



# Over The Wall

Issue 4: Spring 2017

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*Sharing stories from the Five Northerly Synods of the United Reformed Church*

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## Welcome

Welcome to the fourth issue of *Over The Wall*, the newsletter of the five Northern Synods of the United Reformed Church - Mersey, North Western, Northern, Scotland and Yorkshire. This newsletter has been written by members of the Northern Synods Communications Task Group and their colleagues to share news from the synods. Please email any feedback or comments to Chris Reed at [clerk@urcyorkshire.org.uk](mailto:clerk@urcyorkshire.org.uk)

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## John Humphreys - In His Own Words

The shock at the sudden death last year of The Rev John Humphreys, so soon after he retired as Moderator of the National Synod of Scotland was palpable. The Rev Kevin Watson, Moderator of General Assembly and of the Yorkshire Synod reflects on his life using John's own words.

I used many of John Humphrey's own words in my reflection of John's life. Here are some of them.

He said that when he went to the States to study, he was warned about the street gangs, going to Hungary, not to return a communist, even to Amsterdam, warned of the drugs and sex. In each he was warned about stereotypes, negative stereotypes that exposed prejudice and judgement. The result, John returned from each with stories of real human beings, of grace and of a Kingdom of Love, alive and active. He would feel changed by the meeting with strangers. For he once wrote, "There can be no other way. As the circumstances of our life change (people enter and leave our lives, we change, society and community change) so, too, we either adjust and adapt or we get stuck in an unreal existence. Traditionalism dulls the life of the Christian community because it seeks to preserve someone else's response to God."

Change to John was not about change management or a programme to solve a problem, or even changing people, but it is of being ever open to God's transforming Spirit – he really believed and quoted "the Lord hath yet more light and truth to shed forth from his Word" But John was also fond of R S Thomas, and often quoted him, and like him, recognised "He is such a fast God, always before us and leaving as we arrive"

Reflecting on the prophet's vision of the Christ to come – John himself once wrote "there is no ranting or raving in the streets; the servant does not draw attention to self. The servant will not even damage a broken reed. The servant hears the call of God, to be a light to the nations, to help people look beyond whatever imprisons them towards the wonder of God's full life offered to all humanity. Amidst the anger and despair of the exiled Hebrews, captive in Babylon, Isaiah dares to speak of purpose and possibility because of God."

John was primarily a listener – God and to others. So, when that very private, unassuming man spoke at Mission Council about his own journey of self-discovery, and thanked the Church for accepting and embracing him, it was as though he was giving voice to all the neglected, and marginalised, oppressed and prejudiced. **(Cont. page 2)**



# Northern Synod

## Moderator's Open Day

Dave Herbert, the Synod Moderator kindly invited everyone to a Mozambican themed 'open day' at his new home in Ouseburn, Newcastle. Helen Hogg, the Synod's Finance Officer, cooked some traditional Mozambican-style food for everyone to sample and others in the synod baked cakes and biscuits for the event.

It was a very well attended and enjoyable day with people from all corners of the synod calling in and eight hundred pounds was raised towards a four wheel drive vehicle for the Synod's Global Partner Church, the Presbyterian Church of Mozambique, Igreja Presbiteriana de Mocambique (IPM)

It is nearly ten years since the Synod's first fund-raising project for our Global Partner Church, purchased a four-wheel drive vehicle to keep the Church's central organisation in contact with

the parishes. Over the years the Isuzu has coped well with the demanding roads around Maputo but it now needs replacing. The synod is endeavouring to raise funds therefore to replace the old vehicle and other fund-raising efforts have included a strawberry themed open day at the home of the previous moderator Liz Mullen. Dave hopes to make his first visit to Mozambique in the not too distant future so will hopefully get a chance to be driven in the replacement vehicle.



Helen Hogg and Dave Herbert

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## Letters from Manchuria

Neil and Helen Sinclair, (pictured below) members of Stockton Road URC in Sunderland, recently held a book signing at Waterstones in Sunderland to mark the publication of their new book 'Letters from Manchuria'.

It was in the original St George's Presbyterian Church building in Villiers Street that the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of England decided to start a mission to China in 1847. William Burns was immediately ordained as a missionary and travelled to South East China where his work on establishing a Christian Church began.

In 1867 William Burns travelled to Manchuria in North East China where he founded another mission which was this time staffed by Irish and Scottish Presbyterian missionaries including Helen's parents. One of the Scottish missionaries mentioned in the book was Ella Gordon who became the first woman minister of the Presbyterian Church of England at St Mark's, High Howdon in 1956.

### John Humphreys (Cont.)

This was one of John's prayers:  
"Holy God, open our hearts to feel. Open our eyes to see. Open our ears to hear the anguish of ignored humanity in the anguish of Jesus. Open our church to give generous welcome and genuine care and then, gracious God, release us again and again to be his followers, journeying into the heart of Jesus, your heart made flesh."

John concluded one paper he had written, "I hope that I have shared enough to let you feel the spirit of life together to release some of the energy that God gives us. There are no final words in how to be a congregation—but I hope we may be helped to develop the flavour, sparkle, inclusiveness and the ability of freeing people (including ourselves) to be and attract disciples. Not the end!"

I know that we have seen enough of God's Grace in John's life to release that energy of Love, that we call the Spirit, through our lives – so it really isn't the end!  
**The Rev Kevin Watson**

Helen's mother, Marion Young arrived in China in 1935 and for the next six years she wrote weekly letters home to her parents in Ireland. Her letters give a vivid picture of life in the market town of Faku and of the villages in Inner Mongolia which Marion visited as part of her mission work.

Marion's letters and photos were passed down to Helen and Neil and they had to make difficult decisions on which of the letters should be included in the book. Helen read out the selected passages while Neil typed into the computer. They then chose the photographs that would best illustrate the story.

The Right Hon. Douglas Alexander, the former Secretary of State for International Development, whose grandparents were missionaries in Manchuria, writes in the foreword, 'what emerges is the deep respect and indeed fascination with which Marion and so many of her colleagues regarded their Chinese students and the culture and civilisation of which they were part'



Royalties from the book will support the Orphans Programme of Amity, a Chinese Christian organisation, through the Friends of the Church in China. Letters from Manchuria is published by Little Knoll Press  
[www.LittleKnollBookshop.co.uk](http://www.LittleKnollBookshop.co.uk)



**Moderator on air:** The Northern Synod Moderator, The Revd David Herbert, was interviewed recently by the Revd Sheila Hamil, a Church of England priest who is retired from parish work and who broadcasts at 7 am every Sunday morning on Radio Tyneside, hospital radio. Sheila talked to Dave about his time as an army chaplain in Bosnia and the construction of the Peace Garden at Crookham Church in North Northumberland as well as his time at a community project in North Shields.

It's possible to listen to the two interviews via Sheila's website: [sheilahamil.co.uk](http://sheilahamil.co.uk)  
There are many resources on Sheila's website which she encourages people to make use of.

# North Western Synod

## Two New Cannons



On Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> February I was privileged to be present in Carlisle Cathedral for the collation and installation of two new Canons. The Revd Peter Clement, an Anglican priest, was being both collated (an Anglican process) and installed as a Residentiary Canon. The Revd Sarah Moore, our Cumbria Area President and SCM minister, was simply being "installed" as an Ecumenical Canon – an honour being bestowed in view of Sarah's contribution and commitment on behalf of the URC over the past 5 years towards the ecumenical Cumbrian project "God for All." **(the picture shows Sarah with the Bishop of Carlisle, the right Revd James Newcombe).**

The efforts in Cumbria towards ecumenical unity across the county now include the Salvation Army together with the Methodists, Anglicans and United Reformed Church. The work continues to progress in the formation of Mission Communities across Cumbria. The work is exciting though of course, as with any changes, not without its wrinkles.

However a meeting on Monday 6<sup>th</sup> February in the evening of one of the launch sessions for the 2018 ecumenical Bishop's Mission to Cumbria in March showed something of the enthusiasm for our partnership in mission with a packed meeting at our Carver Community Church in Windemere. **The Rev Andrew Mills**

## Big Day out at Southport

Following the success in 2015 when North Western Synod and Mersey Synod held their **BIG DAY OUT** we are once again planning a joint **BIG DAY OUT** on **Saturday 8 July 2017** at **Southport Convention Centre**.

The programme will include the following speakers:

- Revd John Proctor - Acts: The Church in Action
- Revd Steve Chalke - The Church and Peacemaking Initiatives
- Revd Richard Church - Walking the Way
- Revd Andrew Roberts - Holy Habits
- Lawrence Moore
- Grace Pengelly

We are also holding the following workshops:

- Dementia – awareness in worship & work within the community
- Developing the Church in the community
- Gathering and telling stories
- Puppets in worship
- The Naked Vicar
- Magic/clowning
- Art in worship
- Drama
- Crafty Christians & Fun Science

We will be asking each church to bring a large sealed envelope which publicises their own church. The outside of the envelope to be decorated in any way they like – but churches are asked not to put the name of their church on the outside of the envelope.

Churches to include in the envelope the name of their church and any interesting information they would like to share about it. The intention is that each church will take a different church envelope away with them at the end of the day, and perhaps make links with that church after the event.

The **Big Day Out** is one way we are building relationships with each other.



# Yorkshire Synod

## Prayer Pilgrimage around Leeds

In late spring last year, I was attending a Leeds Mission and Care Group meeting in South Leeds, Beeston Hill.

For a while now we as a group have been investigating how we can support each other's congregations in their missional life. To this end a Leeds Partnership has been formed with most of the Leeds URC and LEP churches joining.

After the meeting at Beeston Hill I had a vision to visit all the churches with M&C to learn about their individual situations and pray with them. This was met with joy and my invitation to join me on my pilgrimages was taken and accepted by many.

I went on three walks; one in South Leeds visiting St Mary's in the Wood Morley, the Church in Cottingley, Beeston Hill United Free Church and The URC in South Leeds. The Second walk took me over the North of Leeds; starting at Wigton Moor (my home church) to St Andrews Roundhay, Trinity United in Harehills and Christ Church, Halton. My final walk would go through West Leeds starting at Armley walking up the very steep hill to West Park, down to Headingley St Columba and then on to Stainbeck Church.

A much fuller account of these walks can be had direct from me, and I encourage you to please read it, but for now let me summarise what I discovered walking the streets of my beautiful, colourful city.

Firstly, people are amazing. At no point during my excursions was I alone. Indeed, I was joined for all three walks by Jenny Poulter from Christ Church in Halton. Along the way we were joined by another seven people over the course. Each had their own tales about the places we were passing, and each shared openly. Then there's the people who met us at their churches for prayer. I was told stories of multiple baptisms by emersion to plans to renovate buildings; prayer walks around communities, memorial gardens and celebrations of anniversaries. It was stunning how much faith

and courage people were showing to go out and meet the needs of their little stumping grounds. That's not to say that they don't have concerns. Whether it be the very real prospect of a long term vacancy or having to choose between mission or letting out space to balance the books to the almost uniform cry of "we're not getting any younger" every church will face its battles, but they will face them faithfully and prayerfully which already puts them in good stead.

Secondly, Leeds is a fascinating city. My routes intentionally avoided too many main roads in favour of residential areas. As I walked I spotted manicured gardens, areas of obvious poverty

mixed with pride for the area and such diverse architecture and scenery. As we walked we greeted so many different people. All shapes and sizes, colours and diversities. I have fallen in love with Leeds again.

Thirdly, the Holy Spirit is moving. As we face the challenge of the decline of traditional church we have to ask ourselves not "what do we do?" or even "how do we change?" but more "What does God want to do through us?". It was obvious to me that the URC in Leeds is ready for the challenge, the change and the blessings that come from searching for the will of God and following it faithfully. Every church has a sense of the Holy Spirit and wants it to thrive within their little corner of the Earth but shaped in God's image.

I came out of these walks full of joy having been shown that as diverse the churches and memberships are, all the churches within the Leeds Mission and Care Group know their calling and are willing to shout it from the rooftops.

Finally, I'd like to share what happened next. I led a united service on September 18<sup>th</sup> at the URC in South Leeds to give thanks and praise for all we learned. It was a celebration of the churches and the city they dwell amongst. Early plans are being made for a 'bus pilgrimage' this year with the hope that more people will be able to visit different churches. Watch this space!

I have come out of these pilgrimages with my eyes opened to the active work the Holy Spirit is doing through the Leeds URC and LEP churches. I thank everybody for doing so and give thanks for all I've experienced.

**Alex Walker**



# Award Winning Street Pastors in Doncaster

Hall Gate URC is situated in the centre of Doncaster, on the very edge of clubland, with a ‘Gentleman’s Club’ directly opposite and a ‘Champagne Bar’ just three doors away. So when, in 2010, we were exploring our mission to the local community, it seemed right to explore setting up a Street Pastor Initiative. By coincidence - or was it a ‘God thing’ - conversations about such a scheme began at that time within the police Inter-Faith Advisory Group, of which I was a member. The discussions were going around in circles; no progress was being made. Then in the early hours one morning I awoke with the conviction that I had to do something about it.

“Here I am Lord ... I have heard you calling in the night!”

To cut as long story short, I initiated a small development group – a Baptist, a Methodist, one from the Assemblies of God, and me – and on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2011 Doncaster Street Pastors was launched. Currently we have 19 Street Pastors working in teams of three on the streets every Saturday night, as well as 10 Prayer Pastors who operate in pairs at our base in Hall Gate URC, praying for people involved or situations encountered while the teams are out on the streets.

All Street Pastors are fully trained, and operate under licence from the Ascension Trust, which dictates that any Initiative must be ecumenical, Street Pastors being the Christian Church’s response to urban problems. This is the great blessing of Street Pastors; Christians working together as the one Church of God. In Doncaster, we have 19 churches of all denominations involved actively, with many others supporting us in prayers through our Prayer Partners monthly prayer bulletin.

Street Pastors is all about partnership working. In Doncaster, we have a high level of credibility and trust, with excellent working relationships with the Police, the Health Care professionals, the teams who staff the NHS First Responder Car, the licensees and managers of the pubs and clubs, and the door security staff. We received the Police Award for Partnership Working in 2014 and again in 2016, as well as the High Sheriff’s Award in 2015 for our work in the community.

All Street Pastors are DBS checked, since we engage with people on the streets to care, listen, and offer practical help, especially to those who become vulnerable through drink. We help people to taxis, offer first aid or wait with a casualty for an ambulance. We offer water to those needing to sober up, flip-flops to girls with sore feet, and foil blankets to those inappropriately dressed for the outside temperature. We enter into conversations, offering a listening ear to those burdened with troubles and directing them to appropriate agencies if required, or answering questions about faith. Our Christian faith and desire to share God’s love with others is at the heart of what we do, but not at the forefront of what we say. Street Pastors is not about preaching but about practical demonstrations of the love of God.



Please pray for the work of Street Pastors. We value that support above all else. For more information: e-mail [doncaster@streetpastors.org.uk](mailto:doncaster@streetpastors.org.uk) **Rod Morrison**

## Mersey Synod

On 10th September, **Ruth Wilson** was inducted to the pastorate of Vicar’s Cross and Upton-by-Chester. Ruth was born and raised in Lincolnshire and lived and worked in Oxford and Cornwall before training for the ministry. Her final role was Directors Secretary/Events Manager for the Training Department (later Department of Mission) of Oxford Diocese. The job included organising training events for both clergy and laity and she sometimes joined in!

Ruth felt the call to ministry 10 years ago but family circumstances prevented the move. Finally, her daughter, Megan, said, “*You’d be great!*” and so she candidated and trained at Westminster College. Ruth finished her training in 2015, but then spent a year as a transitional minister working with three pastorates in the Cambridge area whilst Megan finished her GCSE’s. Each of the pastorates was in need of change and leadership and she was able to help them move forward.

Ruth describes Chester as “*gorgeous*” and her congregations as “*just lovely*”. She enjoys the pastoral side of ministry, helping people and offering support. **(Cont. Page 6)**



## Waterloo Welcomes Linda



Waterloo United Free Church, a joint Baptist and URC, had been without a minister for 5 years. In September 2016, they welcomed Linda Hopkins as Baptist Minister in Training. Linda was no stranger to the church, having grown up at the, then, Baptist church before

moving to Sussex in her early twenties. She is a qualified youth and community worker and an experienced educator, working as a tutor of youth ministry at Oasis College in London before returning North in 2010 to work as a tutor at Northern Baptist College until August 2016. One of the things Linda encouraged early on was better communication. While small in number, the congregation were involved in various outreach activities, mainly through 'In Another Place' which engages creatively in the community, through a gospel choir, school assembly teams and large scale events, such as the Narnia Experience. There was also a project underway to secure the future of the church's beautiful building. After some failed attempts to sell the building, the church took the decision to look at the possibility of it being used as an arts and community venue, the project was named 'Open'.

*"We wanted to let people beyond the church know about the opportunity to get involved in 'Open', to find out more about using the space at the church as well as letting people know about who we are and what we do. We recognised that, these days, an online presence is essential. Even though very few of our congregation use computers, we know that anyone who wants to find out about us will search online."*

It took just a couple of short meetings with Synod Communications Officer, Andy Jeens, to get set up, and with a very minimal cost (approximately £20), the church now has a website that provides a face in the community. *"It's a way of saying 'We're here, we're a caring worshipping community' and a link for us to share information about the 'Open' initiative."*

Linda Hopkins [www.waterloounitedfreechurch.org.uk](http://www.waterloounitedfreechurch.org.uk)

## Alzheimer's URC "Home"

The Halton and St Helens Alzheimer's Society holds a fortnightly Activity Group at Ormskirk Street URC, St Helens, which provides an opportunity for the carer and the person living with dementia to meet with others. The group facilitates a range of activities including table football, quizzes, crafts and games.

The group also provides a Dementia Support Worker to support carers, and meets on alternate Thursdays between 10.30am and 12.15pm. The group is part of an ongoing commitment to make our communities more inclusive to those living with dementia, their carers and families. While it is led by the Alzheimer's Society, it also reflects the church's own determination to offer a welcoming, inclusive and supportive space. Donald Swift, local church leader, says:

*"We hire rooms to local organisations who help carers and others with special needs. Many are related to those with mental health problems including an umbrella organisation for mental health. One group, which serves a group of physically and/or mentally disabled people, was closed down by the local authority and now operate independently. They meet four days a week and benefit tremendously from use of our lift."*

*We have a very close relationship with the local Alzheimer's Society and their members, both carers and those in various stages of the disease. The group includes a retired URC minister and a member of one of our sister URC churches in the town. They were all invited to our annual Carer's Carol Service and lunch which was attended by over 100 people including many members of the Society. They are always made welcome whenever they come and they know we care and they feel they belong."*

Andrew Page



Ormskirk Street URC, St Helens

## Ruth Wilson (Cont. from Page 5)

She is keen that people are shown that they are being looked after and held. As I talked to her, she was in the middle of a succession of funerals, an opportunity for her to put these pastoral skills to good use. Ruth believes that funerals can be an opportunity to give a positive impression of church as the families and friends are offered support in their time of need. She is also a trained Street Pastor. Ruth's main interests are cooking and walking Cola, the chocolate Labrador. She loves being outside and the sights and sounds of nature. The proximity of North Wales is also a draw. On her "bucket list" is the ascent of Snowdon – on foot of course! When she was a teenager, she went to Switzerland and the view from the mountaintops, Ruth feels, is a vision of heaven.

I am sure we all wish Ruth and Megan God's blessing as they settle into Mersey Synod and I am sure that the churches will be equally blessed.

Peter Lyth.

# The National Synod of Scotland

**Augustine Assignments** For those of you who don't know, Augustine Assignments is a youth group that takes place at Augustine United Church, Edinburgh on the first and third Saturday of each month. Normally we either bake or do art assignments and then discuss the impact this can have upon the church and the relations between the church, culture and other things.

Some of the activities we've done have included making 'no knead bread' and vegan scones. When we do art assignments, it's a set of challenges to do with the work of an artist or artists.



This has included looking at art that is based on a number which has a level of significance to the person. On this week, the final items included a measurement of height using Pepsi max bottles and a set of significant events at each age that was a prime number.

We have also taken newspaper and magazine clippings and turned them into 'fake flyers'. The idea behind this was that we could express an idea for an event which, while fictitious, we felt would be interesting and worthwhile. This was a hugely fascinating week leading to flyers for events such as a popcorn eating competition, time machine building classes and the slogan "God is love: you are probably observing it".

Overall that week led to interesting discussion as to how we view the world and what it is that leads us to take the actions we do.

The making of the 'no knead bread' was centred around discussion to do with salt – particularly its history and the way the salt trade has shaped the world and brought together people and cultures.

We also discussed how as Christians we should be able to meet new people and, without judging them for their choices and beliefs, be able to have a reasonable discussion – not to convince them they are wrong, merely to find common ground and to better understand others and to a lesser degree ourselves.

Augustine Assignments is a fascinating place where we feel able to express ourselves as who we are. It is hugely enjoyable and I am looking forward to the sessions and discussions that will happen in the coming weeks and months.

**Joshua Undy-Jamison**

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## New arrival



**The Revd Lindsey Sanderson** was inducted to Hamilton URC and the Joint Pastorate of East Kilbride and Hamilton on February 19th.

She is pictured with the Moderator of the National Synod of Scotland, The Revd David Pickering.

## Retirement

**The Revd Leslie Morrison** retired from Duke Street, Leith, on 28<sup>th</sup> February, having served there since 1993 and in the URC since 1982. Leslie will be continuing to serve the National Synod of Scotland as Convenor Finance and Property Committee.



# Peedie Kirk Burns Night 2017

The premier Burns Night in Orkney', so commented BBC Radio Orkney presenter Robbie Fraser as another Peedie Kirk Burns Night drew to a close. The Peedie Kirk has hosted a fund raising Burns Night for many years, with great support from local people and traders. Burns Nights in Orkney have a different tradition for the meal, with mince served alongside the haggis and neeps and tatties combined in a traditional Orkney dish known as clapshot.

With musical entertainment by the world famous Wrigley Sisters along with Strathspey & Reel Society some new? 'facts' were shared. Firstly during the Immortal memory delivered by Councillor Harvey Johnston, it was advised that Burns registered surname at birth was Burnes. With the unusual approach in Orkney of town and village names being made based on local surnames, there was the possibility raised that the origin of Burns family could be from Burness Orkney? Or was that stretching it a bit far, somewhat akin to the claim in the BBC 2 series this spring, 'Britain's Ancient Capital, the Secrets of Orkney'.

Secondly we learnt that women in Orkney really do not approve of men wearing socks and sandals. Not even the new 'all in one version' as humorously presented by Christine Sinclair during the Reply from the Lasses to Fraser Murray who had made the toast. A brilliant night was had by all.

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## Puss in Boots

It was laughs all round at Saughtonhall United Reformed Church when the Saughtonhall drama group got the pantomime season off to a riotous start recently with Puss in Boots.

Pictured right are Rachel Hegarty and Scott Kerr.  
**Photo Sarah Howley**



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## And finally .....at The Windermere Centre

Church House has announced that the date for the next "Line Management Training" is finalised. The training is scheduled for **3 and 4 April 2017** at **The Windermere Centre** and will be led by Jane Baird and Helen Bird. This short course gives you an opportunity to learn about the tools and skills required for first Line Management, with sessions exploring the essentials required for line managing employees.

Those who are interested in booking a place for the training, should email Helen Bird at [helen.bird@urc.org.uk](mailto:helen.bird@urc.org.uk) as soon as possible. Anyone planning to stay at The Windermere Centre for the training should contact the Centre directly to book their accommodation. The first session is likely to start at 2pm on the third of April and finish at 1pm the following day.

Jane Baird is the Deputy General Secretary for Administration and Resources for the United Reformed Church and Helen Bird is the Human Resources Officer for the United Reformed Church