

Ploughshare December 1995/January 1996 (Scanned version from the original)

From the Rector

If you won the lottery...what would you do with the money?

I doubt whether you'd give it away, but the evidence suggests that would be the best thing for your health and general well being.

Virginia Bottomley says it's the most successful lottery in history. It has made 127 new millionaires in its first year. It has netted £3,256m, in addition to over 1,000m from the "instant cards" started more recently.

On three occasions I have been embarrassed to find myself in the lottery queue in different shops! I can assure any reader who may have seen me that it was a mistake. Honestly!

There are two reasons why I dislike the lottery

1. It makes losing feel like winning. A conservative MP got excited having won £80 when he had spent out nearly £150! The payouts to selected "good causes" make purchasers feel good; they think they are giving to charity. But charities are in fact losing out disastrously. A recent estimate said they would lose £339m, while £248m was being distributed -a deficit of £91m, and that will be increased by the time you read this.

2. It is making our nation even more dominated by greed. "*The love of money*", said the Apostle Paul, "*is the root of all evil.*" Time will tell just how much evil is being off loaded onto society by the lottery. Apparently, 80% of the population use it. An average of £2.43 a week is spent, per head.

You and I probably don't need much imagination to think of something better to do with our money. There are other ways of having fun! And there are certainly better ways of giving to charity.

Have a happy, peaceful and -if possible –greed reduced Christmas.

Christopher Frith

Re-Ordering at St Thomas'

*"Yours, Lord, is the greatness, the power,
the glory, the splendour, and the majesty;
for everything in heaven and earth is yours.
All things come from you,
and of your own do we give you."*

This is what we say at our communion service as our gifts are brought forward, and the plate is raised by a member of the clergy standing on two tatty staging blocks which have been man, or woman-handled into place before the service. On the staging stands a rather rickety table which is just about big enough for the chalices and platens for the bread and wine. The whole set up stands on a section of carpet that has seen better days, and we all sit in pews that seem to be designed to make anybody's backache worse!

Surely we need something better!

Through out the history of our church the furniture has always had to change to suit the worship. So in the 1880's we lost our box pews and gained a chancel. A hundred years later we resolved to re-order the interior once again to suit different patterns of worship. We only got as far as changing things at the back of St Thomas' which explains why we have our present temporary rickety arrangements.

At our July PCC meeting the Church Council considered the results of the presentation on the Church Re-development made in May and the comments made afterwards. Reluctantly we decided that the Church was not ready or able to go forward with the full redevelopment plans. We did decide to complete the re-ordering of the church

interior, which has been PCC policy for over 15 years and to go ahead on the new memorial garden as our present cremation plot is full.

St Thomas' very own bush clearing and surveying party has already been at work. The survey plot has been sent to the Architect for his final drawings.

On the re-ordering front, replacement of pews with chairs, permanent staging in front of the present chancel step as a focus for our worship and the clearance of the choir stalls to provide a flexible space and smaller worship area are all proposed as shown in the presentation last May. All groups using the church have been asked for their comments on points of detail. So far 14 fascinating contributions have been received. What about a quiet tea urn? How many sockets do we need? Could I get my handbag under the chair in front? What about storage space?

We in the Development Committee will have met the architects again by the time this is published and the difficult task of fitting all the detail together will be in progress.

Is that the most difficult task? What about the money? How easy or difficult that is depends on us. First of all we have to find enough money to run our church. Then we have to find what is needed for this project. We are talking about £70,000-£80,000 and we are talking about a gift day on 18 February 1996.

Is it unrealistic to ask for this? Is it unrealistic to want to change the interior of our church to be suitable for our developing worship for another 100 years? Surely doing just this and making the sacrifices necessary is more real than saying these words of dedication over a rickety table on temporary blocks for another how ever many years.

Robin Dawson

Chairman of the Development Committee

Welcome Bishop Jonathan

Our new Bishop is to be enthroned in Derby Cathedral on Saturday afternoon, 9 December 1995. He is the Rt. Revd Jonathan Bailey. He has been the Suffragan Bishop of Dunwich in Suffolk since 1992.

As well as the Clergy, Robin Dawson will be representing our parish at the enthronement. In addition, two of our CYFA members, Jonathan Calow and Ben Marshall, have been invited to represent the young people of Chesterfield Deanery.

St John's News

A new curate has been appointed. He is the Revd Andy Broom, at present Curate of All Saints', Wellington in Shropshire. Andy is married to Tina and they have two small children, Daniel (3) and Chloe (1). Unfortunately, they can't move to Chesterfield until May, but St John's folk will be able to meet Andy, Tina and family on Sunday 10 December. They will be at the 9.30 Family Service and also at a St John's lunch that day. We will give more news about them, and publish a photo, in a future issue of Ploughshare.

On 11 September, St John's DCC made the decision to amalgamate the 9am and 10.30am Sunday Services for the time being. **All services are now at 9.30am.** The change started in October and has created a lovely warm atmosphere, with all the different age groups enjoying being together. The spirit is great and so is the welcome. The congregation may soon be too big to fit into one service and two services will be needed each Sunday once again! Sunday Club and Little Fishes are both thriving, with imaginative and dedicated leadership.

Finally, after some financial anxiety (especially about the need to complete payment for the Church Centre and the Memorial Garden), the Gift Day at the end of September brought a most encouraging response. Including pledges and returned tax, the total given was over £12,500 and regular giving pledged to increase by at least £2,400. Praise God!

Beatitudes for the Friends of those with Disabilities

Blessed are you who take time to listen to difficult speech or help us to know that if we persevere we can be understood.

Blessed are you who walk with us in public places and ignore the stares of strangers, for in your companionship we find havens of relaxation.

Blessed are you who never bid us 'hurry up', and more blessed, you who do not snatch our tasks from our hands to do them for us, for often we need them rather than help.

Blessed are you who stand beside us as we enter new untried ventures, for our failures will be outweighed by the times when we surprise ourselves and you.

Blessed are you who ask for our help, for our greatest need is to be needed.

Blessed are you who help us with the graciousness of Christ who did not bruise the reed or quench the flax, for often we need the help we cannot ask for.

Blessed are you, when by all these things you assure us that the thing that makes us individuals is not in our peculiar muscles, nor in our wounded nervous system, nor in difficulties in learning, but in the God given self which no infirmity can confine.

Blessed and be exceedingly glad, and know that you give us reassurance that could never be spoken in words, for you deal with us as Christ dealt with all his children.

(From the Faith and Light Group)

Touchstone -Two Years On

Despite setting out on uncharted waters, we in Touchstone have always kept our aims and objectives clearly in focus: *"to provide the environment and facilities with those disadvantaged by unemployment to enhance their opportunities and restore their role and value in the community, in conjunction with all available agencies."*

With the appointment of Ken Singleton as Manager, the move to new, premises in Old Hall Road and much hard work, Touchstone is now more widely accepted as having a valuable role to play in supporting the long term unemployed. This has been endorsed by Chesterfield Borough Council, the Training and Enterprise Council and the Unemployment Service.

A degree of unemployment will always be with us: unfortunately there are still those who relate unemployment with 'skiving'. The true picture is very different: with unemployment comes a loss of status in society and an unavoidable dependence on benefits with all their inherent problems. Not surprisingly it is our experience in Touchstone that many of these long term unemployed have become frustrated and withdrawn, having lost contact with their peers in work. Consequently the building of new relationships and confidence to tackle the world of work becomes progressively more difficult. In its own small way Touchstone has been able to replace this lack of support within our society with an atmosphere where individuals are encouraged and valued. Consequently many have felt confident enough to take up employment or training opportunities again.

We are in the process of appointing a Gardening/ Community Service Supervisor, our first enterprise appointment, also looking at furniture recycling and community care projects. Although not successful as yet with applications for European and Lottery funding, we shall persevere, since major funding is essential for expansion. The management committee has worked extremely hard throughout the year in moving the project forward, building bridges with statutory agencies and fund raising.

However, we are in desperate need of people with business, administrative and social skills to share some of their time and talents with us.

We also need work contracts for our unemployed to gain experience; this could be annual contracts for church or commercial maintenance or smaller private jobs such as minor building, decorating or garden maintenance/landscaping. All our work will be fully supervised and to the highest standard.

Ken Singleton

Face to Face with Jane Simmonds

Jane is best known to Ploughshare readers for her Operation Christmas Child contributions. At the time of this conversation, her house was full of shoeboxes wrapped beautifully for Christmas.

Jane, how did you get involved with the Shoebox appeal?

I read an appeal in Ploughshare about 3 years ago, asking for clothing for Bosnia. This led me to want to find out the best way to help children in Eastern Europe and I came across Operation Christmas Child, which was based in Wrexham and had been going for two years.

Last year you gathered over 6000 Shoebox presents -and there are masses this year. Where do they all come from?

From school children mostly. I've been to assemblies in over 50 schools in Chesterfield and some in Sheffield -Infants, Junior and Secondary, the latter being rather daunting at first! Then there are 15 or so local Churches which have got involved and through the local papers it has spread right out into the community.

Who is helping you?

We have a committee of about 16 members who are all involved in the collecting and checking of shoeboxes and fund raising throughout the year. Many other individuals have also come forward to help, and I'm very grateful.

You have had a big response from children. Are you a trained teacher?

No, I'm not. I was trained as a home economist and that involved demonstrating, which has probably helped me. I used to work as a sales rep for the Electricity Board and that's been useful too. I have always had a keen interest in children, though, and because I feel that the shoebox appeal is so important for our school children, the assemblies are obviously successful.

You're Welsh, aren't you?

I was brought up in Carmarthen, but came to college in Sheffield, where I met Dave. We got married 15 years ago when we had finished our courses.

Have you been a churchgoer all your life?

I went regularly to church as a child but that stopped when I went to college. It was really our son Gareth's baptism that made us stop and think. If we were going to make those promises, we had to mean them. Dave and I came to a real Christian commitment at that time.

What effect has the Christian faith had on you?

It has really made us sort out our values and priorities. We didn't start a family for a long time and that was because we were searching for the wrong things. I wanted to hang on to my job, have a new car and nice holidays -material things were very important. Now, since we have had Gareth everything is so different -and we still have what we need. We appreciate what we have, much more than we used to though. In lots of ways what once seemed unachievable has been achievable. Not to mention shoeboxes!

We now realise that money isn't important. Had I not left my job to have Gareth, I couldn't possibly have organised such a worthwhile appeal!

Book Review

The Grumpy Shepherd

by Paddie Devon, Scripture Union Hard Back £5.99

Joram, the shepherd, is a seriously miserable man, a kind of biblical version of Victor Meldrew!!

This particular night, he is off to work as usual, up in the hills above Bethlehem, fed up with his job, sheep in general and can't be bothered to talk to his cheerful co-workers Josiah and Obed, preferring instead to go to sleep.

Although he is somewhat startled when Gabriel puts in an appearance, Joram is not too impressed with his message! Fortunately, his friends are and he is whisked off to see the new king (grumbling and complaining all the way of course!)

Upon arrival in Bethlehem, the three shepherds have no difficulty locating the stable, because the brightest star they have ever seen is lighting up the sky above it. As they cautiously push open the door, with even Joram now feeling slightly apprehensive, they are warmly welcomed by Mary and Joseph who lead them over to see the baby Jesus.

Joram's response to meeting Jesus is incredibly moving and changes his attitude and life forever, and we see him leaving the stable with his friends singing loudly and praising God!

If this book doesn't become Christmas classic for children, I shall eat my Christmas stocking! Beautifully written and illustrated, a book to treasure and will appeal to all ages.

Pauline Latimer

Life in Romania -August 1995

Our visit to Romania promised to be exciting, exhilarating, testing, challenging and many other things but to be honest, I just didn't know what to expect.

The relatively short journey ended with the aeroplane touching down on Romanian ground. Bucharest was to be our home for two or three days and for me, my first experience of this country.

This time was a real pleasure for me. We were blessed with a lovely host family who provided everything needed to make our stay very comfortable. My overall impression of this city was of thousands of busy people, cars rushing around, vast apartment blocks, and horse drawn carts.

The few days in this city provided many exciting and interesting experiences including the metro underground, a beautiful park with its own fascinating museum and a generally special atmosphere. The highlight was befriending the youngest child of the host family, who was a cheerful, inquisitive young boy who loved to listen to our Walkman and eat the Opal fruits left from the journey.

The majority of the visit was spent in Constanta, situated south west of Romania on the Black Sea. This was to be base, where we would be involved in the distribution of the supplies brought out for people with many varying needs.

At times in Constanta, things seemed to be against us, whether this was lorry problems, unhelpful Romanian authorities or sickness. Prayer was essential in all circumstances! It was good to be working with faith led Romanian Christians whose knowledge of the way Romanian people do things proved to be very important for the success of the visit.

Teamwork played an important part, and will do so in future projects. As time passed it became easier to work alongside the Romanians and all objectives for the visit were accomplished. The Romanian team were very efficient in deciding where each individual article was most needed. The English were then responsible for the distributions to all the appropriate locations in the region. There is a real need to pray for future teams working together, for unity and understanding concerning how each team works individually and together.

The highlight of the visit for me was visiting the Baptist church in the north eastern city of Tulcea. A group of dedicated Christians were involved in a very exciting project. Here they are building themselves a large Health Centre/Christian meeting place in order to provide for all the needs of the community. The vision is to invite health professionals from other countries to practice in their own particular medical fields when the building is complete. I would like very much to be involved in this in the future.

There are many stories of good and not so good experiences but to conclude, I have returned with my faith boosted and a real desire to go back to Romania in the future. As I look forward to nurse qualification and registration, I hope very much that God will use the skills he is teaching me in order to care for his people whether in Romania or elsewhere.

Carleton Badger

The Listening Side of Prayer

"But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed." (Luke 5:6)

We don't know much about Jesus' private style of prayer but can perhaps gain a clue from his remarks as recorded in Matthew's Gospel:

"And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him." (Matthew 6:7)

The vocal prayer he does recommend is simple and to the point as in the Lord's Prayer which follows this passage. I suspect that much of his own prayer time would have been spent in silent communion with the Father.

In biblical times, life moved at a much slower pace than it does today and there were lots of lengthy repetitive tasks which must have allowed plenty of time for reflection and undistracted absorption in the natural rhythms and flows of life. Out of this background came many people who were very close to God. Moses and David, for example, were both shepherds before they became prominent. There was plenty of time for reflecting on the meaning of life in that job! They were wide open to God for long periods.

Now our minds are pulled outwards nearly all of the time and silence has become almost an embarrassment. Few people can tolerate even a short silence in the company of others, and when alone there are ample opportunities to 'plug in' to a radio, TV or mobile phone. How can God get through to us in these conditions?

I think it is important to make some time for experiencing "the still small voice of calm". That means regularly getting away from distractions, including our own busy thoughts. I would like to share my own way of going about it. It requires a small commitment of time, but deep surrendering prayer does seem to result in a better flow of one's everyday affairs, which compensates for the time lost.

What works best for me is to sit in a comfortable straight backed chair with both feet on the floor and my hands held loosely together in my lap. In this position I can remain relaxed but alert. I spend a moment or two checking for physical tension because I feel that a tense body reflects armouring of the mind. I then think of simply letting go and letting God in unconditionally.

Because our minds are so used to being active, it can be difficult to remain in this attitude of seeking God's presence for its own sake so sometimes I mentally repeat a relevant word or phrase to which I can return if my mind wanders. I started off with "Please God, guide me," and as a result I was given much help in my personal life through Jesus Christ. One syllable words such as Love, God or even Help! are ideal. A simple mute reaching out to God is the best way of all and the single-mindedness for this does come with practice.

It may take several daily sessions (of about 15-20 mins) before any effect is felt. Distracting thoughts can be a problem. It is important not to worry about these. Just gently but persistently lead your mind back to repeating your chosen word, no matter how many thoughts arise.

For habitually busy and mentally active people, this form of prayer may sound suspiciously like doing nothing, but I think of it as a way of making myself available to God so that I can (hopefully!) learn to conduct all of my life from the still centre of His love, which I have sometimes felt in touch with through this practice.

It does not conflict with or replace the type of prayer where we ask for something, or general 'chatting' to God, but is rather the other side of the coin, -the listening which complements the talking.

Listening prayer is a form of Christian meditation. The spirit of it is neatly summed up by this prayer of James Borst's as quoted by Joyce Hugget in her book "Listening to God".

"Send me where you will. Use me as you will. I surrender myself and all I possess, absolutely, entirely and, forever to your control."

Finally, meditation practiced in a group can lead to a wonderfully peaceful and supportive atmosphere. If anyone is interested in forming such a group, I would love to hear from them.

Cathy Turner