CITYtheology The magazine of the Leeds Church Institute



"Cities are full of power and also of potential in a way that the countryside can never be. Lots of people are here, rubbing up along one another, raw, tired and dirty.... The closer we live in physical proximity to one another, the greater the potential for the intermingling of ideas, for cooperation and for interdependence."

Ed Carlise

makes the argument that YHWH's call is to radical engagement in the city.



What are the key ingredients for life-giving ecumenical mission in Leeds?

Paul Lancaster reports.

Ahead of Jonathan Bartley's Hook Lecture, Ed Carlisle asks whether cities can be good, and green.

Visual Theology: Co-creating with God, experiences of beauty and well being and Eco-cycle



Wednesday 12th September 2018 sees Green Party co-leader Jonathan Bartley delivering the annual Hook Lecture at Leeds Minster. Here, Ed Carlisle, Parliamentary and Council candidate with the Green Party in Central Leeds, prepares for Jonathan Bartley's visit by presenting a distinctively Christian perspective on cities and their potential for good.

I don't know about you, but we get a fair few Jehovah's Witness leaflets through our doors down in Beeston. They always carry a version of the same image of diverse people in verdant nature. It looks like a return to the Garden of Eden. I don't mean to be mean as they seem like nice folk and it's nice dreamy stuff, but I think they're missing a trick.

Whilst Scripture starts in nature (the Garden, in Genesis 2-3), it ends with a city (the New Jerusalem, in Revelation 21).

In between, it's fair to say that many of the writers of Scripture take a fairly dim view of cities. There is Babel/Babylon of course which is an archetypal centre of all things wrong. Then there's God's judgements against Sodom, Gomorrah and Nineveh. For many of the prophets, like Isaiah and Ezekiel, critiquing the cities of their time was standard fare and both Jesus and Paul deliver scathing criticisms of certain cities and aspects of urban life. The cities in the Bible largely become symbols for inequity, disconnection, immorality, corruption, violence and rebellion.

Meanwhile, so many of the positive and most memorable Scriptural stories, the ones we tell in Sunday Schools, are pastoral. Think of Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David and others wandering around in the countryside, as well as all those references to sheep and shepherds, Micah's Mount Zion, John the Baptist, Jesus' beatitudes, his forty days in the wilderness, his ascension and so on. It's all very rural.

This means that for many of us, we associate the countryside with good things and cities with the bad. It is a primal memory that has become etched on our collective psyche. We are at best ambivalent about cities. It is also true that in Leeds, and other places that are similar sociologically and geographically, Christians collectively drift towards the countryside or the suburbs (the almost countryside). Why wouldn't we, when that's where YHWH is, waiting for us in the Garden? But is that right, or is YHWH actually calling us back to the city?

I like a good walk in the rolling countryside as much as the next person. We all long for tranquillity, for the quiet day. But YHWH seems perversely interested in the city, and we flee it at our peril.

What has this to do with the environment and sustainability? A generation ago, many of us were led to believe that environmentalism was a niche hobby and a wholesome lifestyle choice.

Increasingly, it's becoming apparent that it, or at least the kind of environmentalism that might possibly just save us from ourselves, demands a radical (literally, 'from the roots') and complete shaking up of society. It requires a realignment of priorities, a restructuring and a reordering. We might even call it a repentance.

Perhaps that sounds too much like an intangible and impossible revolution, and yet I was really struck a few years ago by the introduction to the Transition Towns Handbook. In it, writer and environmentalist Rob Hopkins makes the case that, whilst we do need new technologies, new political systems, and much more besides, developing a deeply sustainable culture starts with each of us, and our relationships.

He argues that in order to respond generously and

creatively to the multiple challenges we face in the coming decades, we need to be nurturing trust, hope, love and other similar assets in our neighbourhoods, our communities, our towns, and cities. Out of these assets alone can spring cooperation and innovation. Then, come what may, our chances of making a Good Society are much improved.

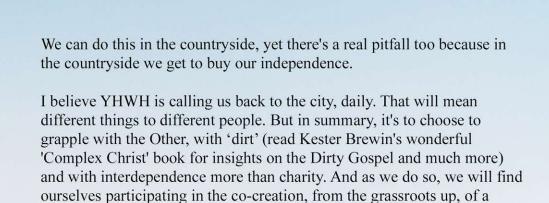
That's where the city comes in. We should all be rightly sceptical of the city: it has a long history of being a place of tyranny, of a special kind of consolidated oppression and depression, of dirt, corruption, collective alienation and seats of power. As with cities, we are worried by power. But (to summarise a great book called 'Power and Love' by Adam Kahane) we need to hold love and power in delicate dynamic balance if we want to achieve any kind of meaningful change in the world. Each one without the other is toothless.

Cities are full of power and also of potential in a way that the countryside can never be. Lots of people are here, rubbing up along one another, raw, tired and dirty. Cities are complex, it's often difficult and conflictual, but the potential for change, for a different kind of society to burst out, is here.

And not only is the raw material (that is, us, the people, full of power) here, but so too are the conditions. The closer we live in physical proximity to one another, the greater the potential for the intermingling of ideas, for cooperation and for interdependence. These act like chemicals forced together in a test tube.

Getting down to brass tacks, a heaving city affords us rich opportunities to travel together, to learn together, to eat together, to work together: to share and to collaborate. That's why in industrialised countries, people living in cities have a 40% average smaller Carbon Footprint than those in the countryside.

But we all face a challenge here. In our individualising culture, we are each an island, but YHWH invites us to something very different. To trust, to need, to share, to cooperate and to fuse. At base, these are the underpinning tenets of what we need for a more sustainable society.



richer, more relational, more creative and more sustainable society.

If our vision of the heavenly endgame is either a party in the sky or a pastoral paradise, our environmentalism will probably always be tokenistic, like an add-on or individualistic hobby.

That's not terrible, but not the enthralling, radical and eternally sustainable New Jerusalem, that I believe YHWH is calling us into. How can we each help to build that enthralling, radical, sustainable city, starting here today?

Rob Hopkins (2008) *Transition Towns Handbook* Green Books Adam Kahane (2010) *Power and Love: A Theory and Practice of Social Change* Berrett-Koehler Publishers Kester Brewin (2004) *Complex Christ - Signs of Emergency in the Urban Church* Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge

Co-creating with God

A series of photographs that express how we create stories with creation over time.



Visual theologians: Lawrence Cockrill, Lydia Groenewald, Jane Mansfield

Inspired by: LCI's afternoon with Revd Dr Tom Oord on 'Photography and Spirituality' where Tom talked about making photos as an expression of co-creating with God.

Location: Beckett's Park and St Chad's Churchyard, Far Headingley

Experiences of beauty and well being

"For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known."



(Imagine a smell of wild garlic accompanying this photo)

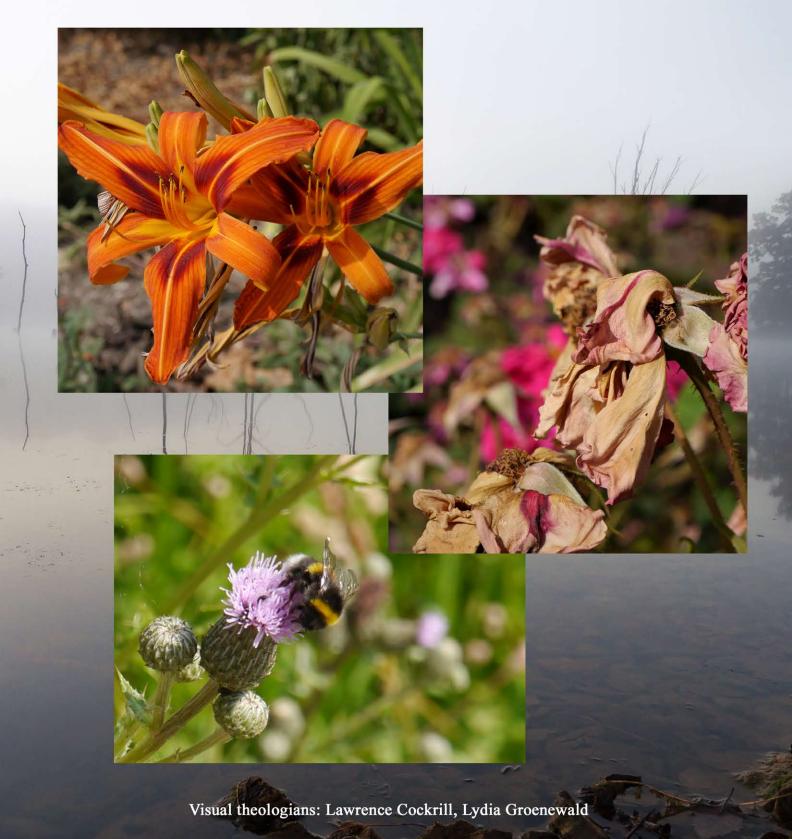
Visual theologians: Lawrence Cockrill, Lydia Groenewald, Jane Mansfield, Doreen Haupt

Inspired by: LCI's seminar on Experiencing Beauty and Well-being with Tasia Scrutton and Mark Wynne from Leeds University, which offered insight from Theology and Philosophy

Location: Bramley Fall Park

Eco-Cycle

Images reflecting stages in creation's process of birth, growth, decline, death and rebirth.



Inspired by: LCI's Eco-cycle retreat day with Shaeron Caton-Rose reflecting on our experiences of growth and loss

Location: Middleton Park



There has long been a view that ecumenical mission activity in Leeds is strong and effective.

"Leeds is a place where ecumenical things happen" said the late Lewis Burton, first Ecumenical Officer for West Yorkshire. In a 2015 *Ecumenism in Leeds* report by Sue Hoey, on behalf of Leeds Church Institute, there was a similar statement; "Over the last ten years ecumenical activity in Leeds has blossomed..."

These claims are evidenced by the scope, breadth and variety of the 75 plus ecumenically-based projects that are now operating in the Leeds District. In broad terms the projects are tackling challenges around poverty, homelessness, hunger, housing, education, cross-cultural mission, and issues affecting ex-offenders, pregnant women and sex workers. There is also a lot of work focused on students, youth and children. Given this positive picture, what can we learn and what are the life giving ingredients that have given rise to ecumenical mission in Leeds?

Earlier this year, I conducted research based on this question on behalf of Leeds Church Institute. In this research, an ecumenical mission project is defined as a Christian organisation/project/network that includes two or more different Christian denominations or traditions. The findings are based on information gathered from 75 ecumenical mission based projects and ten in-depth interviews. The following summary highlights what these projects considered 'life-giving ingredients for mission'.

Prayer and the work of the Holy Spirit

During the last 20 years, prayer has been a vital ingredient under girding ecumenical mission across the city. Prayer activity has taken various shapes and is most noticeable recently through the Leeds Lent Prayer Diary and Prayer for Leeds (P4L).

Prayer for Leeds has been building a network of relationships in order to mobilise prayer with a focus on the various spheres of city life such as healthcare, business and education. The main occasions for united prayer have been monthly prayer lunches, 24 hour prayer events and the Global Day of Prayer. Although the prayer gatherings seek to be inclusive, they have been supported predominantly by those from newer Charismatic/Pentecostal churches.

The Leeds Lent Prayer Diary is a resource produced annually to inform and enable prayer for ecumenical mission and various mission projects. This diary is predominantly used by those in Anglican, Baptist, Catholic, Methodist and URC churches. It supports individual's prayers and is used a resource for These two focuses for prayer are not the only ones but they do represent prayer intentions with a Leeds-wide ecumenical mission focus.

Vision, Passion and Commitment

During the interviews two of the unspoken and probably most life giving of the ingredients is the vision and the passion of those involved. This was particularly noticeable with those involved with youth and children's work but not solely; the drive behind Faith in Elderly People and particularly its work and mission with those with dementia was also very evident. Many of the interviews lasted some time because there was a desire to express their heart for their work. It is also noticeable that initial vision and passion not only gave energy to the projects but opened up far more opportunities than were previously envisaged and enabled them to work beyond their reach. In virtually all of the projects it was the vision for the work that encouraged others to want to be part of steering groups and action teams.

Social Action and Evangelism

One of the main characteristics of the ecumenical projects is their emphasis on social need first rather than overt up-front evangelism. This represents a shift in theological thinking as well as in the form of mission. It was not so long ago that such an approach would have been dismissed by evangelicals as compromising the gospel whereas now many who would describe themselves as of an evangelical persuasion see no issue with this. One has only to look at the aims of each organisation to see how meeting a social need is very much to the fore. This is not suggesting that the gospel message is not being shared but as one project leader said this happened more indirectly. Another suggested that the main thrust of ecumenical mission was "social action and then evangelism tacked on, whereas before it was the other way round."

Vision, Passion and Commitment

Another striking aspect of the projects is the level of interconnectedness between them stemming

from an openness to share information and support one another. Every one of the ten interviewees said they had links and some level of relationship with either LCCT, Network Leeds, Hope for the Nations, Churches Together Groups and particular churches.

Intercultural and international relationships

In the last ten years, the population of Leeds has become even more multicultural and it is now designated as the second most diverse city in the UK after London. Many of the projects saw the need for stronger relationships between the various nationalities and believed that the credibility of Christian mission depended on it. Hope for the Nations and ADMIN in particular are promoting this. It is encouraging to see the growth of intercultural training being offered in various forms in order to encourage this.

Visibility

People talked about the importance of the visibility of their mission ensuring support and engagement from individuals and churches. Overall, people reported that building a reputation takes time and effort. For example, Hope for the Nations (HFTN) advertised its two main annual events for five years and gathered responses from many of the ethnic churches, but it took longer than this to be more widely recognised. A tipping point came when a report about its work was published and circulated at a key ecumenical event.

Those involved with youth and children's projects felt they had sufficient visibility since most people now were aware of their work. Other groups, including Home for Good and African Diaspora Ministries (ADMIN) would like to see greater development in this area and hoped this would come from networking and partnering with other churches.

Financial and general support

Finance is obviously a very practical ingredient for projects. Just over half of the projects in the Leeds Lent Prayer Diary received initial funding from Leeds Christian Community Trust or Seedbed Christian Community Trust. This is funding that has been provided by Christian philanthropists

from outside the city over a period of 15 years. Such funding has not been available to the same extent in the past couple of years.

Some projects reported current problems around finance, for example, Kidz Klub had to stop running one of their buses that picks up children and Sunflower ESOL said their biggest challenge was a lack of finance. On-going finance is considered a challenge and a worry by many.

Looking to the future

Those interviewed identified a number of issues that they hope to address to secure and develop their mission work into the future.

- A desire to see much wider church support rather than just committed individuals. The whole question of the relationship between church congregations and specific ecumenical mission projects is perhaps something that needs to be given more focused attention.
- New funding sources need to be identified and secured; and projects need to learn to work well in a context of increasing uncertainty. It has been suggested that there needs to be a closer relationship between those in business and mission projects, and there has been some evidence of financial support coming from this quarter.
- Many involved with mission in the city are increasingly above the age of 50 and not many from the younger generation are seen to be supporting it. It is important to acknowledge that those above the age of 50 have often great experience and capacity, and that they are an age group that is proportionally over represented in our churches. Nonetheless, it would be good to involve younger adults too.
- Many of the mission initiatives did not set out first and foremost to create an ecumenical project. Rather, they saw a particular need, developed a vision and had a passion in order to fill a gap. Since they were open to receiving help more widely they became ecumenical by default. It is important that there is space and support for such creativity in the future.

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Conclusions

It seems that there is hardly an area of city life that is not being covered to some degree. The projects don't just exist in isolation but interconnect meaningfully and purposefully with different networks across the city, with many gaining useful credibility with Leeds City Council and other secular bodies. Theological differences do not obstruct their work and there is a widespread recognition that social need is the first focus with opportunities to share the gospel taken when appropriate and sensitively. There is a widespread recognition of the transformative contribution that each is making to the life of the city and many individuals are supporting them financially or offering voluntarily help to maintain the work.

Key life giving ingredients that are sustaining ecumenical mission in Leeds include:

willingness to start a grassroots project targeting a particular issue or need

seeing social action as the first level of approach in living out and communicating the gospel

developing a clear vision and a passionate commitment to the cause

gaining support by mobilising others and finding sufficient financial support;

generous financial giving from philanthropists;

being open to networking and information sharing with similar organisations in the city

not allowing organisational, denominational or theological differences to obstruct the work

always working at building relationships across the city

recognising the need to work cross-culturally wherever possible

an increasing commitment to sharing in prayer and allowing the Holy Spirit to inspire and guide us finding the way forward

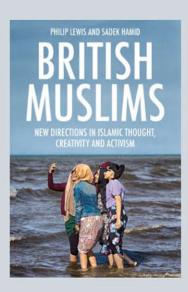
As we look closely at ecumenical mission in Leeds it is clear that there is much for us to take encouragement from.

British Muslims

EDINBURGH University Press

New Directions in Islamic Thought, Creativity and Activism Tuesday 25th September, 6.30pm-8pm at LCI





A chance to meet Philip Lewis and Sadek Hamid, authors of British Muslims, a well argued, evidence-based, exploration of what it means to be a Muslim in Britain today, written by two academics, 'one 'insider', one 'outsider'.

The authors look at how a new generation of Muslims are drawing on contemporary reformist thinking emerging from outside their parents' or grandparents' tradition and are using this to inform their activism.

At Leeds Church Institute (opposite the Corn Exchange, above 'Out of This World') 20 New Market Street, Leeds, LS1 6DG To book email events@leedschurchinstitute.org or phone 0113 391 7928

www.LCILeeds.org

Arek Hersh The Life and Times of a Holocaust Survivor Thursday 27th September, 2pm-4.30pm







Arek Hersh was born in Sieradz, Poland in 1928 and was taken to a camp in 1940 and eventually to Auschwitz.

Join us as we watch a film about Arek's life, learn about his journey and consider our own role in making society a safer place for all today, and tomorrow.

There will be a chance to ask Arek questions after the film.

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