Bird's ashes were interred in the Crypt as I had been told was the intention by Canon Farrow. I had



contacted the Cathedral when trying to find out about Ruth in the early days of the first lockdown. Canon Farrow replied to say he had tracked her down in a care home, and informed me of her passing.

After failing to find an inscription and then enquiring I learnt that Canon Farrow had left the Cathedral in the summer of 2020, so I did not hold out much hope, but eventually I was introduced to a verger who had known her well and had personally ensured that her ashes were retrieved from the strongroom after Covid and were duly interred. He found the inscription near the ceiling, brought a step ladder and photographed it as it was difficult to read from the ground. Her ashes are now in a compartment in the wall behind the inscribed stone at the very top near the ceiling on the left as you face the alter in the Crypt Chapel.

He spoke very fondly of Ruth and her kindness in leaving a small legacy to the vergers which they have not yet spent. He said she had originally wanted to be buried in a family grave but this wasn't possible at the time because of the restrictions. I am so glad she is somewhere safe, out of the rain and among friends.

Penny Rea

After we have wound ourselves up

I have been thinking about how we continue our common life after the limited company and registered charity are no more. The local and zoom groupings will be able to continue to meet as they are not dependent on any form of support from Ashram nationally, and those that continue to exist have never held nor needed funds. But there is a wish to continue to meet residentially for one or two weekends in a year. At some point, this group could be small enough to function in the same way as the Ashram holiday has always functioned: someone books the accommodation and takes the financial risk of not enough paying people showing up. But while there are around 20 people interested in meeting in this way, and if we don't wish to return to self catering, there seems no alternative to booking places at a Conference Centre.

It is my view that this will be facilitated by having funds from which deposits can be paid, and those unable to pay the full cost of a weekend can be subsidised. I envisage a very light structure with just three roles. Someone needs to ensure that things happen (i.e. present Convenor). Someone needs to take any necessary notes and circulate information to everyone on the list (a combination of Minutes secretary and Membership secretary). Someone needs to look after the funds, make bookings at the conference centre and receive people's subscriptions and weekend payments. (A combination of present, Treasurer and Weekends secretary.) This doesn't necessarily require a written constitution, but I think one will be an advantage, if not a necessity, in setting up a bank account and being recognised as bona fide by Conference centres. Therefore, as the constitution is mainly about being looked at by outsiders, I have referred to the three roles as Chairman Secretary and Treasurer in the Constitution I have drafted. I think it is the minimum we can get away with. I would be prepared to undertake the treasurer role. I think that is the most onerous, but Sandra might not agree!

Following the circulation of the draft constitution earlier this year, I am only aware of one response. This was from Nirmal Fernando. After expressing the view that the practice of our commitments as Ashram Community members was best done through hospitality extended in member's homes, and therefore, neither constitution, nor official funds were required, he went on to say that if there was to be a written document, it should be based on the six Ashram commitments, and he made two specific suggestions for amending my draft.

In the first sentence, he suggested, deleting the words "to meet for Christian Fellowship", and replacing them with the words "to meet in discipleship to Jesus." I would resist this, because the original phrase picks up one of the phrases in Ashram Community Trust's current governing document, and so enables us to argue that the new organisation is continuing one of Ashram Community Trust's charitable purposes (though without being a registered charity). This would be important if the new body were to inherit a small part of a present funds. (It is also the case that although discipleship has always been fundamental to Ashram, it is not referenced in our current memorandum and articles of Association!)

The second suggestion related to the third paragraph and was that after "aims of the association", should be added, "namely the six commitments of the Ashram Community" and they should then be listed. My view is that the reference in the first paragraph to "the ideals and ideas that were fundamental to [Ashram Community's] existence would include the six commitments. I have no objection to referencing the commitments, but I would not wish to spell them out as the wording of them has evolved over time, and may continue to evolve. Changing the wording on an annual membership card is one thing: changing a constitution is something quite different.

I hope that gives a context to my suggested draft constitution, which is repeated below for the convenience of people having access to it during the October weekend.

Ian Parker

Draft Constitution for Ashram Community Association

Date adopted: _____

The **purpose** of the Association is to enable former members and associates of Ashram Community Trust to continue to meet for Christian Fellowship, and discuss the ideals and ideas that were fundamental to its existence.

For the avoidance of doubt, there is no intention that the Association be registered as a charity with the Charity Commission.

Membership shall be open to all former members and associates of Ashram Community Trust. Other people who are in sympathy with the aims of the Association may be admitted to membership by a general meeting. The general meeting may, from time to time, decide to delegate this power to the officers.

Governance shall be in the hands of a general meeting of members of the Association. All members of the Association shall be notified of the dates and venues of meetings. Decisions made at meeting shall be minuted, and the minutes circulated to all members. One meeting in each calendar year shall be designated as the AGM, at which the treasurer shall present the accounts and the Officers shall be appointed or re-appointed. Meetings shall be chaired by the chair person, or in his/her absence by one of the other officers. Failing that, members present shall elect a chair from among their number.

Officers shall be the chairperson, secretary and treasurer. The general meeting may appoint to other roles it deems necessary, but they shall not be considered as officers.

Finance

The association shall open a bank account, for which the officers shall be cheque signatories. Members shall pay an annual subscription at a rate to be determined from time to time by the general meeting. The treasurer shall have the power to waive the subscription of any member who is unable to pay. The treasurer is responsible for ensuring that all monies received are paid into the bank, and proper accounts are kept. The accounts shall be audited/examined as determined by the General Meeting from time to time.

Residential Weekends

While the expectation is that members attending residential weekends shall pay their share of the costs of accommodation and transport, the main purpose of the Association's funds shall be to subsidise the accommodation and travel cost of those unable to pay, and any outside speaker invited to a weekend.

Winding up

The association may be wound up by the passing of a resolution to that effect at a General meeting convened for that purpose. All members shall be given notice that the resolution will be considered. Such resolution shall only take effect if supported by three quarters of those present and voting. Any funds remaining shall not be distributed to the members, but shall be donated to such charity as the members agree.



Members and Associates

We invite anyone interested to request details about becoming a Member or Associate from the membership secretary, Sandra Dutson:
smdutson@btinternet.com

Members and Associates are listed in the 7-day cycle Community Prayers

Projects and Commitments associated with the Community

Ashram Press – Radical Christianity, Gospel Study, Discipleship, Community Study and Research- projects on Community and related issues
Homelesss and Asylum Seekers - Residence and Community for people in need
Multi-faith - mutual activities and projects open to all faiths

DATES

2025

9 – 11 May Community Weekend The Hayes, Swanwick
17 – 19 October Community Weekend Hinsley Hall, Leeds

HOUSES AND PROJECTS

For current information about Houses and Projects in Sheffield please contact

John Vincent
T: 0114 243 6688
E: ashramcommunity@hotmail.com

COMMUNITY

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Ashram Press: 7 College Court
See Website www.ashram.org.uk for publications

Ashram Community Trust is a Registered Charity
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Charitable Company No: 4779914

Website www.ashram.org.uk

Act Together editor: Jenny Medhurst
medhurst@phonecoop.coop

Articles for the Spring 2025 edition needed by April 17th
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 –01784 456 474
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 – 07918 757068.