

It may feel as if after two years of COVID-19 that there's been just one story, the Pandemic Story — and, of course, Climate Crisis. Are we going through a catastrophe of “biblical proportions”? It certainly feels that way. But when we hear “biblical proportions” it's hard for people of faith to ignore echoes of the creation story in Genesis: the Spirit hovers over the chaos and births new and diverse stories. That, at least, has been a theme in UTU conversations of late. We have three stories . . . and maybe four.

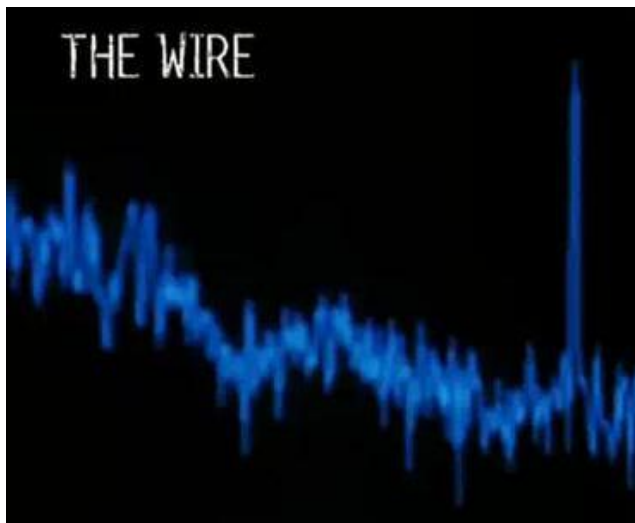
1

experience, Rob brings scholarship and teaching experience to UTU. We think maybe you will get to know him best through an interview that aired on BBC Sheffield. Listen to Rob reflect on his journey of faith with BBC Sheffield's Kat Cowan (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p09y47kr>). We look forward to Rob's contributions to UTU's mission.

A second significant story: the launch of the **Kingdom Evangelism Pack (KEP)**. What is it? Maybe it's best to simply let KEP speak for itself: "Is this pack for you?" it asks on its first page. According to KEP, it might be if you answer "yes" to any of these questions, including:

- I'm a bit embarrassed by TV evangelists, but like 'The Vicar of Dibley' and 'Rev';
- I'd like to see individuals more at peace and comfortable with themselves;
- I think that God does too and that people knowing God's love for them will help all that.

KEP gives practical tips, poems, and some theologically orientated reflection to equip and enable communities that want to follow Jesus and the Kingdom of God he announced. Interested? Are your curtains twitching with curiosity? Follow the link to the **Kingdom Evangelism Pack** and spread the gossip of Jesus for a better world.



Our third story focuses on **UTU's The Wire**, a course being developed by **Revd Julian Sullivan**, former Vicar of St Mary's Bramall Lane. Julian says he became an avid watcher of *The Wire* (a US TV series set in Baltimore) in 2002: "*The Wire* resonated with so many aspects of my role as a city priest that I thought it should be essential viewing for anyone (not just clergy) working in an urban setting as it embraces the crosscurrents and indefinable forces that shape city life."

We plan to develop a course around the issues facing cities and ministry in those cities exploring similar themes, using short extracts from *The Wire* and the contacts that Rob Hoch has from his time as a pastor in Baltimore and UTU's links in Sheffield.

We will be launching the development of our own version of a "Tale of Two Cities" at the 2021 AGM on Saturday 20th November, by having a Zoom link conversation between Gwen Brown, an experienced community organizer in Baltimore and Julian in Sheffield — this is an evolving story. Stay tuned for updates!

AGM 2021

SAVE THE DATE!

**20 November 2021
2 - 4.30pm**

On Zoom and also in person at Victoria Hall

Please RSVP to Jill Wagg indicating whether you will be coming to the meeting by Zoom or in-person (email to office@utusheffield.org.uk).

**Our Theme for AGM 2021 -
*City Wires and Networks: How Christians Navigate Them***

For our AGM we are privileged to have the opportunity to link to Baltimore in Maryland, the city where the challenging series *The Wire* was set, to look at how Sheffield and Baltimore tick as cities and how Christians have engaged with their complex communities.

Gwen Brown, a community organiser in Baltimore will talk with Revd Julian Sullivan, who spent many years as Vicar at St Mary's Bramall Lane in the multi-faith, socio-economically deprived Broomhall area of Sheffield.

Together they will reflect on how their faith affected the way that they engage in tough urban ministries.

This is a launch event to develop a new course helping those in full-time lay or ordained ministry navigate their way around inner-city settings, that UTU will run in 2022.

"We delight in the beauty of the butterfly, but rarely admit the changes it has gone through to achieve that beauty."

— Maya Angelou

Library Changes

Some people love them and some people hate them but we can't escape changes! The library suite at Victoria Hall has seen a lot of them over the past year. As we only rent it two days a week, we have worked hand in hand with The Foundry, the owners, to make it a more flexible usable space.



As you can see from the picture, the majority of our books are now housed in metal shelving to free up floor space and to protect them. So, be prepared for changes when you come in, still a work in progress, but there will always be a warm welcome!

PhD News

So what are the topics and questions of our PhD cohort? Here's one on its way to submission:

Paul FitzPatrick

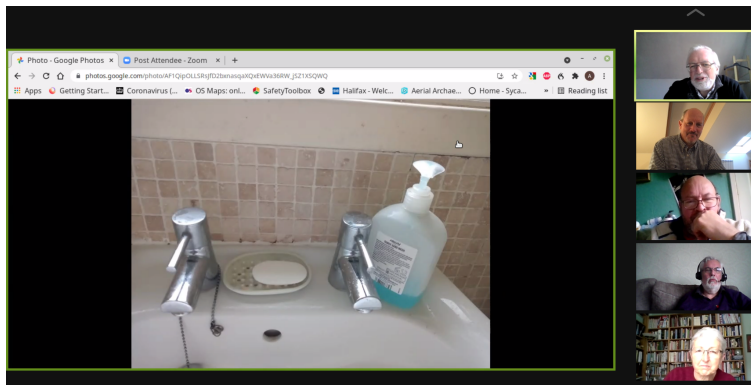
'Quiet Defiance', Rightful Presence' and 'Shaken Welcome': Towards a Contextual Theology of the Solidarity of Others in an Asylum Dispersal'

Doncaster, like similar post-industrial towns, has become an 'asylum dispersal area'. Residents, alongside people seeking international protection, perform asylum and welcome through Doncaster Conversation Club. The category of 'asylum seeker' is a construction of recent government policy, while Doncaster has its own unresolved tensions of loss and resentment.

I propose a 'theology of the solidarity of others in an asylum dispersal area', based on the work of DCC. Through bricolage and open conversations, I examine the language, and specifically the metaphors, used by those seeking asylum, to uncover their perceptions of asylum and welcome in Doncaster. Such a theology is not 'just any philanthropy' (Acts 28.2), but an articulation, through trans-confessional encounters, of a shaken thoughtfulness embedded in performances of welcome and asylum. It prioritises the efforts of those who need to seek international protection and to receive welcome from strangers who themselves recognise their own collusion in the structures which lead to that displacement. It is, therefore, not a theology of the innocent, of the presumed righteous who have seen the light over against the darkness of those who promote a 'hostile environment for illegal migrants'. It may produce a 'theopoetics of shaken welcome'.

Introducing our Newest Cohort in the Certificate of Theology and Discipleship for Mission

On 11 October, we welcomed the newest cohort of the Certificate of Theology and Discipleship for Mission (CTDM). What are their hopes and wishes for the class? Here's how they answered those questions:



Andrew Crowley demonstrates the art of situational analysis for the CTDM Cohort: “What do you see in this picture?”

Rich Andrews (UK): *I like what I heard about UTU and contextual theology. UTU doesn't just seem theoretical, but engaged with us as people.*

Heather Jones (UK): *I want to be challenged and encouraged to move out*

of my comfort zone. I want to feel that God is a stronger presence in my life. And to be clear about my future direction. I feel like I've got some crossroads in my life and I'm trying to discern where to go from here.

Blake Severson (USA): *The church in my context, specifically and in the US broadly, is in a season of change. Being open to what that change may be is important. I hope this course helps me discern the future of my mission and calling.*

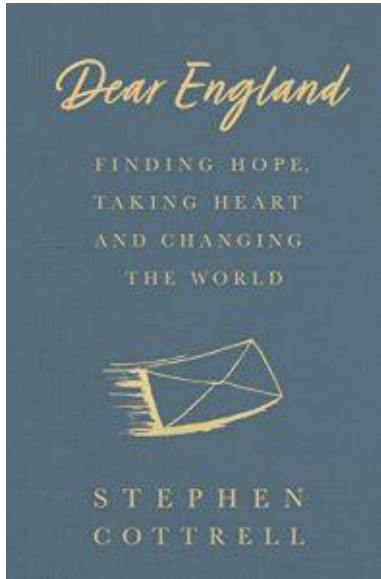
Ninian Thompson (UK): *I know I want to feel God's presence, God's love. To know God is to love God. From that, I find out what to do. I have a heart for social justice. I don't feel like I'm in a particular place for that but you see the injustices in the world and I want to be able to do something about those. I've always had a strong feeling that God leads me to where I need to be for God's purpose, and I'm in God's hands.*

Andrew Melville (UK): *Could I pray about it for 24 hours? I'd like to be able to articulate how the Bible links into the question of climate justice. Jesus was in the Bible and he was talking about the Garden of Eden. That's our planet and it's in trouble . . . we have to do something.*

Debbie Hart (USA): *I am in a season of grief. My oldest brother is still on a ventilator and battling the effects of Covid. Before all of this, I had moved from one end of the US to the other. ... I have settled in a new place and new situation, and have experienced these losses, and I hope that I will be able to focus and discern what God has called me to do at this time and place in my life.*

Lindsey Brown (UK): *I am hoping to find new ways of growing effective faith in action and justice initiatives, where Christ is visibly at their core. I am hoping, too, to find out what I don't know I don't know: always the best bit of any learning experience.*

A Book Review by Joe Forde, PhD



Dear England: Finding Hope, Taking Heart and Changing the World by Stephen Cottrell

For those who enjoyed Rowan Williams's *Tokens of Trust: An Introduction to Christian Belief*, you will find much to like about this offering from Stephen Cottrell, the newly appointed Archbishop of York. As with Rowan's book, Stephen's has been written by a liberal Anglo-Catholic to convey something of what it means to be an orthodox Christian to those who may know little about the Christian faith but are curious to know more. It was never going to be an easy task; yet he pulls it off with aplomb, in part due to the accessibility of his prose style and the ease with which he handles anecdotal recollections.

For Stephen, Christian faith is about finding hope, often in a world where there is little evidence of it and — for some — little apparent justification for it. He ascribes these feelings of negativity about any sense of ultimate purpose to one's life as — in part — symptomatic of the choice culture in which we now live: “a choice culture, where the choice extends to all realms of life. . . . For most of us, there is simply no such thing as an absolute truth: you have your truth, I have mine.” Not only does this ‘postmodern’, cultural relativism have intellectual limitations for Stephen; it can also be psychologically retarding to those who seek a more solid moral foundation on which to call, and who yearn for a deeper — more intellectually nuanced — take on the meaning of life and how to live it, that the Christian tradition offers.

Being a Christian is also about taking heart in the conviction that Christianity offers a way of engaging with the world that is solidly rooted in God's purpose. This is embodied in Stephen's affirmation: “we don't know anything about God that we don't see in Jesus ... [Hence] Jesus is the lens through which we see God.” His theology is thus unambiguously orthodox in that Jesus is the lens through which we see God because, as he puts it, “Jesus is God.”

Being a Christian, for Stephen, is also about changing the world, and his indebtedness to the emphasis that liberal Anglo-Catholicism places on incarnational theology as a route to advancing social justice is apparent, though not explicitly stated. At a time when any notion of the common good is being questioned by some Anglo-Catholic theologians as being inconsistent with a pluralist vision of society (see M. Chapman, ‘Pluralism, Welfare and the Common Good: Three Varieties of Christian Socialism’, *Political Theology*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 2000, pp. 33-56), Stephen embraces it: “My own good can only be secured by securing the common good of all.”

In this regard — as well as in others — it is clear that he has been influenced by Roman Catholic Social Teaching (he has been a member of the Anglican Society of Catholic Priests for many years) to which he makes reference in the closing chapter, sharing a common understanding with Roman Catholics of

the importance of the dignity of labour, the universal distribution of goods, and of solidarity — that is, “reminding us that we belong to one another irrespective of ethnicity, language, religion, education or status.”

At a time when theology is often seen as inaccessible to laypeople owing to the impenetrable style in which it is often written, Stephen, in this book, shows that it needn't be that way. He covers an enormous amount of ground in a modest number of words that convey the essence of his orthodox Christian faith in ways that are fully accessible and comprehensible. As with Rowan Williams, his is a faith perspective from within the Affirming Catholicism grouping that is deeply held and admirably informed. If he can demonstrate the same accessible writing skills that he shows in this book when composing his sermons for York Minster, he might just make a not inconsiderable contribution to stemming the tide of disaffiliation and reduced observance that has plagued the Church of England since the early 1960s.

Say “Hi” to Rev. Robert Hoch, PhD, Director of Theological Exploration



The Revd Dr Robert (Rob) Hoch is the recently appointed Director of Theological Exploration, a newly developed position for UTU. Rob was ordained in the Presbyterian Church (USA) in 1995 and earned his PhD at Princeton Theological Seminary, New Jersey in 2006. He served as a theological educator for thirteen years and has extensive experience in pastoral ministry, including in the City of Baltimore, Maryland. In a forthcoming work, *Wisdom from the Footpath: Practical Guidance for Those Who Preach* (Wipf and Stock, (anticipated) 2022), Rob has written something like a walking-guide for those who preach. Drawing on experiences of walking in the Lake District, he writes to support those who live on the footpath of congregational preaching.

As Director of Theological Exploration, Rob will be helping UTU to raise its profile, renew established relationships and form new ones, expand learning opportunities at the certificate level and support the PhD program.

Rob and his family moved to the UK in December of 2020 to be closer to his wife's family. As an Alaska Native descendant (Athabascan), Rob stays connected with his indigenous experience through First Nations scholarship, participation in Native Alaskan organizations, arts, and friendships. His great passions in life include walking with his best friend in life, Rebecca, and being amazed by their four children, Gwendoline (17), Imogen (15), Gabriel (11) and Iris (8). They live in the Ribbles Valley of Lancashire, near Clitheroe.

In Memoriam

The Reverend Susan Burchell was part of the current PhD cohort until her sudden death from cancer just as she was finalising her thesis for examination. Her death was tragic for her husband, Joe, and their three children, and the parish from which she was just retiring. I first met Sue when I gave a lecture at the St Philip's Centre in Leicester on doing Contextual Theology and its relevance for all faiths, not just Christians. Having just completed an MA at St Philips, she inquired about doing a PhD. Instinctively I responded to her topic about the significance of a Vicar being resident in a parish, and with Dr Alan Billings and Dr Christine Dutton we have been supervising her research ever since. Sue has been an admirable student: always delivering work to a good standard, on time, and appropriately responding to supervisor comments. It is a great shame that she should die just before submitting, and with her fellow students we mourn her loss. Her draft thesis is now being submitted to the University of Manchester for a posthumous award, which we think would be a fitting memorial to her and some comfort to her family. Moreover, we hope that in some way her work may contribute to the current lively debate about 'the parish' in the Church of England.

Revd Dr Ian K Duffield, Director of Research.

The Reverend Jennifer Mullis MBE was among student ministers training for Methodist Ministry with me at the UTU in the mid-1990s and completed a Diploma in Ministry and Theology. Jen, as she was known, brought with her an open, questioning and humble approach to theological exploration. She was good fun to have in the learning environment and a great encouragement to staff and students. Jen went on to have a wide-ranging and invaluable ministry with a keen commitment and contribution to good education and learning for all. She particularly supported those who were most vulnerable and marginalised. Jen was a blessing to all she worked with.

Revd Dr Inderjit Bhogal, Director UTU 1997-2004

MEMBERSHIP FEES

We are very grateful that you support UTU and hope that you will continue to do so. Please check that your 2021/22 membership renewal is set for the correct amount:

£45 full membership, £16.50 concession

Don't forget that you can pay monthly: see **www.utusheffield.org.uk**

Or contact Jill Wagg, Office Administrator (**0114 270 9907**)

office@utusheffield.org.uk

Lower Ground Floor, Victoria Hall Methodist Church, Norfolk Street,
Sheffield S1 2JB (entrance opposite Superdrug in Chapelwalk)