

October 2017

The Bridge No. 21

Newsletter of Ponte Sant'Angelo Methodist Church Rome



MINISTER'S LETTER

As I write, the hurricanes Harvey and Irma have caused devastation to the Southern States of America and vulnerable islands in the Caribbean. While the winds and the waves were equally felt, the ability to cope was very different. The resources deployed in advance by the richest nation of the earth were rather different from the smaller communities on low lying islands already affected by the growing problems that can be attributed in part to climate change.

Yes, we have always had hurricanes and storms, but our weather patterns have become more extreme as a result of the damage done by humans to their environment, through misuse of God-given gifts. The storm in Rome the Sunday morning I was away in the UK , after 14 weeks of no rain and the threat of water rationing, was another example of the damage we can incur if we don't take care of creation.

Harvest within Creation tide (1st September to 4th October) is a time for giving thanks to God for his good gifts to us, for food, and shelter, and the provisions which help us live well. It's a time to remember and respond, to those in need who don't share these things, and for committing ourselves to work for justice and peace in God's world, including the care of creation.

Fred Pratt Green was a British Methodist minister who took up writing hymns in his retirement. He lived latterly in East Anglia, a very fertile agricultural area of England where many crops and vegetables are grown. He ends his hymn "God in his love for us lent us this planet" (StF 727) with this challenge:

Earth is the Lord's: it is our to enjoy it,
ours, as God's stewards, to farm and defend.
From its pollution, misuse, and destruction,
good Lord, deliver us, world without end!

May you have a happy and responsible harvest and remember the needs of others, **Pastor Tim.**

INTERN NEWS

Since arriving in Rome I have been warmly welcomed by everyone! I am really enjoying my time here so far and love exploring the beautiful city. After only arriving and being in Rome for a few days I flew back to London on Monday 4th September for an induction week. On the Monday we had a service for the Launch of the ONE Intern programme, which was also a great opportunity to meet the President and Vice-President of the Conference and other key members of staff within the Methodist network. Throughout the rest of the week we had sessions on 'goals, fears and expectations', 'happiness', 'competency mapping' and 'personal development planning'. The week was also packed with activities and socials that enabled me to get to know the other interns well. Some activities included going to Escape Room London Bridge, the cinema and personally one of the best activities of the week was having drinks at the Shard! Overall, I had a great induction week meeting the other interns!

I have also been attending Italian classes at the Lay Centre, every morning at 8:30 for 4 hours. I am really enjoying the classes, even though they are intensive, and have made many friends with students from The Hebrew University of Jerusalem studying Italian for the month. Attending classes at the Lay Centre has also meant that I have had the opportunity to meet many interesting people such as Emmett Sapp (Political Affairs Officer), Uta Sievers – (Public Affairs Assistant), Maureen O'Toole (Public Affairs Intern); Rachel Elliot (Public Affairs Intern) and Teresa Haney (Political Affairs Intern) from U.S. Embassy to the Holy See (Vatican), and Dr. Cenap Aydin - Director of Istituto Tevere, one of our neighbours at Monte Brianzo.

I am starting to get to grips with the admin part of work that I will be doing for PSA and MEOR. Overall, I am settling in well and am grateful to everyone at Ponte Sant' Angelo for making me feel welcome!

Abigail

CHURCH FAMILY NEWS

The children's home, Casa Materna, at Portici on the coast just south of Naples, was for many years the focus of our Ponte Sant'Angelo mission programme. We used to visit them regularly, and a group of the children came to Rome and participated in one of our Sunday services in December each year. It was started and continued for many years under the leadership of the Santi family - and indeed it was run as a big family. Papa Santi was a kind of Father Christmas figure. Rosaria Vincenzi was I think the last coordinator before it became a centre for teenagers with problems in the 1990s. And Ann Chaplin tells me that Rosaria and her husband Pietro both grew up at Casa Materna, so theirs was a lifelong friendship. Pietro died of an aneurisma whilst they were on holiday at Sibari in Calabria where many of his relations live.

WORLD NEWS

Chosen People Called to Proclaim

If this title sounds familiar it was the theme of the World Assembly of WFMUCW (World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women) which I attended last year in Houston, Texas and wrote about in *The Bridge* a year ago!

A few weeks ago at the Methodist and Waldensian Synod in Torre Pellice, Lidia Ribet Noffke (Pastor Eric's mother) asked me "Will you be going to Belfast next June?" She is the President of the Italy Unit of WFMUCW and also President of the Europe Continental Area. I had to admit I hadn't thought about it, but I have since and will be going!

Some of you may remember that in June 2014 the last Europe Seminar was hosted in Italy, at Pomezia. A group of us attended worship on the Sunday at PSA, shortly before Ken and Marion Howcroft returned to the UK. For me it was an opportunity to meet the congregation as Tim and I prepared to move here. We were treated to a wonderful Pot Luck Lunch too!

The next Europe Seminar will be in Belfast, N Ireland from 7-11 June 2018. Taking the theme 'Chosen People Called to Proclaim' the programme will include worship, speakers, workshops through worship and social action, a 'market place' and optional excursions round the city, including the Titanic Experience.

Having been to several European Seminars over the years I can highly recommend them! The programme is always well-prepared and very worthwhile. It's good to meet women from Britain, Ireland and many Continental countries. Some of these have even smaller numbers of Methodist members than Italy, many of them younger women. It is inspiring to meet them and hear about their churches and groups, often working and witnessing in challenging situations as they reach out to their local communities.

If you are interested in finding out more please see the poster at the back of church or ask me for details. We will be privileged to have the World President of the WFMUCW, Alison Judd, worshipping with us at PSA on 22nd October. She will be looking forward to meeting you!

Angela Macquiban

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Children's choir

Rhonda AbouHana has begun to resume the children's choir called 'The Children's Choir of Rome', as of the 25th September 2017. It is an English speaking choir for young people from ages 7-18. It is for all young people who love to sing and would like to meet new international friends. As well, it offers the reinforcement of the English language. Rehearsals are Monday evenings at St. Paul's Within the Walls Via Napoli, 58 at Via Nazionale. For more information and to register visit **childrenschoir-rome.weebly.com**, or if you have more specific questions please contact the Director Rhonda AbouHana at **childrenschoirofrome@gmail.com**

RICE BOWL PROJECTS 2017, II

In a previous edition of the Bridge, we reported about the Rice Bowl projects, which are being supported this year by Churches Together in Rome (CTiR), such as “Assistance to Internally Displaced Persons in Ain Dara Camp”, Aleppo, Syria submitted by All Saints’ Anglican Church and “Assistance to the Bright Star Relief and Development Association” (BRSDA) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia of the Swedish Lutheran Church.

We reported that the BSRDA organization is running different projects to rescue street children, commercial sex workers, and their families, who are living in very precarious conditions and enable them to increase their participation in society and prepare them to become active members of the society. Missing are further details of the Ain Dara Camp project.

Ain Dara Camp was established by a small group of six friends in Aleppo, Syria under the leadership of professor of archaeology Murhaf Baghdadi, who decided early on in the conflict that they would do all they could to help those in need. They began by assisting the homeless in the city, raising small amounts of money through their international contacts to buy basic items such as food, clothing, blankets, and medicines.

No-one at that stage in 2012 thought that the war would continue the way it has. But as the situation got steadily worse, as countless more were killed or made homeless, a decision was made by Murhaf and his friends to set up a refugee camp for 1000 people, mostly women, children and elderly people in a ‘safer’ area north of the city. When they realized that the camp would not be as temporary as they had initially hoped, they also started to provide an education for the children, and for the adults who were interested. The area of the camp is surrounded by different armed groups, which makes it difficult for Red Crescent and other international organisations to reach them. Therefore they have to rely almost exclusively on private donations to support and protect the people in the camp. Throughout the past 5 years, Murhaf and his friends have struggled to maintain the camp, exclusively with the help of private donations.

Ponte San Angelo contributed € 1000 to each of the Rice Bowl Projects 2017, while the total of CTiR is more than € 21000, with information of two churches still pending.

Marius de Gaay Fortman, Treasurer of Churches Together in Rome

BOOK REVIEW

Singing the Lord's song in a strange land, by Tom Stuckey (who was our visiting preacher in August)

The whole world is passing through a huge paradigm shift the likes of which have not been seen for generations. What is the Spirit saying to the Churches in Britain and to the Methodist Church in particular? In my new book I contend that Britain is a modern Babylon where mammon reigns. The Church has unconsciously absorbed the values of Babylon into its structures and strategies with the result that it has ceased to be prophetic and become a public utility offering cheap grace to a consumer public looking for peace and security in troubled times.

BABYLON

Today we serve the god of consumerism and worship him in our cathedral-like shopping malls. Babylon had its ziggurats. In London we demonstrate our delight in the money god in the profusion of the towering of skyscrapers monstrously designed to shock and awe. Babylon is both a city and a Whore, a term used to signify luxury, sensuality, sexuality, seduction and allure. Although her appearance in the book of Revelation is magnificent (Rev 17), she is not to be trusted. She rides upon a beast of corruption. She is a celebrity who loves to be looked at yet takes even greater delight in gazing at herself. She is the mythological origin of the 'selfie'. The message of Revelation is clear. Beware lest you are beguiled by her charms and drawn into the nihilism which she personifies.

THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY OF THE CHURCH

Martin Luther wrote a pamphlet with this title in October 1520. In it he attacked 'indulgences'. These bits of paper were sold to enhance the glory of the papacy by raising money for the building of St Peter's. They were

expressions of 'cheap grace' giving people a 'feel good' experience without requiring discipleship. John Hull gave us a devastating critique of the Church in Britain. 'We looked for a mission-shaped church but what we found was a church-shaped mission.' The seeking of justice for people and the environment is at the bottom of the agenda of most churches. This is because the culture of Babylon has so permeated the Church that we cannot confront the sins of Babylon without confronting ourselves. Words and noise are the background music of a consumer society. Babylon has invaded the worship of our churches. Boredom is the enemy so we fill the time with image, song, visuals, clips, chat and a short snappy address. The worshippers have become a consumer audience.

James Laney in a sermon about Christian identity in a comfortable Babylon says 'When we look back at the history of the Church, every time we see that the Church has become captive to the dominant identity of its society, every time it has become comfortable with its role in culture, it has lost its universality. With the loss of universality, it has lost the power to create, not merely to evangelize, but also the power to become renewed.'

METHODISM

Methodism has singularly failed to theologically address this deluding Babylonian culture which has almost totally infiltrated our church. Without the corrective of prophetic theology we have embraced the managerial and mechanical solutions of Babylon. Over the past couple of decades we have been shifting the furniture of worship and tinkering with our structures. Martin Percy looking in at British Methodism is puzzled by our heavy organizational baggage and ecclesiastical civil service. He comments that 'our bureaucracy is stifling our democracy and democracy has triumphed over theocracy'. The Babylonian captivity has robbed Methodism of its 'holiness'. 'Know your disease! Know your cure!' was the dictum John Wesley employed. His diagnosis of humanity's problem was that the image of God within had become distorted. Although reason and practical activity were important for him he believed that only the transcendent power of God's grace could work the cure.

My new book entitled '*Singing the Lord's song in a Strange Land*' will be launched at Conference. It will bring a theological critique to the Church in Britain with a particular reference to Methodism. Does Methodism have a vibrant future? Not if we continue as we are!

BIBLE STUDY GROUPS

There are various opportunities to engage in Bible Study at PSA.



Wednesday bible study group: Paul's Letter to the Romans

A city where political intrigue and corruption go unchecked, where celebrities and pleasures are idolized while justice is ignored, where economies are built on a few making most of the money while the rest, to various degrees, struggle..... does this sound familiar? As "Roman" citizens it certainly does to most of us and did to the apostle Paul when he set out to write to Christians in the imperial city of Rome about 2000 years ago. He may not have realized then that his writing, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, would become the most influential letter in the world. Its words sparked the conversion of Augustine and solved for Luther the dilemma of righteousness as he read verse 17 of the first chapter: "For the gospel reveals how God puts people right with himself: it is through faith from beginning to end. As the scripture says, "The person who is put right with God through faith shall live." It is a long time since Augustine and Luther were around, so can the letter to the Romans say anything to us today? It certainly can because God has not changed. The outer circumstances of our lives may look very different, but people are not. The gospel of Jesus Christ has been the most powerful and transforming force in human history and the book of Romans is the fullest and most comprehensive statement of Christianity. Are you interested in hearing what it says? If you are free on alternate Wednesday mornings, come and join us upstairs on the first floor for tea, coffee, fellowship and study of the book of Romans, starting on **Wednesday 4th October at 10.30.** For further details speak to Sandra Mi.

Bible study home group

Bible study home group "Monteverde" resumes after summer break on **Saturday 14th October at 5.30 pm**. We will meet every 15 days on Saturdays from 5.30 pm to 7.15 pm to sing Christian songs, to study the Word of God and to pray in an atmosphere of love and respect for one another. The participants belong to different Christian denominations, thus allowing us to share a great variety of experiences in the Lord, build us up in the Word and create fellowship.

We are going to study the last chapters of John's Gospel and to start the book of Acts.

Here as follows there are the dates of meetings until the end of 2017. Later we will let you know the dates for 2018:

14/10/2017; 28/10/2017; 11/11/2017; 25/11/2017; 02/12/2017;
16/12/2017

Details: Mobile 338/1675680 - Via del Casaletto 63 - Buzz Montelli – Milani (Monteverde area)

Come and join us!

Alessia and Federico

COURSES

'Peripheries in our Lives'

Throughout Autumn the Lay Centre is running a series that will consider the topic of 'Peripheries in our lives' from various perspectives.

Peripheries signifies "going to the boundaries", "going to the outskirts", "going beyond our own comfort zone to reach out to others" particularly those who are socially marginalized. It includes those who experience real poverty, intellectual poverty and spiritual poverty. The series will run every Thursday from October 19-November 23 at 9:30am to 12:00pm.

19th Oct. Peripheries in Our Lives

26th Oct. Peripheries in the Sky

2nd Nov. The last Periphery: Death?

9th Nov. On the Peripheries: Exploring the Paths to Nuclear Zero

16th Nov. Jewish-Christian Relations: from the Centre to the Periphery,
from the Periphery to the Centre

23rd Nov. Peripheries in our Cities

For registration and information, please contact the Lay Centre at:

The Lay Centre at Foyer Unitas

Largo della Sanita Militare, 60, Roma 00184, Italia

T. +39067726761 F. +3906772676235 E. info@laycentre.org

TEDDY BEAR PROJECT

Donations needed for new gently-used clothing, shoes and toys/books for babies and up to age 5. This program benefits immigrant mothers and their toddlers. A box will be provided at the back of the church marked TEDDY BEAR PROJECT into which items may be put week by week.

For information please contact:- Leslie Kiely

T. 380-126-2916 E. LesliemKiely@yahoo.com

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Saturday 7th October at 18.00 : lecture at the Faculty

Saturday 14th October White Night with Luther

Saturday 21st October at 19.30: A meal with Luther at Via Firenze

Saturday 28th October starting at 10.00 : A Day of Celebrating the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation at the Waldensian Church, Piazza Cavour.



SUNDAY SERVICES

1st October – Communion led by Pastor Tim

8th October – Pastor Tim (visit of Dutch School from Rotterdam)

15th October- Pastor Tim

22nd October- Pastor Tim, with Gillian Kingston preaching and Alison Judd (President of the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women) leading prayers

29th October- Pastor Luca Baratto (Reformation Sunday)

Pastor Tim is returning to the UK that weekend to give a lecture in Cambridge and to attend a special service in Westminster Abbey on 31st October.

Weekly Offerings [P = cash; E = Envelopes; BB = Birthday Basket.]

03 Sep. P	141, 00	E 588, 00	BB(Aug) 113, 37	TTL. 842, 37
10 Sep. P	41, 65	E 240, 00		TTL. 281, 65
17 Sep. P	54, 70	E 240, 00		TTL. 294, 70
24 Sep. P	120, 59	E 465, 00	BB (Sept) 75,00	TTL. 585, 59
Total	P 357, 94	E 1533, 00	BB TTL. 188,37	TTL. 2078, 74

Thank you all who contributed to the harvest appeal for All We Can. 214 euros was donated. Envelopes are still available if you would like to make a contribution.

God loves
a cheerful
giver.