

CITYtheology

MAGAZINE OF LEEDS CHURCH INSTITUTE

**BLACK HISTORY
(ONLY FOR ONE)
MONTH?**

**WHAT
ADJUSTMENTS
WOULD HELP
YOU TO
ENGAGE FULLY
IN WORSHIP
AT CHURCH?**

**WHAT DOES IT
MEAN TO LIVE
WELL WITH
DEMENTIA?**

**WHAT DOES
'JOURNEY TO
THE MANGER'
MEAN TO YOU?**

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Welcome to CITYTheology

This last edition of the year is centred around challenging marginalisation in different forms, and specifically focuses on disability and dementia, ethnicity and diverse cultural backgrounds. Read together, the articles and the poem illustrate essential aspects of the Leeds Church Institute's year of learning, activity and theological reflection. I hope you enjoy exploring the important questions raised and I would be pleased to hear your reflections on the content and the challenges of 2023.

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On a sad note, it was with great regret that I heard of the death of Nigel Greenwood on 3 November 2023. Nigel, among his many Christian commitments and engagements, was a long-time member of Leeds Church Institute. He will be missed.

Nigel was part of the ground-breaking work of Faith in Leeds that was formed as a local, ecumenical response to the Anglican Faith in the City Report in the 1980s. He went on to work for the One City Project at Leeds Church Institute in the late 1990s and early 2000s. In these ways, and working with others, Nigel sought to raise awareness of social justice issues in Leeds and develop a Christian perspective and response.

Nigel engaged in the innovative and impactful 'Retreat on the Streets'. These retreats involved spending a full day in the city centre with just 50p for food, and no distractions such as something to read or a friend for companionship. Rather, individuals were invited to focus on experiencing the presence of God and being aware of their neighbours on the streets, especially those on the margins of life, such as those who were homeless. People found these retreats demanding, yet deeply rewarding.

I would like to give thanks for Nigel's commitment to the Gospel and to the city and people of Leeds. May he rest in peace and rise in glory. Amen.

Dr Helen Reid,

Director of Leeds Church Institute



What adjustments would help you to engage fully in worship at church?

REV MO ONYETT, A MINISTER IN LEEDS SOUTH AND WEST METHODIST CIRCUIT, REFLECTS ON HER EXPERIENCES OF LEADING A WORSHIPPING COMMUNITY. SHE OFFERS A CONSIDERATION OF PRACTICAL AND SPIRITUAL ASPECTS OF INCLUSION, AS WELL AS THE CRUCIAL ROLE OF ADJUSTMENTS AND ROLE MODELS.



As a disabled person, I have spent much of my life asking for adjustments, so I can be included in the same activities as my peers and colleagues.

However, there was one area of my life where I was embarrassed to have to ask for any adjustments; that was in church. I am not sure why that was difficult for me. Perhaps, thinking back, there wasn't anyone else I saw asking for adjustments.

Learning from my experience, of feeling excluded from some worship activities, now that I am in full-time ministry, I think about how I can make adjustments, to enable as many people as possible to be meaningfully included in worship. I have also noticed, for the first time, just how many people self-exclude from worship due to not wanting to be 'a burden' or 'a bother'. This is especially common among older people experiencing reduced mobility or health concerns. This means they do not feel able to continue to be active in church leadership or preaching. I have been surprised, and concerned, to learn the decision to self-exclude often has far more to do with personal pride than practicality.

There is a saying, 'if you can't see it, you can't be it'. When I first began preaching I noticed that I rarely saw a preacher with a walking stick or mobility aid, and I certainly never saw another preacher my age with one (I was then in my mid 20s).

As a result, I hid my mobility impairment as much as I could. I am sure it would have been obvious to some, especially those present at my first interview, when I asked for an extra chair to put my leg on after an operation! Of course, I wasn't the first young disabled preacher, but to begin with I felt as though I was.

When I could no longer hide my waddling gait, and when the effort of standing reduced my ability to speak and I had to sit down to preach, something changed about the way I communicated the gospels. That change was not restricted to my posture, it changed the way I was perceived as a preacher. Part of the context from which I read scripture was on display for all to see, and when I began to speak openly about how my experience as a disabled person interacts with my faith, I encountered others who had struggled to be open about disability in church. Some members of the congregations I shared with began feeling empowered to share more of their own experience of disability and difference. That experience was not restricted to younger people. I met older people, who had previously been embarrassed to speak about their difficulties with mental and physical health. They reported being hesitant about taking on a position of leadership because of it.

This experience taught me that simply by being visible, as a disabled person in church, I was giving others permission to bring their whole selves to worship. My call to full time ministry came when I realised my experience was not unique and that many people, of all ages, have found it difficult to be

open about disability or ill health in church. It is not easy being a disabled person in ministry, however does anyone find ministry easy? Perhaps, it is harder for those who do not have a visible impairment to find the confidence to ask for support.

Within the Methodist Church in Great Britain, I am privileged to be part of the Solidarity Circle for Living with Disability. This was set up as part of the strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity. Together they seek to make the church fully inclusive. The Solidarity Circle is a small group of disabled people, from across the Methodist Connexion, who have volunteered to support one another. Together we function as a critical friend to the Connexion on matters of accessibility. Whilst it is sad the church had to legislate for inclusion, it does send a positive message to those who have found themselves on the margins of church, longing for full inclusion.

In July this year, I was pleased to be invited to be part of Leeds Church Institute's 'Even the Resurrection Bears Scars' disability theology event. The one-day event was well attended and brought together disabled Christians from across Leeds. The event was a precious moment in ministry for me. We participated in worship through touch, British Sign Language, and spoken word. We used the story of the risen Christ, meeting with Thomas, which reminds us that Jesus was inclusive of the diverse ways we encounter and learn from the world around us. That account of the appearance of Jesus also confirms that the resurrected Jesus retained the physical, and no doubt mental, scars of his crucifixion.

That the divine body, in whose image we are made, was bent, and broken, like many disabled bodies, is deeply affirming for me.

The cross is central to our understanding of God, yet we tend to sanitise the image of Christ and to separate it from human experience.

We have long recognised that those who live through torture and trauma bear its mental scars. A person does not simply forget an experience of that nature, even if there is no lasting mental ill health. As one who was fully human, as well as divine, Jesus must surely have experienced mental

distress leading up to his death. His reported last words in both Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34 could be said to evidence that. When we declare that Jesus understands the breadth of human experience, including pain, we declare that he experienced pain in both body and mind. I accept it may be challenging to consider that God would demonstrate such vulnerability, as to be scarred in mind and body, through crucifixion; yet it is no more challenging than the concept of God becoming vulnerable through being born as a baby.

I do not deny that Jesus was transformed, through resurrection. I suggest that the resurrected body and mind of Jesus were indelibly marked by the experience of what it means to be fully human. For me, this confirms that impaired bodies and distressed minds are not only acceptable to God, but they also reflect something of the image of God.

I have been in full-time ministry for a little over a year now. In that time, I have met some wonderful visible disabled role models in church. Most of these people are younger than 60. Acknowledging that disability affects older people too, it would be good to have more older visible disabled role models, as well as younger ones. I want to encourage everyone to ask for the adjustments you need; please ask about hearing loops, large print books, wider doors, lifts to church, online services, and other things that would enable you to continue to play a full part in worship and church life more generally. However, having to ask for adjustments can be exhausting, so I also want to encourage non-disabled people to ask disabled people what would make churches more easily accessible for them.

The body of Christ is central to the Christian faith: his birth, crucifixion, death, and resurrection. The apostle Paul explained that the church operates as the body of Christ, active in the world (1 Cor 12:12-14). He sets out that all believers are equal parts of the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:25). That is often quoted when we are explaining the concept of being fully inclusive in church. So, why are those verses so easily forgotten when we might be the ones who need special treatment, or when we think someone may be asking too much? The body of Christ is only complete when all who bear his image are working together effectively. Therefore, we will only be doing church well, when all who bear the image of God are truly welcome and included.

What does it mean to live well with dementia?

Consideration of the value of journeying together through the challenges and joys of life.

SIR JOHN BATTLE OFFERS A RESPONSE TO THE BOOK *JOURNEYING TOGETHER: ACCOMPANYING PEOPLE LIVING WITH DEMENTIA* BY JOE CORTIS AND PIA MATTHEWS.



In this book, the themes of human identity and hope come through strongly from a deeply spiritual theological tradition. Our identity, as human beings, is social and this aspect is clear in the title *Journeying Together*, as well as throughout the whole text of the book. It reminded me of a passage, written by Pope Francis early in his papacy, when he suggested that the whole point of our life is walking with other people. He said this:

—— “ ——

It's important to walk in unity without running ahead, without nostalgia for the past. And while you walk, you talk, you get to know one another, you tell one another about yourself, you grow as a family.

—— ” ——

So, we should ask ourselves: How do we walk? How does our community walk? Do we walk together? And what are we doing to make sure we walk truly in unity?

The image of walking and journeying together in this way would have been helpful to me when my father was struck down with a stroke. He spent two years unable to speak before he died. There was the challenge of going to visit him and learning to communicate just with gentle touch and your eyes. Or sometimes just being there and travelling all the way over to Wigan and coming back again while all the time he slept. Positively viewing this kind of relationship as ‘walking together’ is very helpful and resonates throughout the book *Journeying Together*. It has a message not just for carers, but also for those who serve, such as those taking Holy Communion to those in a care home, as it advises how that can be handled with the sense of walking together.

If you just pick up the book and start to read it, the first 40 pages are stories of those people who have cared: Maggie, Andrea, Mike, Maureen

and Rhoda. Their stories are so powerful. You immediately make personal connections with your own circumstances and wider experience. However, each story demonstrates that every person living with dementia is unique.

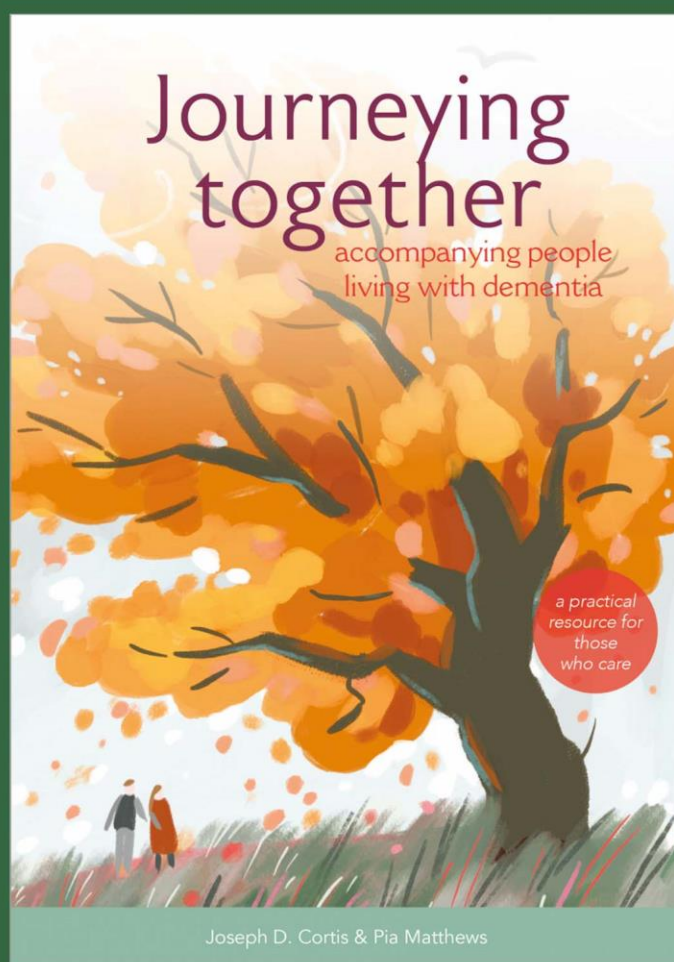
The message, all the way through, is that you have to be attentive to the person, regarding them as someone who can contribute. It is that person-centred, person-focused approach that's really at the heart of the dignity of the person.


This is central to Church teaching and all human social relationships. It is echoed in a document, recently published by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England & Wales, entitled *Love the Stranger*. The document, which is about asylum seekers and refugees, places the human being at the heart of pastoral outreach, looking beyond statistics and policies to the person. It makes a strong statement, that each person has a face, a name and an individual story, and must not be reduced to numbers and statistics. I was, and remain, struck by how this is so important in journeying with people, such as those living with dementia and with asylum seekers, as well as other people too, of course.

This insistence on the need to be person-centric and attentive to the personal details of others is also mentioned in the section of the book on the end of life and dying, which I felt was so encouraging. I recently attended a conference with the St Vincent de Paul Society (SVP), where there was a presentation on caring for people through the process of depression and dying. A graph was presented showing the increasing numbers of British people applying to go to Dignitas, because they feel their identity and hope is gone. One statement in this book stood out for me in relation to this: "Certainly Christians live in the hope of fullness of life as eternal life in friendship with God. Nevertheless, this does not mean that our earthly life has little meaning or should not be lived as fully as possible. Moreover, to believe that a life is useless or burdensome fails to cherish the life we have been given. Indeed, the process of dementia is a part of the gradual unfolding of the

mystery of our life and life unfolds in relationships." I did not think there could have been a better summary of the theology of the whole issue than that statement.

From reading and reflecting on *Journeying Together*, I have learnt more about living well with dementia, as well as caring for someone living with dementia. However, the book has a much wider reference than solely those caring for someone living with dementia. It expresses a rather deep theology about the nature of our relationship with each other, and I think it's something that all of us needs to learn from and to work with. It really is what may be called good news.



If you wish to purchase a copy of *Journeying Together* for £10, please contact Alistair at Leeds Church Institute on finance@leedschurchinstitute.org 

Recommended reading:

Love the Stranger - a Catholic response to refugees and migrants can be found at www.cbcew.org.uk/love-the-stranger/ 

A psalm for those journeying together with dementia.

Lord, you have searched for me and know me as I am.
If I feel lost, you can find me, still.
You understand the thoughts of my heart
even when words escape from me.
You perceive the way I have in mind
when my friends cannot see the road ahead.
You pick up the fragments of my desires,
provide loving hands to weave these threads
into garments to protect me.
Even if I forget to praise you, your faithfulness
feeds me; you remember my history,
and share all my discoveries.

Lord, you search with us, and know how we long
to make smooth the path for our companions,
sweeping away the obstacles that trip them up.
When we are bruised and feel broken,
you soothe us with your wounded hands;
when our heads ache and spin,
you lift from them your crown of thorns.
When loneliness closes us in,
your presence opens new doors. When we stumble,
you are there to steady our steps.
The knowledge of you shines on our high spirits,
and brightens our lowest moments.

Lord, you will always know your sheep and search for them,
the ram, the yearling, the ewe, and lead us
to the fold, safe from the wolves of the world.
You will place your laughter in our mouths,
even as our eyes shed your tears.
You nourish us at your table,
and refresh our thirsty souls with grace.
We are yoked with you in a trinity of care –
needed, given, received.
All the day long, you walk with us,
and when the night closes in, and darkness falls
there you are, beside us, our place of rest.



Black History (only for one) Month?

DWAYNE HUTCHINSON, FAITH AND RACIAL JUSTICE LEAD FOR LCI, REFLECTS ON BLACK HISTORY MONTH AND TOKENISM.



Thinking back to the Autumn, whether it was unconscious, accidental or deliberate, some people and organisations may have approached Black History month like this...



“Quick, it’s October 2023. Get the Black History resources out. Even if we haven’t made anything for this year, get the resources that we used last year. Put them up, fast! Make sure you don’t damage them. We can use the resources again next year. Maybe the years after too. We’ve spent so much time creating them.

Wow, this display looks great. This should make everyone happy. And I think we’ve covered the major topics for Black History as well. Slavery, oppression and black people dying early. This is what we usually hear in Black History Month. If we

miss these points out, our display won’t reflect Black History properly.

Phew, I am so glad that we kept these resources from all those years ago. I didn’t think these resources could last for so long. If we keep them in good condition, it will save us so much time and effort creating another display for every Black History Month in October. Plus, we don’t have much of an allocated budget to create a new one like we did a few years ago, so this will make our leadership and management team happy, to know that it won’t cost them a lot of money to meet our diversity targets.

Just stick this year’s date on top of the resources so that it looks relevant. And then next year, we can do the same again. I am so glad that we thought of this idea.

Remember, we have the new starters next week so it will be a fresh resource for them. Those who have been here for years probably won’t even say anything if they see them again. They probably have forgotten the resources because it has been

that long.

Oh, I almost forgot, make sure that we post a few social media posts. It will be great for everyone to see what we have achieved this month.

Right, it's almost the end of October. We need to stop thinking about Black History and focus on another subject for November. Black History Month is almost finished.



Black History Month finished yesterday. Please make sure that no Black History resources are left on display. We will put them back up next October.

Remember, we only promote, support and talk about Black History in October. If we keep our displays up any longer, or make social media posts about Black History outside of October, it could make us look outdated.

Resources taken down.

"Well done everyone. I think we did a great job this year to celebrate Black History Month."

OK. Let's pause and reflect on these statements, thought patterns, and actions. Black History Month. Almost finished? Black History. Finished by the end of October? Black History, only for one month? Well done everyone. What? Wait a good minute. This was not done well at all.

This is tokenism. This is all wrong.

Unfortunately, this happens far too often, year after year, and it is the approach of many people and organisations.

How on earth can everyone learn the in-depth history of Black People, who are the global majority of people, in thirty-one days? There is only so much anyone can learn about any subject in that amount of time, especially if they then forget it until next year.

Oh, wait another minute. I know what they can learn in thirty-one days. They can learn surface level history. Black people dying before their time. Oppression. Hear about slavery again, as if the history of Black people only included doom and gloom. In fact, almost every ethnicity on this earth has experienced slavery in one way or another. Now that's not something that you hear every day about every ethnicity and slavery.

We need to remember that Black people contributed a lot to British history, but unfortunately, their stories were hidden.

God created Black people years ago. Black people have continuously contributed to society for years. This can be seen in the Old Testament books, such as, Genesis, Isaiah, Jeremiah, to name a few of the Books with references to Black people, so be careful if someone tries to convince you believe that Black people didn't exist until recent times. It is false information and there is so much to learn about Black people in history.

It is time up for this tokenistic approach of Black History in one month of the year. Let every person, irrespective of whether they are Black, White or Brown, enjoy learning about the fundamental and aspiring records of Black people in history, all year long.

I encourage everyone to search about Black history from January to December, every year. Yes, there are painful parts, but that is a part of everyone's journey.

There are so many amazing, fascinating historical stories about Black people that will inspire you, may surprise you, and will encourage you too.

Challenge yourself to go against the status quo, to engage with profound learning about Black history outside of thirty-one days in October. Prepare yourself to learn the great history of Black people across the world, and in the UK, in Leeds, and your local area too.



Now, what if December was one of twelve Black History Months in the year? Would anyone pay attention to the importance of ethnicity or would we be too consumed by the bright lights, excitement and materialism. Can it be considered an opportunity to reflect on Jesus' ethnicity and the fact that he was not white but was of Global Majority Heritage?

There are still many images and videos that portray Jesus as being white, but this is not true.

Shocking right. Well, maybe to some of us. Many churches in the UK have worked on awareness of Jesus' ethnic background, but it is not universally acknowledged. This does seem a particularly important consideration in December when images of Jesus in nativity scenes abound.

Imagine if someone told your story but changed your ethnicity, because they did not want people to know your culture. You would probably say, that is not me and you would be completely correct. Just

as you would deny a false depiction of yourself, by learning and studying the story of Jesus, you should be able to say, that is not Jesus, when you see any depictions of him that deny his ethnicity and cultural identity.

Although you may not be able to completely say whether an image truly reflects him, you should definitely be able to challenge Jesus being portrayed as white.

It is one thing when in a local nativity play, baby Jesus resembles the ethnicity of the people playing Mary and Joseph, but it is quite different to create artwork; for example, stained glass windows, portraying Jesus as white. In Leeds, many of our churches were built in Victorian times, and have such artwork on display. We need to be aware of the impact of these images. Then, in balance, take the opportunity presented to us in December, to steer away from biased depictions and study more about the ethnicity of people in the Bible. It might be surprising how ethnicities are represented.

Remember that Jesus' true ethnicity should not change our view of him. Neither should it deter any of us from engaging with Christianity. Actually, it should enhance our learning and understanding of him, so that we can continue to embrace Christians, irrespective of their ethnicity too.

So, challenge yourself. I hope that your journey of study, and learning more about him, only helps you appreciate and embrace his ethnicity, your ethnicity and every person from every ethnicity.



What does 'Journey to the Manger' mean to you?

THROUGH LAUREN BURNS, CHAPLAINCY COORDINATOR AT CARDINAL HEENAN CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL, WE HEAR HOW THIS JOURNEY RESONATES WITH YOUNG PEOPLE IN LEEDS TODAY, AS SHE SHARES REFLECTIONS FROM IMAGINATIVELY ACCOMPANYING MARY ON HER JOURNEY TO BETHLEHEM.



From the library at Cardinal Heenan Catholic High School, in Meanwood, we tried to imagine the journey that Mary and Joseph took towards Bethlehem. Using *Journey to the Manger*, a resource developed by Leeds Church Institute, we began by talking about the longest walks we have taken. A number of Y8 students shared memories of lockdown, and the time we were only allowed one hour of exercise a day. Y11 students talked about their Duke of Edinburgh Award two-day hike, the painful blisters and having to carry provisions on their back.

We realised that journeying ninety miles, from Nazareth to Bethlehem, might have taken more than a week. It might also have been a difficult journey, leaving loved ones and home comforts behind. Worse still, there might have been perils, such as being hijacked or mugged on the trade routes along the terrain of the Judean mountains.

I shared how I would prepare for a journey such as this. I would need to take my dogs along with me, because I could not leave them. The students then speculated as to whether animals would have accompanied Mary and Joseph, perhaps for food or to sell once they arrived in Bethlehem.

Together, we wondered if Mary was apprehensive or anxious during the journey. Students then shared the times they were nervous and how they coped. This was usually with support from family

and friends. This led to further reflection on the familiar faith tradition of pilgrimage, and there were many comments about how the hurdles and challenges would have been worth it to arrive at their destination. Students were certain that Mary was sustained, by knowing the destiny of her child, knowing that the fruit of her womb would have great honours bestowed upon him, that he would be the key to the salvation of all God's peoples.

Discussion followed on where Mary and Joseph would have stayed. Inspired by the writings of theologian Paula Gooder, we explored the mezzanine level of a traditional home in Bethlehem, with animals below and families living on the upper floor. As we talked, our visions of a nativity scene, familiar to primary school productions and a Victorian depiction of a barn, began to fade away.

A more sophisticated theological discussion developed, informed by current migration policies, reflection on firsthand experiences of hardship, and the awareness of the salvation Jesus can bring.

In summation, journeying to the manger led us all to retell the story, we had long known and loved, in a new way.

Churches Against Racism 2024

Bishops, Pastors and Priests on building anti-racist communities

How can we build truly anti-racist churches and an anti-racist City? Hear leaders from diverse churches in Leeds share experience, best practice and wisdom from dealing with racial discrimination.



You will hear stories of division and hope in unity, then join together to talk practically and theologically about moving into action.

All are welcome to this ecumenical evening of panel discussions, conversations and prayer. Please join us for light refreshments after hearing from the Bishops, Pastors and Priests.

**7 - 9pm, Thursday
18th April 2024**

**New Testament
Church of God
LS8 2TN**

**Please book
here**



We hope you've enjoyed this issue of CITYtheology.

At Leeds Church Institute we are committed to learning for faith and justice, in cooperation with partners around Leeds.

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