

ALTERNativity



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Make Poverty History

Trade Justice—Drop the Debt—More and better aid

Christmas 2004 will be forever remembered for the Tsunami—it added a new word to our vocabulary and put the excesses of the season into perspective. Yet...

"In the six days between the earthquake and New Year," says Kevin Fray from the Methodist Church, "as many people died of preventable causes brought on by poverty, as died in the tsunami.

2005 and Make Poverty History isn't about giving money, but rather giving time and energy: . Worldwide about 30,000 children are dying every day because of poverty that comes from the unfair ways we run the global economy."

This is a year of campaigning and action on the issues of trade, aid and debt and the links might at first seem tenuous to our Christmas celebrations. Yet for us at ALTERNativity, concerns for justice and equality are at the heart of all that we are trying to change at Christmas. The Moderator of the Church of Scotland's comments (opposite) from last Christmas say it all.

More and more people are weary of the excesses of Christmas and are looking for alternatives whether it is in gifts or celebration.

Our choices have consequences

This is the time to start thinking about Christmas in 2005 if you want to do it differently. Nothing more formal than conversations with a few key people. See page 3 for some of last year's ideas.



Why not think outside the box?

www.buynothingchristmas.org

Just Gifts from Christian Aid

This raised £3/4 million in 2004—a big thanks to all of you who chose your gifts from the catalogue.

Remember they can be used for birthdays and anniversaries too;
Tel. 0131 220 1254 or 0141 221 7475

In her Christmas message, Dr Alison Elliot, the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, said the festival should be a "chance to heal the wounds in our world" instead of a celebration of gluttony.

She said:

"Christmas is sold to us as a time for escapism. A time for tinsel and wish lists and a partying that pretends that all is well and everyone is happy. A time to shut out the cold and the dark and console ourselves with food and stories. And more food.

But that's not what it's about at all. It's really about coming down to earth. About God coming down to earth and showing that the world with all its hurts and imperfections and messiness is the world that God made and loves."

Dr Elliot said that this was "worth celebrating", but it should recognise the suffering of others.

"So bring on the streamers and the presents and see them as a chance to heal the wounds in our world, to bring into the feasting those we've been pushing out of the picture the rest of the year," she said.



Looking Back—2004

Best tips

www.buynothingchristmas.org It's full of images and ideas for use at church and school. We loved the new words for carols!

Beyond belief. A CD by Martin John Nicholls—his response to visiting Bethlehem. To order: www.martinjohnicholls.co.uk.

Unbelievable Figures from 2004 (from *The Independent*)

£30 billion—what UK spent on Christmas

£813 –Average spending per adult (good news—down £55 from last year)

5 million -Upset stomachs over the Christmas season

7000 calories average Christmas day consumption

30,525 miles—how far your dinner will have travelled to your Christmas table.

A Christmas idea from Ghana



On Christmas Day when children go visiting in Ghana, they string around their necks some gem biscuits (a plain biscuit with a hole in the middle) and when they meet a friend or a member of the family, they break off a piece of biscuit as a sign of sharing and caring.

Why not adapt this idea for worship—using it at an all –age service.

Sometimes our images of people from Africa are negative; using these ideas reminds us that we have as much to receive as to give.

Why not begin a meeting with a symbolic sharing of biscuits or chocolate (much of our chocolate comes from Ghana) .

Check the Christian Aid web-site (www.christian-aid.org.uk) for an update on how unjust Trade Rules are driving Ghanaian farmers out of business.

Write your own prayer or use the prayer opposite which tells the story of 16 yr old Bismarck on the streets of Accra, Ghana

All: Hear our prayer

Reader 1:

'My mum and dad are farmers in the Eastern Region of Ghana. There's nothing for me to do there, no work, so I've come to Accra to earn money.'
We cry out against the wasted lives and unfulfilled hopes of people like Bismarck - just one more commodity in a world of supply and demand.

Reader 2:

Help us Lord God to pray and to campaign with them for a new economic system where the unique dignity of each human life is valued above all, and where trade serves the need of the people rather than enslaving them. Lord, in your mercy

All: Hear our prayer

Great ideas for sharing

1. Queens' Park Church of Scotland

The congregation of Queen's Park Parish in Glasgow held a Tree Festival in December 2004. Inspired by "The Christmas Tree" book (ISBN 09543209-1-3), organisations inside and outside the church were invited to come and decorate a Christmas Tree to their own theme. 26 groups from in and around Glasgow including local churches, an Asian outreach centre, a centre for adults with learning difficulties, local schools, church youth organisations and even the local hospital— all enthusiastically set to, making their tree the brightest and best.

During the three days of the Festival, children from local primary schools came along and sang carols and musicians and singers of all descriptions came to entertain while the many visitors viewed the trees. A café and shop gave the opportunity to take away



Peace tree

mementoes of the occasion, including

photographs of the trees, as well as having a meal or just a cup of tea. There was even mulled wine for those brave enough!

Although the prime motivation for the Festival was to bring together church and community sharing fun and putting different talents to use, a significant by-product was raising over £1,500. This was shared among the Prince and Princess of Wales Hospice, Glasgow The Caring City and Queen's Park's Renovation Fund.

The spectacle of 26 Christmas trees brightly decorated and lit, created a wonderful display and made a large impression on all who came to see. You could organise your own festival this year. If you need any help or further information please feel free to contact Queen's Park Parish via their website www.qpp.org.uk or by telephone at 0141 423 3654 or **ALTERNativity** at 0141 221 4242.



Support for victims of torture

Ed: Isn't this a great idea? Perhaps your local churches or groups could decorate trees to explain to people what Christmas is all about? All the tree photos are now displayed on Queen's Park web-site.

**“ I shop therefore I am.
Is this all there is to life?”**

2 Paisley Justice and Peace Group

In December 2004, members of the Central Paisley Justice & Peace Group hosted an **ALTERNativity** meal in St Peter's Parish, Glenburn. Liz Snodgrass thought this was a great idea, not only for members to come together to have a social evening but also as a way of inviting parishioners to come along to share time and a meal. Earlier that year she had read 'Turn the Tables; Reflections on Faith and Trade' (Ed. R. Dudley & L Jones CAFOD 2003) and in the days leading up to Christmas felt compelled to take some time out to focus in a meaningful way on the plight of the marginalized in our society. What could she do other than spend, spend, spend in the run up to celebrating the birth of Christ?

She felt that some maybe shocked that John the Baptist (and not Joseph) along with Mary and Jesus are the central people in the Advent meal. Why John? He prepared the way for the coming of Christ and was the bridge between the old and new testaments prophets. He led a simple lifestyle which was full of struggles.

She thought that the meal was a great success because it provided the opportunity to spend time with others who had never had experience of such an evening. It highlighted for her the importance of being with other people and also that God's love and justice is for all. It is a good reminder always that Advent should be a time of preparation and hope for everyone, and should include the poor and excluded in our world.



Teaching parenting skills with puppets; Nicaragua

At the end of the meal, donations were invited to support the work of Familias Especiales in Nicaragua; this is a community organisation which supports mothers of children with special needs. They are working with mothers from the poorest barrios, building self-esteem and developing parenting skills. Puppets used for training were bought with the proceeds of the meal.

Ed; our thanks to Liz Snodgrass and Maureen Brough for telling us about their advent meal and especially their idea for fundraising. It is a good example of linking the global and the local in a way that brings the meaning of Christmas into the celebration both at home and overseas.

*funded by Sisters of Notre Dame, Lloyds TSB and Working Together for Change

Looking Forward: Dates for your Diary 2005

11/12 August 2005 Beyond Belief—Beyond Belief is a powerful portrayal in words and song of life for Palestinians living under occupation. Written by singer songwriter Martin John Nicholls, it brings home in a captivating way the fears and well as the hopes and dreams of Palestinian people. The songs are all based on the stories he was told and the conversations he had with people while visiting Christian Aid partners in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. This production will be performed for two nights only as part of the Fringe programme. Put the dates in your diary now – Thursday 11th and Friday 12th August in St Mary's Cathedral Edinburgh at 8pm. Tickets cost £5 and can be bought from the Fringe Box office and Christian Aid ,41 George IV Bridge, EDINBURGH 0131 2201254

10 September 2005; Visit us at our stall at The Big Saturday Event at the Scottish Exhibition Centre in Glasgow. Our stall will be filled with resources old and new—a chance to buy our Christmas cards, the Advent Gift, the new school assembly materials as well as chat to the Alternativity team. Watch out for the seminar "Just God simply Christmas ; what does it mean to be the church without walls in Advent?"

29 September 2005 Launch of our latest publication of assembly materials for secondary schools— a must have for school chaplains, RE teachers and anyone responsible for secondary school assemblies. Venue to be confirmed: e-mail us if you are interested.

30 October 2005 Get your order in for an Advent Star Box—made in a co-operative in Bangkok and piloted last Christmas. This is an advent calendar for adults and some comments we got last year were "best ever idea" and "we looked forward to each day's message". £5.99 plus p&p