

Reflection: Woman at the Well

This is the text of address during a joint service held by churches in Manor Park, London, to mark the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, by the Revd Nicola Vidamour, Superintendent of the Newham Methodist circuit and minister at Pilgrims Way Congregational and Methodist church in East Ham.



"Jesus, tired out by the journey, was sitting by the well." (John 4:6)

I don't know how long each of you has been walking the path to Christian unity. I have been committed to that path for about thirty years now - since I was a teenager - and sometimes I feel tired out by the journey. It can seem that however much we pray, however hard we try, however much energy and effort we put in to our relationships with one another locally and nationally and globally - we don't seem to make much progress. It can be very tiring and discouraging.

Have you noticed what had happened immediately before Jesus started on the journey which led him past the well? He had learnt that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptising more disciples than John? I wonder if it was partly that news which made him tired? Was he exhausted by the competitiveness which there can be between different Christian groups - the comparisons, for example, about the number of people - especially children and youth - in each congregation? Is that something which you are tired of? I certainly get very frustrated when gatherings of people from different churches turn into bragging matches about how amazing their church is in some particular way. These don't have to be ecumenical gatherings. Groups of Methodist ministers can also be very competitive! I can feel exhausted as a church leader trying to keep up with whatever some so-called successful church down the road or across the world is doing. The ecumenical journey can be very tiring indeed when we spend it comparing ourselves with other churches and other people. We either give ourselves a hard time because we don't seem to be doing as well as they are or we feel under huge pressure to keep on working incredibly hard at our own mission and ministry so that we can retain our perceived status as the best church in our area! Both of those are exhausting!

Do you feel tired out by that journey? Do you need to come and sit for a while by the well?

One of the most important gifts which we can give both ourselves and one another on the ecumenical journey is the knowledge of what it is that sustains and strengthens us along the way. What are the wells that we draw from when we are feeling tired and thirsty? Where are we able to be re-sourced? Each community generally has its own well. We might say that each of our denominations is a well. I need to draw regularly from the Methodist well. For me, that means that I need to be able to be part of a congregation which sings hymns joyfully and confidently. I need to be part of a church where lay and ordained both have an equal voice and role. I need to be part of a community where the gospel of grace is proclaimed and celebrated and becomes flesh in practical ways.

Most of the time we drink from our own well and I would love to hear what that means for each of you but in today's Gospel story, Jesus drinks from a well which is outside his own community and his own tradition. You may be surprised to hear this from a Methodist but I have to confess that I often mix my drinks! I regularly drink from wells containing Russian Orthodox icons, modern Catholic music, the daily office of the Anglican church, the silent waiting of Quaker meetings, the exuberance of African worship, candles and incense, Gospel choirs, and even the prostrations and rhythm of Muslim prayer. All of these re-source me - and, I hope that your ecumenical journey has enabled you to mix your drinks too!

Visit the CTE website for the rest of the Reflection:

http://www.cte.org.uk/Groups/255284/Home/News/Reflection_of_the/Woman_at_the/Woman_at_the.aspx

Churches and the General Election

As the 2015 General Election approaches various churches and networks of Churches Together have produced papers, guidelines and resources to help Christians in England engage with the politics of the nation. This is a (web) page in progress and more links will be added as available. The list is in general alphabetical order:



[A letter to Catholics in England and Wales from their Bishops](#)
[Baptist, Methodist, URC: Joint Public Issues Team](#)
[Bishop Angaelos speaking at House of Lords re Identity](#)
[Christian Aid Election Manifesto - CA is an agency of CTE](#)
[Church of England Pastoral Letter of the Bishops](#)
[Churches Together in Britain and Ireland](#)
[CTBI Guide to Planning Hustings PDF](#)
[Evangelical Alliance: Will you show up?](#)
[Religious Society of Friends \(Quaker\): Quaker Vote](#)
[The Catholic Church in England and Wales re Education](#)
[2020 Vision of the Good Society PDF report](#)

Related NOTES:

[Lobbying and Hustings: a paper from Helen Boorthroyd, CT Cumbria](#)
[Quaker resources re the Lobbying Act](#)
[Quaker concern at the Lobbying Act](#)

Web page link for updates:

http://www.cte.org.uk/Articles/431693/Home/News/Latest_news_articles/Churches_Agencies_and.aspx

General Election and the churches re hustings - CTBI website

This is information about the official website from Churches Together in Britain and Ireland.

On the site you can find information about how to hold a local Hustings event - a forum for members of the public to hear from candidates and political parties. You can register details of your own event and search for events happening near you. You can also download CTBI's election discussion document '2020 Vision of the Good Society' and other resources from member churches and agencies.

Link to CTBI site: <http://ctbielections.org.uk/>



Corrymeela Community 22nd March

@ **Coventry Cathedral**



Members and supporters of the Corrymeela Community are invited by Coventry Cathedral to join in a service @ 1030am and to meet with Padraig O Tuama who will be available at the lunch to tell us about Corrymeela's current initiatives. [Download a letter of invitation and lunch booking](#)

'Crossing London' 2014 reviewed



Andy Frost, from *Share Jesus International*, reports on a major mission initiative in London:

In 2014, Crossing London, in partnership with HOPE, brought nearly 500 churches together in mission in the Capital. The initiative used the following five headings.

1. Encouraging Leaders focused on encouraging leaders to think missionally with a host of Masterclasses from internationally renowned leaders.
2. Empowering prayer built upon existing prayer initiatives with central prayer gatherings, prayer walks across all 33 boroughs and the 'Winsome' prayer resources helping individuals to pray for their friends.
3. Equipping Christians saw the creation of the new Sharing Jesus resource which helped 1000s of Christians have a greater confidence in sharing their faith.
4. Engaging Communities offered practical training to churches to help them host community fun days, local festivals and Pentecost parties.
5. Encountering Jesus became the culmination of the year which gave 1000s of people the opportunity to respond to the Gospel. Under the banner 'Live Up London', events varied from dinner parties to testimony cabarets. The signature event was Love Beyond at Wembley Arena. There have been a great number of stories coming back from across the city. There are stories of churches working together with a greater sense of collaboration; stories of churches who have tried new missional programmes that have helped to reposition them in their community; and stories of people coming to faith. Some of the most exciting stories have come from the diaspora churches who have connected with the wider Church.

Some of the key learning outcomes have been:

1. A central vision and set of values helps local churches become part of a bigger story. Crossing London particularly engaged smaller churches and those not already part of a network.
2. When the vision is very top down, it can limit buy-in but when there is freedom to engage in chosen (rather than all) aspects of the programme and adapt them for the locality, churches are more likely to connect.
3. Working under one banner gives a greater media reach but can still allow local churches scope to deliver programmes according to their own context.
4. The two major challenges to these kinds of city wide initiatives are communication and funding.

The legacy of Crossing London, aside from the practical deliverables, are three-fold.

Firstly, the importance of a rhythm of mission has become clear. Share Jesus International, who led the Crossing London initiative, are moving this concept forward.

Secondly, the year has resulted in a host of new resources. Sharing Jesus has been particularly well received, and is now being used internationally. It will soon become a DVD series.

Finally, there have been new relationships formed across the city and the London Mission Collective has been set up to provide a space for these relationships to be developed for future scheming to take place.

[PDF of the 2014 'Crossing London' Review](#)

[The resource book: 'Sharing Jesus'](#)

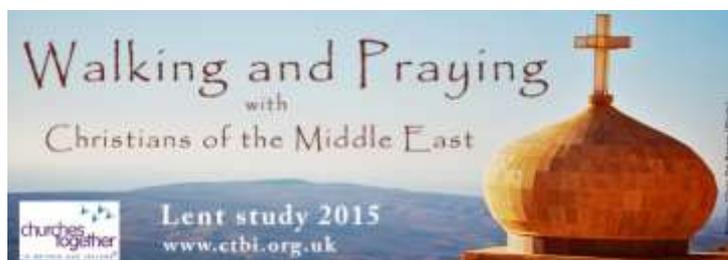
[The organisation: Share Jesus International](#)

[Link to the Mission London Collective](#)

[Resource: Churches doing mission strategically](#)

Note: *Share Jesus International* also facilitates local churches working together in mission and evangelism at Pentecost through Pentecost Festivals: [website Biggest Birthday Party Ever](#).

CTBI Lent Course:



Take Time to Imagine with TLS



The United Reformed Church training for learning and serving (TLS) team is launching its new period of enrolment by encouraging people to take time to imagine – a different world, a different church, and a different you – as part of a practical learning experience.

By engaging with these ideas, TLS aims to creatively explore how some of these possibilities may be a positive influence in a person's life, church and community.

The Revd Stanley Jackson, TLS coordinator, said: "In October 1971, John Lennon released his record 'Imagine'. While some find the lyrics paint an over-sentimentalised, unrealistic and unachievable ideal, others view them as offering a hopeful and inspirational vision for the future. Undeniably, the song highlights the potential of human imagination, touching upon one of the most creative forces of existence.

"Imagine... a different world... a different church... a different you. If you can catch the vision and potential of such thoughts you will understand why Training for Learning and Serving is launching its new period of enrolment by focussing upon what possibilities there are if people start to use their God-given imaginations.

The TLS enrolment period is open now until the 31 May 2015 – find out more about TLS and how you can get involved.

[The new prospectus is available here](#)

Alliance of Town and City Chaplaincies (ATTC)

Growing Chaplaincies to Serve the Nation

Working in collaboration with other town chaplaincies we are launching The Alliance of Town and City Chaplaincies (ATTC) at a national conference in Luton on Thursday 16th April 2015.

The conference will inspire us as we hear from Nigel Tween (former Principal of Regents Theological College and Director of Training for ELIM Pentecostal churches) as to how the Pentecostal movement in the UK has grabbed hold of town chaplaincy.

It will take place at Central Baptist Church, Park Street. Luton LU1 3ET from 9.30am - 4.30pm

There is no charge to attend but you will need to bring your own lunch.

[Click here for a flyer with full details about the day](#)

[Register for this conference here](#)

[Click here to hear Michael Campbell speak about his work as the town centre chaplain in Luton, and the new network](#)

Brutal murder of Coptic Christians in Libya

**Statement by His Grace Bishop Angaelos, General Bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Church in the United Kingdom following the brutal murder of Coptic Christians in Libya
15 February 2015**



It is with deep feelings of sorrow and pain that we received confirmation earlier this evening of the brutal murder of Coptic Christians in Libya at the hands of Daesh (IS). While every life is sacred and every death tragic, the particular brutality demonstrated in this instance and others like it shows not only a disregard for life but a gross misunderstanding of its sanctity and equal value in every person.

Our prayers are particularly with the families of these young Coptic men, who were fathers, brothers, sons and friends of many within their tight-knit rural communities, in which their absence will cause significant loss and sorrow. Their families are not only deprived of breadwinners who had travelled to Libya to support them, but of the joy that they bring when they return.

While it may seem illogical or incomprehensible, we also pray for those who have carried out these horrific crimes, that the value of God's creation and human life may become more evident to them, and in this realisation, that the wider effects of pain brought by this and other acts of brutality may be realised and avoided. We pray for an end to the dehumanisation of captives who become mere commodities to be bartered, traded and negotiated with.

We cannot remember our Coptic brothers without also remembering all those who have lost their lives in equally brutal circumstances: journalists, aid workers, medical staff, religious leaders, a young pilot and communities that are considered incompatible with a fringe and intolerant element.

In the midst of this sorrow however, we must continue to dig deeper for the joy that comes from an understanding that this life is but a "vapour that appears for a little time and then vanishes away" (James 4:14), and that true glory and joy are found in an eternal life prepared for all those who live in and for love and peace.

It is only through this understanding that we can continue to live according to the words of 1 Peter 3:15 as demonstrated in the life and witness of the Coptic Church and her children over centuries, "...always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you..."

News interviews with His Grace regarding the brutal murder of Coptic Christians in Libya:

[BBC World TV Interview](#)

[BBC World Service Radio Interview](#)

More can be found via www.Youtube.com/CopticMediaUK

[A statement from the Presidents of CTE is available here](#)

Over representation of Black People in UK Prisons

This is text from the website of the Free Churches Group reporting on a day conference in which Churches Together in England were partners:

The over-representation of Black People in UK Prisons "It is absolutely clear that black people are over-represented in prisons in England and Wales, and have been for more than 30 years" (Dr Elizabeth Henry)

[Black Man Prison] In UK the proportion of black people incarcerated is currently seven times higher than the general population. Academics, faith practitioners, MoJ representatives, along with church and community leaders assembled in Prisons Week 2014 in Westminster to explore just why this was the case, and interrogate the issue in a way that could elicit a tangible response to what has been termed a social blasphemy. In its 2015 Black Church political manifesto, NCLF – A Black Christian Voice on behalf of Pentecostal and Black-led churches have made their views known that countering this injustice is a key priority for the church today.

The four speakers in Westminster addressed over-representations in quite distinct ways. Starting with an historical overview of black settlement in the UK, they moved through a statistical exploration of the various stages of the criminal justice system where black people experience worse outcomes, to a consideration of gender issues and church responses, and finally ending by examining those factors which may help black people who do end up in prison to have better chances of desisting from crime. A common message was heard that at every stage of the criminal justice process, more could be done to reduce rates of incarceration amongst black people.

[Read the whole report on the website of the Free Churches Group](#)

Orthodox Lecture: 'Christian Ecumenism: does it have a future?'



On 6th February at St Giles Church in Cambridge, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, gave a lecture 'Christian Ecumenism: does it have a future?' in association with the Cambridge Theological Federation and the Faculty of Divinity of the University of Cambridge. Hosted by the Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies in Cambridge, the lecture was recorded and can be seen in the following link:

<http://sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1904437>

Metropolitan Hilarion is chairman of the Department for External Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, a permanent member of the Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches, and a Member of the Central and Executive Committees of the World Council of Churches.

New Year's Honours List

Joe Aldred, staff member at CTE for Pentecostal and Multicultural Relations, draws attention to this circular about encouraging a wider scope of nominations for the New Year's Honour system.



Abdul Ghaffar from DCLG writes:

I am writing to seek your help in identifying suitable candidates for recognition in the New Year's honours list. The Department for Communities and Local Government is keen to ensure that individuals who are making a significant contribution to public life are properly recognised through the honours system. However, we recognise that we will not be aware of the work of many high achieving individuals, so we rely on the valuable networks of our partners, such as yours, to help us to identify suitable candidates for Honours at all levels.

It is important that Honours awarded reflect exceptional contributions by individuals from across the full breadth of our society. Please could you consider whether you know of any suitable candidates in your organisation or in the wider community. We are particularly keen to recognise individuals who have contributed to building integrated communities. Please note that nominees can come from all levels of an organisation; being in a junior role is not a barrier to a nomination.

All nominations for honours are treated in the strictest confidence. The nominee should not be informed that they have been nominated, as it is not fair to raise expectations in case they are not met.

If you would like to nominate anyone for an honour, please complete one citation form (attached) for each candidate, and return them to me by email at integration@communities.gsi.gov.uk by 11th March 2015.

[Honour system explained](#)
[Application Form](#)

Abdul Ghaffar | Integration and Faith Division
Department for Communities and Local Government

A Spirituality for the URC?

During the recent *Windermere Online Festival*, Lawrence Moore produced a video interview with Revd Dr David Cornick, General Secretary of Churches Together in England, on the question: A Spirituality for the URC? Dr Cornick identified three important strands: Reformed, ecumenical and dissenting. He talked, too, about the ways in which his



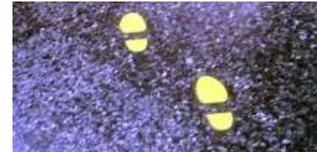
own spirituality has been shaped by that heritage.

[Link to the Windermere Online Festival Video](#)

[Link to David Cornick's book Letting God be God: Spirituality in the Reformed Tradition](#)

Archbishop Oscar Romero lecture: Archbishop Rowan Williams and the ecumenical future

Rowan Williams, the emeritus Archbishop of Canterbury, delivered the Archbishop Romero Memorial Lecture in December 2014 to a packed congregation at St Chad's Cathedral in Birmingham. He gave an inspiring, challenging and memorable reflection on the theme 'A Saint for the Whole People of God: Oscar Romero and the Ecumenical Future'. Here is the audio of his presentation and the text is available on the Romero Trust website. Earlier this month Pope Francis recognised Oscar Romero as a martyr who was killed out of 'hatred of the faith' and he will be beatified later this year.



[Audio link to the lecture on Soundcloud](#)

P for Prayer: the deeper roots of interreligious dialogue

Celia Blackden, Inter Faith @ CTE, writes, 'Some months ago I reviewed Abbot Timothy Wright's book on "[No Peace without Prayer](#): encouraging Christians and Muslims to Pray Together". In "An 'A-Z' of inter faith relations: 26 short reflections for Christians" P is for peace but the Abbot, my cousin, suggested P should be for prayer: hence [this paper](#) which is mostly made up of contributions from my friends and colleagues of other faiths'.

Full texts of edited contributions

[Sr Isabel Smythe](#)

[Malcolm Deboo](#)

[Yann Lovelock](#)

[Natubhai Shah](#)

County Ecumenical Officer for Somerset

Somerset Churches Together is seeking to appoint a new County Ecumenical Officer to work with churches and church leaders across the whole of Somerset. We are offering a salary of £13,000 for 20 hours per week to someone who can encourage and develop ecumenical working together in the mission and growth of God's Kingdom throughout the county; support and facilitate ecumenical understanding, commitment and partnerships amongst churches in Somerset; enable good communication between churches and ecumenical groups in the county and serve as Executive Officer and Secretary to Somerset Churches Together.



Application papers are available [here](#) and further details can be found on the [SCT website](#).

Closing date for applications: 24th April 2015

Interviews will take place on Thursday 14th May 2015 in Taunton

This post is subject to an enhanced CRB Disclosure

New report is wake up call for rural mission

The Arthur Rank Centre strongly supports the research report Released for Mission published by the Church of England today. "It is absolutely essential that the Church of England implements the recommendations in Released for Mission," said Arthur Rank Centre CEO Jerry Marshall. "The next decade is a make or break time for continuing rural ministry. Thankfully some rural dioceses are already moving in the right direction."



The report points to the importance of the rural church (two-thirds of parishes) and to many areas of success, particularly around fresh expressions and Messy Church. A statistical analysis indicates that there is no clear link between growth and the number of parishes in a multi-church group; but lay leadership and an intentional focus on mission are crucial.

Priorities identified by the report include:

- Building a culture of discipleship
- Envisioning, enabling and equipping the ministry of lay people
- Effective training for lay and clergy for the complexity of leading multiple churches
- Simplification of governance and legal structures
- Facilitating creative ecumenical partnerships.

The report outlines findings from a major research project led by Canon Dr Jill Hopkinson, the National Rural Officer for the Church of England.

"Rural churches of all denominations are not always aware that they can and do engage in mission," said Revd Elizabeth Clark, National Rural Officer for the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church. "This report highlights what is happening whilst at the same time pointing out the challenges that exist, particularly for Anglican Churches. Many Methodist and URC Churches face similar constraints. My hope is that we will look for ways of tackling these obstacles together since ecumenism is a mission imperative."

The National Rural Officers are based at the Arthur Rank Centre, the churches' resource for rural mission and ministry. "We provide training and resources in leadership and mission, for both lay and ordained, across denominations," said Jerry Marshall. "But much more needs to be done. We especially urge national leadership structures to find ways to reduce the burden of local governance and to support the creation of staff posts that address administration, finance, and facilities management, to release time and energy for mission. "

[Click here to view the full report.](#)

Inter Faith: National ecumenical conference

2-3 February 2015

Celia Blackden, Inter Faith @ CTE writes about the conference.

Feedback from the second national gathering of inter faith advisers from a number of Christian traditions was overwhelmingly positive and thankful for the opportunity to share so much, whether over the dining table or in plenary and group sessions.

Numbers nearly reached 90, with 40 Church of England Diocesan advisers, a good number of Catholics, some Methodists and URC people, representatives from Scotland and Wales, and Quaker, Baptist, Salvation Army and Pentecostal traditions.

Dr Elizabeth Harris, Associate Professor in the Comparative Study of Religion at Liverpool Hope University, spoke on The Theology and Scriptural basis for Interreligious Dialogue. For some it was the bread and butter of their inter faith commitment, for some a serious challenge to the mission imperative, although dialogue and witness really belong to each other. Some expressed the view that "the theological basis for inter faith needs to continue to be explored and deepened". One person commented that there was "good networking, awareness and diversity within the Christian churches and cultures."

We had invited a Muslim and a Jewish speaker, Dilwar Hussein and Jonathan Gorsky respectively. They gave powerful witness, with their Christian colleagues Julian Bond and Sr Margaret Shepherd nds, to the importance of real friendships built over time to enable genuine understanding and collaboration. They did not circumvent very painful situations but showed that it is only by prioritising relationships that problems can be understood and addressed.

A number of people spoke about local work there were faith specific breakout groups for Christians engaging with Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims and Jews.

People left "heartened and more fully equipped" and took away "many ideas to work on and share with [others]". Regarding greater networking they acquired "greater understanding of how other Churches are structured re: inter faith ... and reassurance that contributions from all denominations are useful and recognised". They would have wanted time for regional networking, smaller group discussions and more input concerning young people... to name a few! Nonetheless, the 24 hours spent together did yield a good harvest for which I thank God.

I am grateful to all the contributors and to Kat Brealey, (Presence and Engagement National Programme Coordinator), Revd Gareth Jones (Methodist Co-Chair of the Methodist URC Interfaith Reference Group) and Revd David Tatem (URC Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations) for their collaboration in putting the event together and enabling it to happen so positively.

Celia Blackden
17.02.15

And finally ..

.. Celia Blackden leaves CTE for Focolare in Rome

After several years working part time for Churches Together in England with the brief for Inter Faith, Celia has accepted the invitation by the Focolare Movement to the main office in Rome to be responsible for the work of interpretation re conferences and publications. CTE friends and colleagues wish Celia God's rich blessing in her new work with grateful thanks for all she has contributed to our work together.

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