



Jan – Feb
2015

outlook

Newsletter of **Highgate United Reformed Church**

Wedding

Those attending church on 4th January might have wondered why we had such a magnificent arrangement of flowers. They were there to decorate the church for the wedding of John Handby Thompson and Petra Laidlaw the day before. Julian was delighted to officiate at this happy occasion. Robert Manning played lots of Bach on the organ and Patricia Judd authorised the marriage – a job that John had done many times in the past.



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Charity no: 1131691

Congratulations!

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Treasurer: Robert Gorrie, 10 Wood Lane, Highgate, N6 5UB. **Outlook Editors:** Laura Templeton & Andrea

a Spiritual Re-set

Those of us who use computers find that sometimes the computer will not

perform a basic task; one that it had readily performed thousands of times previously by the press of a button. In such a situation, when one has exhausted all the alternative ways of getting the computer to perform the same task, I resort to turning the computer off, pausing, then turning it on again. Once I've done this, the computer seems to re-set itself and the problem is solved.

As complicated as computers are, they are not nearly as complicated as people. I'm writing this on New Year's Day when, almost certainly due to over-exuberance in celebrating the New Year last night, I find that I'm not performing some basic tasks very well today: like producing a scintillating article for the newsletter! Rather than fighting inertia, I took Laura's advice and had a rest. Basically, I prayed and then I slept. When I awoke I found I had something to write about.

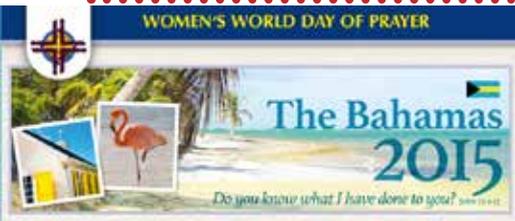
What I think happened is that I experienced a small spiritual and physical re-set. My prayer was an acknowledgement to God that I cannot do everything. This, in turn, evoked relief and thankfulness, and out of this I then felt inspired to write something (although I'll leave you to judge the extent of the inspiration!). God's inspiration and grace is available to all who call on him for help. The perpetual temptation is to think that due to mechanisation, technology, a relatively high standard of living, and medicine, that we don't need to rely on God any more.

The reality that bears down upon us sooner or later is that despite all our technological and medical benefits, we humans in the developed world are still susceptible to disease, depression, economic crises, and relationship-breakdowns. Even more pressing is a nagging lack of purpose in life. Are we here merely to reproduce and then die? Most of the time we can ignore such questions; life is often a matter of going round our familiar well-worn grooves and taking refuge in distractions. However, when we find that we

can no longer perform a basic task—a task as fundamental as forgiving or asking for forgiveness—we come to a crisis. What we need is a spiritual re-set. What we need is the help of One who can turn off the over-complicated rituals we have developed as coping or denial strategies, and re-set the basic functions involved in being a creature before God.

The gospel is the good news that God has provided us with a re-set prototype creature—Jesus Christ, the new human—and by practicing the basic disciplines of the Christian life we can learn his settings. Of these disciplines the most basic is trust. Jesus trusted that God was his loving heavenly Father, and we are invited to share in his trust by becoming sons and daughters of God. The other basic Christian disciplines—worship, prayer, Bible-reading—are important, but they all flow from the basic willingness to trust Jesus Christ more than self. We will still have our malfunctions, since we will never be free from sin in this life, but by the discipline of spiritual re-setting we acknowledge that we are creatures who need God's transforming help, not just occasionally but continually. "Do not be anxious, but in everything make your requests known to God in prayer and petition with thanksgiving. Then the peace of God, which is beyond all understanding, will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:6-7

Julian Templeton



Service organised by

Christian women of Bahamas based on text:

Jesus said to them:

Do you know what I have done to you?

(John 13.1-17).

**Women's World Day
of Prayer
ANNUAL SERVICE**

**FRIDAY 6th MARCH
2:00pm**

**St Joseph's Church
Highgate Hill**

ALL are welcome to the service and for refreshments afterwards (including men).

REMEMBERING

Julian has suggested that we use the Remembrance Day services during the four years of the centenary of the First World War to call to mind as many particular names on our three War Memorials as we can. In 2014 we remembered those associated with the start of the Highgate Camp. Its leader was Lt Commander James Dawbarn Young, Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve, who was killed on St George's Day 1918 in the failed naval assault on the port of Zeebrugge.

Jim Young was a teacher in the Sunday School here and a keen sailor. In 1907, the minister suggested to him that he took half a dozen of the older boys in his Sunday School class sailing. The church would support any who could not afford to go. A fortnight's camp followed and was a great success. It was decided to continue it. Young was helped by Edward Grimwade, another Sunday School teacher, and a master at Highgate School. By 1914, when there was a long hot summer of the kind we enjoyed last year, the camp near Bognor Regis in July, the month before War was declared, had grown to 40 boys.

Like Jim Young, Edward Grimwade volunteered on the outbreak of War. He was commissioned in the Lancashire Fusiliers and like a high proportion of young officers leading their men "over the top" he was killed on the Somme in 1916. Many campers also volunteered and twelve of those who had camped and sailed in 1914 were also killed. One of them, Frank Hockey DCM, had been awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for bravery. At the end of the War the church erected a special Memorial Arch to these fourteen teachers and members of the Sunday School which still survives. Their names are also among the 29 names on the Memorial Cross in the church garden.

Their further memorial lay in the decision of the church in 1920 to revive the Highgate Camp, as it was now called, and set up a Trust to run it. The connection with the church remained but the Camp became so popular between the Wars that local authorities in North London took over its funding to the benefit of generations of boys from less well-off families. The Camp survived the Second World War too. Remembering Jim Young, whose

Christian enthusiasm for the boys in his Sunday School class here started it all off, Edward Grimwade and those young campers who died with him in the War, seems today our duty and our privilege.

RAYMOND C BRICE	FRANK HOCKEY DCM	ALFRED MOORE
ERNEST JOHN DODD	ALAN J HOPKINS	HENRY MORLEY
EDWARD GRIMWADE	CYRIL R MADDOX	KENNETH H PEARSE
HERBERT HEAVINGHAM	CHARLES L MILLER	JOHN WOODWARD
FELIX E JONES		JAMES D YOUNG

The Memorial Arch in Swains Lane, which latterly formed the entrance to a private house and was not in good condition, has recently been replaced by a brick gate-way. It is still in the form of a Memorial. The names above appear in a plaque to the right. A plaque to the left records that a new Memorial has been erected by the family of James Dawbarn Young.

John Thompson

The Home Group

The Home Group resumed its gatherings on Wednesday, 7th. January 2015 and continues to meet weekly on Wednesdays until Easter.

Generally we meet at 14, Southwood Park, Southwood Lawn Road, N6 5SG, unless other arrangements are announced at the previous Sunday morning's service. We start at 7.45pm and aim to finish at 9.45pm.

During Lent we shall follow the Churches Together in Britain and Ireland course *Walking and Praying with Christians of the Middle East* (the same course that the Meditation Group will use and adapt for its Friday meetings). This will consist of Bible readings and testimonies from Syria, Israel/Palestine, and Egypt. Our other sessions use the Lectionary readings set for the next Sunday as a basis of Bible Reading and discussion. No previous Bible knowledge is required and all are most welcome to join us in a friendly and informal setting. Light refreshments are served before and after the meeting. Lifts, door-to-door, can be arranged.

Please contact **Roger Orme**: 07966956160 or 020 8458 2144

Childhood Christianity Part 2: Boarding School in England

In 1946 I came from boarding school at Kodaikanal, South India, to boarding school in the School for the Sons of Missionaries at Eltham College, London SE9. A whole cohort of us came at that time, just after the War, from Kodai to Eltham, and my three brothers had come before me, so I looked forward eagerly to being at Eltham College, and I thoroughly enjoyed boarding school at least until I was 16.

Life was ordered and regulated in ways that suited me well from rising bell at 7.15 to lights out at 10 p.m. for senior boys: rising bell, inspection of hands and shoes, breakfast, bed-making, School Assembly including day boys ("day bugs" we called them), school classes until 4 p.m., then monitored exercise out of doors, tea, prep time in classrooms, evening prayers, hot cocoa, free time or more prep time for seniors, and lights out from 7.45 to 10 p.m. according to age groups in dormitories. Of course there were escapades, pillow fights etc, with the danger of getting caught and caned! The boarding school also organised hobbies in free time, and I did art in the school art class, woodwork in the school woodwork shop, and scouting in the scout hut on Saturday evenings.

The religious regime was quite intense. Morning Assembly for the whole school led by the Headmaster, and for the boarders daily evening prayers led by the Housemaster, Sunday morning Church Parade, when we were marched off to various denominational churches

Painting of Etham
by Roger Scopes



for their morning service, and Sunday evening Chapel Service, when missionaries on furlough were often the invited preachers. In addition the pious ones had a Sunday afternoon Bible Class, and a daily personal "quiet time" in a designated classroom. We were encouraged to use Bible Reading Notes, and each day a senior boy concluded with a spoken prayer. The habit of a daily "quiet time" was well established in those years.

But the hot-house religious atmosphere did cause a reaction. I heard it said that Eltham College became "an engine of atheism". I myself abandoned Christian belief in my teens, under the influence of a day boy who was an atheist. I gave up prayers before breakfast and Sunday afternoon Bible Class, but I had no freedom to get out of School Assembly or Boarders Evening Prayers and Sunday Church Parade and Evening Service. Yet I could not bring myself to stop singing hymns. And one Sunday when I was walking in the country with my atheist friend, and we heard people singing hymns in a nearby church, the sound hit me like a sharp pain in the stomach, and I longed to sing with them! Singing is what Christians do every Sunday at least.

My two brothers Peter and Barrie both went to Cambridge and were much involved with the Congregational Society (Cong. Soc.) I made up my mind to go to Oxford, to join my atheist friend there, and to avoid the family Cong. Soc. tradition. But on arriving in Oxford I found that my atheist friend had dumped me, and Christopher Driver (whose father had been a missionary colleague of my father's in India) encouraged me to come along to Oxford Cong. Soc. activities: Sunday morning service at Mansfield College Chapel and a little choir that met on Thursday evenings to prepare for an Advent Carol Service and an Easter Carol Service. It was there that I met Molly. Enough said!

Roger Scopes

News of Friends

As always it is a pleasure to hear from church members now living away or abroad. Yuka Yazawa, writing from Tokyo, says she is eager to meet us all again, but it's hard to find the time to visit London. Cheryl and Peter Berkeley have been very busy with major home renovations, work, Ellie, dogs, 2 gerbils and a hamster. The Cranes have visited Canada, North America and Suffolk. We send good wishes to them all.

Pam Furse

Memories of Chapel

I was born in a Leicestershire village called Groby and lived there until I left at the age of 18 to go to university. In the village you were either "church" or "chapel". My family was soundly chapel and my brother, 3 sisters and I as well as both my parents attended the Congregational Chapel at least once a week.

The church was simple and dated back to the late 19th century. We children spent most of our time in the adjoining hall - for Junior Church on Sunday mornings, Pilots on Wednesdays and after school and a regular drama group with many early evening rehearsals and weekend productions. The Hall also saw many Jumble Sales and the annual Harvest Supper which was always a great treat.

The highlight of the year was "Church Anniversary". My sisters and I were always very excited about this because it meant we each got a new dress. The downside was that my mother made the dresses! They looked lovely when finished, but it always entailed seemingly hours of standing still next to the sewing machine set up in the living room whilst she checked how a sleeve fitted or pinned up the hem on a wriggly girl.

I have lots of happy memories of Sunday School, but also remember the rather stern figure of Charlie Sutherland who would keep us in order and deliver a short homily each week which formed a sound basis for our ideas of right and wrong. There was time for fun as well and we always had a "Sunday School Outing" in the summer, even if it was only a picnic to a nearby park. Charlie would lead in games of rounders. Charlie was the Groby 'Cong's' Sunday School Superintendent, but it was his wife Ivy who kept the Sunday School going during the 1940s when Charlie was a soldier in Italy. Ivy died last year aged 100, a member of Groby Congregational Chapel for over 80 years.

The church building of my childhood had been built in the 1880s and by the 1970s was old and dilapidated. A new church building was opened in 1981 - a modern, bright church for today, but I still remember the old building very fondly. I wouldn't like to have to look after it though!

Patricia Judd

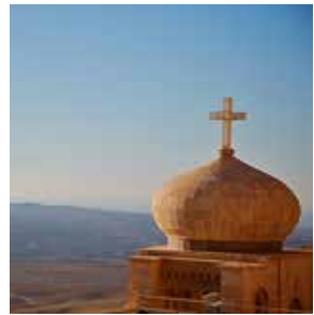


Photo: Chris De Bruyn

Both the Home Group that meets on Wednesdays and the Meditaion Group meeting on Fridays will use this resource throughout Lent.

lent 2015 study

Walking and praying with Christians of the Middle East *What is the theme about and why is it important?*

The Christian churches of the Middle East are facing a crisis unparalleled in recent history. As a result of a set of complex religious and political factors, the number of Christians in the region has fallen dramatically as many have sought refuge in other parts of the world, especially the West. However these are ancient communities that trace their origins back to the very beginnings of Christianity. The present conflicts and political instabilities in countries such as Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Israel and the Palestinian Territories have had a profound impact upon these Christian communities. Many Church leaders in the region believe that without a Christian presence, the future of the Middle East looks bleak indeed.

Yet Western churches' knowledge of these Christian communities remains minimal and often we are unaware of who Middle Eastern Christians are and what issues they face in today's world. In popular perceptions of the Middle East, Arab equals Muslim and rarely Christian. Our knowledge of our Christian sisters and brothers in the region is an important factor in their survival.

During this season of Lent we are inviting you to join with us in walking with them and to pray for and with them. Lent is a crucial time to remember the lands in which Christianity has its roots - Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Israel, Palestine and above all Jerusalem are names that remind us of crucial events in the Bible, but also names that dominate our news today.

••••• **Diary Dates** •••••

January

- Sunday 11 10:30 am Worship with Holy Communion led by Julian Templeton, with Kidz Klub, followed by bring-and-share lunch, and at 1:30 pm, Organ and Piano Recital
- Tuesday 13 8:00 pm Elders' Meeting
- Wed 14 7:45 pm Home Group, 14 Southwood Park, N6 5SG
- Friday 16 12:30 – 1 pm Christian Meditation
- Sunday 18 10:30 am Worship led by Roger Orme, with Kidz Klub
- Wed 21 7:45 pm Home Group, 14 Southwood Park, N6 5SG
- Friday 23 12:30 – 1 pm Christian Meditation
- Sunday 25 10:30 am Worship led by Julian Templeton
10:30 am Fun Sunday in Hall
- Wed 28 7:45 pm Home Group, 14 Southwood Park, N6 5SG
- Friday 30 12:30 – 1 pm Christian Meditation

February

- Sunday 1 10:30 am Worship led by John Stibbs, with Kidz Klub
- Monday 2 2:00 pm Open Door Gathering, Trees, 2–4 Broadlands Road, N6 4AN
- Wed 4 7:45 pm Home Group, 14 Southwood Park, N6 5SG
- Thursday 5 8:00 pm Management Committee
- Friday 6 12:30 – 1 pm Christian Meditation
- Sun 8 10:30 am Worship with Holy Communion led by Julian Templeton, with Kidz Klub followed by **Church Meeting**
- Wed 11 7:45 pm Home Group, 14 Southwood Park, N6 5SG
- Friday 13 12:30 – 1 pm Christian Meditation
- Sunday 15 10:30 am Worship led by Donald Macarthur, with Kidz Klub
- Wed 18 7:45 pm **Ash Wednesday**, Home Group, 14 Southwood Park, N6 5SG
- Friday 20 12:30 – 1 pm Christian Meditation

Sunday 22 10:30 am **Lent 1**, Worship led by Julian Templeton
 10:30 am Fun Sunday in Hall
 Wed 25 7:45 pm Home Group, 14 Southwood Park, N6 5SG
 Friday 27 12:30 – 1pm Christian Meditation

March

Sunday 1 10:30 am **Lent 2**, Worship led by Rev'd Derek Lindfield,
 with Kidz Klub
 Monday 2 **Deadline for submissions to next Outlook**
 2:00 pm Open Door Gathering at Trees, 2-4 Broadlands Road,
 N6 4AN
 Wed 4 7:45 pm Home Group, 14 Southwood Park, N6 5SG
 Thursday 5 8:00 pm Management Committee
 Friday 6 2.00 pm Women's World Day of Prayer Service St Joseph's,
 Highgate Hill.
 12:30 – 1pm Christian Meditation
 Sunday 8 10:30 am **Lent 3**, Worship with Holy Communion led by Julian
 Templeton, with Kidz Klub

Revised Common Lectionary

11 Jan Genesis 1:1-5; Psalm 29; Acts 19:1-7; Mark 1:4-11
18 Jan 1 Samuel 3:1-10; Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18; 1 Cor. 6:12-20; John 1:43-51
25 Jan Jonah 3:1-5, 10; Psalm 62:5-20; 1 Cor. 7:29-31; Mark 1:14-20
1 Feb Deuteronomy 18:15-20; Psalm 111; 1 Cor 8:1-13; Mark 1:21-28
8 Feb Isaiah 40:21-31; Psalm 147:1-11, 20c; 1 Cor 9:16-23; Mark 1:29-39
15 Feb 2 Kings 2:1-12; Psalm 50:1-6; 2 Cor 4:3-6; Mark 9:2-6
22 Feb Genesis 9:8-17; Psalm 25:1-10; 1 Peter 3:18-22; Mark 1:9-15
1 Mar Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16; Psalm 22:23-31; Romans 4:13-25; Mark 8:31-38
8 Mar Exodus 20:1-17; Psalm 19; 1 Cor 1:18-25; John 2:13-22
11 Mar Numbers 21:4-9; Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22; Ephesians 2:1-10; John 3:14-21

Donald Richter

We have had news from his wife, Betty that Donald Richter died at home after a short illness on the 28th of September 2014. He was 79 years old and had had a long and varied career in the ministry. Donald was our minister during the move from Cromwell Avenue to Pond Square was an American, who came with his family for a year's stay and ended up spending much longer!

Born in Lancaster, Mass., he graduated from Bowdoin College and Andover Newton Theological School. He also participated in ecumenical studies at St. George's House at Windsor Castle in the United Kingdom, and served the United Church of Christ in Chelsea, Vt., Seekonk, Mass., London, England, and Westminster, Mass.

Donald was passionate about enriching humanity with common good. He was instrumental in establishing housing for the elderly in Seekonk and Westminster, and worked with a number of congregations to refinance and rebuild their churches.

Donald always looked at challenges as opportunities, even in the midst of builders, demands from Thames North, members, meetings, services and PTA commitments! It is hard to imagine which of us in the congregation at the time of the move to Pond Square, would have had the time or the patience to bring it to its triumphant conclusion. I well remember the Tenebrae service held in the Chapel lounge, amongst bookcases, pews upended and boxes – lit by candles!

Although I cannot recall a single sermon, my kids reminded me that Donald had an ongoing adventure for the children with Misty and Mopey, our very own church mice. And that he gave them sunflower seeds at Easter – a message they have not forgotten.

Donald sought me out, persuaded me to transfer my very old and ignored church membership for a new one, and then roped me in as an Elder before I knew what I was doing. He chaired somewhat fraught meetings



Donald Richter and Elders at opening of Chapel in 1984

with aplomb and never faltered in his aim to get us up the hill into our new space. Year after year he and Betty postponed their return to the States, and we all benefited from his care and attention for those extra years.

It was wonderful to have them all back for the big anniversary celebration and to share again memories of that exciting and frustrating time. We are very sad that just when they had made a final move and settled into their Rhode Island home he became so ill. All the fond memories of the Cromwell Avenue crowd, and the Pond Square movers go out to all the Richters. We remember you with love!

Su Chinn

Don had to be Minister, Architect, Planner, watcher of British workmen versus their US counterparts, house lots of stuff in the Manse (e.g. large Roneo machine) which he took in his stride at this crucial time in the church's history between the old church and Pond Square with calm good humour. He once forgot he had not put his clock forward an hour for daylight and was surprised to see people leaving the church as he arrived!

Pam Furse

VISITING MINISTERS

I am happy to say that Iveta and I have managed to fill all the pulpit vacancies through to 26th July – but for one date. There is always one! It is a reminder of how much the Church depends on our friends, most of them local and regular visitors, to lead worship. Please do support them, especially on the cold, wet mornings of winter.

John Stibbs, a lay preacher and a fairly recent addition to our list, has kindly volunteered to take two services in the first two months of the year: 4th January and 1st February. Rev Donald Macarthur will be with us on 15th February. He was a great support last year when Julian had his sabbatical, coming on three occasions. Rev Roger Orme takes the first of his nine services this year on 18th January.

It may be as well to add that the service on 1st March will be led by Rev Derek Lindfield, formerly chaplain of Caterham School, and housemaster of Viney House there, named after the minister who built our present chapel, Rev Josiah Viney.

John Thompson

Church Meeting, 8 Feb: the Synod's Ministry Reorganisation Proposal

Notice is given of a Church Meeting to be held after worship on Sunday 8 February. The main subject for discussion will be the proposed reorganization of the way ministry is provided to the churches of the Thames North Provincial Synod. It has become increasingly clear that there is a mismatch between what our Church Meeting thinks is the best way to consolidate our growth and future—full time stipendiary ministry—and the Synod's proposed reorganization which appears to necessitate the spreading of stipendiary ministry even more thinly across a cluster of churches, with no guarantee that the proposed 'ministry teams' will work. Below are versions of three responses that have already been made to the Synod leadership by Robert Gorrie, Roger Scopes, and myself. I appeal to you to make the effort to read these and come to the Church Meeting at which we hope to discuss and agree a resolution about the URC's Stipendiary Ministerial Deployment Policy that will be taken to the next meeting of the Synod for debate.

Julian Templeton

On the 20th November last year the church received from the Thames North Moderator a consultation on proposed changes to the organization and operation of the Synod. Simply put these changes involve a substantial reduction in the 35 committees and 200 meetings a year required by the current structure including the replacement of Areas, and their Committees, with Church Groups operating without Committees. The proposal document included some references to ministerial deployment but no specific proposals. We were asked to respond by the 20th December.

The Minister and Elders felt this consultation impinged on the strategy Church Meeting has endorsed for our Church of finding a way to put in place our own locally paid full time minister. Without the time to call and consult

Church Meeting we held a meeting of the group who had previously been identified to help with the development of our own Pond Square strategy to discuss the Synod proposals and our response. Julian, Roger Orme, Robert Courtney, Roger Scopes, John Thompson and I met and based on our discussion produced a response for the Synod which we have submitted on behalf of Pond Square Chapel.

In summary we supported the Synod's desire to put in place an organisation structure intended to promote and support growth in the church and we were encouraged by the hints about local churches involvement in deployment. However we felt that the review had not been based on asking local churches what they felt was needed to support growth and that the review did not focus on the elephants in the room being ministerial deployment and the number of churches.

Our response to Synod included an overview of our concerns, a restatement of our belief in the need, certainly in the case of Pond Square, for full time ministerial leadership, examples of where successful thinking out of the box was addressing the ministerial resource challenge, and arguments against the current deployment policy based on the Bible and the original basis of union.

We have had an acknowledgement of our response from the Moderator accepting that deployment is the elephant in the room. We wait to hear any next steps but in the meantime the consultation was a very helpful prompt for our own thoughts and efforts in pursuit of our own desire to put in place full time local ministry.

Robert Gorrie

If "seeking growth to become central to the synod and its churches" (summary) we need to see signs of significant thinking outside the box of deployment as experienced so far.

The paper "Re-visioning the Synod's future" is committed to groups of churches, and suggests that "for example average groups of 12-14 churches will give a total of 11 groups across the Synod. With the current 40 full scoping, each group is likely to have a scoping of 3.5 ministers." Scoping which depends on fair shares for all groups is bureaucratic and unscriptural (see the Parable of the Talents). Here are two examples of churches who have found that scoping by the formulae used hitherto promotes despair, not hope, and who have therefore done what they could outside the box of current scoping.

Example 1

A united Baptist/United Reformed Church served for a number of years by a full time URC minister. When he moved to another pastorate, the URC initially offered no help towards finding a new minister. No Interim Moderator was appointed. The church was told that they had no hope of having another full time minister, and would not even qualify for a half time minister. It may have been assumed that the next minister would be a Baptist minister. In fact, the church has been able to call a Baptist minister, who lives in the former Baptist manse and is paid directly by the church for a 2/3 ministry. The minister would like to increase this to a full time ministry, and the church is having to consider in the next year whether or not they can afford to pay for this, if they still have to pay their contribution to the URC's M&M fund. This is thinking outside the box of the URC's deployment scheme.

Example 2

A small church which has seen its scoping reduced by stages from full-time to half-time to a quarter-time scoping. Eventually the Area Committee said that the shortage of ministers available to the Area meant that the church could never have another minister (of any scoping) and that therefore there was no point or possibility for them to have an Interim Moderator: they must simply manage on their own without ordained ministry, or close down. The church is considering engaging a young man from outside the URC, whom they are prepared to support financially to enable him to train on the job to become a qualified URC minister. This is thinking outside the box of the URC's deployment scheme.

Roger Scopes

The Moderator is to be commended for his vision " . . . for our churches to be vibrant and relevant, purposely engaged in God's reign . . . healthy, full of life, relevant to understand and to speak the language of the people and serve the Kingdom with a clear intention." He makes clear that *growth in numbers* of Christians is central to this vision and that "our task is to plant and water; growth comes from God." However, unless the nettle of the URC's central deployment policy is grasped, unless some of the challenges thrown up by groupings of churches are overcome, unless recent changes in polity are resisted, and unless the biblical pattern of kingdom growth is realised, I am not convinced that the desired growth will be forthcoming.

The nettle that needs to be grasped: the URC's ministerial deployment policy

I doubt whether the churches comprising the Synod will achieve growth while continuing to accept the stringent limitations on deploying Stipendiary Ministers (SMs) that the central United Reformed Church Deployment Policy dictates. Viewed as a purely pragmatic response to those stringent limitations, the Synod's re-visioning proposal is understandable. But the Pond Square Chapel, Highgate, wishes to challenge the URC Deployment Policy itself. 'Managing decline' is not a strong enough expression to characterise the current policy; 'hastening decline' would be more accurate, since it is the deployment policy that is hastening the contraction of membership and will, I predict, hasten the contraction of Ministry and Mission (M&M) budget.

The M&M budget will contract not only because of contracting membership but also because local churches will realise that they are getting such a small proportion of stipendiary ministry in exchange for their M&M contributions that they will divert their funds into paying staff locally, *as many are already doing*. When one also subtracts the M&M contributions the URC has previously received from its ecumenical churches – now largely being diverted to other denominations, since increasingly only other denominations are able to provide the stipendiary ministry that ecumenical churches seek – the contraction of the M&M fund seems guaranteed.

The reasons for churches failing to grow at present are necessarily local, but my view is that the fractional scoping of churches and corresponding fractional deployment of SMs has *accelerated* a pre-existing trend of membership contraction. SMs attempting to spread their ministry across multiple locations cannot have one of the essential ingredients required for ministry and mission to be effective: a commitment to *place*. Ministers and Members engage in ministry and mission whilst living and working in a locality. When both the Minister and most of the members of a church live and mainly work elsewhere, the local population will understandably question that church's commitment to its locality. Anglican, Methodist and Baptist churches recognise that if contraction is to be arrested and turned into growth, especially when voluntary leadership is less forthcoming, investment in *paid locally based leadership* is required. The United Reformed Church, alone as far as I can ascertain, seems to think that a reduction in paid leadership configured with team ministry will enable growth.

Group challenges

The Synod's proposal effectively devolves the task of deploying Stipendiary Ministry from the Area Committee to each group of churches. The risk of such a change is that churches who happen to be in geographical proximity, but who have little or no wish to have mutual oversight or relationship with one another, will continue to act independently and as a result will be unable to agree about the deployment of SMs within their group because they will each compete for a share of a scarce resource. The proposal of team ministries will only work where there are SMs and others willing and available work as a team. My experience of local churches is that it is mainly the larger ones that have the additional capacity to provide volunteers to help in churches other than their own. A further risk of the current proposal is that the few larger churches left will become so weakened by lack of leadership that they will not be able to provide the worship leaders and pastoral workers that the proposed ministry teams will need in order to function.

Changes in Polity

Recent changes to the *Basis of Union* indicate a change in polity in the light of the URC's deployment of stipendiary ministers in fractional scoping (a deployment policy, we should remind ourselves, that was a *departure* from previous policy). The Pond Square Chapel, Highgate, has expressed its firm intention to resist future fractional scoping because it has recognised that 17 years of half-scoped stipendiary ministry has maintained membership but has not *grown* membership. In order to engage in more effective mission and grow its membership it is seeking full-time URC stipendiary ministry. What it wants is more ministerial time devoted to leading worship, pastoral care, leadership training, catechizing newcomers, and outreach. The church is blessed with a substantial income proportionate to its size, what it seeks is the freedom to use the resources at its disposal to extend its URC ministerial leadership whilst continuing to contribute to the life of the wider church. In so doing it believes it will be putting into practice the principles contained in many of Jesus's parables of the Kingdom of God.

The Parables of the Kingdom of God and their relevance for Church Growth

There are a number of parables that Jesus told about what the Kingdom of God is like that strongly suggest if we don't put our money and energy to work for the Kingdom we are not being good stewards and we may even be

disobeying God. See the Parable of the Talents (Matt. 25:14–30); the Parable of the Mustard Seed (Matt. 13:31–32); and the Parable of the Sower (Lk. 8:4–15). These parables stand in stark contrast to the URC's policy of attempting to share resources fractionally according to a mathematical formula of fairness. The parables mentioned all strongly suggest that if you don't do anything with what God gives you, you will forfeit the little you have; but if you do something with what God gives you, you will prosper and grow.

Continuity of Leadership

The Pond Square Chapel, Highgate, in addition to Sunday morning public worship (average attendance of 30), has two other weekly meetings: a Christian Meditation Group (average attendance of 12) and Home Group (average attendance of 8). The latter 2 groups have grown from small beginnings and continue to grow in number. What these two regular groups have in common is continuity of leadership. An Elder or Minister leads, or is present, every week. The said Elder and Minister verify that the regular contact and conversations that they have with attendees of their groups before and after their meetings has been the key to encouraging regular attendance and incorporating newcomers. The church believes that if it had *continuity of leadership* at its main act of worship, this too would grow. URC Stipendiary leadership has a number of advantages over other forms of leadership: 1. Time available for preparation and pastoring. 2. Biblical and theological and pastoral expertise. 3. A vocation recognised by being called to exercise God's Ministry of the Gospel to and through the church. There are many potential pitfalls and risks associated with locally employed leadership that does not sufficiently understand URC polity (as some churches in the Synod have already discovered to their cost).

A Counter-proposal

The Pond Square Chapel, Highgate, wishes to play as full a part as it can in the life of the Provincial Synod and wider church. It believes it can do this best by being a growing and strong church and thereby develop spare capacity to help its neighbouring churches. This is why it is seeking the freedom to use the resources that God has given it to call a full-time URC stipendiary Minister. In order to do this it seeks the support of other churches in the Synod to bring about a change in the URC's stipendiary ministry deployment policy.

Julian Templeton



THE TRADITIONAL CELTIC BLESSING



MAY THE ROAD
RISE TO MEET YOU



MAY THE WIND BE
ALWAYS AT YOUR BACK



MAY THE SUN SHINE
WARM UPON YOUR FACE



MAY THE RAINS FALL
SOFTLY UPON YOUR
FIELDS



UNTIL WE
MEET AGAIN



MAY GOD HOLD YOU IN
THE HOLLOW OF HIS HAND

Rowena Courtney