



From the
Community Co-ordinator:
Ian Ring

Advent 2013

Dear Friends

Yesterday we had a visit from a couple who met at Barnes Close whilst she was working here nearly forty-five years ago. As we walked around the building they reminisced about the way it was then. This was before the extension and the conservatories, the chapel was still a dormitory, my study was the lounge for the wardens and the office was the staff dining room. They talked about walking on the M5 as it was being built and of walking over the hill to Rubery.

That evening the Barnes Close Committee met and we talked about the ongoing improvements at Barnes Close and the way the use of the building and guest expectations have changed over the years. Alongside we talked about changes in the way volunteers come and the length of time they stay for. Reflecting on this and the conversation mentioned above led me to think about journeys.

Most journeys we make are planned, airline, rail or coach tickets bought, timetables consulted, weather forecasts checked, satnav's programmed, maps read, bags packed and off we go. Some journeys go as planned, others do not but we arrive at a destination. My experience is that however well I research the route and destination I am always surprised by some aspects of it and sometimes I even finish up at a different destination.

Barnes Close is on a journey. Starting out as a country home it has been used as a children's home, youth centre, retreat house, conference centre and office for CfR. CfR is on a journey. Starting as a network community it moved to Barnes Close as a base for its work. The underlying ethos and aims have not changed but the way it is worked out has as the programme has developed, society has changed, personnel have changed and links developed with work in East Africa, Romania, Croatia & Serbia, India and Afghanistan.

2013 has been a journey during which we have served nearly 5300 meals, relaunched our membership, welcomed members, friends and strangers to Barnes Close, sat in meetings discerning the will of God, made plans – and changed them, dealt with the unexpected, got the new Membership & Programme, Marketing and Fund Raising Groups off the ground, said hello and goodbye to a dozen volunteers and prayed for peace and reconciliation.

My journey at CfR started back in Liverpool in the early 1990's when Maureen & Jim Hughes introduced me to CfR and 'their country home', Barnes Close. That journey turned from a quiet meandering country lane into a busy highway when I succeeded John and Joan Johansen-Berg in 2001 and became Community Coordinator. Little did I know where that journey would take me. At times it has felt more like a rollercoaster than a smooth train. At times we seem to have been stuck on a ring road looking for an exit whilst on other occasions we have had to contend with those who prefer to make a u-turn back to the past rather than risk the unknown beckoning future. Through it all we have moved forward and both CfR and Barnes Close have a role to play

if we have the courage to continue to follow God into the unknown and trust him to guide us. Through my participation in the Europe-wide, ecumenical organisation Church & Peace we have a greater involvement in, and stronger links with, the peace movement throughout Europe. The nature of our links with overseas partners has changed with, in many cases, less direct input from CfR and more local direction of projects. Barnes Close now sees a much wider range of guests than it did in the past.

Christmas is both a journey and part of a journey. It is a segment of the journey of God with His creation but it is not the whole journey. That journey did not begin and end at Christmas. It began before time, made its way through creation, Christmas, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost and will continue through eternity. Within that great journey the Christmas journey took Mary and Joseph from sweethearts to parents, from Nazareth to Bethlehem and on to Egypt. It took wise men from the east through Jerusalem to Bethlehem and shepherds from a dull working night on the hills to worship the Messiah in a stable. For all there was great risk, Mary could have been stoned as an unmarried mother, Joseph could have broken off the engagement, the wise men could have been killed by Herod, the shepherds could have lost their jobs for desertion and Jesus himself, God incarnate could have been killed by Herod. All who participated in this journey found unexpected happenings, encountered people they would never normally meet and ultimately discovered deep joy as they became part of something special and much bigger than they had dreamed of as they participated in God's journey.

Journeys are risky undertakings but they are also full of endless possibilities and opportunities. As we journey into 2014 together I pray for you and ask you to pray for me, the staff and volunteers, trustees and committee members. Ours is a shared journey, one that will lead us to unexpected happenings, encounters with people we would not normally meet and to find deep joy as we journey through CfR with God on His journey.

Yours

PS If you would like to make a Christmas Gift please make it for the work of Maji Mazuri and its schools, youth, clinics and job creation schemes in the shanty town and slums of Nairobi. (cheques to 'Community for Reconciliation').

PPS It would be great if you could make a journey to Barnes Close in 2014. We would love to see you

Working for Reconciliation with God and with each other

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