

## **From the Churchwarden**



I am writing this on the 12<sup>th</sup> day of Christmas, which, in the church's calendar is the Epiphany, the day when the Wise Men visited the infant Jesus. But were they as wise as we are led to believe? They were kings, leaders in their own countries and presumably intelligent men. Yet they went to King Herod to seek advice and promised to show him where Jesus was. Did they not realise what Herod's reaction would be? It needed God

to guide the Wise Men in what to do: not to go back to Herod but to go home by another route.

Since the first Christmas we have had 'Wise Men' (or to be politically correct 'Wise Persons') leading the countries of the world but many of them have got it wrong. Indeed today, at the start of 2003, we have 'Wise Men' as leaders but we are on the brink of war in the Middle East, there is a stand off looming over North Korea, there are terrorist attacks all over the world, there is famine in Africa although the West destroys food to keep prices high. I could go on.

We need to pray that those who lead the countries of the world will seek the Lord's guidance and will rather than following their own agenda.

At a local level here at St Thomas' and St Peter's we have hopefully been wise and sought God's guidance. 2002 has been quite an eventful year. The biggest event was Christopher's leaving. However, with the Leadership team, retired clergy, lay readers and office staff all working well together and seeking God's guidance we have kept on course and moving forward.

Other notable events included the restoration of the organ, the setting up of the after school club, the Holiday Club, the fete and the progressing of the development of the church. I extend my thanks to everyone involved.

Looking ahead to 2003. It will be a crucial year in the history of our parish. The two biggest decisions we need to make will be deciding who will be our new Rector and how we progress the development of St Thomas'. I would like to think that we have 'wise persons' to make the right decisions both at Parish and Diocese level. However, to get it right we must seek God's guidance and will.

Verses 20 and 21 of St Paul's letter to the Ephesians are encouraging at this time:

*Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.*

Finally, may I thank everyone who has helped Pam, Adrian, Ian and myself carry out our duties as wardens over the past year and for your continued support in 2003.

### **The Vacancy-Update January 2003**

The advertisement for the new rector appeared in the church press for two weeks at the end of November. Thirty-seven people asked for copies of the Parish Profile and, of these, ten went on to submit an application. The Bishop in consultation with Pam Brimelow and myself has drawn up a short list of five people to interview.

I was initially disappointed that only ten applied for the position. However, according to the Bishop we have done well, another church in the diocese recently advertised and had only three applications.

The interviews are to be held on January 27<sup>th</sup> so by the time you read this (the beginning of February) we hope to have offered the position of Rector to one of the candidates. If so, the person concerned will have accepted or may be considering the offer. On the other hand we may have decided that none of the candidates are suitable and no one has been appointed.

Whatever the outcome it will be publicised as soon as possible. As I said in the November update, if we do appoint someone it will most likely be at least May before they can start.

I ask you to continue to pray. Obviously what we pray for will depend on the outcome of the interviews. Prayers may be for: The person and their family if they have accepted the position that their preparation to move may go smoothly. Also for their present church when they announce the news.

The person and their family if they have been offered the position and are unsure whether to accept. Pray for guidance for them.

What to do next if no candidate is suitable and no appointment is made or the person we offer the position to turns it down.

As I mentioned in the last update the rectory is a complication. Building a new one in St Thomas' grounds is a possibility but this could take up to five years so is not an option in the short term. Various houses and land that have been for sale have been looked at. Only one house that has come onto the market is suitable and at the time of writing the diocese are making further enquires. In the meantime the diocese are planning to do some minor improvements to the current rectory.

Mark Hoare Churchwarden

### **John Pickering concert**

Friday 7<sup>th</sup> March at 7.30pm in St John's Church Centre.

John (with a little help from his friends) is presenting one of his very popular concerts in support of the Gypsy School being established by Nia's Smiles Foundation at Tileagd, Romania. Tickets (£2) will be available from Stephen and Carol Woodward (01246 568118), who will also be reporting on their recent mission trip with Nia. Mark the date in your diary – you really do not want to miss this very special event.

Dear Diary,  
Dates to remember during the next few months:

**Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> February – meet Alison Hawksley at St Thomas’** – I can't wait! Alison has been the "friend we've never met" in our family for the past two years, and at last we will be able to meet her, and hear about the work she has been doing for God in Peru.

**Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> March – Ash Wednesday** – an evening of preparation for Lent - as we gather around the table in church for a service of Holy Communion, I know I must ask God what he would have me "give up" for the next 40 days so that I can get closer to Him.

**Friday 7<sup>th</sup> March – Women's world day of prayer** – calling all women - let's join together and pray for this world of ours.

**Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> March – visit by Paul Brooks, Director of Novimost** – with the annual day of prayer for Novimost planned for the following Sunday, 16<sup>th</sup> March, what a privilege it will be to hear once again from Paul Brooks about their work in Bosnia. Paul will be speaking at all three services, so we should all be able to catch up with the latest news.

**Wednesdays in March and April – The Lent Course** Each week at 7.45pm in church ~~this year's Lent Course starts on Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> March~~ and carries on each week until Easter. The theme this year is "Who do you say I am?" and draws us back to Jesus and how our lives reflect Him.

NOTE - Add another date to the diary now - Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> April, St Thomas' will be hosting the evening - Bishop Jonathan (Bishop of Derby) will be giving the talk which will complete this series of studies.

**Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> March – Flower arrangers 'coffee morning** – 10.00 - 12.00 in the meeting room at St Thomas' - coffee, cake and flowers for Mothering Sunday - a definite date for me and the children!

Julie

## People and Jesus Rosie Welch - GP



The phrase “what would Jesus do?” (WWJD) springs to mind as I think about how my faith affects my work, and I guess it applies to all of us, whatever our situation. As a GP I’m often involved in people’s lives at worrying, vulnerable or important times. I believe God loves each person equally, and as Christians we are commanded to love our neighbour as ourselves, not to judge others, and to love our enemies. So I believe I am called to value, respect and care for each person, irrespective of their situation, circumstances and behaviour, as part of my Christian service. I think this is an essential part of our Christian witness in

our society which judges so much by appearance, by what people do and what they possess, rather than by who they are.

I often ponder on the apparent gulf between church life and the lives of so many of the people I come across in my work, and am constantly challenged by WWJD. It’s very rare for the opportunity to arise to openly talk about my faith, and I often struggle about where Jesus is in it all. He’s wanting to be “out there”, not just “safe” in church. So I aim to do my work with His love and with integrity and for my conversation to be full of grace. (Colossians 4v6).... Not that I always succeed: those I work with see my failings daily. But acceptance of these, humility, repentance and forgiveness are all part of how my faith affects my work.

It is 15 years since I was a GP registrar, and many things have changed, often leading to improvements. But, like many professions, there are many pressures, demands and administrative hoops to jump through, which cause considerable stress. I’m not the best person at change, let alone continual change. As a GP, you also have a lot of different roles and “hats to wear”; doctor, team member, partner, health promoter, employer, self-employed small businessman, gatekeeper, buck stopper, advocate, diplomat! each with its own demands. I am fortunate that some of my colleagues are Christian, so I have extra support. We are all answerable professionally for our actions, but I find it helps to remember that above that we are called by and answerable to God. My service to God underpins the focus of my work, hopefully keeping in perspective my priorities of good care and service. By keeping Jesus and his radical attitude to people in my heart, I hope to show His love in how I do my job.

## Lent 2003

According to the Dictionary in the church office, Lent is "the period of forty days leading up to Easter, during which Christians fast, or give up something they enjoy". This year, the 40 days start on Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> March and we can gather that evening for a service of Holy Communion, and start our fast together.

Well, maybe not an actual *fast* in terms of not eating - but I am challenged to give something up that I enjoy, and in denying myself something, to ask God to turn it on its head and, far from it being a loss, make it an enriching experience.


Time is what is most precious in my life - and there is far too little of it to please everyone in my life! So, can I think about giving up some of my precious time for forty days, and commit it to God? I know that this sounds easy, but I assure you it won't be. God knows how hard it will be for me. So I am sure that is why He calls us together to support and encourage one another so that part of my "fasting" could be the 6 mid week time slots when I can get together with others in church and study the Lent Course.

This year's Lent course is called "Who do you say I am?" - Jesus asked that question of his disciples and he asks it of us in 2003 as well, and what will our answer be? And what

"Who do YOU say I am?"

Four Studies  
for Lent to  
be used by  
the churches  
of the  
Diocese of  
Derby  
and of  
Derbyshire

2003



Derby Springboard  
Equipping a Confident Church

Produced by  
Canon Barrie Gage  
Diocesan Parish Development/Mission Adviser  
Chancellor of Derby Cathedral

£1

difference will that then make to our lives?

In the booklet that accompanies the studies (Price £1 from church) the author, Canon Barrie Gauge, writes,

*""the New Testament does not say much about evangelism. What it does say is a lot about new life in Christ.*

*This course draws us back to the person of Jesus, whose people we seek to be. We want to be those who respond to the request, "Sir, we would see Jesus".*

The course begins at 7.45pm on Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> March and runs each week until Holy Week, with Bishop Jonathan coming to deliver his Lent address to conclude the series on Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> April here in our parish.

Look out in church for the booklet and let's get together this Lent and "fast" together.

Julie Lomas

## **Stop Press - Pastoral Visitors appointed.**



A recent meeting of the PCC approved the appointment of Marion and David Smith as official church Pastoral Visitors to help meet the spiritual and prayer needs of the congregation in an emergency or hospital need during the vacancy period.

Full details have still to be finalised at the time of writing, if you feel that you would like more information then please contact the church office

## Turning Bosnia into a Good News Story

Ten years ago the most savage war in Europe in the second half of the twentieth century was tightening its awful grip on Bosnia-Herzegovina. You will remember the harrowing scenes of ethnic cleansing that flashed across our television scenes. Between 1992 and 1995 a quarter of a million people were killed – 17,000 of whom were children; half the population became homeless and this small country (about the size of Wales) became the most densely-mined nation on earth. Against a backdrop of millions of praying people, a peace agreement was signed on 14<sup>th</sup>. December 1995, ending the bloodshed, but leaving the country in ruins and the children deeply traumatised.

In December 2000, members of St. Thomas', along with members of churches across Britain, supported Novi Most International, by signing and sending Stars of Hope to the people of Bosnia. As a direct result of Star of Hope, doors previously closed to Christian ministry to young people were flung wide open and hundreds of lives are being affected today.

**Klub Novi Most** was opened in 2001 and is now a place of love, trust and joy for young people in Mostar.

### **Please pray:**

- for the 11-14 year olds, that they would continue to grow in confidence, be healed from the past and look to their futures with hope.
- for the 15-18 year olds, that they would be instruments of



transformation in their community. (Romans 12:2)

- for the over 18s, that they would grow in responsibility and maturity and be good, effective role models for the younger members. (1 Thessalonians 4:1-2)

Thank you to everybody who gave foreign currency, signed Notes of Hope and gave financial support to reassure the people of Bosnia that, amidst their everyday struggle to survive, they are not forgotten today.

### **Bosnia 2003**

The Bosnian economy has collapsed and unemployment remains staggeringly high. Young people have little prospect of finding work in the future. Lord Paddy Ashdown, the International community's High Representative for Bosnia, said recently, "Bosnia's greatest export is its young and talented people – its future. 6 in every 10 teenagers plan to emigrate as soon as possible. In the meantime, Bosnia, a country rapidly being forgotten by the world at large, is becoming a breeding ground for criminals. Over 70% of the hard drugs and 60% of the sex slave girls found on the streets of Britain and other European countries are trafficked through this tiny Balkan state."

We neglect Bosnia-Herzegovina at our own peril. However the exciting fact is that it is a small nation where communities can be, and are being changed by the practical application of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Her Excellency Elvira Begovic, the Bosnian Ambassador to the United Kingdom, recently thanked Novi Most International for the transforming hope that it is introducing to cities like Mostar, Banja Luka and Zenica. "My country remains in deep depression," she told Novi Most Director, Paul Brooks last November, "We need your organisation and the churches of Britain to show us hope for our nation."

### **Please pray:**

- for God's mighty blessing on the people of Bosnia Herzegovina.
- that He would enlarge the place of Novi Most's tent and grant them success in mission! (Isaiah 54:2-3)

The year 2002 was a year of great change for Novi Most. They are now **preparing to advance in 2003**. Gill Rowell, NMI's Project Director writes, "Our work at Klub Novi Most is enabling deep relationships to flourish, and our field

team have been greatly encouraged by the change they have seen in the young people they are working with. That's what it is all about: one to one, hand in hand, lives coming under the sphere of God's grace and love as Jesus is proclaimed through word and deed. **2003 sees huge challenges for us within Novi Most."**

Here at St. Thomas' we have a very important role to play to support Novi Most.

- **Please pray regularly for Bosnia and the work of Novi Most.** (There are three-monthly Prayer Guides available by the Mission Board. Please take one.)
- **Have you considered helping on the summer mission programme?**

**Dates for your diary;**

- **Sunday 9<sup>th</sup>. March** – Paul Brooks, the Director of Novi Most will be speaking at the 9.00am, 11.00am. and 6.30pm. services at St Thomas'.
- **Sunday 16<sup>th</sup>. March** is our annual 24 hour Day of Prayer for Novi Most. (At least 48 volunteers will be needed to pray for 30 minutes.)

**A Prayer for the people of Bosnia.**

God Our Father, we thank you for the glory of your Gospel, that through it, all people can come to a knowledge of yourself, through Jesus Christ our Saviour. We pray that, through the power of your Son, hope, healing and reconciliation will flow into every corner of Bosnia Herzegovina. We pray that Bosnia, now a place of suffering, pain, anguish and deprivation may one day become a place known amongst the nations as a place of your favour and grace. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

If you want any more information about the work of Novi Most, please contact Barbara Goodacre, Tel. 566294.

## Kids Korner



# Valentines Word Search

E B V Z N B E B O E D T  
S G A E H E A R T K K I  
G G S C A N D Y E N Q H  
Y Z A A S I E W U I D N  
A G R L R T R U F P I N  
P F R I E N D S H I P Y  
H K O S W E E T I E U Q  
T R W B O L N E X E C P  
Z L Y Z L A I E V O L T  
J E U L F V M W Y K M I  
K N M R O S E S Q J C K  
S S C I N S B Y N P J C



ARRDW  
BE MINE  
CANDY  
CUPID  
FLOWERS  
FRIENDSHIP

HEART  
HONEY  
LACE  
LOVE  
PINK

RED  
ROSES  
SWEETIE  
SWEETS  
VALENTINE

**Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> February at 11am – a special All Age service on the subject of “LOVE” for Valentine’s day – come and enjoy this short service with all the family!!**

## WORSHIP and LEARNING at ST.THOMAS



On Christopher Frith's leaving as Rector in September 2002 I was approached to be a "stand-in" leader for **Worship and Teaching** until the new Rector arrived! After 35 years of ministry this has been a real privilege to continue my ministry, and help me to ease down into retirement! I am so grateful for the support and encouragement I have received from many in the Church, and the understanding that I am only a "caretaker" for this area of mission and

ministry and in **no way a substitute Rector!**

This aspect of the life of the Church illustrates the effectiveness of the previous leadership and management skills of Christopher. St. Thomas is in a really strong position with shared ministry and trained leadership. I would want to express the Church's gratitude to all who help to make our worship so worthy and able.

This includes the licensed ministers, Sam Cartwright, along with myself as ordained clergy (with the occasional help from Alex Simpson from St. Peters) together with the two retired Church Army Officers, David and Nanette Sanderson and the readers, John Goodacre, Bill Woodend, Bill Galloway, Robin Dawson and my Eileen, who with the excellent trainee Pat Clayton prove such a capable team, along with our Youth worker Neil Roper, who so ably leads our youth and children's worship. We **are fortunate indeed.** These are supported by a wide and committed team of lay helpers, who provide music, amplification, overhead and power point projection, lesson readers, intercessors, administrators for communion, sides persons, refreshments, healing ministry, bell ringing etc. etc. Our wardens and deputy wardens ensure smooth operations on Sundays. But none of this would be effective if it was not the underpinning of the office, especially the care given by Julie and Anne who are always there to plan, produce, appoint and guide us all.

The teaching side was all in place, and although a new leader may want to experiment, we are happily continuing with the Common Worship lectionary at 9.0 am, the scripture Union SALT material at 11 am, and series of sermons for the 6.30 pm service. The Open House programme is happening all the time, with a varied menu of

centrally planned and locally chosen material. I am particularly grateful to Tim Wheeler for co-ordinating the leaders, and for David Sanderson for his input before Christmas in guiding us to study renewal in our neighbourhood in preparation for the Development Project. At Diocesan direction we are committed to bringing the groups together during Lent this year to study the Course "Who do you say I am?" produced by Canon Barrie Gauge. I know some do not welcome studies that are "imposed on us" from on high. Yet we have the concerned support of Bishop, Jonathan, who is coming to St.Thomas on Thursday April 10th. at 7.45 pm to complete the series. I urge you to take this opportunity to support one another, as we look ahead to the appointment of the new Rector.

One area of concern expressed by the Mission and Ministry Leaders is the **corporate prayer life** of the church. We are again grateful to the stimulating and inspiring prayers led for us during our Sunday worship sessions and we know many take the opportunity to pray through the requests given week by week on the Sunday leaflets, but we are disappointed by the low numbers that attend the actual "prayer meetings" that are arranged. A small group pray regularly each Saturday from 8.30 am for a half an hour in the vestry. David and Marion Smith have kept this going in the place of a Rector, together with a very small group. On the second Saturday a half morning of prayer is held in the Meeting Room, mainly led by John Goodacre, who helps to keep the World Mission programme before us. We are sad that the "Come Together" first Wednesday evening has discontinued, but we have called the Church together on occasions to pray for important events and decisions.

My brief covers other areas, which continue faithfully. Thanks to Bill Galloway (Alpha) Discipleship (Pamela Gratton) Bible reading notes (Special thanks to Sian Roberts who has just retired from this) and Kathryn Shemwell (Women's World Day of Prayer). It is a joy to work among such a dedicated and competent team of Christian workers, who illustrate the meaning of "the **Body of Christ.**"

**Robin Balch**

## SPRING HARVEST HOLIDAYS FRANCE

Most of us have heard of Spring Harvest, and many have experienced it first hand at Skegness over the Easter holidays.

In 2003 Spring Harvest are branching out into the summer holiday market ... at Le Pas Opton in the Vendee region of France.

From 19th May through to 27th October there is something for everyone: from **A**rt workshops and **B**ridge through to **W**indsurfing and **Y**achting!!

There is a huge choice of brand new accommodation: Fully equipped fixed tents, three grades of mobile homes, luxury villas, and even emplacements with power for your own tent, caravan or touring van. The prices are reasonable too! For a two week holiday including ferry crossing Dover to Calais, prices per head range from -

Fixed Tents from £58 to £166

Chalet- Style mobile homes from £67 to £229

Luxury Villas from £81 to £263

Own tent, caravan or tourer from £37 to £75

As you'd expect from Spring Harvest, there is a morning time of reflection and prayer and in High Season, an evening worship and celebration. There are also morning seminars by guest speakers. Of course, all these things are optional ... but what a great opportunity for spiritual refreshment while relaxing on your holiday!

The brochure has all the details. It really is an excellent read! Very informative and probably the best set out holiday brochure I've ever read. Do pick up a copy from the back of church or phone **0870 060 3322** or e-mail **info@springharvestholidays.com**.

There are lots of **job opportunities** at Le Pas Opton too! If you are over 18 years old there are vacancies for General Courier, Children's Courier, Receptionist/Admin Assistant, Bar Staff, Catering Assistant, and Pool Supervisor.

Initial interviews are on February 14th and 15th, and regularly

thereafter. Obviously it is advantageous to speak French, but it's not essential! Application forms are at the back of church or phone 0870 060 3321, or e-mail

**couriers@springharvestholidays.com.**

**Other opportunities** exist in April and May to put the 'finishing touches' to the site: landscaping, putting up tents, equipping tents and mobile homes, and general DIY.

As you look through the brochure, you may notice in week 19, 22nd September, that Linedancing is on offer (along with yachting, arts & crafts and French language). If you've never tried it before, or are an experienced dancer, or would like to try western partner dancing, do consider booking for the course in that week ... the emphasis will definitely be on having fun, and there'll be a party on the Saturday night ... see you there!!

Kathryn Shemwell

### FROM THE PARISH REGISTERS:

**WE EXTEND SYMPATHY TO THE RELATIVES AND FRIENDS OF THOSE WHOSE FUNERALS HAVE TAKEN PLACE IN RECENT MONTHS**

25 October	Irene Miles (82)	Brookholme Nursing home
11 November	Ivan Bowers (77)	368 Chatsworth Road
12 November	Edward Orriss (87)	8 Mayfield Road
21 November	Reginald Naunton (85)	16 Glenthorne Close
27 November	Arthur Cooper (80)	149 Hunloke Ave
5 December	Lillian Merrington (71)	82 Moorland View Road
5 December	William Goodwin (81)	5 Haddon Close
2 January	Florence Spooner (92)	Brookholme Nursing
6 January	Geoffrey Watson (71)	7 Gower Crescent





Ever since Alex added “something for the children” to our Sunday Morning Services at St. Peter’s, the whole congregation listen with great expectation, wondering just what little gem is to be revealed.

Especially for Advent were a number of brightly coloured stars on which the children were invited to write a message, before pinning them onto a

cardboard Christmas tree.

### **Christmas card to Jesus**

These came from Sian, Alex, Liddy, Eathan, Iona, Jack, and Ellie

#### **What they wanted for Christmas**

Train and a track

Basketball and Harry Potter Lego

Cuddly toy

#### **What they thought Jesus would like**

Peace on Earth

Friendship

Happiness and free will

Love and caring

A world with a heart

So what shall we do with all these stars when Christmas is over? Throw them in the bin? Keep them in a cupboard? Or, publish them in Ploughshare for all to read and to be shared with others?

Peter Grayson  
Secretary, St. Peter's



## **‘OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD’ – ‘2002’ – LOOKING BACK! Jane Simmonds**

Many of you will be familiar with Samaritan’s Purse’ biggest project – The Shoebox Appeal, aptly named ‘Operation Christmas Child’. Throughout the autumn term many local schools busily pack and collect gift filled shoeboxes as part of school life. **The Shoebox Appeal has become as traditional as the Christmas concert!**

What makes this appeal so special is that children from as young as nursery age can take an active part, making decisions and becoming aware that other little children are not as lucky as they are. But not only schools are involved - churches; offices; various groups-both young and old; community groups and individuals all scramble to find shoe boxes and spend hours making what initially looks like a small package into a work of art. Thousands of people are touched by the opportunity to be able to send a gift to children suffering through no fault of their own. Many of these children would not otherwise receive a gift. In many areas the shoe boxes are sent to, parents are unable to feed their children, let alone buy gifts. As has been told on many occasions, children in orphanages in Eastern Europe are not necessarily orphans. Their families have to make the decision to send a child to a state orphanage in order to keep the rest of the family together - **Can you even come close to the thought of having to do that?**

Thanks to people’s generosity, many of these children can at least receive a gift at Christmas, a time when we as Christians remember that Jesus was sent to us, to teach us to love one another. This appeal demonstrates that act of love, because it is practically impossible to take such time over wrapping a box and filling it, without doing it with love!

This year in Chesterfield and the surrounding district, we have collected and sent 22,042. The total throughout our area (including Derbys, and Notts.), still under the auspices of Chesterfield, was 39,316, and nationally the total is well over 1,000,000, the figure still rising. World wide, well over 4,000,000 suffering children will have received a well deserved gift. Whether you made a shoebox; collected from schools; helped in the warehouse; knitted hats; loaded the lorry or helped with a hundred and one other

tasks – you are very much appreciated, and we couldn't have managed without you.

This year one of our Chesterfield volunteers visited Croatia, with a representative from Derby visiting Belarus. It is always good to have this opportunity to hear more about the distribution of the shoeboxes. As well as hearing how the children react when they receive these gifts, it helps us understand what the needs might be and perhaps even reasons for us having to remove items at the warehouse. This particular point was highlighted on the trip to Belarus, where one gift box had obviously been overlooked at the checking stage. Our leaflet specifically asks people not to include any form of liquid, e.g. toy bubbles, shampoo, bubble bath, snow shakers etc. The main reason for this is, of course, with the pressure of cartons piled high in the lorries, these items could easily crack and leak, or simply leak by being on their side. However, one box in Belarus was opened to find a bottle of bubbles and a snow scene – frozen solid. The glass in the snow scene had already cracked with the expansion of the ice, and both solid blocks would soon leave their marks in a now disappointing half empty gift box! (All items deemed unsuitable for this appeal, have specific reasons for their exclusion, following many years of experience.) Whilst the team were in Belarus they visited the hospital/orphanage we have supported for 12 years, and it is still hard to grasp the fact that children are still being born deformed as a result of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, 17 years later. The charity is hoping to finish much of the renovation programme at this orphanage this summer.

Following is a brief account of Tessa Hope's distribution trip to Croatia at the beginning of December 2002. Tessa is a committed volunteer at our Chesterfield warehouse and an active member of the Church of the Annunciation, Spencer Street.

6<sup>th</sup> December – the feast of St. Nicholas is a significant day for most of Europe. It is a day on which children receive gifts. It was the day that a team from Samaritan's Purse flew out to Croatia to distribute Operation Christmas Child shoeboxes, in Vukovar, in the extreme east of the country.

For those who watched the news in 1991-92, Vukovar is a name to remember. It was besieged and attacked for three months before it fell to the Serbian army. Every building in the town of 44,000 people was damaged or destroyed in the fighting, or razed to the ground afterwards. The population were exiled from the town and,

so far, only about 10,000 have been able to return. Many people live in only partially rebuilt houses, often without all basic amenities like power and water.

This is the town where we went to meet children to bring them a message of hope and love in a shoebox. It's very difficult to describe the emotions of despair and poverty of material things. Many of the children we met were born after the fighting, but they were having to live with the effects on their parents – if any- and on their environment.

Christian is 9 and in a special school. He had put his shoes out for the gifts from St. Nicholas, but they were empty when the day came – his family is very poor. We visited his school on the 7<sup>th</sup> and it was obvious that this was still a very distraught little boy. However when he received his box, he was thrilled and a huge smile lit up his face. When he opened it and saw what it contained, the smile was even bigger – if that was possible. There was no way he was going to put the box down or let go of it!

Miriana lives with her mother and sister, in a fourth-floor flat without power – except that 'borrowed' from a neighbour! On the stairway up to their floor was a three-metre diameter shell-hole, from floor to ceiling – no protection for stair users and no light to see by. The father of the older girl was killed in the fighting. Miriana who is just 6, hardly wanted to unpack her box. Her eyes told a very sad story.

Christina is 3 and the youngest child in an orphanage of sixty-six children. In the bedrooms there was hardly a toy to be seen. We were told that the money they receive to run the orphanage was only enough for food and clothes for the children. I had a large teddy bear, which I gave to Christina. I received a big hug and a lovely smile.

On behalf of these children and many others – Thank you for their gifts.

From just a few stories, adding to those from previous years, it is plain to see that these little gifts are valuable in so many ways - their contents; the expression of love; the memories they build and the hope they bring for the future. For our overseas Christian distributors the value is the doors which are opened by the gifts. This was one of my biggest observations in the Muslim area of Mostar a few years ago. The Evangelical church was welcome in the Muslim school at any time – “because they brought gifts for their children”!

The sad observation is that in our time here on earth there will always be a need for this type of appeal. We are all equal in God's eyes, and therefore all deserve equal. A shoebox is by no means equivalent to the wealth we possess, but its message is strong, and it's giving *does* make a difference.

Let's not forget though that many of those suffering throughout the world are by far more spiritually wealthy than us, their materially blessed neighbours! The first Christmas Child was born poor, suffered *many* hardships - but.....

### **Joining the Tribe!**

I didn't think I'd like rap music, especially as it was the preferred listening of my troublesome neighbour (long since departed). However, during a service at St Thomas's, they played a video clip of a Christian rap crew called The Tribe, advertising their forthcoming gig at the Winding Wheel. Simultaneously fascinated and appalled, I went along, out of the same sort of curiosity that got me going to church in the first place.

As I entered the Winding Wheel, the music was so loud it almost thrust me back onto the street. But there were people there of all ages, which made it less intimidating for one whose last remaining ambition is to collect his pension from the local post office, before they finally shut it down.

The Tribe burst onto the stage in a blaze of razzmatazz. They weren't playing instruments: the days of groups like The Beatles are over, and the backing is all pre-recorded. This music is about style, and swagger; and I can report that it is hugely entertaining. The Tribe are from Manchester, where they visit local schools, preaching the gospel and trying to steer the kids away from drugs. My only thought was "if they can't do it, who on earth can?" I don't remember Christians ever using rock music without diluting it and making it sound prissy. The Tribe, by contrast, seem to have found a way of embracing the whole rap attitude and investing it with a Christian urgency.

My favourite song was "God made me funky," which was played against a background of South Park-style graphics. It sounded like a young person's celebration of him/herself, whilst acknowledging God's place in creating everything: its simplicity was its genius. Each member of the crew took it in turns to address the audience on the subject of Jesus, and we were promised, without any apparent irony, a "wicked" party in heaven! The Tribe play at Manchester Apollo on Sunday 16.2.03; details on [www.message.org.uk](http://www.message.org.uk).