

CHAPLAINS AT WORK



Winter 2021

Welcome to our Winter newsletter. We have a Christmas tree full of stories from our Chaplains, and as the days get shorter, the nights longer and the busy-ness of Christmas approaches, why not make a lovely hot drink, pull up a chair and enjoy a good read. Peace to you this Christmas.

The "Quotable Quotes" this time are taken from 'Child of the stable's secret birth' by Timothy Dudley-Smith.

Annual Commissioning Service

Our Annual Commissioning Service took place on Sunday 21st November. Val Dalton writes ...

It was good to welcome more than 30 Chaplains, Trustees and guests to our annual Commissioning Service on 21st November. We were warmly



welcomed to St John the Baptist church by Colin Corke who is the vicar as well as being Chaplain to JLR. We may have been wearing

facemasks, and been physically distanced, but there was a real feeling of joyous celebration as we were able to gather together for this special service to worship together, to commission and welcome new Chaplains and to reflect on the past year before re-dedicating ourselves to Workplace Chaplaincy in and around Birmingham and Solihull. Steve Faber, Chair of CIGB and West Midlands Moderator for the URC; and Dave Ellis, Trustee and Regional Minister, Heart of England Baptist Association led the service and I led the musical part of the worship: facemasks firmly in place, everyone sang with great enthusiasm – which was a joy to hear!

Two Chaplains were commissioned:



Audrey Thompson, who will be joining the Solihull Retail Team and Alex French, who will be joining the National Express Bus Chaplaincy. Audrey spoke about her journey to Chaplaincy which started back in 2014 when she met Peter Sellick during

one of his Chaplaincy visits to Birmingham City Council. Due to a prior commitment Alex was unable to attend so was commissioned in his absence.

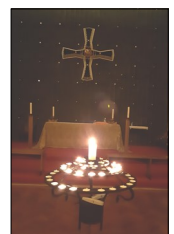


Our guest speaker this year was David McLoughlin, Emeritus Fellow, Newman University whose talk, based on the reading from Mark 6:2-13, was so

inspiring that people asked afterwards if they could have a copy of David's notes ... I wonder how often that happens to preachers? ? I'm not even going to try to summarise David's talk here: if you would like a copy of David's notes, please let me know at the usual email address.

We were treated to a hot drink and an assortment of snacks after the service, and enjoyed a much-missed opportunity to have a time of fellowship together. Huge thanks for this to Irene Lees, Chaplain at Longbridge Extra Care village and her two assistants who not only served drinks in proper cups, but washed-up afterwards: an important ministry that is often overlooked!

Sunday 21st November is Christ the King Sunday, which marks the end of the church year before the new year begins with the season of Advent. As we wait for the coming of Jesus, the Light of the World, I'll end with a photo I took of the candles lit by our Chaplains at the service.



If you, or anyone you know is interested in being a voluntary Workplace Chaplain, here are some details about our next training course

INTRODUCTION TO VOLUNTARY WORKPLACE CHAPLAINCY IN BIRMINGHAM AND SOLIHULL

7-Week Evening Course

Thursdays 5-7pm
Starting Thursday 3rd March
Venue in central Birmingham
Course fee: £50

For more information contact
val.dalton@cigb.org.uk

**QUOTABLE
QUOTE**

Child of the stable's secret birth, the Lord by right of the lords of earth,
Let angels sing of a King new-born; the world is weaving a crown of thorn:
A crown of thorn for that infant head
Cradled soft in the manger bed.

Frankfurt Christmas Market

The Frankfurt Christmas Market has become a regular event and, love it or hate it, it's part of Christmas in Birmingham. Elaine Hutchinson, Be.Friend team leader writes ...

Breaking the Language Barrier

On a visit to the Frankfurt Market a trader said "You speak for God, no?" I think what he was trying to say was that we represent the Church. But the phrase "I speak for God" kept swirling around in my mind. I'm glad that there was somehow a connection to God in what we're doing as Chaplains because the language barrier can be a bit of a challenge. The appreciation of the traders never ceases to amaze me, and as we visit, the conversations move from the superficial to significant, so speaking for God, or being a representative becomes central.

It can be very difficult coming to a foreign place: not fully understanding the language, dealing with the British general public who are keen for things to get back to some sense of normality, working for 12 hours in the cold. It can be very difficult indeed. So we try through smiles, through nods and through very limited conversations at times, to speak for God, by affirming and by befriending.

A trader is concerned about the number of homeless people on the streets and wonders why we are spending time supporting the Frankfurt Market instead of looking after what the trader describes as the 'poor' and that conversations leads to sharing about the struggle of living with someone who is an addict and how important faith is in that journey. We pray that our words will be seasoned with God's love, and as we share that God will give us the right words.

It has been great having new volunteers join the team as I couldn't do this ministry without the committed support of volunteers.

Ashish Shinde who also visits the Bullring Shopping Centre shares his encounters of Chaplaincy at the Frankfurt Market as a new volunteer.

"From being a once-upon-a-time visitor to Frankfurt Christmas Market to being a Christmas Market Chaplain is a thrilling experience. My wife Sarah and I came to Birmingham from India in 2019 when we first experienced the Christmas Market.

The impression of the Christmas Market, as seen by a visitor, is of people everywhere, food/drink, lights, carousel etc. But so much effort goes on behind the



Daniel and Ashish enjoy lunch!

scenes to welcome the wonderful Christmas Market in the city. I learned this during the training, especially when the Operations Director from Birmingham City Council explained this. The facts and figures in her presentation gave us a good picture of the significance of this market.

I was a bit nervous about visiting the traders at first because of the language barrier, but expressing love and receiving love has no limitations of language. Traders recognise our faces – some remember our names and this can be read by the smiles on their faces and their gentle nods when they see us. There are some quite heartfelt and fruitful conversations and exchanges of cultural information. Moreover, the Security staff and Police also appreciate our presence. I had a chance to hear their experience as well. Hearing about the different situations faced by traders, Security staff and the Police is challenging. The very little I could offer by spending few minutes with them during Chaplaincy visit and later prayers for them and their families is no less than a kingdom privilege."

Elaine concludes: Paul reminds us in Colossians "Let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right response for everyone". Col 4:6 NLT and that continues to be our prayer as we go out as God's representatives.



Elaine and Sarah on duty

**QUOTABLE
QUOTE**

Eyes that shine in the lantern's ray; A face so small in its nest of hay
Face of a Child who is born to scan the world of men through the eyes of man:
And from that face in the final day
Earth and heaven shall flee away.

Hope for Jobz

We heard from the Job Club at Carrs Lane in our last edition. This time we hear from Beryl Moppett and the team at the Job Advice Club, Solihull.



JACS came into being well over twenty years ago and we have over the years helped a great number of people with their job searches. We are proud to say that as a result the vast majority have found the employment that they wanted. What has really pleased us too is that many have returned to visit us over time and updated us on how their careers have progressed.

We ceased to meet at the beginning of lockdown but before opening up again we took the opportunity to join 'Hope for Jobz' under the umbrella of CIGB. This has meant that with the funding that was procured we are delighting in having two laptops, a printer, and various sundry accessories available for use as necessary.

We have re-established our relationship with Job Centre Plus in Solihull and with advertising via social media as well we are beginning to have the meeting room repopulated with visitors.



We are grateful to Solihull URC for proving us with accommodation and for the team of volunteers who give freely of their time.

Volunteer Stephen Saum adds that quite a lot of the contact comes via the website or Facebook. There are some clients who come quite regularly for support. There have been some challenges with EU citizens especially since Brexit, and we do our very best to help them through what has become a minefield. The team at JACS is small, and it would be really helpful if we had more volunteers.

If you, or anyone you know might be interested in helping at JACS or the Job Club at Carrs Lane please contact val.dalton@cigb.org.uk

Updates from around our Chaplaincies

A Chaplains' meeting was held recently. Here are brief summaries from Chaplaincy Team Leaders:

Birmingham City Centre Retail: Elaine was pleased to report that two new Chaplains had joined her team. Maxine was glad to see that so many of the shops she visits in the Bullring were still in business. Both were looking forward to delivering Christmas cards to shops.

Solihull Town Centre Retail: Anne spoke about the plight of the staff in House of Fraser who face a very uncertain future. Ann Polson spoke about the impact of the M&S store relocation to a retail park. Mince pies and cards, all funded by Touchwood, will be delivered to retail staff in the coming weeks.

Waterways: Richard welcomed Sunila Fernando to his team—Sunila was recently commissioned at her own church. The Waterways Chaplains continue to support those who use and live on the canal network.

NEX buses: John was pleased that 1½ new Chaplains had joined the team: Alex French has moved to Birmingham from the Black Country where he was a bus Chaplain with BCUM; and Carol Farrell had recently completed the Chaplaincy Training Course. Christine reported that the garages at Acocks Green and Yardley Wood were short of drivers. Brexit was partly to blame, but other bus drivers have left to become HGV drivers. Christine also mentioned changes to the outer circle route which now involves passengers having to change buses. Buses are very crowded and there are problems with heavy traffic.

Birmingham airport: Tanya and Stephen reported that little by little the team are coming back. There had been a delay with getting security passes for Chaplains to go 'airside' but this has been sorted out. There was some optimism about air travel resuming before the new Omicron variant came along. Tanya is still doing drop-in sessions, as little by little word is spreading about the 'Come and have a Chat with a Chaplain' message. It is hoped that a Carol Service will be held at lunchtime on Thursday 16th December.

Longbridge Retail: Val and Joan had started visiting the shops again. Some of the smaller shops on the High Street had closed. Staff at Timpson and Sainsbury's were really pleased to see Val again and there were longer conversations than before the pandemic.



QUOTABLE-QUOTE

Child of the stable's secret birth, the Father's gift to a wayward earth, To drain the cup in a few short years of all our sorrows, our sins and tears - Ours the prize for the road he trod: Risen with Christ; at peace with God.

MEET THE CHAPLAIN

As you know from page 1, Audrey Thompson was commissioned at our recent service. In this article Audrey tells us a bit more about her journey to Chaplaincy.

Here's how it all began.

I worked in a large open plan office in Birmingham city centre.

I was on my way out to lunch one day in 2014 when I noticed two men wearing clerical collars standing by a table. I walked across to find out why they were there and they explained to me that they were Workplace Chaplains.

I had never heard of Workplace Chaplains or CIGB before, but I thought it was a great idea—really good for the staff.



Sometime later I received an email from the Chaplaincy Team offering staff an opportunity to do Workplace Chaplaincy training. I wanted to do the training, but as I worked full-time I wondered how I would be able to fit my hours in. To cut a long story short, God made a way for me to do the training, which I enjoyed and hoped that one day I would become a Workplace Chaplain. I had a very demanding job and various roles within the church I attend so it was impossible for me to take up Chaplaincy straight after completing the training.

In February 2019 I shadowed two Retail Chaplains in Birmingham and then I joined the Solihull Town Centre Chaplaincy team in October 2019.

As I have got to know the retailers, I have built up some good relationships. Some of the retailers have asked for prayer for sick relatives and on one occasion I was invited to share my faith.

I'm looking forward to our annual distribution of cards and mince pies/cakes to retailers – a small gesture, but it's always much appreciated.

Here's a photo of 'my patch' in Solihull—a busy area with a lot of shops and a lot of shoppers!



Last Word

Walking through town the other day I noticed that the cathedral was surrounded by these lovely angel lights and although these angels have trumpets, not harps, it reminded me of a traditional Christmas song—I've pasted a couple of verses below ...



It came upon the midnight clear, that glorious song of old, from angels bending near the earth to touch their harps of gold: 'Through all the earth, goodwill and peace from heaven's all-gracious king!' The world in solemn stillness lay to hear the angels sing.

With sorrow brought by sin and strife the world has suffered long and, since the angels sang, have passed two thousand years of wrong: the nations, still at war, hear not the love-song which they bring: O hush the noise and cease the strife, to hear the angels sing!

Wishing you the very happiest of Christmases, and hoping that, in the midst of all the busy-ness you might find a few moments to listen ...

... who knows, you might just hear those angels singing as we celebrate once again the coming of Jesus our Lord and Saviour



PLEASE STAY IN TOUCH

We love hearing your stories— the exceptional ones and the more everyday ones. Thanks to everyone who has contributed to this edition of "Chaplains at Work".

CIGB, 1 Colmore Row, B3 2BJ 0121 426 0425
val.dalton@cigb.org.uk www.cigb.org.uk

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