

CITYtheology

MAGAZINE OF LEEDS CHURCH INSTITUTE

A MATTER OF
LIFE AND
DEATH

WORDS OF
LOVE

“LET YOUR
EARS EAT
GRASS...”
(AGAIN)

HOPE, HURT
AND HEALING

WINTER 2024
ISSUE 41



Welcome to CITYtheology

Welcome to this special 10th anniversary edition of *CITYtheology*!

Not long after I started my role as Communications Manager for LCI, I went to visit Ripon Cathedral. While I was listening to the archaic but familiar language of the Book of Common Prayer service, my eyes were drawn to an instruction in the book that referred to the act of receiving communion as 'communicating'.

It sparked a reflection on my journey home, that the root words of 'communion' and 'communication' point towards uniting, drawing together as a community. In sharing stories and in breaking bread with others, we build stronger relationships, which feed us for our daily journeys. These innately human rituals are found across cultures and throughout history.

It's a joy to read through these articles about listening, writing, and sharing communion in Leeds, and the ways this has brought the LCI community together to work for justice, to heal, to include, and to hold each other through the storms of life.

I'm proud to celebrate ten years of *CITYtheology*, and I'm honoured to carry this special publication into its next decade.





The articles in this edition:

- ✱ **Let Your Ears Eat Grass... Again!**
Ten years of theology and creativity
in Leeds
- ✱ **Words of Love** How does the act of
writing shape us?
- ✱ **Hope, Hurt and Healing**
Reflections from the Leeds
Christians at Pride team
- ✱ **A Matter of Life and Death**
Biblical lessons for pastoral
support

Emma Temple

Editor



Design: Daniel Ingram-Brown
CITYtheology is published by Leeds Church Institute.
Registered Address: 43 The Calls, Leeds LS2 7EY
Registered as a company (00155840) and as a Charity (220966)

“Let your ears eat grass...” (again)

Pippa Woodhams reflects on ten years of theology and creativity in Leeds, and the ways Leeds Church Institute can listen to and learn from city voices.



In the very first *CITYtheology* magazine, issue 1, spring 2014, I wrote under this title, illustrated by a closeup photo of - an ear.

article, “Are you a theologian?” featured with a cover photo of a man cupping his ear, actively listening, varieties of the image repeated three times for emphasis though those pages.

“Let your ears eat grass.”

Pippa Woodhams covers the east of Leeds' World City Remains, which explore the natural world in Leeds.

“Let your ears eat grass.” I found this homiletic expression the other day, during a passing conversation, and I got me thinking. In all the conference and noise of this town, where there is so much to do, these words also capture something of the need for downtime, silence, and being willing, even, to be still.

The same sentiment motivates us on “Wild City Remains”. We all read down time, chewing the cud, listening to stories and conversations of the world. Listening to the seasons help, every year we can measure. At Moorwood Farm, we were surrounded on all sides by the city, but at times we almost failed to notice it. I am wondering if it is not almost too vast a vision to be challenging us with the tension between “city” and “wildness”. We need to be a group who will personally look for, and be led by, the “wild” (however we may choose to define that even in the heart of the city).

The same feeling can be found in this wooded valley. Standing still in a small patch of natural grass, one can report down and look at a sky line of trees, fields, grazing animals and a bubbling stream. Here, too, listening is not hearing, perhaps, but



out the grass, there was the constant murmur of traffic noise, shouting, and the faster of cars. Digging my face in Moorwood Tip, Henry James kept the Leeds economy going, and the network of emergency vehicles served the needs of our huge urban population. In this place, our “ears could eat grass”. Not sure how taking in the complex network of our surrounding city.

Before we can really tune into the natural world, we need to be in the present, in touch with our bodies, and the senses are the way to meet. There are many more than just the five senses. These such as intuition or balance will be required to truly experience and learn from the non-human



Exactly ten years later, in spring 2024, Helen Reid's

What has changed in ten years? How has *CITYtheology* stimulated and challenged us, as people of faith engaged in *listening* to the city of Leeds?

I have been involved in many actions and organisations for justice and peace in Leeds over fifty years. My focus shifted, from my youthful early beginnings with fair trade on a Leeds market stall in the 1970s, to local politics in East Leeds. Later this grew into the need for explorations in contemplative spirituality, the natural world, and finally creative and community arts, each time spiralling round the same issues of poverty, war, refugees, climate, family, hospitality, and education. For many years LCI informed, inspired, and sometimes funded, our small struggles for change, and we applaud it.

Ten years of this magazine is a milestone, its impact magnified through its striking visuals and graphics.

Looking through back copies, themes emerge and recur.

Issue 1 alone covered sexuality, identity, the power of story, justice and beauty, failure, and the natural world. Not a bad start!

Sometimes I question myself over why I spent so much of the last twenty years of my life in the creative arts. But the development of LCI over the lifetime of this magazine hints at some answers.

Artists, illustrators, storytellers, poets and writers, have been key to increased engagement and change in this organisation. New and often younger members have been attracted to the wholistic approach of linking creativity, spirituality, justice and learning: it is often the flexible minds of artists who make these inner connections, communicate them and challenge the city at a deep level.

Let's look at one or two examples of the many times

LCI has enabled transformation through creative arts, involving many local people.

The work of writer and designer Daniel Ingram-Brown in 2016 led to a book which was eighteen months in the making, *"Stories from the Forests of Leeds"*. This is a fantastical, imaginative romp, involving ordinary people from all over the city inventing characters, writing stories, and thereby throwing light on the humour as well as the underbelly of our sprawling city. It's brought to life by Si Smith's illustration, who went on to produce comics such as "How to disappear completely" and the trilogy, "Abide with me". How could such ideas have emerged without the skill of these artists?

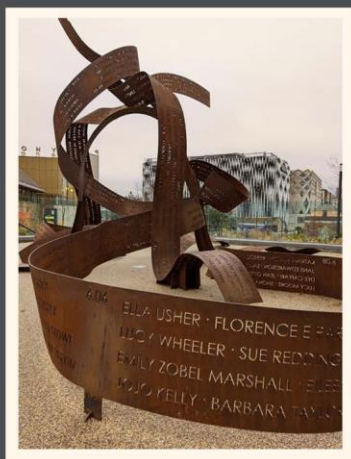
It was an inspired idea to pair an artist and a theologian for an extended project. The 2020 bursary, "The House of Questions" enabled Dr. Charlotte Naylor Davis to work with artist Phill Hopkins to stimulate hundreds of people to pose difficult questions and see them brought to life and debate through a powerful installation.

"Then, even when we can't express hope, questioning itself is a hopeful act."

Listening to our city involves also listening to developments in its public art.

Some years ago, local artist and curator Pippa Hale worked with then opposition Leeds MP Rachel Reeves on an audit of our public art, statues and memorials. No surprise, but they found very few women were represented here, and decided the city should start to put this right.

October saw the dramatic unveiling of a new sculpture, "Ribbons", sited near the back of the Playhouse. This was the result of work with national government and the city



council, to celebrate the unsung contribution to society of nearly four hundred women of our city. Read about it here:



This follows the significant unveiling of “Hibiscus Rising” by Yinka Shonibare, in November 2023. It is 10m high and took seven years in production. It memorialises David Oluwale, drowned in the river Aire in 1969 while being hounded by two police officers. *“The first public artwork in the city to reflect its cultural diversity.”* Read more here:



My own art form of felt-making has this year contributed to a major exhibition, “Entangled” at Leeds Industrial Museum in Armley Mills, open until May 2025. Twenty artists consider the interaction between

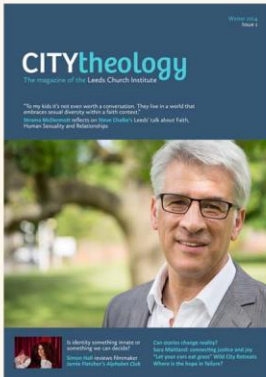
industry and the natural world, working in wool amongst the many intriguing machines and histories of the industrial revolution in Leeds: another form of listening to our city. I will be extending this theme, in partnership with the Leeds Craftivists, to look at the need for a new Industrial Revolution in the clothing industry today, during an artist’s residency at the Armley Mill in early February. Read more here:



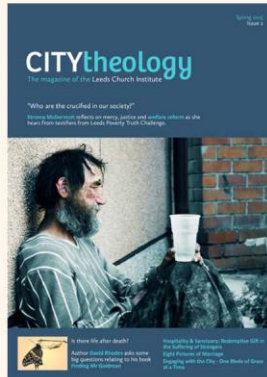
“Let your ears eat grass” is a Jamaican saying that inspired my article in the first issue of this magazine. It entices us to down time, reflection, chewing over things.

Let’s reaffirm the primacy of listening to ... voices on the margins, the messages of the natural world and the other-than-human, the shifting currents of our society. It’s been an emphasis for LCI over many years, along with the power of questioning, and balancing activist engagement with downtime, prayer and creativity.

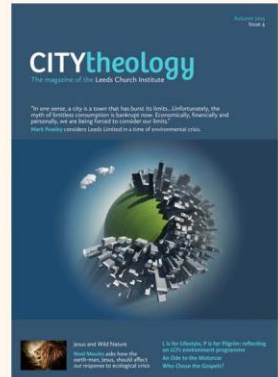
Let’s continue with a hope-filled listening, and support LCI in the challenge of the *next* ten years.



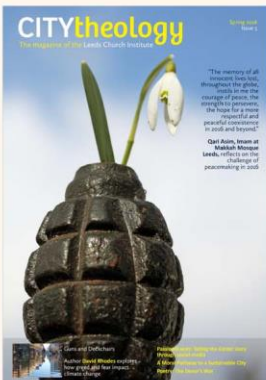
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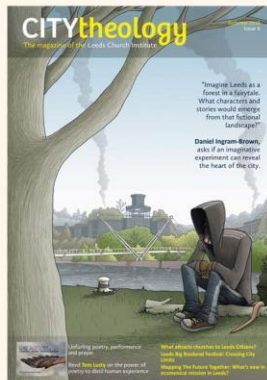
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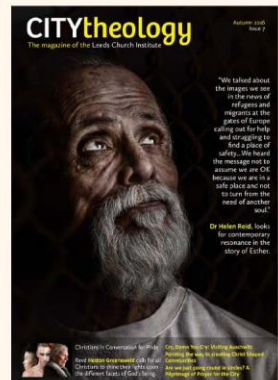
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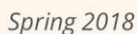
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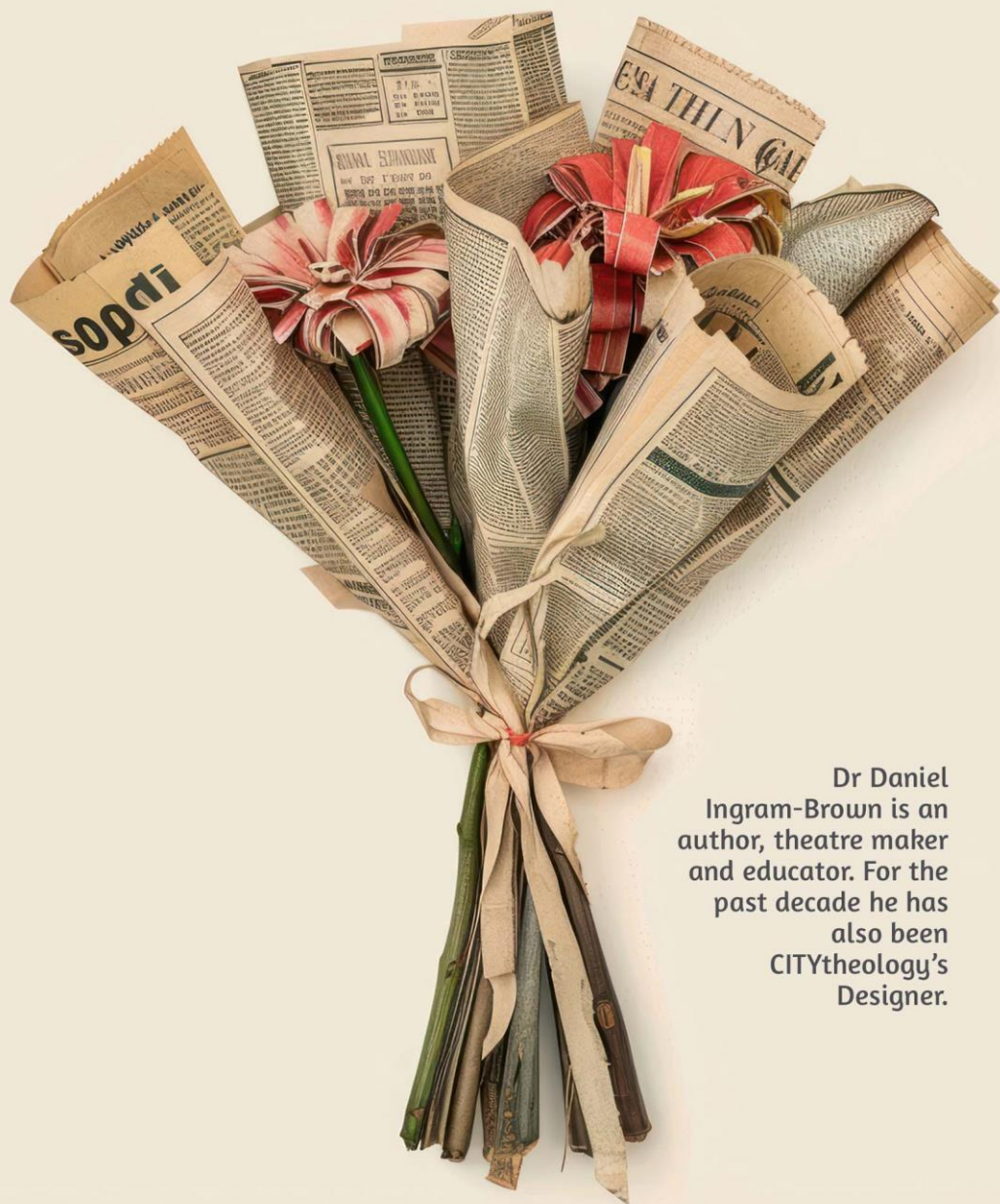


Autumn 2023



Summer 2024

Words of Love



Dr Daniel
Ingram-Brown is an
author, theatre maker
and educator. For the
past decade he has
also been
CITYtheology's
Designer.

In the first edition of **CITYTheology**, I asked the question, “Can fiction change reality?” I argued that stories shape the way we see the world and therefore how we act, and so, they do affect reality.



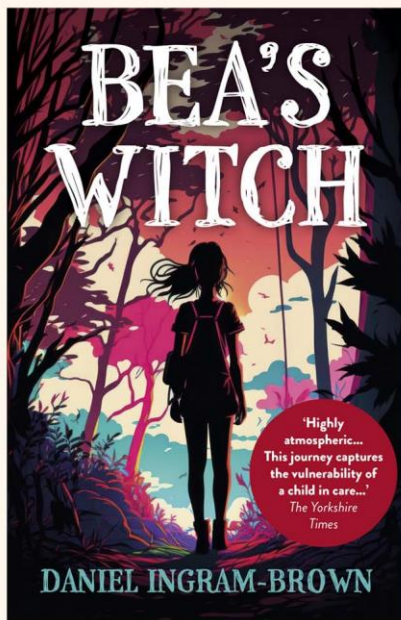
In this article, I want to consider a different but related question: “How does the act of writing shape us?” How does it affect the sort of knowledge we construct and generate?

In a time when AI can write quickly for us, how does spending time on the process of writing make us more human?

I wonder how those who have written for *CITYtheology* over the past decade have been changed by expressing

themselves in a way that builds a relationship with you, our readers?

I've designed the last forty editions of *CITYtheology* (forty-one including this edition). Alongside that work, I've been undertaking a PhD in creative writing and education. I passed in February, graduating in July. My research had three stages. The first phase involved my own writing practice, specifically writing a novel: *Bea's Witch: a ghostly coming-of-age story*.



The novel tells of an 11-year-old girl, Bea, who has

moved into a new adoptive home and is struggling to know who she is and where she belongs. One night, she runs away and encounters the ghost of England's most famous witch, Mother Shipton. The encounter changes her, helping her to come to terms with aspects of her past and find hope for her future.

In the second phase of my research, I worked in two secondary schools, using the novel as a structure for year-long writing residencies, creating space for students to explore some of the book's themes, including home, belonging, bullying and identity. At the end of the year, the students published their own anthologies. The final phase of research was writing my thesis. It became a second novel (to be published as, *The Writer's Cauldron*). It reflects on my writing process and how that informs my educational practice. It asks how we bring personal experience to our writing, and how considering readers shapes our work. It argues that writing is a process that is transformational (for writer and reader), relational and dialogic – that it is an act that calls for response-ability.

One of the main things I became sharply aware of through my research is that writing is more than merely a form of report. It's a process of discovery, of generating knowledge. The way we write, the forms we choose, change the things we discover, affect the way we see the world. In my thesis, I pushed back against the traditional form of a PhD – scientific and dispassionate, with an introduction, methodology, findings and conclusion. That form suggests the writer is objective, distinct and distant from their research. My research argued the opposite – that writers are bound to their work.

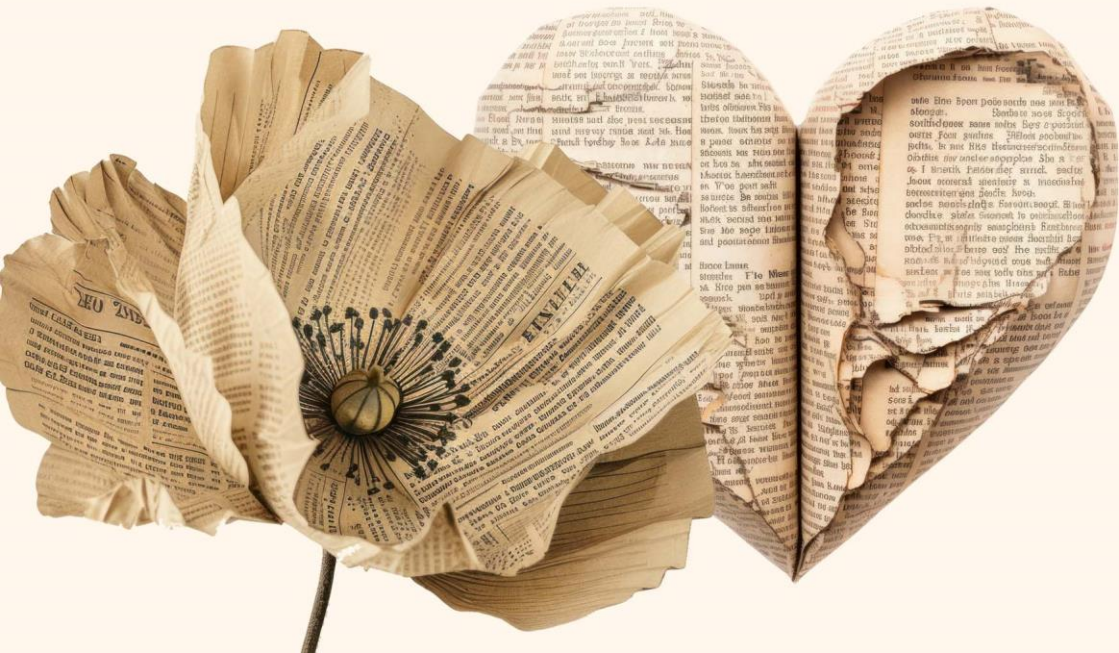
We shape our words and our words shape us.

I wrote my book about an adopted protagonist because I'm an adoptive father. I wasn't removed from the plot. It reflected my values and position, as well as shaping my ability to empathise with adoptees by imaginatively stepping into my character's shoes.

Such a process is an act of love. It takes others seriously, seeking to see from their perspective, asking how and why people act and react the way they do, growing empathy.

So, I wrote my thesis not as a dispassionate account, but as a choose-your-own-adventure story. These stories are written in second person, with “you”, the reader, as the protagonist. At points in the narration, you are offered a choice (“Do you take the lefthand path, the righthand path or go straight on?”). Each choice instructs the reader to

turn to a different page. Writing is an act of choosing – what subject, what style, what words, what meanings am I creating? Why? What do I want my reader to think and feel? Who has power here? How might we mitigate unequal power dynamics, encourage readers to have agency, recognise the vulnerability of writers? What would I like my readers to take away from the relationship formed? This involves taking my reader seriously as another human, looking for just the right words, ones that will respect intellect, emotion, experience. Such a process prompts reflection: on one’s own experience, on other people’s responses, and on the realities of the world. This is a



process that changes me as I write, with the hope that readers might be inspired, permissioned, find community or hope, that they – you – might be changed in some way too.

Perhaps that's why the Word became flesh and dwelt among us?

Perhaps that's why we are letters from Christ, written

on the tablets of our hearts?

I hope that over the past ten years, that's what *CITYtheology* has been about – not just a process of writers telling readers what they already know, but a process of writers being changed through the act of writing, and then loving their readers enough to hope that they will be changed too. I hope that these pages have been filled with words of love.

We're always looking for new voices to contribute to City Theology. If you'd like to find out more about writing for us, please contact our editor Emma on comms@leedschurchinstitute.org





Hope, Hurt and Healing

The Leeds Christians at Pride team joined together this year to organise the Leeds Pride Celebration Service at Leeds Minster. Since its start, CITYtheology has been a space of inclusion and exploration for LGBTQ+ Christians, and it was wonderful to co-create this physical space of welcome during Pride weekend. Here some members of the group share reflections on their experience.



It was a joy and an honour to be involved with the Pride service at Leeds Minster, and then be on the Minster steps during the Pride Parade to greet those taking part along with others from the church. I believe in inclusivity - faith, sexuality and gender should never be hidden, neither in faith settings, within the LGBTQ+ community or any other part of life.

This year's Leeds Pride saw significant steps forward for the City of Leeds in many parts – civic, religious and LGBTQ+, and led to reverberations further afield across Yorkshire and beyond. The love and care in the preparation of the service, and the warm

welcome and sense of togetherness in the service, have led to me hearing incredibly positive comments, and desires for the future from all sections of our city.

The love of God and the movings of the Spirit have clearly been seen by many through this time and it gives us all further building blocks to progress forward. People have felt closer and more understanding of each other, and it is clearly our duty to follow Christ's example as we, with the power of the Holy Spirit, seek to make our great City a more loving, safe, caring place for all.

Thanks be to God.

Christina Jane Badrick

“

When I first had the opportunity to get involved with the Leeds Pride service in my role with Leeds Sanctuary it felt like a perfect fit for me. I've been a member of All Hallows church in Hyde Park for a few years and part of an LGBTQ+ choir community, Gay Abandon. And as the mother of three queer kids (and a fourth straight one!) my life is very rainbow coloured.

But I have also experienced a lot of hostility and distrust towards the Church and Christianity from members of the LGBTQ+ community outside the Church, and hurt and pain from those inside it. The wounds will take a lot of healing and won't disappear because we've had one Pride Service. But I really believe this is something we can build on. It was such an uplifting day that really felt like the first step towards bringing light and rainbows into a previously dark place.

Sam Havis



It was on Saturday 20th July that I led the most wonderful service and celebration alongside an amazing team hosted by Leeds Minster for Leeds Pride Weekend – The Leeds Pride Celebration Service.  

I am a Church of England Vicar based in Rothwell and have been a priest for over 20 years. I am also gay and have attended Leeds Pride Parade for many years which is a celebration of all that has been achieved for the LGBTQI+ community, as well as being reminded of the many struggles and protests of the past. It helps us raise awareness of the many existing challenges and struggles that still remain for many of us within the LGBTQI+ community within the UK and also for so many across the world.

You don't need me to remind you of the many struggles that have taken place within our churches on the inclusion and welcome of the LGBTQI+ community. Sadly, for those of us in the Church of England, this struggle still remains. Small steps have been taken, and my hope and prayer is that full inclusion and marriage services for same sex relationships will be allowed to take place soon within the C of E.

The service at Leeds Minster was just a joyful and moving time together. Leeds Minster for the weekend were flying the progress flag on its flagpole – a real symbol of our hosts' real welcome and hospitality – a big thanks to the folk at Leeds Minster for their time, help, and hospitality for this service.

For me, this service was so special for many reasons, including that here was the civic church in the centre of Leeds holding a service to CELEBRATE the LGBTQI+ community. For years so many of us have felt unwelcome and excluded. Some of us have lived closeted lives because we could not reconcile who we

were with our understanding of our faith due to the teaching and practice of the churches we attended. For many of us it has been so hard to “come out” as Christian to our LGBTQI+ friends due to the message and pain that the church has brought in its practice and theology to so many lives through the years. This still continues and at times it has felt that I only hang on by my fingertips to remain as a leader in the Church of England due to its continuing homophobia and transphobia in some of its ways and practice. God loves me, God loves and accepts all who are part of the LGBTQI+ community.

I cannot wait to repeat the Leeds Pride Celebration Service again in 2025.

Revd Canon Mark Umpleby



A Matter of Life and Death

Revd Dr Chris Swift offered this reflection for us in 2020, part of a series of online events to help us see dying as something we can plan for and manage rather than something to fear and avoid discussing. Then, Chris was Director of Chaplaincy and Spirituality at Methodist Homes, and before that for 20 years he was a chaplain in the NHS. We were pleased to announce in October this year that Chris has been appointed as the new Director of Leeds Church Institute, and we're looking forward to welcoming him to the team.

Content note: This article contains discussion of baby loss and bereavement.



“God turns towards that from which people turn away.”¹

I think the main advice I would give around spiritual and pastoral care for people who are bereaved, based on my experience, would be to offer compassion with truthfulness. Sometimes that is reflected in the language we choose.

There can be all kinds of ways we avoid using the word death or dead, and whilst it's not a term that should be laboured, it's equally important at times to simply use accurate words to describe the situation that somebody is facing.

Reticence about doing that might actually be a lot more to do with us than it is to do with the person who is bereaved.

I believe that there is a great need to be able to witness, in that truthful and compassionate way, the circumstances that are before you. Sometimes the way in which somebody has died can

be traumatic, and may have caused exceptional anxiety for those who are bereaved. From a theological point of view and from a position of Christian spirituality, I would not want to look away from that reality or those circumstances.

Sometimes as a chaplain I would be called into a critical situation in the NHS, for example the death of someone who is younger, or indeed the loss of a baby, and at those times it felt to me that it was so important to represent and to model a God who doesn't look away. We may not be able to give someone the magical solution that they would want in those circumstances – for that younger person to continue to be alive with us – but the very, very least we can do is not shy away from their experience.

It seems to me that people value and need an interaction with somebody who is willing to stand beside them and to behold what they are beholding, and to witness that experience in their lives.

To give an example from my own work, in the circumstances of the death of a baby, I was able to take the funeral, and I can remember the grandmother of that child saying that when she couldn't be with the parents at that critical time because it was so sudden, it had been so comforting to know that they weren't alone, that there was somebody there with them attending to their spiritual needs. Not necessarily saying too much – there is a real importance in valuing and cherishing silence within pastoral care. Not oppressive or distant, but a silent attention and presence.

One of the key biblical texts that I draw on for that insight is the beginning of the book of Job. You will remember

perhaps that Job, in the devastation of his life and all those multiple losses that he was experiencing, did have three friends. Friends might seem a misnomer! They are sometimes called comforters, but in the rest of Job it's not always comfort that they seem to bring. But in the early part of that book, the friends hear about the suffering of Job.

The first thing that happens is they don't just sit there and wait for Job to contact them when he decides he needs some help. They decide together to go and find him. They seek out Job, and Job meets them whilst they're on that journey.

They then mirrored and reflected in their own embodiment, in their physical presence, the posture and the position that Job was in. He was on the ground, his clothes were torn, he was distraught. The Bible tells us they too got on the ground with him, and they expressed their lament, their sorrow, in a similar way to how he was physically cast at that moment.

But the key thing is that it then says they sat there with

him for seven days and seven nights and they didn't say a word.

They were in silence because they saw his suffering was so great. He was not alone, but people didn't rush to him full of words, wisdom, clichés, proverbs – they simply didn't say anything because they saw that his suffering was so great.

Sometimes our words cannot grapple with, or engage, or represent the suffering that somebody is experiencing in bereavement. At those times being silent, but being present - being attentive and not shying away - is the right thing to do, and brings unspoken solace and comfort to those who are distressed.

¹ *Christentum und Medizin. Welche Kopplungen sind lebensförderlich? (with G. Etzelmüller) in: G. Etzelmüller/ A. Weissenrieder, Religion und Krankheit, WBG 2010*



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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!

Our membership fees are 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.



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