

Around the Synod

March 2010

News highlights from the Northern Synod



The
United
Reformed
Church

From the Moderator.....



Dear Friends,

At the heart of the Christian story is the death of Christ from which new life is raised. As we walk through Lent towards Easter we too set out on this journey, setting our face with Christ to Jerusalem and the world that rejects the God who is present amongst us.

Yet everything in us cries out against the dying from which God can raise new life. We scream! We rant! We resist! We get angry! We argue like Peter, 'God forbid it Lord, that should never happen to you' and hear Jesus say to us, 'Get behind me Satan. You are an obstacle in my way, because these thoughts of yours don't come from God, but from human nature.' (Matt 16:22-23) We struggle, like Christ in Gethsemane, but so often reject 'Not my will but yours' and hang on to our own sense of control. (Matt 26:39) The dying is fought and life is not willingly surrendered in God. Yet still God graciously raises new life amongst us.

The blind Scottish minister George Matheson (1842-1906) knew this reality of life from death being part of God's providence and something that if we know God in Christ we too must recognise. In my favourite hymn 'O Love that wilt not let me go' Matheson writes: -

*O Cross that liftest up my head
I dare not ask to fly from thee;
I lay in dust life's glory dead
and from the ground there blossoms red
life that shall endless be. (R+S 511)*

If this is our lived experience in Christ why we are so resistant to surrendering ourselves to death with him? Why will we not burn like a candle of hope in the darkness until the wax is used up and the wick burnt down? Why as church do we barricade ourselves in instead of giving ourselves for the sake of the world?

In a surviving sermon plan of Matheson's he wrote: '*All things shine by passing into the life of others: the seed into the flower, the sun into nature, the sea into the reflection of light... Exhibit then how Christ was slain from the foundation of the world.*' (Cornick: Letting God be God p 82) This movement of new life arising from death that is the climax of God's way in Christ is also central to God's plan in creation, and is worked out through the Holy Spirit. It is God's way in which we are to trust.

Brian Wren's hymn 'Here hangs a man discarded, a scarecrow hoisted high, a nonsense pointing nowhere to all how hurry by' stirs and challenges me every time I sing it or read the words as a powerful poem. Now I invite you to make the last verse your own prayer

*Lord, if you now are risen
help all who long for light
to hold the hand of promise
and walk into the night.*

May a blessed Lenten pilgrimage towards death and a blessed rising with Christ be yours and the churches' daily.

Shalom

Celebrating St Cuthbert

At the St Cuthbert's Centre, Holy Island
on Tuesday March 16th at 7.30

Holy Communion

followed by drinks and refreshments

*Elena Narinskaya, who took part in the
Sinai Pilgrimage last year
will be talking about icons and presenting
her icon of St Cuthbert to the Centre*

Ecumenical Quiet Day

At Ushaw College, 22nd May, 10.30—4.00

"Come away to a quiet place and rest"

- a journey into quietness and prayer

with Christian Smith of St Antony's Priory, Durham

Retreat Association members £20, non-members £25

Details from Ruth Crofton, tel 01388 763093
rcrofton@tiscali.co.uk

NEWS OF PEOPLE & CHURCHES

David Herbert has accepted a call to the North Northumberland Mission Partnership, where he is currently part-time minister. The induction service to the full time post, to take place on April 24th, will also see the ending of his current special category ministry post in rural ministry research.

David Whiting has accepted a call to the four churches of the Sunderland Partnership, and subject to concurrence given by Synod will be moving from his chaplaincy post in Stockton later in the spring.

The St Cuthbert's Centre, Holy Island, has submitted an application for special category ministry status for a future Director following Barry Hutchinson's retirement in 2011. Members of the authorising Assembly committee are hoping to visit the Island and the Project later this spring.

Sheelagh White, an Anglican priest in the Durham Diocese, has moved from Gateshead to take up the ministry at the Local Ecumenical Partnership at Oxclose in Washington. She will also serve as the diocesan Ecumenical Advisor.

Catey Morrison is looking forward with her family to moving to the manse at Lingdale, following agreement within the South Cleveland Group that the presence of a resident minister in the village should be new focus for their shared mission strategy.

Ryton URC within the Gateshead Group have made the decision to close, and will hold a final thanksgiving service on May 16th.

The two SENEA churches at **Newbiggin** are currently in conversation, and it is hoped that St Andrew's Methodist and St Mark's United Reformed Church will become a single congregation in September.

PILOTS GOING TO WARWICK

Northern Synod Pilots will be among those from up and down the country supporting this year's national Pilots Day— being held this year at Warwick Castle on Saturday 15th May. Synod Pilots Officer Marilyn Armstrong says



“Come and be a Pilot for a day— a day of sharing, fun, activities, a wonderful Castle to visit, meeting Pilots from all around the country with their friends and relations. A coach will be leaving Hartlepool around 6.00 pm on Friday 14th May, staying overnight in a Travelodge near Warwick so as to have a prompt start to the day on Saturday. We will travel back to Hartlepool on the Saturday. The day starts at 9.30 am and will finish at around 5.30 pm. Packed lunches required, although there is a good restaurant on site.”

SPRING SYNOD AT PONTELAND

Synod will meet at Ponteland URC on Saturday March 20th: coffee will be served from 9.30 with the meeting beginning at 10.00 and lasting until 4.00. The synod roll consists of ministers and lay representatives from each church— but meetings of synod are open meetings, and members and friends of any of our churches will be welcome as guests. More information about the meeting will be available from your own church's representative, who will be receiving papers about two weeks in advance— but already a special invitation has been issued to those who work with children and young people to take part in the session that will focus on this topic, where we hope to be joined by national youth development officer John Brown.

ST CUTHBERT'S WAY

The synod pilgrimage will take place July 26-31 2010, following the celebrated 65 mile trail from Melrose to Holy Island. Full details were sent out to all churches in the January mailing, and now is the time to be signing up. However, there is still one problem to overcome: the organisers plan to transport walkers to and from accommodation each day by minibus, and are currently looking for a volunteer driver. Please contact Linda Gowland if you might be able help: linda.gowland@btopenworld.com or tel 01434 605837.

BIRDS AND BIBLE

This is *Faith and Feathers* with a difference, as this time our own synod ornithologist and theologian David Peel is joined by New Testament lecturer John Proctor of Westminster College Cambridge for a residential weekend, May 28th-30th on Holy Island, based at Marygate House and the St Cuthbert's Centre. The programme will include visits to nesting sea-bird colonies including, weather permitting, a half-day trip to the Farne Islands. Participants can hope to see arctic, sandwich and little terns, puffin, guillemot and razorbill, shag and cormorant, ringed plover and eider. A booking form has been sent to every church in the February mailing— or contact Barry Hutchinson, centre@holylisland-stcuthbert.org or tel 01289389254.

CARING FOR ANCIENT BUILDINGS

The next Help & Advice Group seminar will be held jointly with SPAB— the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings— on Saturday May 22nd at St James's URC in Newcastle. Led by Sara Crofts, the day seminar will look at all aspects of caring for our older buildings, not just our listed buildings, and should be invaluable for members of fabric committees and the like. For details and bookings contact Andrew Atkinson at Synod Office— tel 0191 232 1168 or andrew.atkinson@urc-northernsynod.org.

Keep the news coming in! - Contact the Synod Clerk: Revd John Durell, 44 Wearside Drive, Durham DH1 1LE
Tel 0191 3841475 email john.durell@urc-northernsynod.org

This newsheet can be downloaded from www.urc-northernsynod.org, and further links followed there