

# ALTERNativity

## Just God simply Christmas



Newsletter no 16

November 2004

### Time to reflect.

This edition of the newsletter takes a completely different theme from recent copies.

Although we have talked much about how we can make Christmas sustainable, environmentally and with a concern for the poorest, we have not focussed much on personal issues. Sustaining ourselves for 'resistance' is the other side of the coin.



Pictures can aid reflection and encourage contemplation of God in the real.

One of our concerns, touched on in the last newsletter, is about our use of time.

The pressure on people in Advent seems to reach a peak and we wonder if, together, we can begin to change this pattern.

This newsletter brings you some examples of Advent reflections from different traditions and styles and, if it is not already your practice, we would encourage you to experiment with taking some time out daily. Each of us will find different ways of becoming still - through words, or music or the reading

of a verse from scripture— and perhaps a commitment to share that time with others would make it easier.

You may find that the contemplation of something visual is more conducive to quiet. It can be something as simple as contemplation of a Christmas card or a poster or a photograph.

Sit down comfortably and relax. Allow your mind to quieten down and then let the picture 'speak' to you. Are you drawn to one of the characters? Does it connect with some part of your life? Where does the birth of Jesus fit in with the many other activities?

Committing to even five minutes a day can help to put the razzmatazz into perspective.

To make it very easy for you, we have enclosed a pamphlet 'A Pregnant Pause' developed by the Rev Ally Newell for ACTs in 2003. There is one reflection per week as repetition in prayer can reveal new truths.

Our wish for you this Advent is that you may experience the joy and the peace which God longs for his world, and that you may be able to transmit that joy to those you meet.

### What's been happening at ALTERNativity?

Last year a survey of minister's needs led to a training evening in Glasgow with samples from our latest book and work begun on Assembly materials for Secondary Schools.

*'stimulating and helpful 'not so much dread now' 'inspiring'*

Sadly the Edinburgh clergy event did not run because of lack of numbers.

Introductory Evening held in : Coatbridge and Kirkwall.

Joint materials developed with Boards of World Mission and the Guild of the Church of Scotland focussing on Philippines and Thailand. (copy enclosed)

## The Advent Adventure

David Rhodes

The inner city may seem an unlikely place to find inspiration for Advent but David Rhodes shares the good news of God's love, spoken to a tired and damaged world by those rejected as worthless; the homeless and the poor.

*"If you love security and comfort, this book will probably disturb you. If you love organised religion it is sure to infuriate you. But if you want to find meaning and the love of God, you will find it an adventure"*

Scenes and encounters from contemporary life jostle with stories retold from the bible.

ISBN 0 281 05159 3 £5.99

## In joyful hope

Henri Nouwen

This small pamphlet of meditations for Advent is a selection from Nouwen's writings. He has an ability to share his own spiritual journey which is both humbling and inspiring and these are no exception.

The readings are centred around Christ being born in our hearts in the here and now; they begin with a scripture passage and end with a prayer.

His ability to look at the gospel message and highlight how counter-cultural it is gives us a gentle challenge in looking at our own life in the world today .

Available from Catholic bookshops  
( no ISBN number )

Advent is a time of waiting –what does it feel like to wait? What are you waiting and longing for this Advent?

## Innkeepers and Light Sleepers

Songs for Christmas John L Bell

Perhaps words or the visual do not help you to reflect easily, whereas music or songs can bring the season to life.

There is much sacred music which is easily found in music shops but this selection of songs move to a different beat.

The collection of 17 songs allow you to meet the characters of the Christmas story in all their humanity, whilst capturing the mystery of the event.

Sometimes we get stuck in a sugar sweet image of the birth of Christ as portrayed in children's nativity plays and, although they have their place, it is a very different picture from Bethlehem 2000 years ago as these songs remind us.

Tape £9.99 CD £14.99

## Advent readings from IONA

Brian Woodcock and Jan Sutch Pickard


Written out of a need for something fresh and relevant, this book of readings was developed by the Iona Community Island residential group in 2000.

They describe the book as being *from* and *for* companions– folk sharing bread and sharing a way of life.

The interpretation of the passages in simple every day stories grounds the Advent gospel in everyday life.

It encourages us to look for the signs in our own lives and reflect on past and present events. Because it is written by two authors, it has quite different styles which adds to its uniqueness and appeal. The use of poetry brings an added dimension.



 ISBN 1-901-55733-2  
£7.99

## **A Candle of Hope**

Garth Hewitt

This book takes us through Advent towards Christmas by visiting places and people in the Holy Land.

It begins with stories of Bethlehem in the Old Testament and journeys through to the birth of Christ and the hope and light that brings.

'Advent provides the Christian Community with a new beginning and new beginnings provide new opportunities for people. As all of us are on the journey of life, it is good to continue to look for new opportunities and fresh starts....let us pray that the mistrust among the nations that make up the Middle East, be they Christians, Jews or Muslims be forgotten, and that the three faiths can join hands to protect what is left of the beauty of an area which God has chosen and made so special'

Riah Hanna, Anglican Bishop Jerusalem

ISBN 1 84101 041 3  
£6.99

## **Prepare A Way**

CAFOD

CAFOD's reflections for 2004 are centred around Bangladesh.

The authors offer daily spiritual meditations to refresh the spirit and prepare us for Action, so that we will be ready to celebrate the feast of Christmas.

It is an ideal resource not only for individual use, but also for group discussion or for worship preparation. £2.50

CAFOD Supporters services  
Romero Close  
Stockwell Road  
LONDON SW 9 9TY  
Tel 0207 7733 7900

Christmas is a time of giving. What is it about gifts you give or receive that make them valuable to you?

What would need to change in our celebrations so that 'valueless' gifts could be cherished?

## **Further Resources for Advent Meditation**

**A Feast for Advent** Delia Smith  
ISBN 0 7459 2330 5  
£ 5.99

**Come Lord Jesus**  
Geoffrey Rowell & Julien Chilcott-Monk  
ISBN 1-85311-473-1  
£5.99

**Watch for the Light**  
Many well known contributors  
ISBN 0-87486-917-X

Colourful Advent, New way to pray  
Sheila J Merryweather  
ISBN 1 844 1704 497 £5.99

On the way to Bethlehem, reflections  
Hilary McDowell  
ISBN 1 8410 10162 £6.99

Hope in the wilderness, Bible readings  
David Winter £6.99

**Reflections on the Web**  
[www.surefish.org.uk/faith](http://www.surefish.org.uk/faith) - Isaiah

[www.alternativity.org.uk](http://www.alternativity.org.uk)—concern for others

<http://dailydig.brudershof.org>

## **A final word from Oscar Romero**

Advent should admonish us to discover  
in each brother or sister that we greet,  
in each friend whose hands we shake,  
in each beggar who asks for bread,  
in each worker who wants the right to join a  
union,  
In each peasant who looks for work in the  
coffee groves,  
the face of Christ.  
Then it would not be possible to rob them,  
to cheat them,  
to deny them their rights,  
They are Christ and whatever is done to  
them, Christ will take as done to himself.  
This is what Advent is,  
Christ living among us.  
The Violence of Love; free e-book format

## RESOURCES from ALTERnativity

### The Christmas Tree -

New ideas on a traditional theme.

The Christmas tree has become a central part of our Christmas celebration: this book has ideas about how the tree might add to worship or even become central to it in the season of Advent and beyond.

ISBN 09543209-1-3



£6.00 +p&p



### The Advent Meal

Two outlines for meals which combine celebration with reflection. Loosely based on the tradition of the Passover meal with responses and symbolic action.

ISBN 0954 3209 0 5

£4.00 + 40p&p

### Changing Stables

An introductory resource for different Advent and Christmas celebrations.

Amidst the materialism and partying of the Christmas season, how can we be good news for the poor? This new book offers a range of ideas for finding ways of doing it differently which are fun, freeing and faithful to the biblical story. Includes conversation starters, activity outlines and worship resources.

ISBN 095432909 2 1 £ 9.50 + p&p 85p



### Advent Reflections—A Gift 'Poverty has a woman's face'

This year *ALTERnativity* got together with the One World Shops to try to think of a different way to remember the poorest this Christmas. The result is this beautiful box made by women in Bangkok as part of a small co-operative known as Hot Chilli. These women make beautiful paper products and some of these can be found in the One World shops.



Our order was for this red star shaped box, which contains reflections for each day in Advent. Four stars have also been left blank for you to personalise.

As a symbol of our commitment to sustainability, we have included a star template so that you can use your favourite cards to make the gift for a friend next year!

Many of the poorest women in Thailand are forced into prostitution or illegal activity such as drugs or stealing as a way to feed their families. Hot Chilli offers an alternative and the project not only gives an income but also pride and dignity to the women. As a recent visitor commented "They weren't looking for a handout—just a better chance in life"

Just after we had placed our order, disaster struck— a fire broke out in the slum and burnt everything to the ground including their homes and the Hot Chilli factory.

Undeterred the project has found temporary premises and begun work again.

This year there are only 100 of these so place your order early.

**Cost £5.00 +p&p** but if you are wish, a donation could also be forwarded to Hot Chilli.

### For orders:

Tel 0141 221 4242

E-mail: alter@christian-aid.org

Did you know it costs us 75p per copy to produce this newsletter? Do you have an e-mail address?

Donations to support the growing work of ALTERnativity are welcomed.