

Ploughshare February/March 2001
(Scanned version of selected articles from the original)

From The Rector

During the year 2000, our PCC worked hard on seeking to clarify what our church is called to do. It came up with this:

SHARE THE LOVE OF JESUS

It's rather stark. It's clear. It's practical. Our prayer is that it will make a huge difference to the life and witness of our two churches and all our members, to the benefit of our whole community.

To help us, we have three things.

First, there is a sentence which goes with it: *we aim to become more like Jesus every day as we respond to his love for us and as we share the good news of him with others.*

Secondly, we continue the tradition of adopting a motto from the Bible for the year. In 2001, it is the call to everyone: Jesus said, "*follow me*". If we manage to do this we won't be able to help sharing the love of Jesus

Thirdly, the PCC have agreed (and they don't find it easy to agree on anything!) what our "CORE VALUES" are. Our Core Values set out the things that really matter to us:

- The Love of God shown in the Cross of Jesus, inspiring our wholehearted love for him.
- Communion with God in praise, prayer and the breaking of bread, through the working of the Holy Spirit within us.
- The Family of God welcoming and including all as of equal importance regardless of age, gender and status, as we meet together and share our lives together.
- The Word of God which inspires and sustains our faith, guides our lives and encourages us to become more like Jesus.
- The Concerns of God for the poor and downtrodden, the lost and imprisoned, the suffering and those who mourn, the little children to whom His kingdom belongs; and for justice, mercy and peace for all.
- The Mission of God that all people may come to know Him by receiving Jesus and His love for them.

However we realise, it's one thing to put things down on paper. It's quite another to put them into practice!

Christopher Frith

WHY PRAY NIGHT AND DAY FOR BOSNIA?

BOSNIA - A LAND OF DARKNESS

Bosnia is Europe's least evangelised country. A heart-shaped country in the heart of Europe, it is about the same size as Wales, but it has never experienced spiritual revival. It is a country where Islam, Eastern Orthodoxy and Western Catholicism merge. In a whirlpool of historic, political and religious agenda, all opposed to each other, prejudice, fear and mistrust make Bosnia a spiritual land of darkness and a fertile seedbed for conflict. Fifty generations have experienced bloodshed and vile atrocity. The First World War germinated on Bosnian soil. Each conflict carries within it the seeds for the next one, as the cycle of nationalism and injustice continues, year in, year out.

In the 1992-95 war in Bosnia, over 250,000 people were killed, an estimated 40,000 women were raped, and 9 in 10 children experienced shooting - half of them witnessing first hand someone being killed or injured. Trauma and fear were experienced by people from all ethnic groups as atrocities were committed against each other, often in the name of Christ - a heinous blasphemy.

THE CROSS - FRIEND OR FOE?

The problems we see at a human level in Bosnia Herzegovina are the consequences of allowing the "powers of darkness" free reign there for centuries. To Bosnian Muslims the sign of the cross is the sign of rape, arson and murder. To Bosnian Croats and Serbs the sign of the cross is claimed as part of their national identity. But the real Jesus remains veiled.

PRAYER - THE MOST POWERFUL RESOURCE

Prayer is the only effective weapon we have to re-claim God's rule, advance the Kingdom of God and see healing, justice and righteousness established. Prayer is the most powerful resource God has given to his people. Through prayer, every barrier to the Gospel of the Kingdom can be crossed; every "impossible" situation can become another proof of the miracle working power of our God; and every other resource in the universe can become available to the Church in her fulfilment of the Great Commission.

NIGHT AND DAY

The most ambitious prayer campaign ever launched on behalf of the people of Bosnia is your opportunity to play a part in God's eternal purposes. The time has come to reverse the influences of evil and see the light of Jesus Christ shine throughout the land; to restore the honour of Jesus' name; and to see young people - future leaders - reconciled to God and to one another.

A CHALLENGE TO PRAY FOR BOSNIA

When Paul Brooks visited us last November [2000], he specifically asked us to consider being part of NIGHT AND DAY prayer for Bosnia. St. Thomas' is now registered and our day to pray for Bosnia is March 16th. Novimost will provide all the information and aids to prepare us to pray. We now need 48 volunteers to pray for half an hour each between 12.00a.m. on Friday 16th March and 12.00a.m. on Saturday 17th March 2001. Please take further information from, and sign up on, St. Thomas' World Mission notice board.

Thank you very much.

Barbara Goodacre.

JILL ROBINSON

After several strokes and being ill for a long time, Jill Robinson died on Boxing Day. So many people were so fond of Jill and we have all found it hard to bear.

A Service of Thanksgiving was held at St Thomas'. This was described by many as the most enjoyable funeral they had ever attended. Tears were, of course, never far from the surface but there was plenty of laughter too - as there always was with Jill! We thanked God for her humour, generosity and love. We acknowledged with gratitude her radiant, much tested faith - and her agonised questioning. Her husband Richard bravely, amusingly and movingly talked about Jill and urged listeners to turn to Jesus before it was too late.

Ray Hearn, in his tribute, described Jill as a "magnetic impressionist": magnetic because she drew people the church was packed for her funeral - and impressionist because she always made an impression!

Thank you, Father, for Jill and for the truth that *"our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us"*.

Christopher Frith

Alison Hawksley

Alison Hawksley is our South American Missionary Society (SAMS) Mission Partner in Peru. She is a primary school teacher in her mid twenties, and comes from Ilkley in Yorkshire. Originally, she was hoping to leave for Peru in July 2000. However, paperwork delayed her and, when it finally arrived with a departure date of 8th October, she developed flu! Eventually, Alison arrived in Peru on 28th October.

She spent several weeks in Lima, whilst waiting to go to Arequipa, where she is now based. These were trying times for her. She couldn't go out alone in Lima because she didn't know the city too well. She had 'fun and games' there, spending two days in the customs warehouse paying taxes and doing paperwork. Thankfully, she was able to collect all her luggage and send it on to Arequipa ahead of her.

The wait in Lima, gave Alison the opportunity to visit some of the projects there, including a day care centre for young children and a centre for older children to help them with homework and give extra classes in Christian education. She also visited an extremely poor area where families - far too many young single mothers with three plus children each - were living in one 'room' huts made of straw panels the size of a bathroom. The huts were built on hills of pure sand and would surely be destroyed with the onset of the rainy season, which will bring mudslides.

The church there has started a duck-rearing project where women learn to rear and care for ducks, as they grow quicker than chickens, are cheaper to keep and more nutritious. The women sell eggs and meat and also eat the meat themselves. There are seven duck farms where women from each area do the courses. On completion of the course, they are awarded a certificate, which says that they can work in a farm. Alison reports that the desperation of their situations and the poverty in this area really is incredible and deeply affected her, but the project is very successful and has created a lot of interest in the Anglican church that is trying to help.

She has been made to feel welcomed and loved by the Peruvians she has met. Their sense of humour and ability to accept life with a smile never cease to amaze her.

Alison arrived in Arequipa in November. Unfortunately, she had problems settling there and has had three addresses in the village already. Since arriving, she has been teaching English and studying Spanish. At the end of the term, in the school where Alison is working, the kindergarten graduated to the first grade. As is their tradition, the children all dressed up in their caps and gowns, and were presented with a certificate. The school nativity play would appear to be the same worldwide - Joseph's beard fell off, and Jesus' halo slipped down over his eyes.

Celebrations take place on Christmas Eve in Peru. Alison was invited to spend this time with a Peruvian family. The meal is eaten at 12 midnight, and presents are opened after the meal. Alison attended two services on Christmas day, one in Belaunde, the shanty town in Arequipa where she will be working, which was attended by fifty local children who do not usually attend church, and another in the centre.

Alison returns to school on 8th January 2001, teaching two days and studying at the institute the rest of the week. She will be facing many difficulties: the culture, the climate, the language and her teaching to name but a few. Please pray regularly for her as she undertakes God's work she particularly requests prayer for her e-mail situation! Her birthday is on 7th February.

Visit to Albania

We arrived in Albania in the early afternoon to blue skies and temperatures touching 70! We were met by Maki to be transported by a rickety old mini bus from Tirana Airport to the Child Evangelism Fellowship Centre at Durres some 20 miles away on the coast.

Our journey along the only road from Tirana to Durres was fascinating and a real culture shock. It seemed we were travelling through one endless building site intermingled with scrap metal dumps of old burnt out vehicles and litter everywhere, yet at the same time there would be locals tending a solitary cow or a few sheep, hens or turkeys.

When we reached Durres we expected some improvement but we soon left the main route to follow a zigzag course through 3 and 4 storey tenement blocks and half built houses of all types driving along what could hardly be described as roads as there was mud and potholes everywhere eventually arriving at the Centre which proved to be an oasis in the chaos.

We were welcomed by Raymond from Northern Ireland and his wife Wilna, from Holland. We were agreeably surprised by the accommodation available, with 3 bedrooms with 2 bunk beds in each with showers and proper toilet facilities adjoining and a large dining kitchen area. However when you looked out of the window you came back to earth, with a view over squalor and unfinished buildings in every direction.

The first evening we were invited to attend one of the clubs run by Raymond and his team of Albanian Christians. By this time it was dark and as we were in the midst of one of the regular power failures we were guided by torchlight through a maze of mud filled streets and paths to the back of a small tenement block where seated in the outside stairwell area were some 30 children aged from say 4 to 11 happily singing Christian songs in Albanian to tunes well known to us. The club was being led by a real character, Arian, who had such charisma and captivated his audience as he related the tale of Moses. When the Children sang Silent Night our emotions were at' bursting point. It was just so wonderful to see such happy faces in the midst of such poverty

and to witness a successful programme of Christian Outreach, something which throughout our visit was repeated several times.

We learnt next morning that the number of boxes to distribute was only 900 as deliveries to Albania had been used elsewhere in the country and it would be a week before another lorry with 10,000 arrived. Thus we would be concentrating on a large school with 800 pupils up to the age of 13 and a state orphanage for special needs children.

Then followed the organised chaos of box distribution and we endeavoured to speak through an interpreter to every class explaining the reasons for the gifts and handing out a leaflet in Albanian with a Christian Message and tear-off slip to be sent back to the Fellowship Centre if the children were interested in more information on Christianity. Raymond and his team are using the Shoebox Gifts to really further their outreach efforts and it was explained that their only entry to schools was because of the Shoebox Scheme as no Christian teaching is allowed in schools normally.

Giving out the boxes was very emotional and the happiness and excitement of the children was wonderful to see. We had time to help individual children to open their boxes and their eyes glowed with happiness and for a while the poverty of their surrounds was forgotten. It was an unforgettable 4 hours we spent at the school.

We then moved on to the orphanage and with 3 others of our team and Arian from the previous evening we gave a presentation and Arian led more singing. Again it was very emotional and one little boy who would not keep still took centre stage. For a few minutes he sat on my knee intrigued by my camera and proceeded to take a photograph of the ceiling on it!

When we gave the boxes out most parents had come to collect their child and there was excitement all round. Conditions in this centre were much better than we had anticipated and even the state orphanage was not as daunting as the others had expected.

The first day's distribution had left us with no more boxes and initially we wondered what we could do next day. We were invited to join morning and afternoon clubs and this proved to be a very rewarding experience on many counts. It made me admire the wonderful work of Raymond and his team and their enthusiasm and commitment to Christian Outreach to the children of all backgrounds in Durres.

Sunday saw us all packed early prior to joining the Albanian Christian Church Service in an old theatre in Durres where we met up with some of the children from the clubs. We were very warmly received by the Albanian congregation of some 200 and then took our leave from the Fellowship Centre full of our individual memories of a brief visit to the heart of Albania.

I am delighted to report back that the hard work on Shoeboxes for Operation Christmas Child is enabling people like Raymond throughout Eastern Europe to outreach to children and their families with the Christian message.

Don Wild

TOUCHSTONE NEWS

As an established organisation helping the unemployed and providing support in our local community Touchstone continues to expand in response to changing demands and expectations. The Government has recently set up a new "Learning Skills Council" in Derby to fund adult learning initiatives. Touchstone have been invited and accepted one or two places on the board representing the voluntary sector. This initiative is in recognition of the large pool of adults who do not have the skills frequently very basic skills - needed to equip them for the changing world of work.

Touchstone has long been aware of this, being at the sharp end actively responding to the needs of individuals and providing high level of support and training, tailored to their needs. We have a good team of qualified and experienced staff so that we are well able to respond to these changing requirements. We now support between 20 - 25 full time waged trainees and receive major funding from the Coalfields Regeneration Trust and the Employment Service.

The greatest reward for all this hard work is to watch individuals, initially with very little going for them, gaining in stature and feeling valued members of their community. Our success rate with trainees moving into permanent employment or full time education is excellent. The furniture recycling is so successful that we have difficulty keeping up with demand. Please contact us on 554932 if you have any usable household furnishings for collection.

Our new Chairman is Bernard Drew from the Church of the Annunciation and of course Richard Robinson our Vice Chairman is your contact at St Thomas'. Our trustees meet monthly and we would welcome enquiries from anyone interested in contributing their skills and time in almost any capacity.

Adrian Marsden-Jones