



During this month of February, we enter into the season of Lent. Br David Newman shares some thoughts for your consideration:

## Choices in the Wilderness

*(Please read Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7, and Matthew 4:1-11)*

79 years ago, on the evening of Shrove Tuesday, 13th February 1945, 773 Royal Air Force Avro Lancasters bombed the city of Dresden. During the next two days the US air force sent over 527 heavy bombers to follow up the RAF attack. Large numbers of refugees fleeing from the advancing Soviet Red Army had massively increased the population of the city above the normal 650,000.

It was regarded as a triumph for Arthur 'Bomber' Harris, head of RAF Bomber Command, and his policy of area or blanket bombing, known in Germany as terror bombing. Dresden was all but totally destroyed.

Not everyone at home rejoiced at this news. Many felt very uneasy about the level of violence being unleashed on innocent civilians. Yes, it could be seen as revenge for the wartime blitz over Britain, but was such revenge a fitting kind of motivation for a country which was taking the moral high ground in this war against evil? (This whole story has echoes in modern day conflict in the middle east.)

Research has suggested that over 35,000 were killed, but some German sources have argued that it was well over 100,000. What is certain is that more people died in those 72 hours in Dresden than were killed in all the attacks on London during the whole of the Second World War.

Despite their unease, few in Britain had the courage to speak out against the bombing. It was a churchman, George Bell, Bishop of Chichester, who spoke on their behalf. Bell argued that this area bombing was an insult to Christian values, and that celebrating the bombing was immoral. However, his Archbishop would not back him in asking the government to account for their actions. In the House of Lords, Bell argued that the devastation of cities was threatening the very roots of civilisation, that this campaign disregarded the law and in so doing, undermined the Allies' claim to be the liberators of Europe. He was heard in near-silence. The then Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, called him 'this pestilent priest'; and it is now generally accepted that George Bell never went on to be either Archbishop of Canterbury or Bishop of London largely because of his views on the bombing of Dresden. He never regretted the choice he made, but as a consequence he knew afterwards what it felt like to walk in a wilderness.

I tell you this story of George Bell to show how that as Christians we have choices to make, and if we are to be faithful, the right choices may have to be the unlikely, unpopular, or difficult ones; and this is something worth reflecting on as we begin our journey through Lent.

I ask you to read the familiar gospel story of Jesus in the wilderness. This is a story about choices.

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World Day of Prayer 2024

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Br Ronald Davey

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One of my favourite films is a comedy by Simon Pegg called Hot Fuzz about a police sergeant who annoys everyone in his London station by being too keen. He is sent to a sleepy Cotswold village to get him out of the way. He gets to this beautiful bywater and soon discovers that it is only kept this way by the village association who murder any undesirables who might tarnish the village and their phrase is 'its all for the greater good'.

That phrase has stayed with me as I have listened and watched as the recent events with the Post Office have unfolded. No one in authority tried investigating the claims of the sub postmasters and politicians, of all parties, ignored it for years. No one inside Fujitsu, the Post Office or Government wanted to risk reputations, damage public confidence or lower profits by being open, honest and listening to the voices of the little people who they were crushing. It was all for the greater good.

But the Post Office is not the only example of being blind to the damage to the people on the ground. The Windrush scandal where the Government was removing alleged illegal immigrants to satisfy election pledges led to the appalling treatment and deportment of people to the Caribbean who had come here as infants. This was presided over by Theresa May when she was Home Secretary and campaigners say that the compensation owed to many victims still hasn't been paid to many. Think of the murder of Mr Stephen Lawrence where racism and incompetence in the

Metropolitan Police Service was overlooked for years, or the Bloody Sunday and Ballymurphy murders in Northern Ireland where lies by the Army were accepted as truth and innocent people were killed and their good names trounced for years to protect the reputation of the Army and the State. And there are, of course, other examples.

Here are victims, little people who the 'important' believed were of no consequence. Lies did not matter because it was only **them** and **they** had no money or powerful friends. No one would know, reputations would stay intact, profits could grow, and it was all for the greater good! But God calls us to a higher standard, he hears the cry of the widow and orphan and through the prophets calls for justice, mercy and humility. God in Jesus, in the Gospels, seeks out those on the edges who are ignored and turned away by everyone else and puts their needs before those of the herd, the 99, in safety. In the New Testament letters, James rails against partiality shown to the rich and powerful and against the poor. The whole thrust of the Bible, in ethical terms, is towards a fair society that values individuals and for a system of law that gives justice. When we pray 'Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done' this is what we pray for in our society and for the way we live together – this is what the greater good really should mean.



Sr Sarah Groves  
Editorial Team

## Notice of Provincial Synod 2024

The Provincial Board hereby give notice that Synod in 2024 will be held at The Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick between Thursday 18th July and Monday 22nd July 2024 inclusive. Please note that we meet on the Thursday not the Friday as at previous Synods.

The timetable for submission of Credentials, Memorials, Nominations, Proposals and Reports is as follows:

1. Congregation Deputies' Credential Form (if different to that already advised) or confirmation of Congregation Deputy (email will suffice) to be at Church House by 31st March 2024 (2.3.a.3). (Deputies will not be expected to bring a copy with them to Synod).
2. Class A Proposals \* must be notified to the Provincial Board by 19th April 2024 (2.3.b.1).
3. Class B Proposals \* must be notified to the Provincial Board by 30th May 2024 (2.3.b.2).
4. Reports and Memorials must be sent to Church House by 6th June 2024.
5. Nomination Forms for Provincial Board

and Provincial Committees to be at Church House by 6th June 2024 (2.4.i.5.i).

Synod Papers will be distributed to all those attending no later than 4th July 2024.

Note \*:

1. Class A - Proposals that effect and become part of the Book of Order of the Moravian Church in the British Province.
2. Class B - Proposals which are not to be incorporated in the Book of Order of the Moravian Church in the British Province.
3. Proposals which have not been duly notified under the Book of Order 2.3.b.2 above will only be given a place on the Agenda paper if:
  - a. They are regarding matters which have arisen since the last date for the submission of proposals, or
  - b. They are in response to issues current at the time of Synod, or
  - c. They arise at Synod, and
  - d. Synod agrees by show of hands that they be included on the Agenda paper.

To Messenger Editorial Team,  
Once again it is happy New Year time even though it does not seem so long ago that we were wishing this on family, friends and acquaintances. What kind of happiness are we wishing on one another? Do we want the recipients of our blessing to have this year the same happiness that we experienced last year, this year? How happy were we the last 12 months? Were we happy enough to share that joy of happiness with family, friends, others we met on holiday or closer to home, or the next door neighbour? My 2023 started so badly but it didn't hold me back on my wish for happy New Years for others. As a nation, 2023 started badly for us and ended much worse. The BBC news tells us, along with my newspapers, that the UK is suffering a cloud of loneliness because we aren't talking to one another enough and so we must spend more time together in conversation. I would like to know much more about what makes my Brothers and Sisters happy or even sad. What do you think of the future for our young ones? Wishing you all a blessed New Year.  
**Br Alan Holdsworth**



## Choices in the Wilderness (continued)

It tells us first of all that Jesus chose to be led by the Spirit, into the desert, or wilderness, to be tempted by the devil. *He chose to be led by the Spirit ... to open himself completely to the gracious will and mighty power of God. He chose to be led by the Spirit into the wilderness ... to follow God into a place that was not at all like home, an uneasy place, a place of testing. He chose to be led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil ... to face up to the evil in him and around him; to grapple with the demons, not to ignore them.*

And he also chose to *fast* - something which Christian people have from time to time valued and embraced, but something which isn't much in fashion these days. The idea of fasting is to simplify our lives, to focus down into our inner being, to recognise our dependence on God, to more willingly open ourselves to God. True fasting - it's never an easy choice - but Jesus made it.

We then read of the three temptations which offered Jesus three choices: a choice about food, a choice about status, a choice about power.

*'If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.'*

This was a choice between breaking the fast and keeping it. Jesus could give in to his dependence on food to keep him going, or make the harder choice of holding on to his dependence on God. His response: 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God'.

*'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you'.*

This was a choice about testing his status. Jesus could choose between doing something dramatic to show how great he was, or simply resting in the grace of God. His response: *'Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'*

*'All the kingdoms of the world and their splendour I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.'*

This was a choice between taking up or giving up power. Jesus could choose between accepting all the power which the world can offer, or confirming his devotion to the greater power of God. His response: *'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'*

Now, we might wonder if these temptations of Jesus can really have anything to do with us. If we have choices in life at all, surely they are different to the choices Jesus had to make. After all, he was the Son of God and we are just 'frail children of dust', as a well know hymn puts it.

True, but we still have choices, and the challenge to each of us as Christians is how to make sure that God is involved in our making of those choices.

We all have choices about food. For some people, the hard and very limited choice will be, what can I afford to buy to make sure my family gets fed right through the week? What should I not buy for myself to make sure that happens? For others it might be, can I afford to spend a little bit more on Fair Trade goods, to help people overseas who produce them to receive a fair wage for their efforts? The choice for us as Christians is, do we give in to our dependence on food to keep us going, or do we make the harder choice of holding on to our dependence on God: that's hard when you have very little - can we, will we, trust God to provide?

We all have choices about status, because status isn't just to do with well-to-do people or politicians or celebrities. We all have an anxiety about what others think of us; about whether we're judged a success or a failure, a winner or a loser. The choice for us as Christians is, do we respond to that anxiety by trying to do dramatic or showy things to impress other people, or do we let ourselves simply rest in the grace of God, and get our status from him.

And we all have choices about power. Again, we might not think that we're very powerful, compared to the landlord who can either fix our leaking roof or let us keep on living in the damp, or the council who can decide to dig up the road outside our house, or take off a bus route we depend on, without asking us. Yet we do have power, each of us. Personal power - power which gives us choices either to help someone in need or ignore them, to forgive someone who has hurt us or let them carry on suffering by ignoring or abusing them. We all know about the power games that go on in our society - they can go on in our communities, our homes and our families, too. We each have power in relation to other people. The choice for us as Christians is, do we use that power as the world does, manipulatively, selfishly, greedily, or do we devote ourselves to the greater power of God: *'Worship the Lord your God and serve only him.'*

All this about temptations and choices goes back to the Genesis story of the very beginning, to the man and the woman in the garden of Eden, with the tree, the fruit, the serpent, and the choice. The difference between us and Adam and Eve is that we already know that we are naked in the sight of God; we know that we are flawed human beings, we know that we are able to choose good or evil, we even know what the consequences of our choices are likely to be before we choose. The Genesis story tells us that: *'the eyes of both were opened and they knew that they were naked'.*

Lent is about asking God to help us keep our eyes open, as Jesus did, and keep our hearts fixed on him.

**Br David Newman**





# World Day of Prayer 2024



Few in the world can be ignorant of the plight of innocent people in Gaza over the last few months. On 7th October Hamas shocked everyone by attacking Israelis at a pop festival and in a kibbutzim near the Gazan border. Atrocities were carried out and hostages taken. The unexpected ferocity of the Israeli retaliation has caused the deaths of more than 22,000 people in Gaza, 8,000+ of whom are children. This is the backdrop for the 2024 World Day of Prayer service on 1st March.

In 2017 the Christian women of Palestine were asked by the World Day of Prayer International Committee to write the service for 2024 based on the Gospel text of 'I beg you, bear with one another in love' (Ephesians 4:2). The stories they tell relate to the time before and since 1948 when Palestine passed from British control to become a nation of relocated European Jews and indigenous Palestinian people. Palestinian people refer to this time as the 'Nakbar' or Catastrophe. As more and more Jewish settlers arrived on Palestinian soil they moved out Palestinians in a bid to grab land. Previous to this Jews, Christians and Muslims had co-habited peacefully together in rural and urban communities. Many thousands of people from both sides died in combat as the new nation of Israelis fought to establish themselves. Many wars have taken place in the years between then and now as existing Palestinian land was reduced in size because of illegal settlement (international law recognises this action as illegal) and Palestinian freedoms were restricted. Palestinians in Gaza and on the West Bank have been surrounded by security walls which impede their freedom of movement to attend hospital appointments, go to work or visit family (who often live on the other side of the wall). Israel now controls what goes in to and out of these walled-in areas including water, power, food and medicine. When under threat the Israeli Government can order 23-hour curfews. Yet, despite this, in 2017 the Christian women of Palestine

understood and appreciated Christ's teaching of love towards all people and wanted to share this with the wider world.

It is very difficult to remain objective at times like this. Our hearts go out to all those who have suffered on both sides after the attack of 7th October. Our prayers are prayers of peace that a long-term solution can be found. We ask for God to intercede and soften the hearts of those in authority so that they may begin helpful conversations. We thank God for the peacemakers and those on both sides who strive for a happy outcome: (for further information about bi-national projects follow the link [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arab%E2%80%93Israeli\\_peace\\_projects](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arab%E2%80%93Israeli_peace_projects)).

On 1st March 2024 women from all Christian denominations around the world will meet to pray for the women who are represented in the service material. At this moment in time, we do not know of their circumstances. We do not know if they are still alive, if their homes are still intact or if their families have been affected by bombing or social unrest. They use the olive tree as a symbol of peace and the parts of the tree - roots, branches, leaves - to explain the characteristics of the story-tellers. Olive trees are precious to Palestinians as they provide essentials for life (food, oil) and denote the ownership of land which, for some, has been in family hands for millennia (or at least before the writing of legal documentation). Olive trees can live for hundreds of years.

By the time of the service, WDP England, Wales and Northern Ireland pray that the present conflict is at an end and plans are being discussed by the international community for a two-state nation where human rights are guaranteed for all. We invite you to pray alongside us for a peaceful settlement.

I include here a meditation by our past President, Elizabeth Burrows. In 2008 she was an ecumenical accompanier escorting Palestinian people through checkpoints as they went to school, work,

hospital visits and family reunions.

The Writing on the Wall - Bethlehem 2008

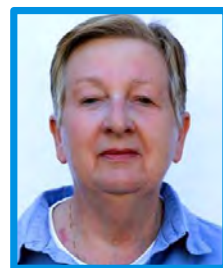
*Twenty-six feet  
Eight metres  
Of dark grey pre-cast concrete  
Strangles the city,  
Chokes its heart,  
Destroys the spirit of its inhabitants.  
The Wall  
Built for security?  
But walls do not bring security,  
Walls do not bring peace.  
Freedom brings peace,  
Peace brings security.  
Look at the writing on the Wall:  
'Only fear builds walls.'  
'There are no just or unjust wars;  
wars are just stupid.'  
'I don't want to feel hate.'  
'An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind.'  
'Victory is to win without picking a fight.'  
'I will always have my dream.'  
'We ain't losers 'coz in wars there are no winners.'  
'Nothing lasts forever.'*

*Twenty-six feet  
Eight metres  
Of dark grey pre-cast concrete  
Strangles the city,  
Chokes its heart  
But it cannot destroy life  
Or hope  
Or justice  
Or joy.  
'Nothing lasts forever.'  
One day 'the wall will fall,'  
Freedom will come,  
Bringing justice, peace, security in its wake.*

(Used with permission)

**Sr Maureen Colbert**

Moravian Representative on the World Day of Prayer National Committee



## Caring for my wife with dementia - a heart rending story

We were at a Christmas dinner, in 2011 in a local hotel and seated with friends. My wife asked me what she had ordered, and I told her immediately. Then a waitress appeared to take our orders, she asked my wife who could not remember what I had told her just seconds before.

In 2012 it became more noticeable with my wife being unable to cope with other ordinary day to day things like cooker switches and pouring water from a kettle into a coffee pot. I realised things were wrong and got her to go to see the doctor who did tests and arranged for a consultant to see her. The consultant got no responses from my wife on any of the visits she had with him. After the tests I was told she had Frontal Lobe Dementia and he referred her to a local day care centre.

This form of dementia affects speech so communication with my wife was really difficult.

She was always desperate to leave the house and would wander off. She loved to go out in the car, but I had to get the passenger door disabled and get a cover put over the passenger seat. Only going to see the sea would pacify her and this became very difficult during lock down when we were not allowed to drive about. Sometimes she would attempt to open the passenger door while the car was in motion and then at other times she would refuse to get into the car. On one occasion it took me half an hour to get her back in the car when we were out in a local town.

I had to get help so Social Services became involved and arranged a care package of three half hour visits, morning, afternoon, and bedtime. This was great but I still had to care for her for 22½ hours by myself. Many of the problems were at night when I was on my own. Gradually the situation got worse, and it became impossible for me to carry on and she was taken into care in 2020 for respite for me. However, during this time, I was hospitalised with chest pains so respite for my wife became permanent.

When my wife was taken into care no visiting was allowed because it was deemed a settling in period. All I could do was sit at a closed window. Then COVID arrived and all visiting ceased except for the window visiting. It was so depressing! Eventually visiting restrictions eased and I was accepted as her care partner. This meant I was able to be with my wife for long periods, but the downside of this was at the end of my visit I was going home to an empty house. It is a long stretch by yourself from 3pm until bedtime at 10pm!

I found this so hard to handle and I lost weight, felt dizzy and was very depressed even though my family helped all they could. Social Services became involved again, this time on my behalf and they changed the visiting times for me so I could visit for a time in the early afternoon and then again in the early evening. This meant I had less time in my house by myself. Social Services also recommended that I start going to a Men's Shed to get more companionship.

I was put in touch with our local Men's Shed and started going there of a morning. At first it was very strange to me, and I felt uncomfortable with some things. But once I spoke with the leader about it the issues eased, and I began to feel very comfortable there. It has given me something to get up in the mornings for and I love going on the trips and the functions and getting to know other men and about their lives. I have put some weight back on and my general health has improved.

I still visit my wife twice a day in her care home and the staff are very good to me. Our journey continues to the end - we have travelled on this dreadful journey of dementia together and it has affected both of us.

*The writer of this article is a member of the Moravian Church but is anonymous to protect his wife's identity.*

### FROM CHURCH HOUSE

#### Provincial Diary for February

5	Faith, Order and Ecumenical Relations Committee	Online
6	Mission and Society Committee	Online
15	Church Service Committee	Online
17	Irish District Conference	Kilwarlin
	Lancashire District Conference	Online
	Yorkshire District Conference	Wellhouse
21-22	Provincial Board Meeting	Church House

### CONGREGATIONAL REGISTER

#### Deaths

12th October 2023	Joan Swanson	Horton
4th December 2023	Peter Madsen Gubi	Fairfield
11th December 2023	Alan Millea	Fairfield

*Dates to remember!*

1-7	World Interfaith Harmony Week
6	Isra and Mi'raj - Muslim
10	Chinese New Year
11	Church Action on Poverty Sunday ( <a href="http://www.church-poverty.org.uk/sunday">www.church-poverty.org.uk/sunday</a> )
	Racial Justice Sunday ( <a href="http://www.ctbi.org.uk/racial-justice-sunday-2024/">www.ctbi.org.uk/racial-justice-sunday-2024/</a> )
	World Day for the Sick
13	Shrove Tuesday
14	Ash Wednesday Valentine's Day

# Movement in Moravian Church Membership in the UK - Part 2

The British Moravian Church, it seems, first decided to take action against the decline in membership at the 1972 Synod. This may well be connected with a sharp article in the *Moravian Messenger* in 1968 criticising the Church for having fallen asleep and needing to be 'woken up'.

Subsequently a 'Renewal Committee' was set up and 1974 was declared a 'Year of Renewal'. A message sent to congregations informed them, 'When a group of Christians is renewed it becomes alive and positive and attractive to outsiders. We therefore have the faith that Renewal would produce very practical results, such as increasing attendance at worship, growing membership, healthy congregation finances, in addition to a real outreach in love to the world around us which would include evangelistic activity'.

Renewal was not therefore solely about increasing membership although that was seen as a natural by-product. Several articles in the *Messenger* appeared on the theme of renewal: re-examining one's faith, Bible study and general reawakening. At the same time that this was taking place the evangelical side of the URC, recently created by a union of Congregationalists and Presbyterians (itself occasioned by declining members) had also begun a renewal project called 'Come Alive'. This looked to Pentecostalism and the charismatic movement for inspiration. The URC were only too aware how the Pentecostal Church was growing apace and the charismatic movement successfully entering other denominations with very positive results. 'A Church', the URC commented, 'which has grown in the 20th century into a world movement of 14 million and is still expanding cannot be dismissed now as a sect, a bunch of cranks'. It was suggested that URC members visit local Pentecostal and Charismatic churches for experience. 'Come Alive' produced a study course which was then adopted by the Moravians. The success of Pentecostalism and the charismatic movement was not lost on Moravians either. One article in the *Moravian Messenger* spoke of how the early Moravian Church, on 13th August 1727 had its own Day of Pentecost and the author looked to Moravians being baptised in the Holy Spirit, having no fear of the charismatic movement and speaking in tongues. But the British Moravian Church remained un-charismatic.

Whether or not the URC and Moravians benefitted from these renewal movements in any way, the decline in membership numbers continued. By 1995 new members of the Renewal Committee wrote: 'None of us was sure what the job entailed'. Similar attempts at Church revival in the UK were made in the 1990s. These years were declared a 'Decade of Evangelism' by the Church of England which invited other Christian Churches to take part, a suggestion taken up by the Moravians. A renewed emphasis was to be made to make Christ known to the world.

While, again, the project was not solely about Church growth it was expected that this would naturally follow. At the end of the decade, much to the disappointment of all, the statistical evidence pointed to continuing decline in those Churches already in decline.

Decline in the Church of England continued at a worrying level. Not put off by past failure the 2010 General Synod of the Anglican Church itself decided on a 'Reform and Renewal' programme. The purpose was 'to contribute as the national church to the common good, to facilitate the growth of the church in numbers and depth of discipleship and reimagine the church's ministry'.

In 2014, as part of that programme, a report *From Anecdote to Evidence* was issued subtitled *Findings from the Church Growth Programme 2011-2013*. The programme, which had run for 18 months between 2011 and 2013, sought to investigate the factors influencing church growth within the context of the Church of England. It focussed on finding areas of ministry which were showing numerical growth and finding out why.

The conclusions, in a nutshell, were that the following hindered growth: declining numbers of children and young people, more than one church under the same priest, unwillingness of congregations to change (as opposed to congregations with a clear mission and purpose) and clergy who were not flexible and did not 'push' people in the right direction (as opposed to those clergy who prioritised numerical growth over nurturing those already attending the church).

An upbeat report, *Reform and Renewal*, was issued in 2016. This stated that the programme had demonstrated that 'decline in attendance can be reversed through well-founded, prayerful approaches in areas and among demographic sectors where church attendance is lowest'. It then rather ominously added, 'but of course, this has not led to significant growth in numbers, depth of discipleship and impact in communities in totality across the Church of England: it has merely shown what could be possible'.

Notwithstanding, £248 million was spent by the Anglicans between 2016 and 2020 on the renewal programme based on these two reports. But in September 2021 the Archbishop of Canterbury admitted that turning round declining numbers 'has not so far happened'. In fact, during the period in which the money was spent attendance at services fell by some 50,000. Of course, one might argue that attendance might have fallen more without the programme and accompanying cash and indeed some churches did grow while others declined, but it rather looked as if the secret of renewing the entire Church was yet to be found.

An interesting aspect of the 2016 Anglican report is that theological tradition (i.e. High, Broad or Evangelical or, perhaps, liberal, middle-of-the-road and conservative) makes no difference to church growth. This is in many ways a surprising finding as Pentecostalist and (Protestant) charismatic Churches bucked the trend and continued to grow. Both are strongly evangelical.

In 2016 three Canadian academics looked further into the question of church decline and theological tradition. For the purposes of the exercise, they chose four Canadian 'mainline' denominations (what we might call middle-of-the-road theologically, such as Moravians, Methodists and URC). Their study compared the demographic and religious characteristics of congregants and clergy of individual growing mainline Protestant churches in southern Ontario with the characteristics of individual declining mainline Protestant churches of the same denominations from the same area. The purpose was to identify predictors of growth or decline.

This study was more sophisticated than most previous studies in identifying the distinctions between conservative and non-conservative congregants and ministers. Their conclusion was that clergy and congregants of growing churches were more theologically conservative. They exhibited higher rates of Bible reading and prayer and were more likely to emphasise youth programmes and use contemporary worship styles. They also tended to have younger congregants, slightly younger clergy and a clarity of mission and purpose.

Contradicting the findings of the British Anglican report they stated, 'in terms of the purpose of our study, the most notable result to emerge from our analysis is the importance of theological conservatism as a predictor for church growth among these mainline Protestant churches. Our data demonstrate that within our sample, theological differences do matter for church growth'.

This conclusion goes a long way to accounting for those denominations in the UK which have bucked the trends of decline (Pentecostalists and charismatics) and those individual churches within otherwise declining denominations which are also seeing growth. I do not have actual figures for growing churches in declining denominations but am told by non-evangelical clergy of two, URC and Anglican, that their evangelical churches are faring better than the others.

The attraction for many of Pentecostalism and charismatics is not hard to see. Both are new movements dating from the last century and appeal to young people. The 'culture' of many of these churches, such as the New Frontiers and Vineyard Church, have a strong US feel to them, are dynamic and with an emphasis on youth, liveliness, modern music, 'unstuffy' worship styles

and a claim to give you direct contact with God through the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which is manifested by speaking in tongues, healing etc.

While this approach is altogether different to Anglican conservative evangelical Churches, such as those belonging to the Church Society (opposing women's ordination, same-sex marriages, very conservative view of the Bible, etc), these churches are also apparently growing, or at least holding their own.

The particular Church Society church I have looked at is extremely professional and dynamic with an emphasis on growth, has a youth group, a mothers' group, a retired men's group, a band, a choir, a Sunday School and acknowledges that congregations need to change to survive. Needless to say, the church is professionally managed by a 'leadership team' of ministers. It is, of course, far easier for large churches to lay on these additional attractions and may account partly for the successful megachurches (also usually evangelical) both here and in the US. Small evangelical churches, particularly those with a shared minister, cannot provide these extras.

What is it about (mainly conservative) evangelicalism that attracts? One factor must be the religious certainty of such churches, whether in their view of the Bible, Christian doctrine or salvation. We are all attracted by certainty. Doubtless it is this certainty which makes evangelical churches more dynamic and keener to spread their message.

Religion is also, of course, a social phenomenon and some sociologists have suggested that the appeal of evangelicalism is found in 'subcultural identity theory'. This means that evangelical convictions contribute to the vitality of congregations by helping them maintain a distinct identity vis-à-vis the larger culture, providing unity through an external locus of authority in the Bible, stricter membership rules, the encouragement of formative religious experiences and prioritising the faith development of youth and children. A congregant becomes part of an exclusive group.

Large numbers of churchgoers, of course, are neither evangelical nor impressed by the claims of Pentecostalists or charismatics. This probably includes a considerable number of Moravians and probably most Methodists and URC members. It is inconceivable that churches catering to such congregations will ever entirely disappear. Christian practice through the ages has, like most human activities, been subject to fashion. Despite the gloomy prognostications one hopes that the British Moravian Church will continue in its current form for many years to come.

**Adrian Wilsdon**

*With thanks to Lorraine Parsons, the Moravian Archivist*



# Br Peter Madsen Gubi

(1930-2023)

*Before Peter died he wrote out a brief story of his life which was used as part of the address at his funeral at Fairfield on 28th December 2023. This obituary uses part of this Lebenslauf and the words in italics are by Sr Sarah Groves.*

I was born on the 3rd of May 1930, on the American island of St. Thomas in the West Indies. I had a Danish father and an English mother, which made me an Anglo-Danish-American-West Indian and, as I increased in age and stature, my nationality became a problem.

When I was eight years old, we moved to Barbados and lived at Sharon, in the parish of St. Thomas, just as World War Two began. There were five of us children, with several acres on which to roam without leaving the premises. Much of it was under cultivation by church members, as tenants, but we also had our acre and, as children, we were expected to do our share of the required work. It was wartime and, if we didn't grow our own food, we didn't eat!

When Germany occupied France, the islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe became German territory and were used as submarine bases. As a result, many of the ships which supplied the islands with food and other goods were torpedoed, making things like rice and flour, and petrol, scarce and rationed.

When the war ended, we moved to Antigua where I became a pupil at the Antigua Grammar School and, after leaving, got my first job at the Antigua Sugar Factory in the weighing office, weighing the sugar cane as it came into the factory from the fields by train. In 1947, my parents were due for furlough, and we all came to England, where my brother and sisters continued their education at Fulneck, and I entered Fairfield College and Manchester University to train for the ministry.

That's when my complicated nationality caused problems. Under British law, I was a Danish citizen and, because Denmark had been occupied by the Germans during the war, I was suspected of being a collaborator with the Germans and had to report to the police every two weeks in order to assure them that I was not subverting the nation. Being sympathetic to the Germans was the last thing any Dane would be, but it was too soon after the war, and people were still a bit jittery. Father solved the problem by getting us all naturalised British - even himself.

My first year in Fairfield was spent at night school in Manchester. In the winter, this meant turning out in the frost and polluted smog, when the bus conductor had to walk alongside the bus to let the driver know where he was. In the holidays, we all lived in Brockweir which, in those days, had no electricity or water, apart from the village pump and the river. House and church were heated by coal and wood, which we salvaged from the river. I worked on the farm next door during the holidays to boost my meagre funds.

In addition to the official list of subjects to be studied at Fairfield, I learned how to develop and print black-and-white photographs, with the help of Dick Connor for whom it was a hobby. I was also introduced to the mysteries of electronics by John Smith and Harry Bintley, both of whom had been involved in radio and television construction and maintenance before entering college.

After completing my training, I got a job at B & S Massey in Droydsden, first as a labourer and then as a metal turner. The firm produced machine tools, and I operated a 12-foot lathe which turned out giant pistons and crank shafts for use in drop hammers and other large machines.

In due course, I was ordained at Fairfield by Bishop Connor, and called to the Eastern West Indies Province as the minister of Cedar Hall, Gracebay, and Five Islands, congregations. The first six years of my ministry were spent on the move. Being single, I was the easiest and cheapest person to move, and my first responsibility lasted for one year when I was called to St. Kitts to the Cayon congregation and, later on, Basseterre was added while my parents went on furlough.

My main congregation there was Calvary in Bridgetown, with Fulneck and Gracehill. The unit had been without a resident minister for four years and I was welcomed, whoever I was. But within a year, I was called to Tobago. I had not lived in Tobago before, and I enjoyed the different trees and birds, and insects.

The time came when I returned to the congregations in Barbados. The termites had been slowly eating the woodwork in the church in Bridgetown while no one was looking, and the congregation decided to scrap all the wooden items at the front of the church and replace them in concrete. Not a single voice was raised in protest, and we all lived happily afterward for at least two years, during which time I married Joyce Gibbs, a Methodist Sunday School teacher. After furlough we were called to St. Kitts, to the Basseterre and Cayon congregations again, and to be Superintendent of the Conference once more.

Our stay in St. Kitts was for three years, during which time our daughter Anne was born. In 1963, hurricane Flora hit Tobago



destroying five of our churches and one manse. In 1964, we were called to Tobago to rebuild the damage. My son, Peter was about to be born, so Joyce remained in Barbados with her sister, while I went to Tobago to find somewhere for us to live while the rebuilding went on. I was appointed Superintendent of Tobago and also Trinidad. After collecting the family from Barbados, we lived in rented accommodation while the manse at Moriah was built. Then we were called to Barbados again where we lived at Mt Tabor and I also looked after four smaller congregations. After a year, we were called to Bridgetown once more, with its three smaller congregations, where we enjoyed our stay until 1975. I had difficulties obtaining a residence and work permit, and so we decided to move to this country, to serve in the British Province. We came to Lower Wyke with Wellhouse.

*The move to England was hard, particularly for Joyce. The stipend was very poor and ministers with children qualified for income support from the state. So, whilst Peter served the congregations in Yorkshire he also worked as a postman in Bradford.*

*Peter then moved to the West Country and served Swindon with Tytherton for 16 years and additionally Malmesbury for four years. He also served the Tytherton and Brockweir congregations during interregnums.*

*I knew Peter as a quiet man who would sit without much comment at Minister's Conference whilst others said much out loud. But when you chatted to him later a dry sense of humour and much wisdom would emerge. As well as serving his congregations he also served the Province on the Finance Committee, Renewal Committee and Church Book Committee and served as Vice Chair of Synod for a number of years.*

Joyce died in 2011 after a long illness and, after living for a few more years in Tytherton, I moved to Crewe to live with our son, and joined the Dukinfield congregation where I took the occasional service, preached and played the organ. And, as if to complete a full circle, I recently became a member at Fairfield due to my son being called to serve there.

I've had a long, varied, and enjoyable life, and I leave it with few regrets. So, until we meet again, farewell.

*Peter's calling to the ministry was for a lifetime and his faith sustained him through the good, interesting and the difficult times. His faith was deep and his preaching intelligent, his concern was always to leave his congregations with words that would sustain them through the coming week. The Old Testament Watchword for the 4th December, the day of his death was from Isaiah 41:10 Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be afraid for I am your God.*

*Peter's cremated remains will be interred in Brockweir Moravian Church God's Acre where his wife is buried.*

**Sr Sarah Groves**



# Br Ronald Davey

The Fulneck congregation in West Yorkshire is mourning the loss of Br Ronald Davey, who for many years was a church stalwart. Ron, who lived with wife

Roz in the settlement, was 93 years old.

He attended Trinity Church Sunday school in Pudsey, where he made many lifelong friends. He attended Trinity Church Men's Class and joined in many lively discussions.

Ron met Roz on a blind date and 18 months later they were married. Roz said: 'Ron was very loyal and sociable. He had a great capacity for making and keeping friends and we had a great social life.'

Having attended Pudsey Grammar School, Ron's father suggested he become an architect or accountant. Ron was having none of that. He had only ever wanted to bake and when he left school at 16 he joined the family bakery.

Roz says: 'Ron only ever wanted to be a baker. He loved it and ran the family business for many years with his older brother Ken, cousin Rodney and sister May.'

He was happy in his work and whistled wherever he went - earning the title the 'Whistling Baker'. In his spare time, he loved rugby and dancing.

Ron grew to love Fulneck Church as much as he had loved Trinity. He embraced church life, becoming a chapel servant and eventually head chapel servant.

Ron was a representative at Synod, secretary of the Men's Fellowship, secretary of the Music Society, a founder member of the Bible Study Group, assistant treasurer of the choir and administrator of the Choir House.

The Daveys had two children, Samantha and Michael. Tragedy entered their lives when Michael died at 10. 'Ron was devastated', said Roz, 'but we pulled together, had faith and got through it'.

The family enjoyed holidays in Scotland and days out in the Dales. Roz said: 'We enjoyed all our Scottish holidays together, both with the family and on our own. We both enjoyed going to the theatre in Pitlochry and visiting the smallest distillery in Scotland, where Ron would always buy a bottle to bring home.'

The 'Whistling Baker' continued to bake at home and taught others, including daughter Sam. He also baked the Lovefeast buns for services for many years, something he started while running the bakery.

Ron loved people, a good chat and a healthy debate. He did so much to help so many, not seeking validation but getting on with it quietly. He was a true Moravian gentleman.

**Br Dick Porter**



## Cliftonville, Belfast

We were saddened by the sudden death of Sr Anne Brown (nee Mitchell) on 8th October. Over the years Anne was a youth club leader and Sunday School teacher. She is greatly missed by her family and friends.

We also record our sympathy to Hugh and Lorraine Gill and family on the sudden death of Tommy, Hugh's brother.

A Craft Fair was held again this year. Our thanks to all members and friends who provided goods for the church stalls, also to the people who rented tables to sell the crafts they make.

Br Stephens presided at the Blue Christmas that he organised for any who because of bereavement or memories sometimes find it difficult to find real joy in the season.



© Br John Cooper

The Christmas tree and the church were decorated, and the star and Advent wreath were prepared. Also displayed was the Nativity scene donated by Sr Maud Hamill. We had our joyful and well attended Christingle Service at 4pm on Christmas Eve when we were pleased to greet Sunday scholars from past years among the congregation. We were surprised and grateful to the greengrocer who kindly donated the large oranges for the Christingles when Vivyiene went to purchase them.

The Sunday service on Zoom is appreciated by those who can no longer make the journey to church.

**Sr Edna Cooper**

## Horton, Yorkshire

Here we are at the start of 2024 looking forward to the year ahead, to sharing fellowship with all our Brothers and Sisters, and we wish you all a healthy, happy, peaceful New Year.

We have shared some very lively services recently, with a family service and the annual Christingle service delivered by Sr Claire,

Christmas Day by Sr Liz and a shared Café church with Lower Wyke delivered by Sr Maureen. Each of the services involved some action, and some creation, by the congregation and we got to take home some wonderful reminders of the services. The Christmas Day service involved three very grown up Shepherds who gave us a different perspective of the Nativity story. Even though in these services we are sometimes taken out of our 'comfort zones' (and our 'normal'

seats - does this happen in every congregation?) we try to embrace the challenges and new ways of learning.

We have continued with the Birthday Club Socials holding quizzes, a beetle drive and a Yorkshire morning, and a very successful fashion show was held with over 80 people attending. We are so grateful to everyone for organising, hosting, helping and attending.

We are now running a monthly coffee morning on the first Saturday of every month as part of our local BD5 churches together which fits nicely with 'Holy Habits' as we are reaching out to our local community. Other Churches in the area host a different Saturday in the month with each Church offering something different. Our 'speciality' is a supervised play area for under-fives, not to mention the homemade cakes, jigsaws and quizzes. So, if you are in the area and fancy a chat and a cuppa or have small children/grandchildren, please come along - you will be made very welcome.

**Sr Linda Barraclough**



© Br Michael Newman

## Christmas at Fetter Lane, London

Your ideas about Chelsea might come from reality TV but we know that there are many residents, young and old, for whom Christmas can be less than convivial, and west Chelsea, where we are, is home to a large housing estate as well as a number of supported living blocks.

At Fetter Lane we celebrated the Christmas season with two gatherings in that busy weekend of the 16th and 17th. Over the past year we've established a happy and constructive relationship with the Chelsea Corps of the Salvation Army, located just down the road. We've already worked with them for the 'Awesome Autumn' half term event, so this was yet another chance to combine their skills and ours. On Saturday evening their brass band, busy all over Chelsea, made its way to Moravian Close for 'Carols in the Close'. We were joined there by about 40 local people, attracted by the fairy lights and the sound of music. The carols were a mix of popular and traditional so everyone could join in.

Br Michael organised a craft activity for the younger visitors



© Sr Cynthia Dize

to make small and colourful lamps, Br David provided the welcoming commentary and our friend Abby from the Salvation Army entertained with a lively musical puppet show for all ages. Her husband Phil from the Salvation Army managed to acquire a very large amount of mince pies and biscuits so all were served.

On Sunday, having worked hard with the oranges on the morning before, we held our traditional Christingle service with Br Michael and Br David leading. Candles, fairy lights and music over that weekend set us well on the way to the next weekend as we waited to welcome the birth of Jesus, focusing on light and perhaps hope in this often dark period.

**Sr Cynthia Dize**

## Wellhouse, Yorkshire

Following the summer break, on the 17th September we welcomed the Katie Philpott School of Dance for their Annual Presentation Service. The service was led by Br Evans as our minister Br Cooper had returned from the Unity Synod with COVID. It was a well-attended service with trophies being presented to the winners from each class of dance and the Wellhouse Cup for the most improved dancer of the year going to Madeleine Bach.

The following week on the 24th we held our Harvest Thanksgiving Service which was led by Rev Sally Wallace Jones from a local Anglican Church. The gifts of tinned vegetables, soups and chocolate biscuits were donated to the Bradford Soup Run to help feed the homeless and those on the streets in Bradford.

On 15th October Sr Janet Cooper had been invited to conduct the Sisters Anniversary and at the end of the service a cup of tea along with light refreshments were served as part of the Holy Habits theme of Eating Together. It was an enjoyable service and time of Fellowship.

On the 2nd December we held our Christmas Supper and were entertained after supper by Karen Clegg. Karen has travelled the world and has starred on television programmes and commercials. It was a time of laughter and fellowship.

We held our service of Nine Lessons with Carols on the 17th and on the 18th as part of the Churches Together in Mirfield and District Brs Cooper and Evans distributed knitted angels to the Ings Grove House Residential Home in Mirfield. A friend of Wellhouse Church had knitted about 240 angels and the majority

were taken to various other homes in Mirfield along with a few going to visitors at the Christingle service. Ings Grove House really appreciated the angels. A note from the manager said, 'This really was a lovely gesture and we would really thank you for thinking of us and gifting us all the beautiful knitted angels'.

On the 24th we held our traditional Christingle service when we were entertained by Eleanor Birt, a young lady from Katie Philpott's school of dance. She sang for us: 'It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas', and she sang like an angel. The following day we held our Christmas Day Service when we celebrated the birth of our Saviour.

On the 9th December we were saddened by the news of the sudden death of Sr Denise Hyndman who was found by a neighbour early in the morning. She has been a member of the Church for many years, and the funeral is arranged for 10th January 2024. We remember her husband Maurice in a residential home and her daughter Jackie and family in Australia.

**Br Kenneth Evans**



© Ings Grove House

## Kilwarlin, Northern Ireland

In the absence of our minister Br Livingstone Thompson (who was officiating at the wedding of his niece in Jamaica) our Christingle service was taken by his wife Sr Jean Marie. The service was opened by Br Noel Walker who welcomed everyone. Tom and Fraser read the lessons, Ty and Montana explained the meaning of the Christingle and five little girls sang 'Away in a Manger'. Sr Jean Marie gave an interactive story, during which the girls Ariana, Abigail, Siena, Esme, and Maria brought up baby Jesus to the crib followed by the shepherds and animals and their gifts. Jordana looked after the overhead projector and



© Br Montana Law

her sister Lesley Ann read a poem about Christmas which she had written herself. Br Desmond Law gave the closing prayer and benediction.

Mulled wine, mince pies and shortbread followed this lovely service.

**Sr Esther Law**

## Christmas Concert at the Moravian Church in Ockbrook, Derbyshire

I write as Chair of 'Rendezvous' which is a Christian Faith Ladies Group who meet in the Parish of Ockbrook & Borrowash. We are very involved in helping various Charities, especially at Christmas.

I was invited together with Kathy Singleton, who is a member of both the Moravian Church and Rendezvous, to the High Sheriff of Derbyshire's Legal Service in Derby Cathedral where the theme was 'Unity is Community'. We are both passionate about bringing our community together so, under the umbrella of 'Rendezvous' we decided to organise an event for the Parish.

We approached Rev Joachim Kreusel, the Minister of the Moravian Church in Ockbrook and he very kindly agreed that we could hold a Christmas Concert in his church. We asked a local entertainer - Johnny Victory if he could then provide the entertainment for us and we also invited the High Sheriff of Derbyshire - Theresa Peltier who was delighted to accept.



© Christine Gardner

We thought it would be a nice idea to provide a boxed picnic lunch for everyone. We initially thought we would aim to sell 100 tickets, but the number just grew, and we soon sold over 150 tickets. We needed help preparing the picnic boxes but ladies from the Moravian Church, Rendezvous and Ockbrook and Borrowash WI soon came together and were a super team.

This Concert proved to be an amazing event in many ways. The community had a wonderful day and we received so many lovely comments. For most of our guests it proved to be the highlight of their year.

Guests gave donations towards the High Sheriff's Charity and £170.00 was raised at the event for the Deaf Society in Derby. A really important thing for us was that we were able to donate £1,550 to the Moravian Church, so everyone was able to gain from this wonderful event. A day to remember.

**Christine Gardner**



# British Moravian Ministers

## Michael John Smith



Thanks to Hilary Smith I came across a book by Duncan Wood about her late husband, Br Mike John Smith. The book draws on Mike's writings and weaves in his personal life,

with some sections written by Hilary.

This is one book in a series about Moravian ministers who were active in the British Province in the twentieth century.

Although Mike sadly died over 30 years ago, I know that many of you have fond memories of him. Duncan lived in Oldham and got to know Mike well while he was serving at Salem. He describes Mike as 'a rumbustious character ... with a keen sense of humour'.

Mike's father was a Catholic and his mother an Anglican: from his teenage years Mike moved to the Moravian Church, initially Hornsey in London, and yet throughout his Ministry the traditions of the Anglo-Catholic church influenced his thinking. Hilary offered an example from their time at Salem. After the Maudy Thursday service, the church was cleared of anything ornate, no cloths or flowers. The congregation were then invited to sit in silence with only one light at the front. People then left in silence.

In the early 1980s one of Mike's writings directly addressed the topic in a paper titled 'English Moravians and the State Church'. He provided details of the long friendship that can be traced back to before the Thirty Years War (1618-1648). More currently he wrote of Moravian Ministers leading congregations to the Parish Church quarterly for Holy Communion. Interestingly, this is an area that has arisen recently in some of Hilary's research; it seems likely that where Societies came together, they formed 'united flocks' to attend their local Parish Church for communion.

The book also offers extracts from an earlier paper (Minister's Conference 1978) which Duncan describes as quite provocative, as Mike states that he feels strongly that challenges need to be faced or the church will be 'doomed to a dishonourable extinction, and all the glories of the past will not save us.' In this paper Mike also argues that as the world faces many disasters, and thus perhaps a more significant figure for us to remember should be Comenius rather than Zinzendorf.

The book offers not only many insights into Mike's writing but also his personal life as a Minister. While still a student minister training at the Northern College they moved to Gomersal in October 1989, where he was then ordained the following year.

Shortly after his ordination a PEC circular went out inviting Ministers to volunteer for service in the recently created Jamaican Province. They volunteered, were chosen and then were able to have a conversation with Pat and Estelle Craig (parents of Beth McOwat) who were on furlough from Jamaica and staying at Ockbrook. Here Duncan hands over to Hilary who paints a fascinating picture of their work and some of the practical challenges of life in Jamaica. This part of the story illustrates the work they both undertook: Hilary was able to teach the local school children and translate letters in German sent to the Province from Herrnhut.

They returned to England in 1974, initially to Salem. In 1980 they moved across the Pennines to Horton, thus for Hilary moving so much closer to Baildon, her childhood home. Again, Duncan hands over to Hilary as Mike was diagnosed with myeloid leukaemia. In the summer of 1988 Hilary describes how they celebrated their 20th wedding anniversary with other ministers and spouses at the annual Yorkshire ministers' 'works' outing'. The funeral for Mike was at St Oswald's Church Little Horton on 2nd March 1989.

During the difficult years of 1987/1988 Mike went through a period of intense personal suffering. It was at that time that he wrote 'Some Prayers for the Dark Hours'. Mike opens this booklet by encouraging us to let the prayers into our hearts. 'Then, in your dark hours, you will not need to move, even to switch on the light.' For each prayer he offers some opening comments. For example, he introduces the Sanctus by saying that this prayer joins us not only with all Christ's people, but with the angels of God in their eternal worship:

***Holy, Holy, Holy Lord  
God of power and might,  
heaven and earth  
are full of your Glory.  
Hosanna in the highest!***

'British Moravian Ministers: Michael John Smith' by Duncan Wood is available on Amazon, along with his book about Francis Hugh Mellowes; he is currently working on one about Emily Shaw. Hilary has copies of 'Some prayers for the Dark Hours': if you are interested please ask her.

A warm thank you to Hilary for initially mentioning this book to me and then spending time sharing more of the story.

**Sr Mary Holmes**  
Fulneck

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