

*ALTER*nativity

Just God simply Christmas



Issue no 19 September 2006

What's been happening at *ALTER*nativity?

A year ago just now we were celebrating 'The Big Saturday' in the SECC in Glasgow; it was a real opportunity for us to spread the news about *ALTER*nativity and resulted in a big increase in the sales of our publications. What it also made us realise was that we need to 'get out there' and introduce more people to our materials.

We applied for funding to the Church of Scotland's Parish Development Fund and we are off to Inverness and Elgin this autumn; at the moment the events are designed for ministers and the guild but we are hopeful of having an open event in both, when people see what we have to offer!

Our funding from Christian Aid ends this year and we asked for an annual subscription from our database;

A BIG THANKS TO THOSE OF YOU WHO RESPONDED! and especially to those who sent words of encouragement. It's not too late....

A small group are busy working on materials for women's groups just now and a student placement from Glasgow University will pilot these in different women's groups in Glasgow over the next winter. We have secured funding for its publication in 2007.

We are continuing our relationship with folks across the globe and this year the Diocese of Melbourne used some of our materials in their children and families workers' training day in June.

And last but not least, we were delighted to appoint Matt Grady as development worker so now there is two of us working one day a week. He introduces himself on the next page.

10 years old

This year *ALTER*nativity is 10 years old and we are having a party to celebrate.

We will have the Moderator of the Church of Scotland the Very Rev Alan McDonald as our special guest speaker.

Monday 9th October
2006, 12:30—2 pm

@

Kelvin Grove Parish
Church



New Development Worker

On the 1st September I started my role as development worker, I might have spoken to some of you already and I'll no doubt speak to others as time rolls on. I'm looking forward to the challenge of taking ALTERnativity out to a wider audience and I'm hoping we can build on the work that has already been done. Let me know if there is anything we could be doing that we are not already.

Take Care

Matt

REVIEW OF THE ARTICLE - "PREPARING FOR CHRISTMAS"

by Ruth Grayson (first in the Methodist Recorder. 2005)

"I hate, I despise your feasts" Amos 5:21

In her article, Ruth challenges in a profound and thought-provoking way, all our Christian preparations and celebrations for Christmas. Using the Gospels, and different theological and biblical approaches, she demonstrates that the current celebrations which emphasise Advent and end abruptly on Christmas Day ("shutting up shop") create a real imbalance in the message we give to the world. Instead she urges us to re-assess our corporate and personal Christmas Celebrations, to prevent "a travesty of the Gospel message and an obscenity in the eyes of the starving world."

Ruth makes very positive and helpful proposals for changes. She suggests these will benefit not only the message we give to others, but will also do a great deal to rectify the ills (including physical and mental ill health, family and marital breakdown, increases in suicide) associated with the "dead" period after Christmas and before the majority of people return to employment.

This article is well worth reading, and sharing with people in your churches.

Ruth closes it by saying, "In fact, it (Christmas) is the event that is meant to change the world. Sadly, our Christmas celebrations appear to contradict the basic message of the Gospel and need to be urgently reconsidered." In this article she makes a very powerful case for change, and I will be sharing what she writes with the Kirk Session where I am – you might like to too when you have read this article!

You can download the article from our website.

<http://www.alternativity.org.uk/pdf/prepforchristmas.pdf>



Buy Nothing Day is on Saturday the 25th November this year. We would encourage you to mark this day and use it as an opportunity to pause for reflection at this hectic time of year.

ALTERnativity 759A Argyle Street, GLASGOW G3 8DS 0141 221 4242 www.alternativity.org.uk
Supported by Christian Aid, Church of Scotland, Iona Community Wild Goose Resource Group, BERT,
Working Together for Change, Episcopal Church

Star Boxes

In this beautiful hand made star box is a thought for each day of Advent –



written on a star shape. These are still proving very popular and are a lovely to either use yourself or give to someone as a gift.

This beautiful box is made by women in the slums of Bangkok as part of a small cooperative known as Hot Chilli!

“Many of the things that we buy are made by women in developing countries. That’s a good thing. These women need jobs and they are worth investing in. They may be poor but they work very hard. Their environment can be quite unpredictable but they are often the most loyal people you could meet. If they can raise a family on \$1 per day, you can safely bet they can manage just about anything. Give these women the hint of an opportunity to improve their lives and they will grab it with both hands. Fair trade organisations exist to provide links between women like these and the global market place, ensuring that they receive a fair price for their products and a just return for their labour. It’s just the kind of opportunity they need.”

Here are some of the women’s stories:

Tu is 35 years old. Working in the project meant she could save money for the first time in her life.

She purchased a house in the slum community and then used it as collateral to buy a pick up truck which her husband uses to sell plastics in a large mobile market. Tu lost her house in the fire, but income from the plastic sales is going towards a new home in the rebuilt community.

Jumpi is 55 years old. She used her earnings to rebuild her home, buy another as a rental property and send her son to a better school. Jumpi also lost her home but, like Tu, she has a reliable source of income to put towards a new home.

Ung has two preschool aged children so she couldn’t go outside the community to work. The children are welcome in the project work room and she takes extra work home to do in the evenings when they are sleeping. She has doubled her family income.

The co-op has been running profitably for five years, doubling in size each year. It is the linking of high quality products with groups like *ALTER*nativity that ensures that these women will continue to profit from their skill and labour for many years to come. . By buying Hot Chilli Concepts products you are playing a vital role in helping these women fight poverty.

More than just tinsel - here are some words from a satisfied user of these resources

“I found the pack incredibly useful in a number of settings. Christmas eve service with the whole church, Christmas assembly at the high school, SU groups, new members class, my Sunday evening youth group, and I even presented it to one of our worship teams who used the HIV stuff to lead a fantastic service with very little input from the ministry team.

It was very easy to adapt, add or remove sections according to the participants, setting, tone and of course how much prep time I had for any given group. It lent itself to being shaped and shared in a variety of ways and for a variety of folks.

The Bethlehem images and HIV stuff in particular left a lasting effect in the groups, and are still brought up in conversation by some folks 6 months on from when we used it.

The bit that hit a note with me as someone keen to see others grow in skills was that you really don’t have to be the all singing all dancing member of the ministry of magic to use the pack to great effect. New members of the church with little experience of leading worship were able to adapt and use the materials with groups to great effect.



Lastly it cut down my prep time for all those groups significantly whilst at the same time connecting people feelings with “other peoples” problems in a way that’d struggle to do by writing my own stuff. As someone who is highly disorganised this was a really appreciated Christmas present.”

TAKING THE COMMERCE OUT OF CHRISTMAS

By Ruth Grayson

Christmas has become synonymous with everything that Christians should be opposing. It is a time of rushed activity in the weeks beforehand and general anticlimax afterwards. It is a time characterised by overindulgence followed by regret, over-expenditure by debt, over-exuberance by social and family stress. It is a time increasingly associated with domestic violence, marital breakdown, depression, and even suicide. The celebration of Jesus' birth has become marginalized even among Christians, who almost cannot help but become caught up in the frenzy of activity that epitomises the Advent season and the boredom of its aftermath. So much for the 'glad tidings of great joy' that Christmas is supposed to bring to the world. So much for our witness that we allow it to happen at all.

Little by little, however, the tide seems to be turning with 'alternative giving' begun—cows to Africa, cans of worms to Bolivia— and charity Christmas cards as well as projects for homeless people. All this is a big step toward putting Christ back into Christmas. But it is not enough. Our commercial Christmases remain an anathema in a starving world.

How can we restore to it God's message of peace and hope? The church needs to take stock of its celebrations and we as individual Christians too.

The church needs to take the lead in setting a different pace at Christmas; currently it follows social trends rather than trying to buck them. It adds to the frenetic build-up during December by scheduling in extra services, nativity plays, and parties. Christ's coming among us did not abruptly end at noon on 25 December and should give us cause for continuing celebration. The church should not 'close for the holidays' at exactly the time of year when it may be most needed and when everything else is shut. And above all, it should not concentrate the majority of its Christmas services in the very hectic pre-Christmas period, but should aim at reminding members and non-members alike that Christmas is the beginning of a new era, not merely the culmination of the Advent season. If the church were to stop treating Advent as a count-down to Christmas as the shops do, and move some of its services and other activities to the period following Christmas Day, this could help alleviate the frenzy beforehand and the anticlimax afterwards. A 'shopping free Saturday' in December, with a quiet service and a

simple lunch would be a good start. Carol services could be held after Christmas. So could Christmas plays and parties. And toy services — when children are encouraged to bring gifts for their disadvantaged counterparts in towns and cities all over the country — should be held at Epiphany.

Today we regard Epiphany as the end of the Christmas season, the day on which the decorations are taken down and life returns to normal. Again, this is nonsense. Epiphany, rather than Christmas, was celebrated in the early church for at least two reasons. It was the time when the infant Jesus was first manifested to the Gentiles. And it was the time when those Gentiles brought their gifts to him — their very valuable, sacrificial gifts in humble acknowledgement of God's even greater gift to them. The giving of gifts at Christmas has its origins in Epiphany, and it is only recently in this country that the tradition of gift giving began to take place on Christmas Day itself.

So why give gifts to each other at all? We can stop all commercial giving and concentrate instead on alternative, social, sacrificial giving. We can contribute all that we would normally spend on ourselves at Christmas to local or overseas projects aimed at helping those less fortunate than ourselves. Let's keep birthdays, anniversaries and special personal or family occasions for the shopping sprees and let's devote our Christmas giving to Christ. If Christians alone were to spend as much on social projects as they do on themselves every Christmas, the amount raised would come to considerably more than the estimated 2.5% given to charity of the £15bn spent at Christmas last year.

None of this will necessarily be easy or painless. Decisions about giving at an individual level may mean not only changing our own customs and expectations but also those of our families and friends. Decisions about services, communal meals and activities in our churches may affect our own family and holiday plans and will certainly affect those of our ministers. But it may help to restore Christ to Christmas and make us think about our faith as never before. Swimming against the tide requires perseverance as well as strength and determination; but that, after all, is the essence of following Christ.

Got A Response??

If this article or any of our resources have you itching to respond we'd love to hear from you. Let us know your thoughts by contacting us using the details below.

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