

*An all age community ... on a shared journey of faith ... making the edge the centre
so that Jesus can be known*

Registered Charity 1132925

In this issue:

WHITHER GOES THE CHURCH? -- <i>Rev Canon Dele Agbelusi</i>	1
Connect Groups update, November 2024.....	3
Homes of Promise (<i>Jade's verdict</i>) – <i>Jackie Kenealy</i>	3
Caring for Creation.....	4

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editor@ccstalbens.org.uk. *Peter Young (Ed.)*

WHITHER GOES THE CHURCH? -- *Rev Canon Dele Agbelusi*

There are various periods that become turning-points in the life of a church or in one's Christian life. They can be exciting times. They can also be painful times. The Church of England has been in the news recently and as expected, it's not the type of news to make you smile. So... I am sad, I am disturbed and I am burdened. At a time like this, it is of immense benefit to the soul to allow the Spirit of the Lord to provide counsel. I opened to the book of Malachi and there read about a people who were losing touch with the Living God - our present experience is very similar to this and it's not difficult to see this coming. If your love for the Lord is not as fervent compared to the love for him when you were first saved, then the **handwriting may be on the wall**. As I try to understand the arguments in the General Synod regarding the House of Bishops' proposal which fails to "1. critique the modern sense of self and individualism and the sexualisation of our society, which is leaving our children and young people confused and vulnerable; 2. provide a vision of the holy life in following Jesus as Lord", I discern problems ahead for the body of Christ within the Anglican Communion. Where do we go from here?

Filled with a sense of their own importance, Malachi presents a picture of the leaders and teachers in post-exilic Israel, easily becoming unteachable. Like these leaders in Malachi's days, we in the Church of England today are falling into a terrible danger of becoming so accustomed to ministering the Word of God that we have foolishly become closed to the Word Himself and blind to our own sins.

In Malachi 1: 6-14, we read about the symptoms of irreverence to the Lord. Malachi pre-empted any protestations of innocence. He says, "Are you going to ask how you have dishonoured God?" In other words, "Are you going to ask what is wrong in your worship - and your practices? Then I will tell you". What was playing out were priests who despised the work God had given them to do and are more interested in their own agenda.

Perhaps we gasp at the incredible situation of Malachi's day. We are left asking, 'Well, how on earth had their hearts got this way?' It usually starts from one simple compromise until their guiding vision is lost in the quagmire of compromises. Israel's symptoms are present

in embryonic form within ourselves. Our fear now is that such things as in Malachi's day are easily taking hold of us. We see how easily fellowships and churches can fall into the barren religion so graphically described by Malachi, where the priests had forgotten the greatness of God. They had forgotten that their God, their Master was none other than "the Lord Almighty". He's the one who declared that "My Name will be great among the nations." (Malachi 1.11).

Looking at what God was saying to these priests (Malachi 2: 1-9), we must realise that He will judge us for the influence that we exercise upon other people. John Benton says "for the counterfeit Christian, or the counterfeit leader, who has only confirmed the world's prejudice against God's people, there will be a terrible judgement."

It is very rare for the spirituality of a group of Christians to exceed that of its leaders. That is a true observation from life that should make all those who aspire to leadership think twice and perhaps tremble. It is my prayer that God will help us to discern the times, humble ourselves, seek His face and pray, so that "our land" may be healed.

Jude writes to all believers to contend earnestly for the faith. A true contender vigorously endeavours to win the competition, not holding anything back. In this case, the struggle is for "the faith," which is the saving truth of Jesus Christ and His teachings (2 Corinthians 11:3-4; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; Hebrews 1:2). And since this faith was "entrusted to God's holy people," all believers, not just Christian leaders, are called to defend the truth of Jesus Christ. And since this faith was entrusted "once for all," Jude intends to stand against those who claim to receive "new" revelations of truth. Through Christ's personal teachings and the work of the Holy Spirit, Jesus has already given the full message of truth to the apostles (John 14:26; 16:12-13). Paul gives a similar warning not to let anyone pervert the gospel of Christ with *new* and different teachings (Galatians 1:6-9). God has spoken, and any *new*, continuing, or special revelations of "truth" are to be rejected.

The two basic false teachings Jude contends with are stated in Jude 1:4: "For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord." First, Jude opposes the false teachers in their sanctioning of immoral behaviour—they "pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality." Second, Jude calls them out on their rejection of the deity of Christ—they "deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord."

The faith entrusted to God's holy people for which they must contend is grounded in Jesus Christ. This faith is expressed through holy living to which all believers are called (Leviticus 20:7; 1 Peter 1:16; Romans 6:1-14; 12:1).

Guided by the Holy Spirit, Jude writes to encourage his readers to aggressively defend the faith that the apostles taught. The core of these teachings are complete, so Jude writes that "the faith ... was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 1:3). The primary aspects of God's truth had been revealed. The apostates might subtract from or add to those teachings, but to do so was to corrupt the pure Word of God.

Jude had a change of mind regarding what he wanted to write about. At first, he intended to address matters pertaining to salvation. Instead, he feels led to tell his readers to aggressively defend the faith—the truths the apostles had given to believers. What brought about his change of mind? The answer is divine inspiration: the act by which the Holy Spirit guided the writers of Scripture to write only what He wanted them to write.

In most parts of the world, Biblical, orthodox Christianity is returning to the position it held before the rise of the European church-state complex we call Christendom. We are living in the wake of **its** collapse. This is a frightening reality for some but our hope is where it has always been in the promise of Jesus our Lord. The Lord assures us that the

gates of hell shall not prevail against His Church. No movement, not Gnosticism, Moralism, Revisionism, Romanism, or Islamism can alter our Lord's plans for his church and for the nations.

Maranatha. Come Lord Jesus.

Connect Groups update, November 2024

This month we have an update on where we have got to in our growth of Connect Groups so far this year.

We started the year with five home groups. One of our first decisions taken by the Co-ordinators of these groups was to change the generic name to 'Connect Groups', connecting with Jesus and connecting with each other. The aim of the groups was described as applying the Bible to our daily lives and growing in love and service for each other, supporting each other in prayer and encouragement.

We promoted the groups in church services in February and March and wrote to those on ChurchSuite who were regular church attenders but not yet involved to see if we could start a new group. As a result of this we have had enough interest from people to form **two** new groups, each with seven initial members!

So here are the groups in order of day of the week with their Co-ordinators. If you are not already a member of one of them, do see me about which one might suit you, or talk to any of the Co-ordinators directly.

Monday Night Group (too new to have chosen a name yet!) meeting fortnightly on Monday evenings (what a surprise!) in homes starting 4th November. See me about this one.

Kingfishers Group meeting fortnightly on Tuesday afternoons in homes – *Brenda Everest*

Pastimes Group meeting on Tuesday afternoons at church – *Meriel Dixon*

Ridgeway Group meeting on Tuesday evenings by Zoom – *Hilary Boyce*

The Berean Group meeting on Tuesday evenings by Zoom – *Dele & Iyabo Agbelusi*

Pilgrim Group meeting on Wednesday evenings in homes – *Marion Jones and Jackie Kenealy*

Barnabas Group meeting on Wednesday evening in homes – *John & Eleanor Truscott*

If you are not part of any of these, do join one and see what you have been missing!

John Truscott, Connect Group Co-ordinator

Homes of Promise (*Jade's verdict*) – Jackie Kenealy

I know a lot of you spoke with my friend Jane [Davidson] in church on the 20th October. She was so happy to come and worship with us and thank you for making her feel so welcome. She will be going back to Uganda soon, but I wanted you to see what a young lady called Jade had to say after visiting Homes of Promise for a couple of months recently:

"Now in Kenya, it's hard to believe that I've just spent the last two months in Uganda. When I first arrived, I had no idea what to expect, but I quickly fell in love with the beautiful country and its people. The boys are all so special and unique, each in their own way. Despite the challenges they've faced, they're doing remarkably well, and it's been an honour to spend time with them. The camp was so much fun, and I've loved playing football with the boys and enjoying countless games together."

"I was able to take the younger boys to the Botanic Gardens, and afterwards, we watched Transformers in 3D at the cinema; it was a nice way to say goodbye, and we had a great time. Sadly, I didn't get to see the older boys again, as they're away at school. It has also been such a pleasure to get to know the staff; they're doing an incredible job supporting the boys.

"Uganda is a truly special place, and I'm already looking forward to visiting again. I miss the boys already and can't wait to see everyone again, hopefully, in the not too distant future." -- Jade

This is the impact Homes of Promise has on people.

Caring for Creation



Christ Church Caring for Creation (C4) group

C4's most recent meeting was held on Monday 21st October, reverting to the usual pattern of the 3rd Monday of the month. It was an opportunity to give feedback on the activities held at church following the service on Sunday 21st September. C4 members were encouraged by the response, despite the disappointing weather, which slightly dampened some of the outdoor events!! And they were also thankful for the support and help of participants.

Looking again at the Eco Church questionnaire, to ascertain whether we might now qualify for a Silver Award, C4 found we are still somewhat borderline in the Lifestyle section (that is, how we as a church are encouraging our membership to be aware and engage with sustainable lifestyle habits and care for the environment).

C4 agreed to start using the publication '[Making a World of Difference](#)' by *Dave Bookless and Renew or World* at future meetings to anchor activities on the centrality of God in why Christians should be engaged in Creation Care: <https://www.renewourworld.net/making>, which is available as a pdf download.

Remember, any church member would be welcome to join C4 meetings (details will be in our weekly e-newsletter).

A Rocha Blog and Field Notes Podcasts

At the time of editing this issue of *>imprint<*, there have been no additional blog updates or Field Notes Podcasts since *>imprint<* no.128 was published.

Click the link <https://blog.arocha.org/> to read previous A Rocha blogs and/or <https://arocha.org/en/field-notes-podcast/> (or from wherever you get your podcasts) to listen to any of the archive of Field Notes Podcasts.

Climate Finance Actions ahead of COP29 (11-22 Nov, Azerbaijan)

The organisation Christian Climate Action will host an opportunity for prayer for financial justice outside the **Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**, King Charles Street, SW1A 2AH on Friday 8th Nov, 12.30-13.30.

Also on the morning of 8th Nov (time tba) a "Polluters must pay" action. For information: <https://christianclimateaction.org/2024/09/06/climate-finance-actions-ahead-of-cop29/>