*the*LINK



The quarterly magazine of Stockton Heath Methodist Church

WINTER 2023-2024



Artwork by Lesley

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Charity Commission Number 1134148
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www.facebook.com/stocktonheathmethodistchurch,
or www.twitter.com/uk_shmc



Image: Creative Commons

CHRIS IN COSTA RICA



Chris has just sent these latest photos of his work in Costa Rica.

See page 14 for his update on the trip, plus an early Christmas photo!







LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Greetings everyone and welcome to the final copy of *the*LINK for this year.

First of all, thank you to everyone who sent me articles and photographs etc which has made my job so much easier. I hope you enjoy what I have included this time. It was lovely to hear from Chris with photos from a beautiful country and it is good to know that he is doing well so far. I don't envy him trekking coast to coast in high temperatures and humidity.

I could have included something on the current Israel/Palestine war but as this is covered fully on TV, radio and social media at the moment, I decided against it. Let us continue to pray that the conflict will end swiftly but I cannot imagine what life is going to be like for the Palestinians after this.

Sadly the war in Ukraine continues, and the situation in Afghanistan is bad after earthquakes and the deportation of thousands of Afghans from Pakistan. The earthquake in Nepal is under-reported but a lot of people have been very badly affected—up to 1.3 million according to UN estimates. Many live in remote mountainous areas and winter is imminent, so people desperately need warm clothing and shelter. Let's pray for these people and aid agencies, and donate if possible.

Here's hoping 2024 will bring better news.

All for now.

Julia

Data Protection: personal records are kept on computer by Revd Jeremy Tresise as minister, and Chris Park as records co-ordinator. If you wish to know what is under your name, please speak to either of them.

Contact Julia on 650237 or ewhitfield2008@btinternet.com if you wish to include anything in the next edition of *The*Link.

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NEXT DEADLINE: SUNDAY, 4 FEBRUARY 2024



MESSAGE FROM THE REV JEREMY TRESISE

It is with great pleasure that I write my first letter for *the*LINK to you at Stockton Heath. I also write with a sense of deep gratitude for your warm and thoughtful welcome to both Lis and me and the preparations you made over the summer to make our arrival here in Sankey Valley Circuit as smooth as possible.

One of the joys of circuit ministry (yes, such things do exist!) is the opportunity it gives to worship in different parts of the circuit and to experience different ways of worshipping. Recently I was invited to speak at New Song Café, now based at Latchford MC, to share something of my faith life and was given the chance to choose 10 pieces of music that have spoken to me over the years. One of the pieces I chose was Leonard Cohen's *Anthem.*

I admit his gravelly voice and mournful songs divide people quite sharply into those who like and those who dislike! However his songs, which explore the themes of faith and mortality, betrayal and redemption, desire, regret and loss have spoken and continue to speak to many. In his song, *Anthem*, is the line:

Forget your perfect offering; there is a crack, a crack in everything; that's how the light gets in.

The song reminds us that rather than be disappointed and frustrated with our inability to offer a perfection that is unattainable, we should accept ourselves for who we are, imperfections included It may not be quite how God intends us to be, but God can still use us and speak and act through us. How can we be open to God's light shining in our own lives and how can we reflect some of that light onto those around us? More often than not, it is the cracks in our lives that allow the light to shine so that God may be glorified and enables us to live more closely to how God intends us to live.

The essence of the Christmas story is how God acted decisively in human history by becoming one *of* us and one *with* us in our far from perfect world. Even in our own state of imperfection, God can use us for his own purposes.

As I write this, the horrors of the events of the past few weeks in Israel and Palestine continue to reveal themselves to us. We have seen only a small part of the horrific events that have taken place and can only imagine the fear and despair felt by many today in both Israeli

and Palestinian communities. We are impelled, even with our feelings of powerlessness, to pray for God's peace in the Middle East.



Through it all, it is sometimes hard to remember that there is still far more that unites us than divides us and that we are called to pursue the paths of peace where "justice rolls down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." (Amos 5:24).

And despite the cracked and marred image that we all present, may we continue to look for the divine spark in everyone we see and meet, for it is then that we see God, in whose image we are all made. "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them." (Genesis 1:27)

Peace this Christmas.

Jeremy

(Image: Creative Commons)

O LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM

By Bob Peters

During Holy Week in 1982 I was with a party of Christian pilgrims in the Holy Land. We arrived in Tel Aviv at the time Israel and Lebanon were at war and were greeted on the first evening by a high ranking Israeli general who assured us that we were safe if we did not wander off on our own. And this proved to be true.

One result of the war meant that on a few of the days our programme of visits was changed, sometimes while we were travelling in a coach. Whenever we set off, we were never sure where we were heading!

On one occasion we were a short distance from a restaurant where we expecting to enjoy a traditional Israeli lunch, but we were hastily diverted to a different town. It was the only time our guide and the driver, showed any sign of concern. We learnt later that the original restaurant had been bombed.

Often in the morning it was very chilling to see aircraft flying low over our hotel heavily ladened with missiles and bombs. And it was even more chilling when they returned later completely empty.

Another chilling place on our pilgrimage — although this time it was a pleasant chill — was the birth place of Jesus in Bethlehem, which was under Palestinian control. Having experienced the hustle and bustle of the wealthy cities of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, the little town of Bethlehem came as a shock.

Jesus, Christ the King, was not only born in the poverty of a stable fit only for animals, but was also born in one of

the poorest and most deprived parts of our world. It is easy to understand why Jesus showed such compassion and love for the poor and the sick people he met during his ministry on earth — he not only understood their situation, he had grown up with them.

If I have the opportunity, I would happily return to the little Palestinian town of



Bethlehem that we will be singing fondly about this month during Christmastide, and also remembering it as we put up our nativity sets. It was during my visit to Bethlehem that I bought my first nativity. Appropriately, it was made locally from olive wood — although, perhaps, it is not really appropriate, and neither are the other 160 sets I have, as they don't reflect the real poverty into which Jesus was born. If you have an opportunity, a more realistic image of Bethlehem is a small number of what are claimed to be Banksy's drawings on walls in Bethlehem. The drawings reflect the conflict of peace and violence that haunts the poor little town of Bethlehem that God chose to adopt for his son's birth.

There is, however, one place in the Holy Land that I would not choose to return to - Jericho, the oldest city in the world. I have visited several capital cities around the world and always felt safe, even in Jerusalem when the country was at war, but the inhospitable atmosphere of Jericho frightened me and I was not the only one in our party who could not wait to leave.

(Image of Bethlehem from an old illustrated family Bible)

LEND WITH CARE

I was prompted to write this article after the Sunday service in October featured the work of Lend with Care, which is one of our chosen charities for this current year, as I have been lending money through them after seeing so much poverty in Ecuador and then in Vietnam. You can decide how much in total to invest then decide how much to give to each project you choose, from £15 upwards. You are encouraged to make a donation towards running costs too, but this is optional. The

website is easy to use: www.lendwithcare.org and I'm happy to help anyone if they struggle.

Lend with care brings together entrepreneurs in low-income countries with the people that have the power to help them - people like us. These entrepreneurs are just ordinary people struggling to provide for their families, to pay for the children's education and improve their standard of living. Run by CARE International UK, Lend with Care is a way for us to help people to work their way out of poverty with dignity. The projects all have to show a positive environmental impact to be approved.



Here's how it works:

1) **It starts with a request**
From launching a small business to diversifying crops and everything in between, entrepreneurs living in low-income countries are full of ideas - all they need is a helping hand to get started.

2) **The entrepreneur requests a loan**
Entrepreneurs approach one of Lend with Care's local development partners for a loan. If their plans to invest in their business show promise, their loan is approved and they will have the go-ahead to get started. Most Lend with Care partners charge interest on loans to help cover the high operational costs associated with reaching low-income customers with small loans.

3) **You lend to an entrepreneur**
The local partner adds the entrepreneur's profile to the Lend with Care website where they will join other entrepreneurs from different locations across the globe. You can browse all entrepreneurs available for funding and choose which promising business idea you would like to support.

4) **The entrepreneur's business grows**
After an entrepreneur receives their Lend with Care funding, they will get to work starting or growing their small business. They try to keep all entrepreneur profiles updated so you can see how their business is progressing.

5) **Your loan is repaid**
Entrepreneurs pay back their loans in instalments to local partners, who in turn transfer these repayments to CARE International. They then credit the repayment to your Lend with Care account.



6) **You decide what happens next**
As money is repaid monthly/quarterly, you can choose to make more loans, helping more low-income entrepreneurs to turn their hopes for a better future into reality. You can also withdraw the credit if you wish.

There are many projects to choose from and it is interesting to read their stories from many different parts of the world. Here is just one example

Ms Huyen, a single mother. She lives in Nhu Thanh, Vietnam in a small house with her young son who has poor health. Their family's income primarily relies on Ms Huyen's earnings as a garment worker and from raising buffaloes on a small plot of land. Despite these difficulties, she remains optimistic and resourceful, seeking opportunities to enhance their livelihood.

Recognizing the potential in expanding her livestock farming venture, Ms Huyen plans to purchase 2 buffalo calves. These animals will provide additional income by selling them to the traders after raising them for around one year. With the loan and her savings, she hopes to secure the necessary funds to purchase the 2 young buffaloes, which cost around £502 each. This investment will not only increase their income in a year's time but also create a more sustainable livelihood for her family.

Janet Stott

(For more information go to: www.careinternational.org.uk)

Images: Lend With Care website



AMNESTY WRITE FOR RIGHTS CAMPAIGN

The Write for Rights (WfRs) campaign over November and December is the world's biggest human rights event and once again features people from a range of countries, all connected because their human rights have been violated - some by their governments, others by the police, or even big corporations. All because of who they are or because they simply exercised their rights.

The campaign enables individuals to send messages of solidarity to carefully selected cases. The awareness that their situations are gaining public attention offers reassurance to them and their families that they are not forgotten.

This year, after Sunday service on 3 and 10 December, the Warrington Amnesty Group will have cards for up to 6 cases ready for signature so you will have the opportunity to be part of this event.

One of the cases this year, Rita Karasartova from Kyrgyzstan, a human rights defender and an expert in civic governance, has dedicated her life to providing independent legal advice, helping people whose rights had been violated by a corrupt and unreliable legal system. Now she is under house arrest, having spent months detained in a cramped cell unable to see or speak to her family. Worried about her people's access to water, Rita peacefully opposed a border agreement giving control of a freshwater reservoir to Uzbekistan. She has been charged with attempting to 'violently overthrow the government' and faces 15 years' imprisonment.

Does it work? Can cards make a difference? After leading an anti-government protest in May 2020, Cecillia Chimbiri, Joanah Mamombe and Netsai Marova were arrested, taken to a police station, forced into an unmarked car, and driven out of the city of Harare, Zimbabwe. They were subsequently beaten, tortured and left on the side of the road. While hospitalized, the women were charged with criminal offences relating to the protest. Later, they were also charged with communicating falsehoods and obstructing the course of justice, for speaking about their ordeal. Netsai fled Zimbabwe following the attack. After featuring in Write for Rights 2022, where more than half a million actions were taken on their behalf, Cecillia and Joanah were acquitted by the High Court on 4 July 2023.

Cards and messages are selected to be meaningful to the recipient. Religious cards are often not appropriate so designs are chosen perhaps to reflect a specific interest or hobby if possible.

For further information about WfRs or the Warrington Amnesty Group please contact Gill Hardy on 07778060443 or at gill.hardy2610@gmail.com.



Rita Karasartova – picture from AIUK Write for Rights Toolkit.

LITTLE KNOWN WORK OF THE BBC

I recently read an item on the Internet about the work of the BBC World Service. As I am sure you know, girls in Afghanistan are not allowed to receive secondary or higher eduction. Many teachers have lost their jobs.

The BBC is transmitting a programme known as Dars, a word which means lesson in Afghanistan's official languages of Dari and Pashto. The show is picked up by teachers and used in secret school lessons. The girls meet secretly, often in the teacher's basement.

The show recently started its second series on TV, radio and online and is hosted by BBC female journalists who fled Afghanistan when the Taliban returned to power just over 2 years ago.

Any form of learning "provides safety, hope and opportunity", says Yasmine Sherif, the executive director of Education Cannot Wait, the United Nations global fund for the education of children in crisis.

"Community-based education or remote learning, such as the BBC's Dars programme, offers them the learning lifeline which they so desperately need," she adds.

As far as I am concerned, this makes the BBC licence fee worth every penny.

If you would like to know more about this show, go to: www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-65130305

Julia

ALL WE CAN UPDATE

On 22 October Tim Baker came to Stockton Heath to lead worship. It was great to have him with us after the 2 previous services via Zoom.

The retiring collection made £432 plus £30 which Tim donated in lieu of taking expenses. Thank you everyone.

In late August, our treasurer forwarded £1,127 to All We Can from the financial year 2022-23.

Don't forget that, along with many other charities, All We Can offers Extraordinary Gifts which would make good Christmas presents for those who have everything.



allwecan.org.uk

We are coming to the end of our time with Eagles in Malawi. Next year we join a Liberian partner – The Self-Help Initiative for Sustainable Development (SHIFSD). SHIFSD is a humanitarian organisation started by a group of dedicated Liberian Refugees at the Buduburam Refugee Camp, Ghana, in 2000. By 2008, the organisation returned home to Liberia and continued to pursue its aims and aspirations of helping others help themselves through individual and collective initiatives.

(All We Can's website. Used with permission)

CHRISTMAS 2023 AND BEYOND

DATES FOR THE NEXT FEW WEEKS

25 November (in case you receive the magazine in time for this) is our Christmas Fair from 11 am to 2 pm.

3 December, 10.30 am: first Sunday in Advent. All Age Worship with Hazel.

17 December, 6 pm: Carols by Candlelight.

21 December, 7.30 pm: Carols Round the Tree (in church).

24 December, 10.30 am: Carol Service.
2 pm: Christingle with Revd Jeremy Tresise.

25 December, 10.30 am: Family service with Revd Jeremy Tresise.

14-21 January: Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

21 January, 4 pm: BCT Week of Prayer for Christian Unity; service at St Thomas'.

14 February: Ash Wednesday.

18 February: First Sunday in Lent.

Please check church notices nearer the time of each event.



The House Group's Christmas meal in 2022. I am sure there will be another one this year.

Thanks Viv for the photo.

Don't forget to visit the church's website to see all the photos in full colour.

THE MEANING OF '12 DAYS OF CHRISTMAS'

(This was included on last year's church notices at Christmas. I don't know where it came from although there are several versions on the internet.)

There is one particular Christmas Carol that has always baffled some. What in the world do leaping lords, French hens, swimming swans, and especially the partridge who won't come out of the pear tree have to do with Christmas?

This is the real meaning behind this carol.

From 1558 until 1829, Roman Catholics in England were not permitted to practise their faith openly. Someone during that era wrote this carol as a catechism song for young Catholics. It has two levels of meaning: the surface meaning plus a hidden meaning known only to members of their church. Each element in the carol has a code word for a religious reality which the children could remember.

1.The partridge in a pear tree was Jesus Christ.

2.Two turtle doves were the Old and New Testaments.

3.Three French hens stood for faith, hope and love.

4.The four calling birds were the four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

5.The five golden rings recalled the Torah or Law, the first five books of the Old Testament.

6.The six geese a-laying stood for the six days of creation.

7.Seven swans a-swimming represented the sevenfold gifts of the Holy Spirit: Prophesy, Serving, Teaching, Exhortation, Contribution, Leader-ship, and Mercy.

8.The eight maids a-milking were the eight beatitudes.

9.Nine ladies dancing were the nine fruits of the Holy Spirit: Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, and Self Control.

10.The ten lords a-leaping were the ten commandments.

11.The eleven pipers piping stood for the eleven faithful disciples.

12.The twelve drummers drumming symbolized the twelve points of belief in the Apostles' Creed.



Image: free-to-use images from freepik.com

HEART-WARMING

If you have time and the internet, have a look at the UN UK website: https://www.unhcr.org/uk/great-british-welcome. There are some amazing stories of how refugees are making the most of their lives here in the UK.

TIME FOR A SMILE

Four stages of life for modern man: You believe in Santa Claus; you don't believe in Santa Claus; you are Santa Claus; you look like Santa Claus. (ACE).

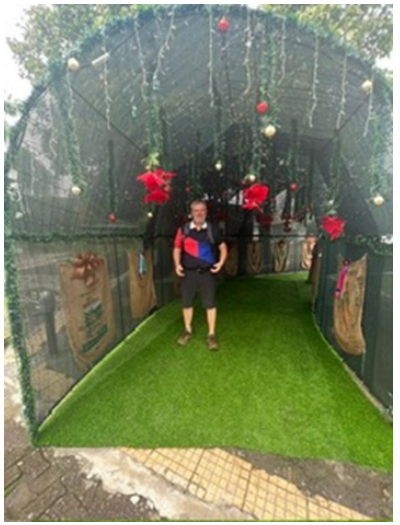
FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Work diligently. Give generously. Pray faithfully. Love deeply.

Confession without repentance is probably nothing short of bragging.

Dear God, be good to me. The sea of life is so wide and my boat is so small.
(ACE).

CHRIS IN COSTA RICA



It's been 7 weeks or so since I left the UK for the warmer climes of Costa Rica. For those of you unfamiliar with my adventures, this is my third Raleigh Expedition to developing countries. The focus of my time is to manage a group of 18-24-year-olds in their quest for experiencing a different culture and using their time and energy to support environmental and community projects in this beautiful country. It has certainly been a challenging time for me as I am experiencing the issues created within the Covid generation. Many of the elements of my work are not as simple as might have first seemed and it's not just been a case of planning work in the various projects. Currently I am leading a Youth Trek across the country, coast to coast.

It is the end of the rainy season here in Costa Rica. It's hot, 26 or so degrees during the day, dropping to about 16 degrees at night. The humidity averages about 82%. It makes trekking across the country warm to say the least. We try to set off at around 5am and walk when it is a little cooler. Unfortunately that means a 3 am wake up which, as you can imagine, is not too popular. Much of the scenery is spectacular, made even more magical as you walk amidst, over and under various layers of clouds.

The morning light helps as well. Everything looks better with the morning light. We hope to be at our destination before lunch as it usually rains just after lunch and you want to avoid the tropical storms if at all possible. When it rains - it rains and it makes Manchester look dry!

It was much colder in my first phase in one of the volcanic National Parks. They even suggested that we may see snow, not too surprising at nearly 3,000 metres.

Christmas comes early in CR *(above)* and the decorations were adorning all the shops in September and many households have trees and outside lights which are well established now. Time passes quickly. My groups are both interesting and inspiring. I am looking forward to the luxuries that home provides but have another 6 weeks or so of basics in the true sense of the word. Pura Vida.

Chris

THE CHURCH AT CREAMFIELDS 2023





Well done Karen and Dave for enduring the very muddy conditions. It has not put them off for next year!



Mud, mud, glorious mud!



The House Group had a much better day when they visited Laskeys Farm for afternoon tea.



HARVEST CELEBRATIONS AT ANTROBUS AND STOCKTON HEATH





Top left: at Antrobus. All the others are at Stockton Heath.

Photos: Denise and Julia







