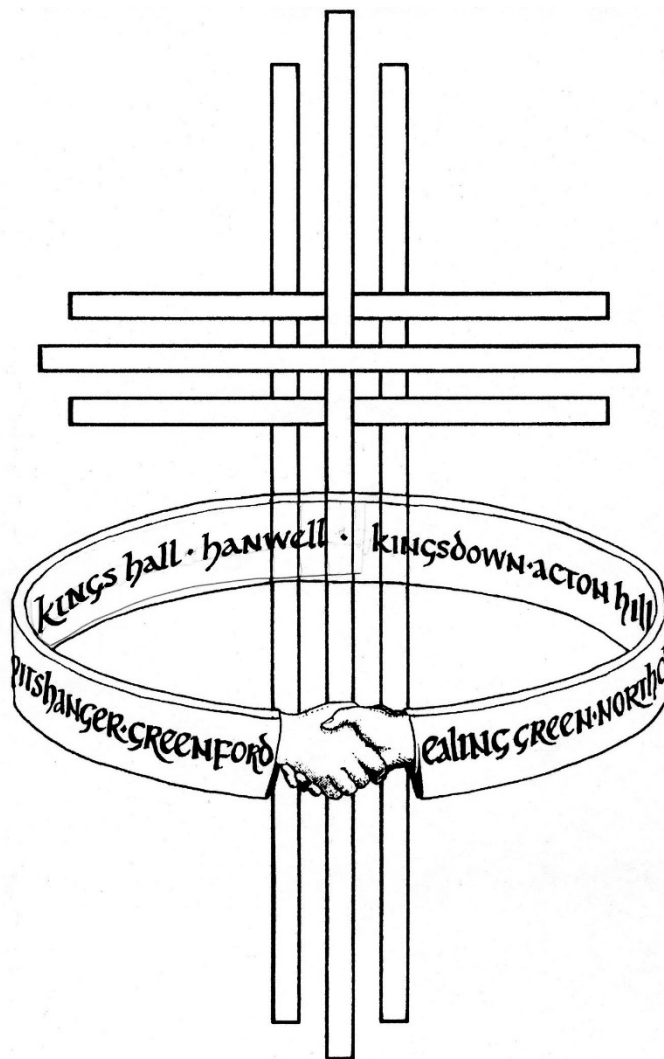


In-touch

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The magazine for *all* the Ealing Trinity Circuit.

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Circuit website: www.ealingtrinity.org.uk

Front Cover designed by Marion Narain

Urgently Required: Circuit Safeguarding Officer

Could you serve the Circuit by offering to become Circuit Safeguarding Officer? The post has been vacant for some time and urgently needs filling. Please speak to Rev Rachel Bending if you are interested.

From the Superintendent

Dear Friends,

As we look at the world around us, at the news, at the people around us and our communities, there is much suffering. I often find myself talking with people who find themselves overwhelmed by all that is happening and wrestling with how to believe in God in the face of so much pain. Often they, and I, ask where is God? Why does God allow this to happen? What have I done to deserve this? These are age old questions that wail through the Psalms of Lament in the Hebrew Scriptures and scream in the agony of Jesus in Gethsemane and on the cross 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' But still we often fail to face their depth and instead run from them with trite responses.

I've recently been working with some Local Preachers in training on their assignments for the training course. There's one particular assignment that caught my imagination. The assignment asks the students to read part of the book 'Where the hell is God' by Fr Richard Leonard where he suggests some unhelpful phrases and clichés that are often spoken to us in times of pain and suffering and to think of their own. Well, once I got started my list grew at speed. Try these for a start:

"Whatever doesn't kill you makes you stronger". – frankly, I'm not keen on either of the two alternatives in that one - I'd be quite happy being not so strong, alive and untroubled!

"God only gives trouble to the strong" - well, I don't know about you, but I think I'd rather be weak and untroubled!

"God sends us trouble to teach us" - really- REALLY- would you deliberately trip up your child and cause them injury to teach them to look where they're going? If not why in the world are you suggesting God would?

By the way, I'm not suggesting that we don't learn from suffering, of course we do. We can learn and grow and be strengthened by anything we experience in life, including those things that are painful. I'm just suggesting that a good teacher finds positive and healthy ways to enable students to learn. Are we really suggesting that God is a bad or capricious teacher who instead chooses to teach through suffering?

"The more we suffer now, the greater our reward will be in heaven" - in my reading of scripture there are no good neighbourhoods and bad, no big palaces or small hovels. Being in heaven is being united with God. All are equal. So there can be no first class ticket or 5 star accommodation to be purchased.

I could go on, and on, and on... Maybe you have your own that you could add to the list.

It seems to me that they all have several things in common:

They all reflect our wish to run away from the pain or to put a lid on it;

They all seem to involve images of God as vindictive, careless or requiring offering to be placated;

They don't seem to take seriously the model of God in Jesus who came, suffered and stayed with people in their pain and who calls us to do the same.

So what might be a better response?

I think the first is to be willing to sit with people in their pain, knowing that we can never truly know what it is like for them. "I can't imagine how you must be feeling..."

To recognise that the God shown to us in Jesus is a God who grieves with us, whose heart breaks for us.

To show love, forgiveness and compassion to ourselves and each other.

As we travel together through joy and sorrow, I pray that we will have the courage to stay with each other in times of pain, to weep with each other and to hold God's presence for each other even when hope seems lost. I also pray that we will find times of joy and know God's resurrection and the full expression of God's loving presence.

With love and deep blessings,



Circuit Services this Quarter

There will be three Circuit Services this quarter:

Thursday 9th April at 7.45pm at Northolt
A special service for Maundy Thursday

Sunday 19th April at 11.00am at Hanwell
We come together for worship as a Circuit for a service on the first Sunday after Easter.

Sunday 31st May at 4.00pm at Ealing Green
We come together as a Circuit for a special service to celebrate Pentecost. In addition, our Local Preachers and Worship Leaders will re-affirm their vows at this service.

Lent Course 2020

What are the parts of the Bible that set your heart on fire?

What texts or passages or stories in scripture make your heart burn within you?

Our Lent Course this year seeks to encourage participants to discover the Bible with their 'hearts', as well as their minds and souls and strength.

Scripture, especially when read with our hearts on fire, can provide a series of vital entry points through which the great themes and the different yet interlocking aspects of the relationship between God and human beings can be explored, the threads drawn together, leading potentially to our own change and transfiguration.

Come along to go deeper into God's Word in your life.

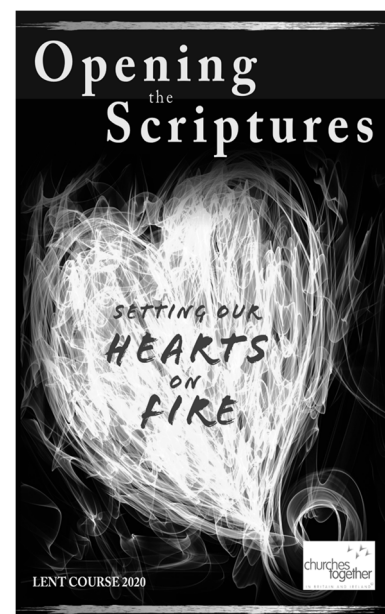
The course will run for 5 weeks starting on Tuesday 3rd March at:

Tuesdays 7.45pm for 8.00pm until 9.30pm at Rev Rachel Bending's manse.

Wednesdays 2.30pm at Greenford led by Rev Yemi Jaiyesimi

Fridays 10.00am at Kingsdown led by Rev Sue Male

Fridays 7.30pm in Urdu/Hindi/Punjabi/English at various people's homes



Christian Aid Iraq and Lebanon Project

The Circuit continues to move towards meeting its overall target of £5,000 by the end of December 2020. The 'Holy Humour' event at Ealing Green raised £304 and an individual donation at Kingsdown adds another £100. This brings the total reported so far to £4,179.

Watch out for forthcoming events including a Circuit Barn Dance and a concert by the Apollo Choir on 14th June at 4.00pm at Ealing Green

Our fundraising will be matched 6:1 by the US charity Bread for the World, so our target of £5,000 will be turned into a total of £35,000 for the Christian Aid Iraq and Lebanon Project. These funds will primarily go to support young people (aged 18 – 35) in Iraq into employment through vocational skills training and to two centres in Lebanon supporting around 800 children and their carers.

Christian Aid 2020

Ruby Warne, Kingsdown

The London Team Christian Aid launch event takes place on Thursday 6th February so as I am writing this before the event, I am unable to tell you about it. However, I do know that this year Christian Aid will focus on the life threatening drought in Kenya caused by the climate crisis, but more of that later. First of all, Christian Aid dates for 2020:

Christian Aid Week 2020

10th May: Christian Aid Sunday in the UK

10th – 16th May: House to house collecting

16th May: Flag Day in the London area

17th May: Circle the City walk

Christian Aid Week 2020 – Kenya

Rose is 67. Every day she battles to bring water home for her grandchildren but drought and hunger are driving her to the brink. “The drought has been severe”, she tells us. “We have had three long months without water and now we have to walk long distances. We are suffering.”

Every morning after nothing to eat she sets out on a long and dangerous journey to collect water. While she walks her stomach gives her stabbing pains and she feels weary under the hot sun. Her aching legs walk on and on for water because if she gives up, her grandchildren will hunger and thirst.

At last she arrives home. Her grandchildren cook her a meagre bowl of porridge but they know she is still hungry.

Rose won't have the strength to fetch water for much longer and the sad truth is it doesn't have to reach breaking point. There is an earth dam just minutes away from her home and it should be a lifeline. But many people in Kenya, just like Rose, are struggling to survive the drought and with such dire need, every last drop of water in the dam has dried up. This is Rose's 'climate crisis' – no matter how she battles against it, drought leaves her hungry.

Rose needs every last drop to survive this drought. With a dam full of water, Rose would be free from her long painful journeys. She'd have time to grow fresh vegetables for her family to eat. And she would see her grandchildren grow up and live life in all its fullness.

Christian Aid in 2019

The following amounts were collected by churches in our Circuit during Christian Aid Week 2019

Acton Hill	£809
Ealing Green	£1,238
Greenford	£211
Hanwell	£1,747
Kingsdown	£3,438
Northolt	£238
Pitshanger	£316
Total	£7,997

Last year, churches in our Circuit participated in numerous ways during Christian Aid Week – church collections, house-to-house collecting, Flag Day, Circle the City and the Richmond Park Riverside Walk.

And finally, John Beastall, the Ealing Area Treasurer for Christian Aid sends his thanks and best wishes to all. John has been the Ealing Area Treasurer for 32 years and is asking us to consider whether there is anyone in our churches who would be able to take over from him. If so, please let Ruby Warne know and she will pass names over to John.

London Generate

London Generate is a FREE event on Saturday 29th March from 10.00am – 4.00pm at Fulham Broadway Methodist Church for young Methodists aged 11-23 years from all across London. It's your chance to gather together to discuss issues that are important to the young people of London.

Take part in the Marriage and Relationships Consultation, give your thoughts on evangelism to your peers and how to action the 3Generate Manifesto.

Engage your fun and creative side with gospel magic and escape room activities.

Pizza and drinks will be provided.

To book tickets, go to:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/london-generate-tickets-90787232055>

Fulham Broadway Methodist Church is at 452 Fulham Road, London SW6 1BY (nearest tube station - Fulham Broadway)

Palm Sunday in Cáceres

Gerald Barton, Editor

Last April we made a trip to Extremadura, a region of Spain to the west and south of Madrid. It's a fascinating area with a number of historic towns and cities but not one that sees a great number of tourists from outside of Spain except in Merida where there are some rather spectacular Roman remains. The timing of our holiday took in Palm Sunday and the start of Holy Week. Without realising it we had timed our visit to the town of Cáceres to coincide with the great processions that begin on Palm Sunday.

Organised by various confraternities rejoicing in such wonderful names as "The Royal and Most Fervent Brotherhood of Penitents, and The Palms Brotherhood, The Holy Christ of the Good Death, Our Lady of Hope and Saint John the Baptist" and "The Penitential Brotherhood of The Holy Christ of Love, The Lord of Sorrows and Our Lady of Charity" these processions involve large numbers of people of all ages parading in the robes of their confraternity. The centrepiece of each procession is a huge 'pasos' often several centuries old with figures depicting some aspect of the story of Holy Week carried slowly through the streets by members of the confraternity.

While the local authorities encourage tourists to come to see the processions, they are not put on as tourist attractions. Rather, they are clearly part of a deeply felt religious tradition. The people involved reflect a wide cross-section of ages with participants ranging from very young children to teenagers and adults old and young. Similarly, the stunning brass bands that accompany the processions include youngsters as well as adults.



Procession of the Royal and Most Fervent Brotherhood of Penitents shortly after leaving the church of San Juan



Pasos of the Triumphal Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem (Jaime Martrus I Riera, 1946)



Pasos of the Penitential Brotherhood of the Holy Christ of Love (Pedro del la Cuadra, 16th century)



Penitent of the Penitential Brotherhood with three nails as Symbols of the Passion



Pasos of the Pontifical and Royal Brotherhood of Our Lord Jesus the Nazarene and Our Lady of Mercy



Penitent of the Pontifical and Royal Brotherhood

Processions such as these are not part of the British Protestant tradition so seeing them made our stay in Extremadura and Cáceres in particular one of the most memorable of our lives.

Photos ©Gerald Barton

Holy Week and Easter around the Circuit

Circuit Service

Thurs 9th April 7.45pm Circuit Service for Maundy Thursday at Northolt

Acton Hill

Sun 12th April 11.00am Easter Holy Communion

Ealing Green

Fri 10th April 9.30am Meditation for Good Friday

Sun 12th April 9.30am Easter Holy Communion

11.00am Easter Worship

Greenford

Fri 10th April 3.00pm Meditation for Good Friday

Sun 12th April 11.00am Easter Worship

6.30pm Easter Worship

Hanwell

Fri 10th April 10.30am Meditation for Good Friday

Sun 12th April 11.00am Easter Worship

Kingsdown

Fri 10th April 2.00pm Meditation for Good Friday

Sun 12th April 10.45am Easter Holy Communion

King's Hall (Urdu/Hindi)

Fri 10th April 12.00pm Meditation for Good Friday

Sun 12th April 2.00pm Easter Holy Communion

Northolt

Fri 10th April 12.00pm Meditation for Good Friday

Sun 12th April 11.00am Easter Holy Communion

Pitshanger

Sun 12th April 11.00am Easter Holy Communion

“God in Love Unites Us”

Gerald Barton, Editor

As readers of In-touch will be aware, the Methodist Church is currently asking churches and circuits to discuss a major report on marriage and relationships, “God in Love Unites Us”. In our Circuit discussions have been arranged on:

Thursday 27th February at 7.45pm – 9.45 pm at Kingsdown
Saturday 7th March at 10.00am -12 noon at Northolt
Monday 16th March at 7.45pm – 9.45pm Ealing Green Church

So, what’s this all about? In 2016, the Methodist Conference set up a Marriage and Relationships Task Group to revisit and consider the definition of marriage adopted by the Methodist Church. At the 2018 Conference the group was directed to produce a report on these matters including any recommendations to change Methodist Standing Orders should the group conclude that the current definition of marriage should be changed. “God in Love Unites Us” is the report produced by the group.

The report is wide-ranging, thorough and well written and is well worth reading in full, although it is quite long. Many readers will be aware that one of the issues that the group was asked to consider was the question of same-sex marriage – hence the question whether the definition of marriage should be changed. It should be added that the report does not just focus on that one issue, but also considers the wide variations in human relationships we find in our society today.

It goes without saying that the issue of same-sex marriage is controversial with many people having strong and often opposing views on the subject. The Conclusions section of the report opens with two quotes from John Wesley’s sermons –

“Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike?”

“Be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion.”

In essence the Task Group acknowledges that views will differ on matters of relationships and sexuality. Indeed, the report does not produce a ‘one size fits all’ conclusion but seeks to find a way forward that embraces differing opinions and views. The authors ask us to consider their report and its conclusions in the spirit of these quotations from John Wesley. In so doing, we will all need to be prepared to listen to and respect the views of others who disagree with us and to exercise humility in how we hold and express our own.

Because of the breadth of issues covered by the report it is difficult to summarise in a short space. What I have tried to do instead is to give at least an appreciation of the breadth and depth of the report. To understand it fully, you need to read the report itself.

The report begins with God. As we are made in the image of God, to understand what it means to be human means understanding something of the nature of God. As Christians we believe that we can see and understand something of what God is like through the life and ministry of Jesus, the 'Word made flesh'.

We are made to relate to God. God reaches out to us in a relationship characterised as a 'covenant', not a contract because it is "an act of grace which calls for a responding commitment. Those who respond to the covenant choose to do so, but the initiative is God's". The response to God's covenant love is to love God and others as we love ourselves. Humans are social beings, made to relate to one another. We are also sexual beings made to relate sexually to each other. How we, as Christians approach and think about relationships should reflect the covenant love God shows us in Jesus.

One of the key themes running through the report that stands out to me is that of change – how thinking about marriage, about relationships and about gender and roles in society has changed over time.

Starting with marriage, going way back into the Old Testament, it is clear that polygamy was not unusual and there was provision for 'levirate' marriage when a man should marry his brother's widow in order to provide for her even though he was already married. By the time of Jesus, however it appears that monogamy had become the norm.

Similarly, the way we think about the purpose of marriage has changed. The Book of Common Prayer of 1662 gave the purpose of marriage as the procreation of children; a remedy for sin; and mutual comfort and help. The emphasis now, however is very much on "... life-long unity of heart, body and mind, comfort and companionship", but adding "..... so that children may be nurtured, family life strengthened and human society enriched" (Methodist Worship Book 1999). Procreation is no longer seen as a primary purpose of marriage. After all, many older couples beyond child-bearing years marry and it would be absurd to assert that their marriages are somehow lessened by the fact that they cannot have children. Similarly, "a remedy for sin" is no longer seen as a purpose of marriage as we now recognise that God made us to be sexual beings who relate to each other sexually.

Whilst the church, and indeed probably most people still sees marriage as a life-long union at least in principle, the possibility of that marriage bonds could be broken has long been recognised. Whereas the Catholic Church regarded marriage as a sacrament instituted by God which could not be broken, the Orthodox Church recognised that, albeit in rare circumstances it might be better for some marriages to be ended. After the Reformation, Protestant countries increasingly came to consider marriage a civil contract and the courts assumed the power to dissolve marriages. That said, it generally remained a matter of public policy that divorce should be severely restricted as it remained in the UK until the 1960's.

Churches, but not the Catholic Church do now recognise that marriages fail and that divorce and re-marriage is possible and legitimate. From the point of view of compassion, it seems harsh to deny the possibility of the happiness that making a new commitment in marriage can bring should a previous marriage have ended in divorce. One point the report raises is the need for the Church to do more to support people when their relationships end. In particular, the authors suggest developing liturgies to help people through relationship breakdown.

The report highlights the variety of forms of relationship now available to people. These range from informal co-habiting to civil partnerships to marriage. When same-sex marriage was legalised in the UK it was not long before some people starting demanding that civil partnerships be made available to opposite-sex couples as well. At this point you may wonder what, in fact is the difference between legal marriage and civil partnerships. In fact there is very little difference in law between the two. The principal difference is that adultery may not be cited as a reason for ending a civil partnership.

For people to be legally married in the UK they must make two statements, one affirming that they are legally able to marry (ie they are not already married to someone else) and then that they take the other person as their wife/husband. Christian thinking about marriage, as the authors point out goes much further than this seeing in marriage a reflection of God's covenant relationship with us. Indeed, the words of the marriage service and the vows that we make – "for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health...." Reflect the fact that marriage from a Christian standpoint is much more than simply a legal contract.

The report recognises, however that many couples choose not to marry but to co-habit. Indeed, around half of babies in the UK are now born 'out of wedlock'. Thankfully, the stigmatisation of children as not being 'legitimate' when born to couples who are not married (or in a civil partnership) is now a thing of the past and, as the authors note is "no longer acceptable in our Church, if it ever were"

There are many reasons for this trend towards cohabitation. Some people regard the idea of marriage as out-dated and overly patriarchal. For others there may be purely practical considerations such as the need for two incomes if a home is to be secured or the sheer cost and expense of weddings, receptions and honeymoons. While many such relationships may be loose and apt to fracture, many are stable and long-lasting and, in terms of the quality of the relationship between the parties involved pretty much indistinguishable from marriage. That, of course reflects the level of commitment and the attitudes of the people involved.

The authors suggest that the Methodist Church should consider ways in which it can encourage good relating and deepening commitment in all forms of couple and marriage relationships. Arguably, it is more important to encourage people in this way than to stress the outward formal structure of their relationships.

The authors note that the way people think about sex, gender and sexuality has changed and developed quite rapidly in recent years and has become increasingly

complex. 'Sex' is assigned to us at birth depending on our biological characteristics, gender refers to how we express ourselves in terms of 'masculinity' or 'femininity' while 'sexuality' refers to our sexual feelings, orientation and activity. To help the readers follow the discussion the authors include a glossary of terms. If nothing else this goes to illustrate the diversity in the ways people are thinking about themselves and how they want other people to see them.

The authors do not discuss why there is this diversity of feeling but do note that the term 'intersex' in particular refers to people whose biological characteristics do not clearly fit what we normally consider to be 'male' and 'female'. Indeed, a small percentage of people are born with characteristics that include both male and female attributes. Similarly some people are born with chromosomes that differ from the normal XX for female and XY for male, eg XXY or XXX. Whilst there does not seem to be a gene that explains homosexual orientation, there is evidence that it is connected to certain aspects of how genes are expressed and the interaction of the developing foetus with hormones in the uterine environment. Suffice to say, there is good evidence to indicate that sexual orientation is determined at birth.

Throughout the report the authors draw on insights from Scripture and it is important to keep this in mind when thinking about the report. Numerous Bible passages and verses are quoted in support of the various arguments and themes being discussed. This is particularly so in the section that discusses whether the Methodist Church should widen its definition of marriage to include same-sex marriage. Underlying this section is the question of how Scripture should be interpreted. The authors note that in a report to the 1998 Conference seven different attitudes to Biblical authority were identified (although the report does not say what they were). Conference did not at the time, nor subsequently adopt any of those ways of interpreting Scripture as being superior to others, nor did it reject any. That said, the authors have taken note of the fact that scholarly debate is moving away from arguments about the precise meaning and implication of terms or particular texts, to judgements about their importance within the context of the whole range of voices that make up the Bible.

It is also worth remembering that various passages in the Bible have been given greater or lesser weight at different times. For example, some passages were once used to lend support to the practice of slavery. These passages are now viewed differently and would not be used nor interpreted in that way. Indeed, doing so would be seen as contradicting the overall thrust of God's love for all human beings.

The authors move towards their conclusions against the backdrop of a God whose compassionate love extends to, and welcomes all. In that light the authors consider that the 'companionship' model of marriage that the Methodist Church has developed over the years applies, theologically and practically just as well to same-sex marriages as to mixed-sex marriages. As the authors note, "The purposes, qualities and practices of marriage relationships that we have identified in this report as enabling those relationships to flourish can be applied to same-sex committed loving relationships as well as to mixed-sex relationships". The authors

therefore conclude that there is a strong case for the Methodist Church to extend its definition of marriage to include same-sex relationships, noting that “ if marriage is what the Methodist Church says it is, and is as wonderful as it says it is, this Church cannot remain true to the God of justice and love by continuing to deny it to those same-sex couples who desire it so deeply”.

As I commented at the start of this article, the authors of the report recognise that many will come, with equal integrity and faithfulness to different conclusions, that the Church should not redefine marriage to include same-sex relationships. They further recognise that those different conclusions should also be respected and honoured summarising Paul in Romans 14 “when Christians hold opposing convictions on the same issues, all are equally accountable to God, each must act according to their own conscience and none must behave in a way which damages or even destroys the faith of another”. Going on, they state, “The summary in Romans 14:13 of Paul’s advice on how to live with contradictory convictions amongst the members of the body of Christ still stands: Let us therefore no longer pass judgement on one another, but resolve instead never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of one another”.

In framing their recommendations, the authors note that if Conference agrees that the definition of marriage should be broadened to include same-sex relationships, similar provisions can be made as already exist for ministers who as a matter of conscience feel they cannot officiate at marriages where one or both of the couple are divorced. In those cases, the minister is not obliged to conduct the wedding but is obliged to point the couple to a minister who will. In the same way, a minister who, in all conscience feels unable to conduct a same-sex marriage would not be obliged to conduct the wedding but would be obliged to point the couple to a minister who will.

This leaves the question of the use of Methodist churches for the solemnization of same-sex marriages. The authors note that Local Churches already have a choice as to whether or not they should register for the solemnization of mixed-sex marriages. They recommend that Local Churches should be given the choice as to whether they should also register for the solemnization of same-sex marriages. However, in parallel with their recommendations for ministers, those Local Churches deciding not to register for the solemnization of same-sex marriages should be obliged to point same-sex couples to a church that is registered should they be approached.

I hope I have succeeded in giving you a ‘flavour’ of the report which I can only recommend that you read in full if you can. This is clearly a subject on which many of us will differ and therefore needs to be considered prayerfully and with respect for the views of others. The authors have sought to find an approach that will permit those differing views to be encompassed within one united body. In conclusion, let us recall the words of John Wesley quoted at the start of this article, “Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike?”

A number of copies of the report ‘God in Love Unites Us’ are available at all churches in the Circuit or can be downloaded by going to <https://www.methodist.org.uk/MandR19/>

Climate Change: the Imperative

Gerald Barton, Editor

In recent months, climate change has hit the headlines quite a few times. Extinction Rebellion has disrupted London and other cities on more than one occasion. The world has sat up and listened to Greta Thunberg, the Swedish teenage climate campaigner. A cross-party group of MP's is setting up a 'citizens' assembly' from people selected at random to discuss and recommend ways in which we can all contribute to reducing harmful greenhouse gas emissions.

Whilst we might be concerned, perhaps the problem is that as the days and weeks go by life seems to go on as normal. True, we might sit back and reflect that our winters seem milder than they used to, there might be more short very hot spells and there might be fiercer storms. Overall, however we seem to be carrying on without any great disruption to our lives.

The issue is that while we are starting to see the effects of climate change, the full impact will not be felt for some decades to come, probably in the second half of this century. For many of us, that's not so much of a problem because we are already old enough not to be around much beyond mid-century if not earlier. For the 2.6 billion people born this century however, it is potentially a very big problem indeed. That gives impetus to the message of the Greta Thunbergs of the world, one which we 'oldies' should be paying heed to.

The role of carbon dioxide and other gases in warming the planet started to be understood as long ago as the early – mid 19th century. By the turn of the 20th century Svante Arrhenius, a Swedish chemist was suggesting that that low levels of atmospheric carbon dioxide may have caused the ice ages and that the industrial use of coal may warm the planet. What no one could foresee was how rapidly the use of fossil fuels and the consequent increase in levels of atmospheric carbon dioxide would grow during the 20th century.

The use of fossil fuels is intimately bound up with everything else that made the 20th century unique in human history. Fossil fuels have provided the energy to power manufacturing, heating and transport and to make all the planet's other resources more accessible. Oil refineries have provided the raw materials for plastics. Our lives, at least in the developed world have been transformed as a result and we now enjoy much higher standards of living and levels of wealth than we did before the widespread use of fossil fuels. During the 20th century gross domestic product, a measure of economic activity doubled four times whilst world population almost doubled twice.

During the first half of the 20th century scientists believed that the oceans would soak up almost all the carbon dioxide being emitted by burning fossil fuels. In the 1950s, Roger Revelle, an oceanographer showed that this was not the case. Revelle also initiated efforts to measure year-on-year changes in atmospheric carbon dioxide. By 1965 it was clear that these levels were rising. Predictions at the

time that rising levels of carbon dioxide would result in rising temperatures and sea levels without parallel in human history seemed peculiar to many. Furthermore, such predictions called into question the very foundations of the world's economic development.

Since 1965, emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases have gathered pace. At that time, the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere was 320 parts per million (ppm), just 40ppm above pre-industrial levels two centuries before. The next 40ppm took just three decades and the 40ppm after that two decades. The current level is about 408ppm and is rising at 2ppm per year.

Looking back over the last 400,000 years or so, levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere have varied significantly. Low levels are associated with ice ages and higher levels with 'inter-glacial' periods when the world was much warmer. Broadly speaking, carbon dioxide levels during inter-glacial periods were about 1.45 times those during ice ages. Today's level is about 1.45 times the level of a typical inter-glacial period.

Climate change is a complex phenomenon. Other gases in addition to carbon dioxide warm the planet as does water vapour. Increased temperatures lead to a moister atmosphere, which itself warms the planet. As water vapour condenses it forms clouds, some of which warm the planet and some of which cool it. These complexities make precision difficult when it comes to predicting the amount of warming expected from a given increase in levels of carbon dioxide. In addition, burning fossil fuels releases particles small enough to float in the air forming aerosols. These can warm the planet, but they can also cool it. Volcanic eruptions also produce aerosols although these cool the planet.

These complexities meant that there was doubt about whether the planet really was warming and, if it was whether human activity had anything to do with it. These doubts have been deliberately fostered by the fossil fuel lobby. However, it is now undeniable that the planet is warming. Every decade since the 1970s has been warmer than the previous one which suggests that natural variations in levels of atmospheric carbon dioxide and other gases are not the underlying cause. It is now also possible to compare climate models that account for just the natural variations in greenhouse gas levels with those that take account of human activity. These comparisons show that until the 1980s the effects of human activity were not statistically significant. Since then however, they show that the effect of burning fossil fuels on global warming is indisputable. Natural factors alone would have left global temperatures broadly where they were compared to average temperatures between 1850 and 1900. Human activity is shown to account for the rise in average global temperatures of around 0.5°C since 1980.

At this point, note that the rise in temperatures is not evenly spread across the planet. Temperatures over the oceans has risen a good deal less than over land masses. The highest increases have been recorded over the northern hemisphere and over the polar-regions in particular. By 2018 temperatures there had risen by about 2.5°C compared to the average for 1951-80.

Whilst emissions have continued, and still continue to rise, it is not true to say that the world has done nothing about it. In 1992, at about the time the human effect on global warming was becoming clearly apparent, the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro the world signed the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). This was but a first step in countries promising to “prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system”. Since 1995 signatories to the agreement have met annually to assess progress in dealing with climate change.

In 1997, the Kyoto Protocol established legally binding obligations for developed countries to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions during the period 2008–2012, later extended to include the period 2013-2020. The 2010 United Nations Climate Change Conference produced agreement that future global warming should be limited to below 2.0°C compared to pre-industrial levels. The Paris Agreement, which came into force in 2016, governs reductions in emissions from 2020 on through commitments to a lower target of limiting the rise in global temperatures to 1.5 C.

Commitments are not, of course the same thing as action and actions taken do not necessarily achieve the desired result. The target of limiting the rise in global temperatures to 1.5°C is only significant to the extent that that is what the signatories have agreed to do. It does not mark a limit beneath which there will be no adverse effects from global warming. Neither does it mark the point beyond which catastrophic disaster would inevitably ensue. It remains true, however that the greater the overall warming, the greater will be the harm – more frequent extreme weather events, more intense changing patterns of rainfall and drought disrupting ecosystems and driving up sea levels.

As things stand, further warming is inevitable whatever the world does about emissions. This is because average temperatures take time to respond to the effect of greenhouse gas emissions. Secondly, what matters is the total amount of greenhouse gas in the atmosphere, not the rate at which it increases. Warming will only stop when the level of greenhouse gases is no longer increasing at all, ie at zero emissions. If warming is to be kept to 1.5°C, that needs to happen by about 2050. To be on target to achieve that means halving emissions by 2030. Currently, no nation is on course to do that.

The changes required to achieve zero emissions are profound. Everything that involves burning fossil fuels or emitting greenhouse gases would have to change including how we heat our homes, cook, what we eat, how we move about, how we make products such as steel or cement, how we generate electricity and in addition recycling or replacing plastics and transforming farming. At the same time economies will need to continue to develop and expand sufficiently to meet the needs of a world population that may be 50% greater than it is today by 2100.

One step towards halving global emissions would be to increase electricity generation from renewable sources from the current 7% of global generating capacity to 50% by 2030. However, electricity generation accounts for less than

40% of all industrial emissions. Progress towards reducing emissions from industrial processes and transport is far less advanced. Only about 0.5% of the vehicles in the world are electric. Moving towards significantly more electric vehicles and converting industrial processes towards renewable power will require even greater increases in renewable generating capacity. Furthermore, this is against a background that sees demand for electricity growing year-on-year.

Given the scale of the problem, it is not surprising that increasing emphasis is being placed on finding viable ways to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere – so called ‘negative emissions’. It then becomes possible to accept higher emissions now since technologies to remove carbon dioxide will reduce greenhouse gas levels later in the century. Of course, the snag is the technologies to remove billions of tonnes of carbon dioxide a year at reasonable prices do not currently exist. There are ideas, such as growing plants to suck up carbon dioxide from the atmosphere through photosynthesis then burning them for power generation then storing the carbon dioxide underground. Whilst such systems could exist at scale, the amount of land required to grow such crops would be enormous.

There is a dilemma, a ‘moral hazard’, in such ideas. Developing negative emissions technologies can make the problem of current emissions seem less urgent – rather like saying we can carry on making a big mess today because someone else will clean it up tomorrow. However, advocates of technologies to soak up emissions are clear that they should be used to reduce carbon dioxide already emitted, not as an excuse to continue emitting.

Reducing emissions is clearly a global problem requiring collaborative global action. If most countries take action, laggards can dodge the costs of reducing emissions while still reaping the benefits. Conversely if a few countries take action, but most do not, those that do will still feel the impact of global warming just as much as if they had taken no action. Furthermore, the most action is required by the developed world where emissions per person are highest. Global average emissions of carbon dioxide per person in 2017 were 4.6 tonnes. Europe emits about 1.75 times that level per person with China not far behind. The United States emits about a whopping 3.7 times that level. It is therefore very regrettable that President Trump has pulled the USA out of the Paris Agreement. That said, a number of states within the US are seeking to take action whatever the views of their president.

It would be fair to say that Greta Thunberg and Extinction Rebellion are right in that climate change is urgent and that not enough by far is being done to tackle it. Action is required by government, by industry and also by ourselves as individuals, particularly in the developed world that has benefitted most from the fossil fuel economy. There will be costs in tackling climate change and we can expect to have to change the way we live as individuals and some things which we have come to expect as being ‘cheap’ to become not so ‘cheap’.

Acknowledgment: in writing this article I am indebted to a Briefing on Climate Change published in The Economist in its 21st September 2019 edition.

Forthcoming Events around the Circuit

[as notified to, or discovered by, the Editor]

March

- 7th Sat 10.00am **'God in Love Unites Us'**
12.00pm *Circuit Conversation at Northolt*
- 7th Sat 10.30am **42nd Ealing Animal Charities Fair at Hanwell**
4.00pm *Many participating societies. Great guest speakers.
Live music. Admission FREE. www.ealinganimalsfair.london.*
- 15th Sun 16.00 **DBS checks at Rachel's manse**
18.00 *Please contact Rachel for her address details*
- 16th Mon 7.45pm **'God in Love Unites Us'**
9.45pm *Circuit Conversation at Ealing Green*
- 21st Sat 10.00 **Kingsdown Book Fair**
12.30 *In aid of Dementia Concern*

April

- 1st Wed 19.30 **Quarterly Plan Meeting at Rachel's manse**
- 9th Thurs 19.45 **Circuit Service for Maundy Thursday at Northolt**
- 19th Sun 11.00 **Circuit Service at Hanwell**

May

- 16th Sat 10.30 **Local Preachers & Worship Leaders Retreat**
16.00 *Venue tba*
- 28th Thurs 7.30pm **Circuit Leadership Team Meeting at Kingsdown**
- 31st Sun **Circuit Service for Pentecost and Local Preachers and
Worship Leaders Re-affirmation Service at Ealing Green**

Articles for **'In-touch' Issue No 92 (June - August)** should be sent by e-mail headed **'In-touch'** to the Editor, **Gerald Barton**, or as hard copy to the Circuit Office.

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