

# CITYtheology

MAGAZINE OF LEEDS CHURCH INSTITUTE

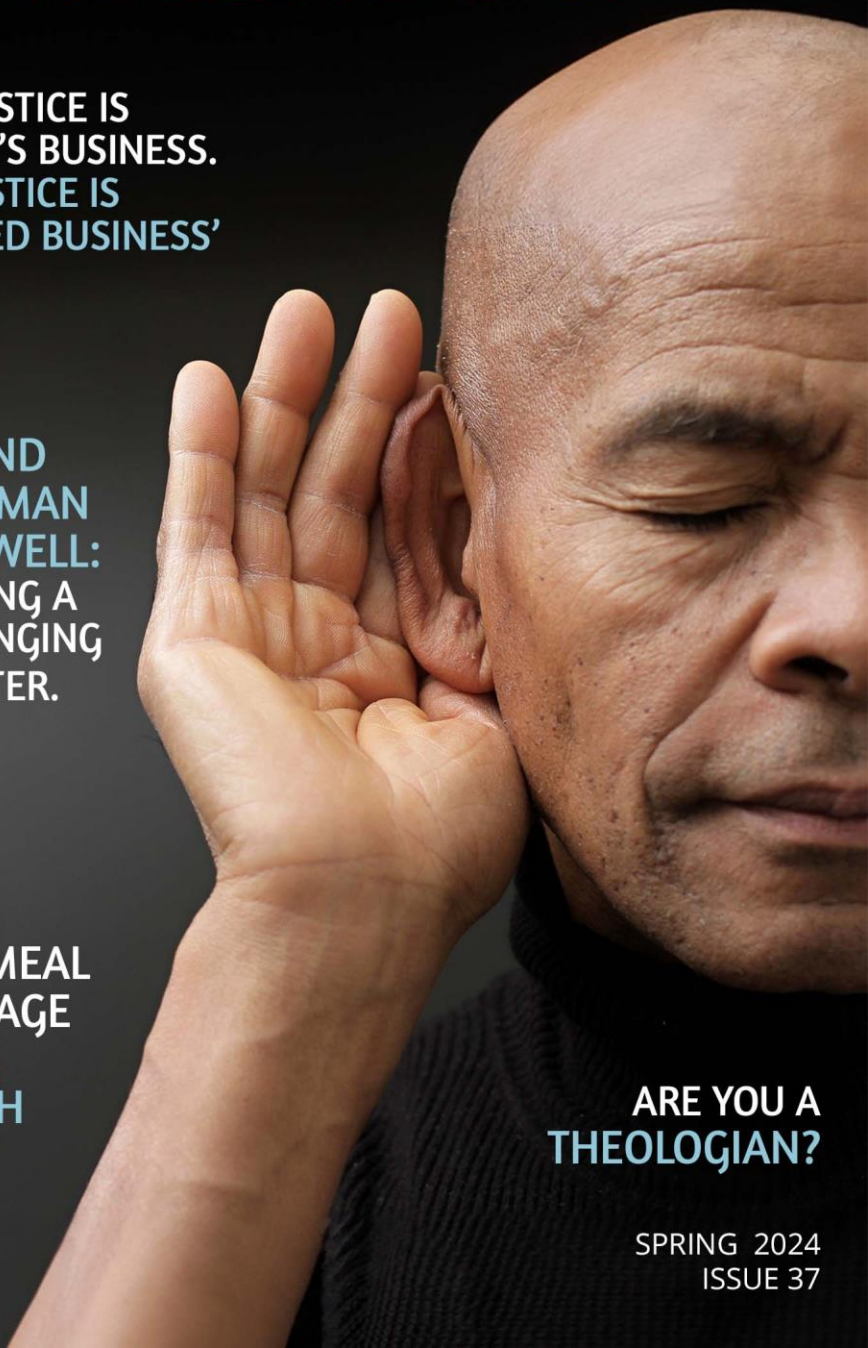
'RACIAL JUSTICE IS  
EVERYONE'S BUSINESS.  
RACIAL JUSTICE IS  
UNFINISHED BUSINESS'

JESUS AND  
THE WOMAN  
AT THE WELL:  
MODELLING A  
LIFE CHANGING  
ENCOUNTER.

CAN A  
SIMPLE MEAL  
ENCOURAGE  
HEALING  
THROUGH  
UNITY?

ARE YOU A  
THEOLOGIAN?

SPRING 2024  
ISSUE 37



# Welcome to CITYTheology

Welcome to the Spring edition of CITYtheology. The magazine has now entered its tenth year, as the first edition was published in Winter 2014. For those readers who have been with us since the start, you will have read a wide range of articles written by many different people seeking to engage with theology directly relevant to Leeds. You will also have seen how the design and layout has developed over the years and, of course, this most recent change, as we are now printing in an A5 format. I hope you enjoy the changes.

The articles in this edition:

- ✳ Are you a theologian?
- ✳ 'Racial Justice is everyone's business. Racial Justice is unfinished business.'
- ✳ Can a simple meal encourage healing through unity?
- ✳ Jesus and the woman at the well: modelling a life changing encounter.

*Dr Helen Reid*

Director, Leeds Church Institute



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# Are you a theologian?

DR HELEN REID,  
DIRECTOR OF LEEDS  
CHURCH INSTITUTE,  
WRITES ABOUT THE  
LCI WAY OF DOING  
THEOLOGY.



**We are all theologians in the spirit of St Anselm's teaching that theology is 'faith seeking understanding'.**

It is certainly true that to live as Christians in Leeds in 2024, we need to keep learning about God, and how to live out our faith in this time and this place. This is the work of theology in our thinking, our development and our actions, both individually and collectively. Yet, there is a tendency to shy away from claiming to be a theologian or doing theology. This is perhaps out of humility because it can sound a 'grand' title, and maybe it is sometimes said out of respect for those who have studied theology and have degrees in it.

Over the years, some people have been made to feel that they should leave the theology to leaders. For others, theology is what you read in a book, and not something you 'do'.

These responses are entirely understandable but can lead us as a faith community to suffer from the lack of a shared language for talking about faith and our intentions to act justly in city life. This matters within the Church but also in wider city life too where we need to be able to explain and claim our distinctively Christian role and calling.

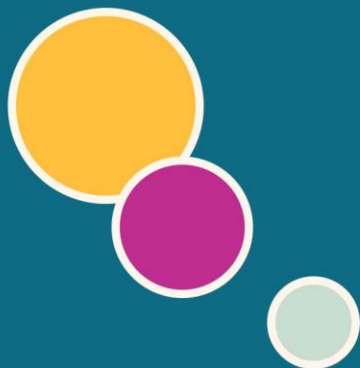
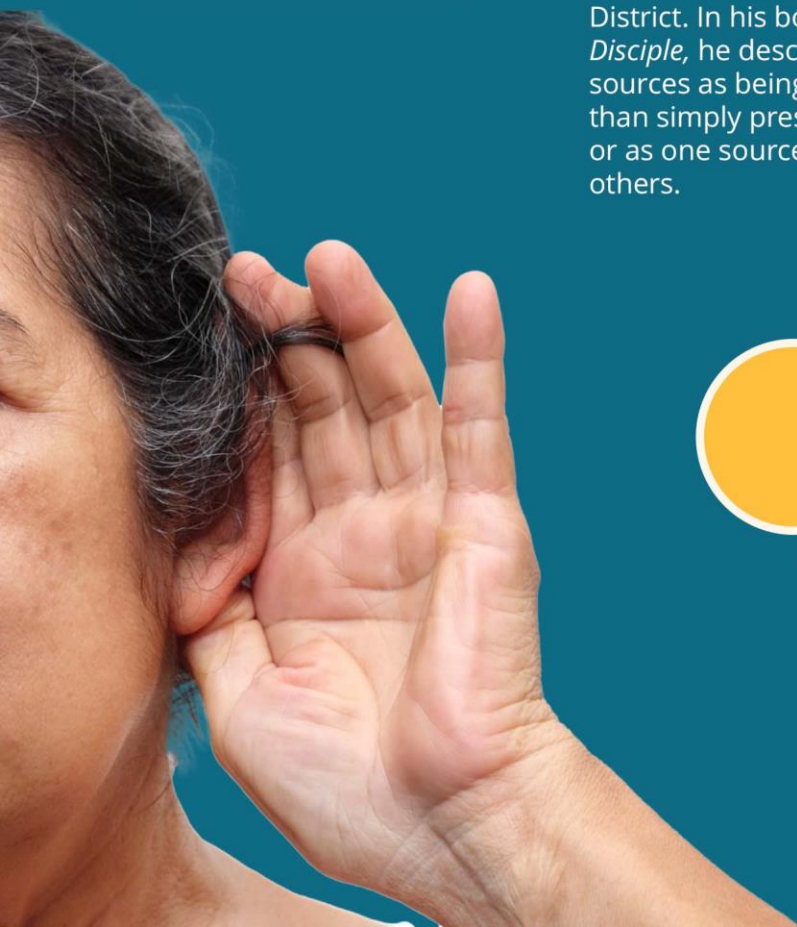



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Theology can play a central role in our contribution to city life when it enables us to be seen and understood as authentically Christian, and as witnesses to gospel truths when we work for change and transformation. It is part of our partnership and dialogue with others in the city, our local communities and neighbours.

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At Leeds Church Institute, engaging with theology explicitly, intentionally and confidently is central to our commitment to faith, learning and engagement in city life. Theology is essential to the why, what and how of our work, and so it is something we all do. The model we use for theology isn't unique or new, although it is practised in an ecumenical and relational way that is specific to Leeds. It is inspired by 'Four Source' theological approaches that draw on Scripture, reason, tradition and experience. And more specifically, it has been influenced by Roger Walton, the first Chair of the Yorkshire West Methodist District. In his book, *The Reflective Disciple*, he describes the different sources as being in dialogue rather than simply present simultaneously or as one source dominating others.





**At LCI our  
theology is a dialogue  
between Scripture, Church  
traditions, personal experience  
and Leeds city voices that lead  
to a greater understanding of  
God and of how to live well  
in our city for the  
benefit of all.**



Scripture is, of course, the easiest one of these to introduce. But, in the light of awareness of ecumenical diversity, Scripture is not prioritised above all other sources. Scripture is an essential part of the conversation, not the trump card.



Similarly church traditions, whether historical, liturgical or doctrinal, are referred to in the plural as another way we recognise our ecumenical commitment. The distinctives that different church traditions bring to our understanding are to be embraced positively and not problematised. When we

do theology including different denominational approaches, we may well find points of divergence and even disagreement. This is only a problem if we find this is a barrier to genuine dialogue.



The role of 'reason' in four source theology brings our context in Leeds into our model of theology by including the voices, policies, knowledge and thinking of those around us. These are collectively described as 'city voices', and they include secular and faith-based, local and city-wide voices. We listen to strategic voices, for example, Child Friendly Leeds, City of Sanctuary, Root Out Racism or Compassionate City; and we listen to local people, as individuals and as groups of people. All can be understood as key stakeholders in our theology and theological dialogue. Even where these voices seem discordant or indeed explicitly reject 'the God stuff', they can help us to grow our understanding if we listen and learn from them, in dialogue with other sources for theological reflection.





By highlighting the role of personal experience in doing theology, LCI recognises that we do this as people of faith for whom this really matters, and as individuals located within a specific identity. It is widely observed that no one is truly objective in approach, but rather we are subjective; and this is good when it is named and contributes to the dialogue.

We use this approach to theology regularly, as individuals and in our work together. For example, at a recent Away Day for Staff and Trustees, we reflected theologically together on the question, 'Why does poverty matter so much to LCI in 2024?' Our reflections showed us ways that Scripture and city voices challenge some current church practice and assumptions. This led us to look forward and explore how to be part of a more radical response to poverty issues.

At LCI, we consider ourselves all to be theologians. At the heart of our reflection is an orientation towards seeing God's Kingdom more fully expressed in our time and our place.

**So, are you a theologian too?**





# DAVID OLUWALE

A British citizen, he came to Leeds from Nigeria in 1949  
in search of a different life.

David Oluwale was hounded to his death near this bridge  
after enduring years of persecution. Two police officers  
were imprisoned for their crimes.

'The river tried to carry you away,  
but you remain with us in Leeds'

Caryl Phillips  
c1930-1969





# “Racial Justice is everyone’s business. Racial Justice is unfinished business.”

EMMA TEMPLE,  
MARKETING AND  
COMMUNICATIONS  
MANAGER FOR LEEDS  
CHURCH INSTITUTE,  
INTRODUCES ‘OLUWALE  
AND LEEDS’, A  
PHOTOGRAPH TAKEN BY  
LOCAL RESIDENT  
RACHAEL LOFTUS AND  
SHARED IN THIS EDITION  
OF CITYTHEOLOGY.



**Every month in 2023 local artists were invited to share their creativity at Leeds Church Institute, each on the theme of ‘Friendship’.**

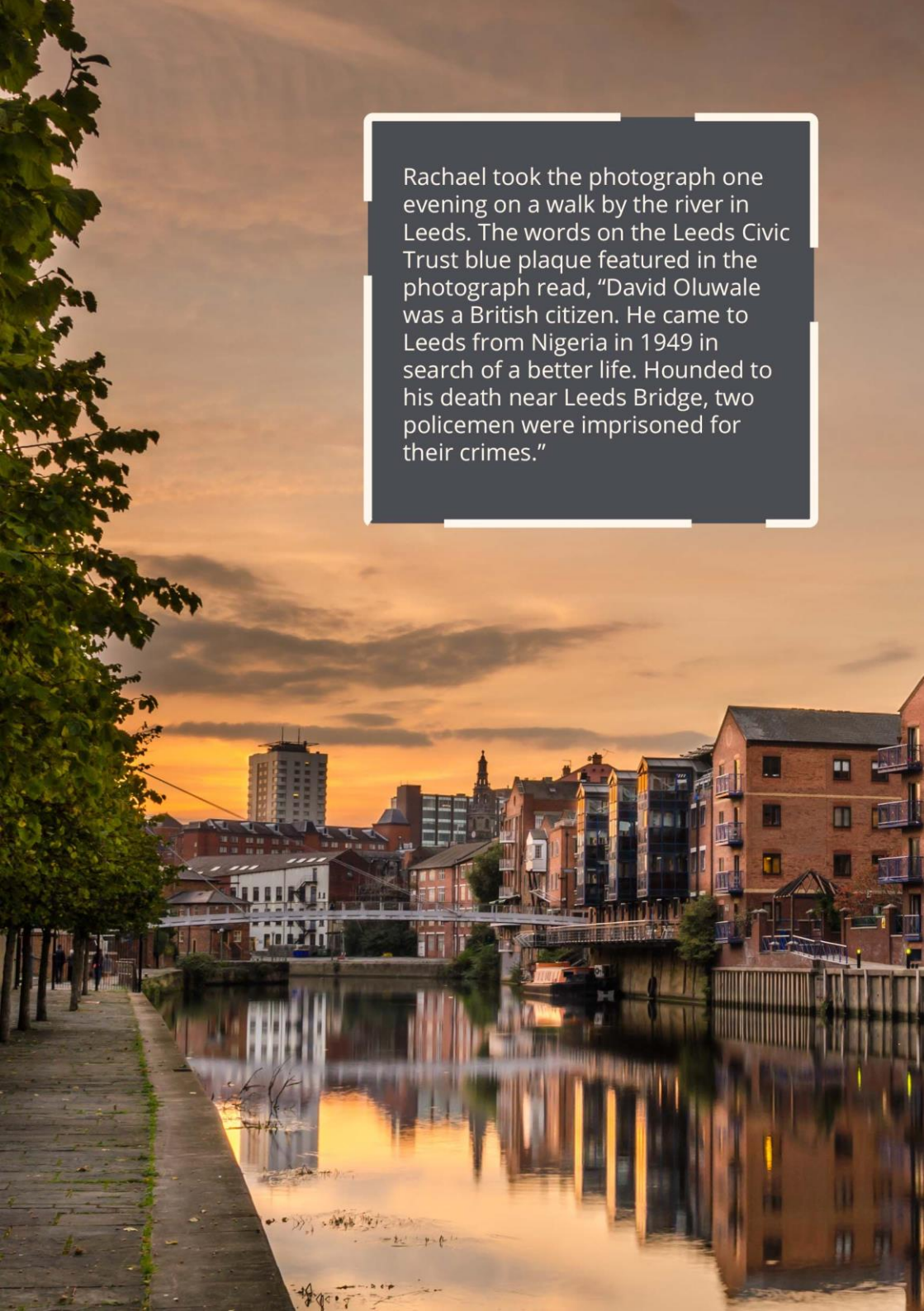
The works ranged in their interpretation to include messages about racial inequality, the cost-of-living crisis, climate action, and poverty. They were curated by LCI Art Theologian, Bronagh Daly, as a platform to explore how art can be used as a conduit to learn about social justice and spirituality.

Artist of the Month for January 2023 was Rachael Loftus who lives and works in Leeds. She was awarded an MBE for her services to the city in the response to the pandemic.

Rachael first met with friends of David Oluwale through her work with people experiencing homelessness in Leeds. She has long been aware of his story of migration and experiences of racism here in Leeds, as well as the campaign for justice for David and that he be remembered.



Rachael took the photograph one evening on a walk by the river in Leeds. The words on the Leeds Civic Trust blue plaque featured in the photograph read, "David Oluwale was a British citizen. He came to Leeds from Nigeria in 1949 in search of a better life. Hounded to his death near Leeds Bridge, two policemen were imprisoned for their crimes."



Photographer Rachael said:

“

I have never considered myself as an artist. I do believe, however, that it is important to share images and stories that are often hard to hear. It is wonderful to see a photograph I took as a permanent image on display, and start conversations about friendship and community, especially at a time when so many people in Leeds are marginalised.

I was really struck by the metaphor of how David's plaque is cemented into the Bridge of Leeds because I think that's how I would like to think of his memory and his legacy, as cemented into the fabric of Leeds. The way we think of him and his memory is about it being absolutely part of who our city is, but also a reminder of who our city needs to be.

”

The title for this article is a quote from Richard Reddie, Director of Justice and Inclusion at the leading ecumenical body, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. Richard will be joining us here in Leeds at the **Churches Against Racism** event on Thursday 18th April and will be giving the Hook Lecture 2024 on Wednesday 23rd October. For more details visit the LCI website: [LCILeeds.org/events](https://LCILeeds.org/events).





# Can a simple meal encourage healing through unity?



BRONAGH DALY, ART THEOLOGIAN AND FAITH & CREATIVITY LEAD FOR LEEDS CHURCH INSTITUTE, EXPLORES HOW AN ART PIECE COMPRISING OF A CONCEPTUAL MEAL LED TO AN UNEXPECTED LEVEL OF FAITH UNDERSTANDING AND UNITY.

**Freda Shafi's conceptual lentil meal for eight was used as an interactive art piece.** It intended to foster a deliberate juxtaposition of the intimate and the austere, in order to amplify the need for more informal interfaith conversations. Central to this is the use of food as a conduit for learning as a faithful city.

This small group comprised Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Christian voices,

offering much-needed sanctuary. With stories of beloved family dishes, sharing lived experiences of marginalisation and an openness to the differences, it demonstrated Interfaith Week as a recipe for unity.

And so, on a stormy November night Canon Paul Maybury, Rector of Leeds Minster, opened the church doors to people of various faiths. They have each journeyed

with artist Freda Shafi and Art Theologian Bronagh Daly on a listening project of food, faith and unity.

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**Bringing a small group of people together to discuss the hardest of all social injustices takes courage, especially when the invitation to break bread is in a sacred setting such as Leeds Minster, and the unfolding news reports of intense civil unrest in the Middle East is on everyone's mind.**

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Add to that inclement weather and would people venture out for a creative experiment in food, faith and unity?

Under Shafi's instruction, the table was set informally, her background in site-specific sculpture allowing an openness to experimentation. A showreel of curated voices and videos filled the air along with the aroma of lentil dhal and freshly baked chapatis. A local chef, Lal, prepared food inspired by the stories from the listening project. These included a Live Simply Lenten Soup bag project and a Gurdwara's communal langar.







Download more  
Food, Faith and  
Unity stories and  
recipes here:





Among all the ingredients, the humble lentil shone through as a unifying component for many. The lentil, often said to be fodder more suited to feed animals, requires prolonged cooking, meaning time and patience, to make it fit for our plate. Yet this humble legume provides us all with a level of humility. Our most basic need, to be fed, is met. In taking time, and being in commune with one another, the myth of scarcity becomes our liturgy of abundance.

Just as in the parable of the forgiving father, the prodigal son, remembering eating animal food, is welcomed back to a great feast. And just as the father who had yearned for his absent son, celebrates his

presence with a feast. So too, the people gathered yearned for connection and remembered hard times.

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**Our plates overflowing, yet with hearts breaking, small talk led to big talk. Hard to swallow dinner topics like war, partition, holocaust, despair, peace and hope were exchanged like hot dishes, back and forth across the table, all with tenderness and humility allowing trust to simmer.**

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Even though small in number, the kindness and courage of each guest made the vast church building feel like Shafi's front room, with her intention that the meal would be seen as a piece of art in itself; a site-specific sculpture with guests, food and stories as raw materials required for this one-off fine art installation, unique to the setting. The conversation acted like an artisan glue, keeping the delicate sculpture intact for just that event.

The main course was followed by a sweet dessert for the eyes, in the form of a guided tour of oversized photos of pitta, photographed at the Shantona Women's centre. They depict the lovingly handcrafted rice flour pasties, set against the cardinal scarlet uplighting of the altar. With saints and sacred icons aglow the pitta function as a

reminder of a wafer used in Communion. The metaphor of pitta as a host enticed a conversation amongst religions and cultures, reminding us of the eucharistic meal, as well as the pledge of 'Welcome and sanctuary for all' heard at the 2023 Hook Lecture, held just weeks before. It was an invitation to explore themes of visual and spiritual nourishment, enhanced by the encounter of each other, thanks to Shafi's work.

When we share food, we evoke sacred traditions, unique to each person's cultural and religious background. We are both host and guest when we share food together. We are united in that moment and when we are fed physically, we are also nourished by the hospitality of others.

If there had been an audience present for this small artistic experiment, the learning message they would have taken away would be one of unity, hope and prayer for peace. Aptly, the evening ended with an impromptu moment of silent and interfaith worship.



"I came to the evening with an open mind. I had no idea that just a small gathering of people would move me to tears so much as it did. The unity I felt with my fellow Leeds citizens was wonderful and it made me realise that unity can definitely be achieved at a round table with delicious food. From small acorns ....."  
*Ros, Bookshop Owner*

"Our neighbours can be from different faiths. We give them our food; they give us theirs. It forms a connection and faiths unite, bringing the community close."  
*Lal, Chef*

"In eating together, we share our basic human need and are united in that sharing. In sharing food, we learn to appreciate and value our differences, as well as our common humanity."  
*Paul, Rector of Leeds Minster*

"Receiving hospitality and sharing food as a guest reminds us that we are all guests on the Lord's earth. This is a message that people of faith need to pay heed to at this time, but it is also something that we can share with everyone in the city. Don't treat the earth as if you own it, but as a guest who is just passing through."  
*Michael, Live Simply Coordinator, Our Lady of Kirkstall Parish*



# Jesus and the woman at the well: modelling a life changing encounter.

GRAHAM  
BROWNLEE  
(LEEDS  
CITIZENS)

VANESSA  
BROWN  
(INTERACT  
CHURCH AND  
COMMUNITY  
PARTNERSHIP)



*Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers.*

*They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Saviour of the world."*

*John 4: 39-42*

**When we encounter people who are different to ourselves and engage in conversation with them, there is the potential for transformation.** Transformation for ourselves and transformation for those we meet with. But creating the space for this encounter to take place is not always easy. Leeds is a diverse city full of people from different cultures with different views of the world and it can be difficult to bridge the spaces between us.

When we read the story of Jesus and the woman at the well in John 4:1-42, we discover a model for encounter between people from different cultures, both of whom gained something from their meeting. In Jesus' case this was his need for water, which he could have reached on his own. For the woman, this conversation changed her entire life and, as we see later in the scripture, the lives of her entire community.







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There is a tantalising idea that simple encounters between human beings will generate trust and help bring our communities together. From these meetings, we build new relationships that become a means for shaping our communities in fairer and better ways. When we read of Jesus meeting people at the lakeside, on the mountain, in the village and city, we see encounters which do just that.

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Through reaching out, listening to and indeed accepting help from someone who was marginalised, Jesus reached an entire community who otherwise would not have heard his message.

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Creating encounters is a wonderful idea, but many churches find it difficult to engage new people, or they find that the effort of making new connections depends on the same small group of individuals. This core group of activists may be fewer in number and more burdened in recent years.

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The listening in Lent resource developed by Leeds Citizens and InterAct is a tool for individuals and churches to use as we seek to create space for encounter with others and to build relationships with the communities in which we live.



This is how a conversation began between Vanessa Brown from InterACT (a community organisation formed from a partnership of churches in Meanwood and Chapel Allerton) and Graham Brownlee from Leeds Citizens:

"We wanted to find a way in; a way to bring people together and encourage churches to be involved in new relationships and actions that influence and bring positive change in the community. It's a simple idea, but not an easy one - so many initiatives seem to fall into familiar traps:

- Asking the same small group and local church leaders to be busier
- Bringing outside, top down, solutions
- Being too idealistic or complex, making it impossible to be sustainable

We wanted to find a way to aid simple encounters between people from in and around churches without people being overwhelmed with what is expected of them. So we came up with something that we think is an accessible tool.

It's called **Listening in Lent.**

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In Lent, in the lead up to Easter, many Christians use the time for reflection and an opportunity to come together for prayer, study and witness. 'Listening in Lent' has been developed with this in mind, but it could be used at any time in the year. It starts with a look at a simple relationship-building encounter between Jesus and a woman at a well. It then encourages people to try similar conversations with friends or groups they're already involved with, and to come back and share how they went and what they learnt.

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Creating encounters is a wonderful idea, but many churches find it difficult to engage new people, or they find that the effort of making new connections depends on the same small group of individuals. This core group of activists may be fewer in number and more burdened in recent years.

So, we invite you to use this tool in your church and community, in Lent or at any time of the year."



If you as an individual or as a church group make use of this resource, we would love to hear your stories of Listening in Lent. Has this resource helped you to listen to the community around you? Has anything changed for you or for the community as a result? Get in touch with Paul to share your stories at: [margins@leedschurchinstitute.org](mailto:margins@leedschurchinstitute.org)

You can download the resource here:  
<https://lccileeds.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Listening-in-Lent-2024.pdf>



# Do you share our passion for learning as a faithful city?

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

If you'd like to join us on this journey, become a member!

In 2024 we're re-introducing membership fees on a pay-as-you-feel basis to support our continued work in the city. Everybody is welcome, and you'll receive a quarterly copy of CityTheology magazine as well as regular email updates for all the latest events and resources. Plus you'll help shape the future of LCI at our AGM each year.



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to join the Institute:



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