

# B L O O M S B U R Y



## *annual report*

2009 / 10

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# Introduction

No two years in Bloomsbury's life seem to be the same and the past year has been one of significant change and challenge.

As anticipated in last year's report, Andrea Kvackova joined the ministry team last August as Pastoral and Community Worker. Her appointment was one of mutual benefit - to Bloomsbury because she was able to take over and, indeed, expand the work in this area that Seyan (our erstwhile Ministry Assistant) had undertaken, and partly to Andrea herself to help her gain experience of these aspects of church work before applying formally for ministerial recognition. Little did we know when Andrea took up her appointment how much we would need her help because, only four months later Simon, one of our ministers, was diagnosed with depression (a not uncommon illness in today's world of ministry) and was off sick until April. We are delighted that he is now back with us full-time. Despite Andrea's invaluable support -- supplemented by the membership in many ways -- Simon's absence inevitably imposed a substantial extra burden on Ruth and we are grateful for the way she coped - with only occasional signs of stress!

I wrote in last year's Report how much we were going to miss Seyan when he left last September to become a student minister at Walmer Baptist Church. This has indeed been the case but we are delighted (but not in the least surprised!) to learn that Walmer is thriving under his leadership. As I mentioned above, Seyan left us with a significant "hole" in our pastoral and community work, but an even greater loss was his dealing with the large number of lettings we have each week along with the general running of the building. In addition to appointing Andrea, we were fortunate that amongst the newcomers to Bloomsbury last year was one Vilem Kriz, who had come to London from the Czech Republic and was working as a hotel receptionist. Vilem expressed interest in that part of Seyan's old job which we designated "church manager" and, to cut a short story even shorter, Vilem was appointed to this post which he was able to take up within a matter of weeks thereby enabling him to overlap with Seyan and learn the ropes. Vilem has significantly improved our in-house IT facilities and has also increased our lettings income at a difficult time for the economy. We offer him and Alena (another newcomer to Bloomsbury from the Czech Republic) congratulations on their recent engagement.

But despite the staff changes and a number of difficult issues with which we had to deal during the year, one aspect of Bloomsbury has remained constant - and that is the substantial number of members and friends we have who have willingly given of their time and energy to help in running the church in so many ways. The names of many of these appear at the end of the various reports that follow. In addition, however, as I mention each year, Bloomsbury is blessed with a "silent army" of folk who provide many – often unglamorous - support services

which are essential to the smooth running of the church. The list is worth repeating and includes such labours as laying tables, cooking, serving and washing-up at Sunday and Tuesday lunches, preparing communion, providing and arranging flowers, recording services for those unable to attend, representing Bloomsbury on various bodies, editing and contributing to our magazine, organising social events for the elderly and lonely folk in the area, carrying out repairs to the building and its equipment... the list is endless. We are grateful to all who do so much to keep Bloomsbury running.

As ever, I hope that you enjoy reading this account of the latest year in the life of Bloomsbury. Should you have any comments or questions on our activities, please let us know. To those of you who have had no previous contact with us, or any other church for that matter, but would like to know more about us, I invite you to visit our web site ([www.bloomsbury.org.uk](http://www.bloomsbury.org.uk)), to drop in during our Open Doors (10am – 4pm, Monday to Friday) for a cup of coffee, or perhaps attend one of our services. I can assure you of nothing more, or less, than a warm welcome.

We hope that, with God's help, we as a fellowship - near and far - will continue to evolve to meet the changing challenges of our time and that Bloomsbury will continue, as in the past, to be a church for the city and the world.

*John Beynon*  
*Church Secretary, 1 July 2010*

## Ministry Team Reflections – The Open Church

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times – well, perhaps not that extreme on each side. But it has been a varied year from the point of view of the ministry team. We started with Seyan's departure, and the arrival of Andrea and Vilem to be new members of our team. This has involved working out new patterns of activity, and new assignment of responsibility. As a team, we get on very well, and our strengths and weaknesses complement each other. The hand over was pretty smooth, and such hiccups as there were have proved less than fatal. Andrea and Vilem have settled well into the fabric of this ministry, and as a church we are grateful to God for both of them.

The end of 2009 and the beginning of 2010 had particular challenges because Simon was off for several months. We missed him very much and it was good to welcome him back full time at Easter; it seemed a very fitting time.

As a church, we aim to be open and engaged with the world around us. We do this physically through our building, welcoming in both those who hire rooms for various activities, and those who come into the building through our *Open Doors*. We are again very grateful to those who keep the building open, and are the face of our welcome, dealing with all sorts of issues and questions, making people feel at home, and making endless cups of tea. This year, Libby Brown has taken over managing the rota – thanks Libby – and various new people have got involved. With the variety of people coming in and the new people getting involved, we are in the process of arranging some training for those who staff *Open Doors*. We intend that this will become a regular feature of our work – a context in which we can share experiences and learn from each other.

We are also open on Sundays, both in terms of the building, open for worship and also for our lunch together. Again, we want to say a huge thank you to those who make sure the building works well – is clean, warm, and functioning well and safely. And we are grateful to those who feed us – managing the cooking and washing up of lunch, and putting the rota together to make sure it happens!

In worship, we aim to be open – to be open to the leading of God through our listening and our worshipping. We have been fortunate in the variety of people who have led worship and have preached over this last year. During Simon's illness, various people stepped in at short notice, and since then, we have been developing a pattern of various different groups leading a service once a month. This openness to different insights, styles and expressions helps us all be more fully open to God's leading.

We are open too to connections with our wider community. Ruth has been involved in the reconstruction of the interfaith partnership in Camden, after a difficult year. This is just beginning to come together again, but looks hopeful.

There have also be good contacts with the new officer for social cohesion in Camden – a connection that should lead to more interaction with other faith communities in the borough. We have also maintained good contact with the developers at St Giles' Court, and we want to say thank you to those in the church who have stayed in touch, and kept the conversations going – and the developers who have helped our building stay open by their redecoration of the foyer. Things are very nearly finished now, and we look forward to developing more contact with those who move into the new buildings; the publicity group, among others, is working on finding ways of making that contact effective.

Our openness to the wider world is partly maintained through our website, and this year has seen a group appointed to look at revamping the site. This is well underway, and the updated site should be online very soon. We get a lot of contact through our site, and we want to say thanks to all who contribute to it. We can always use more involvement – especially in photographs. If you have photos of any church events that we could share on the site, please let us know.

As our Pastoral and Community worker, Andrea has been involved in the wider community by serving on the Churches Together in Westminster Executive Committee after Seyan left, representing us at the Westminster Interfaith panel and also serving as a chaplain to King's College in London. This was an important step for us, as free churches haven't been represented on the chaplaincy team at King's for several years, so the College was very grateful to have someone appointed to that role. This work involved spending her Mondays doing prayer services for students and then holding lunches and having one to one meetings with students and staff. The chaplaincy team had also got involved in a *Living Wage* campaign and several young people from our church have helped by attending events related to the campaign. There were several special services and ceremonies that Andrea attended as part of her chaplaincy. It is an important field of ministry in which it's been a blessing to be active. She will continue in this role next year, too.

Some of our interaction with the wider world is less positive. There are people who object to things that we do or say, and some are not at all hesitant in making their feelings known. This has been a demanding year in terms of people feeling that they need to tell us what we are doing wrong, and handling that has led to some difficult moments for the ministry team. But we reassure ourselves with the reflection that we would rather be open and engaged – and deal with the conflicts – than shut away and cut off from the world we believe we are called to serve and love.

Above all, this year, we have sought to listen for God's voice and to respond with integrity. And above all, we are grateful that God calls us, as the church in this place at this time, to join in such a life of love.

*The Ministry Team – Ruth Gouldbourne, Simon Perry, Andrea Kvackova*

# Individual Reports

## Catering

Bloomsbury is very fortunate to have a group of willing, able and reliable volunteers who fulfil the many catering functions the church offers, from serving teas and coffees to meals on Sundays and Tuesdays as well as providing food for special functions during the year.

We are always in need of new volunteers and any offers of help are gratefully received.

This year sees the retirement of Fred Mardell from the Tuesday lunch team. Fred has given many years of faithful service to Bloomsbury in this, as well as many other ways, and his cheerful contribution in the kitchen will be very much missed.

Hazel Beynon not only works on Sundays and Tuesdays in the kitchen but, behind the scenes, deals with the ordering of catering supplies and “balances the books” - an unenviable task as we try to keep the cost of Sunday and Tuesday lunches affordable for all, to offer a free meal for 24 of London’s homeless on Sundays and to have tea, coffee and biscuits available on most occasions.

At Bloomsbury we continue to see the opportunity to share meals together and have time to talk over a cup of coffee as a vital ministry in the life of a busy inner city church.

*Margaret Cooper-Johns*

## Child Protection

We as a church continue to take the welfare and safety of the young people and vulnerable adults seriously. Members and friends ask questions and seek clarification about Child Protection issues. Questions about images for publicity on our website have been asked. Permission is always sought from parents and carers before images are used. By their very nature some areas cannot be discussed publicly.

Procedures we have in place are monitored on a regular basis. A new system for Vetting and Barring is now being reviewed by the new Coalition Government so we await developments as to how we proceed. Meanwhile we continue to use the original system to check CRB disclosures.

*Libby Brown - Safe from Harm Co-ordinator*

# Children and Young People

## Sunday Club

Sunday Club is at the heart of the activities amongst children and young people. The group continues to follow the key Lectionary passage as identified by the *Roots* material and which forms the first Bible reading in the morning church service. This enables the whole church to focus on the same weekly Bible passage. The leaders meet every two months to do some forward planning.

Numbers attending the main part of Sunday Club are smaller than last year, partly because some of the older teenagers have begun to stay in church for the rest of the service and partly because one child, who brought several other younger friends with her, has moved away from London. The impact of one child can be quite significant!

The annual church picnic in Regents Park was a great success, attended by many children, as well as younger and older congregation members from throughout the church. We have also continued the activities during school holidays. The summer outings were a day out to Hastings and Polegate, and visits to Greenwich and Thorpe Parks. Other holiday outings have included entering the Westminster Faith Committee's annual art competition (unfortunately no prize winners this time), painting the walls in the children's room, and seeing a couple of films. A group of sixteen took part in the annual Christian Aid walk around the churches of the City of London, raising over £1,000 – a record amount. And once again the Porter household generously hosted the annual New Year outing to the Questors Theatre in Ealing, followed by tea and games. This year the performance was 'A Christmas Carol'.

The children have also contributed to Sunday worship through readings during Advent and Lent. The whole group performed their annual contribution of a nativity play with a difference (again written by Ruth Gouldbourne) on the evening of the Sunday before Christmas while the Tots sang 'Away in a Manger' in the morning service.

'Sunday Tots' has continued to thrive, with numbers ranging between two and nine. These are the 3-5 year-old children who are too old for the crèche but not yet old enough to cope with the needs of the older children in Sunday Club. The sessions include hearing Bible stories and doing craft and singing activities. An important aspect is the opportunity it provides for the children to chat and make friends with each other – which they particularly enjoy. Sandy Porter is supported by a number of helpers, including Doris Barrera, Hazel Beynon, Ludhi Bootla, Barbara Brown, Margaret Cooper-Johns and Anna Seguros.

The current Sunday Club team consists of:

Brian Bowers

Emma Langley

Paulet Brown

Kim Cing San

Alena Faltova

Jackie Somerville

Jean Harrison

Gwenda Walters

with occasional help from Jill Clark and Nicole Maturen.

### Megabytes

The young people continue to meet on the first Sunday afternoon of each month. Although numbers have fluctuated we have had a variety of topics for the meetings. These have included dramatising (in very contemporary style!) the parable of *The Prodigal Son* and beginning to think about budgeting for themselves.

The Megabytes contributed to Sunday worship during Advent and Lent. They also presented their dramatised version of *The Prodigal Son* and took part in the Christmas play.

Two teenagers attended a Scripture Union holiday, thanks to the Bloomsbury Bursary, and three also joined in the weekend at the Greenbelt Festival.

We had one weekend away this year. This took place on a warm September weekend at Halls Green near Sevenoaks Weald, Kent. On the Saturday everyone piled into the cars and drove down to Walmer to participate in Seyan's induction service. Other activities included a midnight hike, a barbecue, swimming and chasing Simon in the dark as well as leading our own service on the Sunday morning.

Those in the current Megabytes leadership team are:

Tim Jones

Simon Perry

Jean Harrison

Jackie Somerville

with extra help for the weekend away from Sandy and Dave Porter and Katie Adams.

Helpers with Minibytes (the younger siblings) this year have usually been the Sunday Club leaders. However, there have been several occasions when no one has been available to help and we have either had to cancel Minibytes or include them in the Megabyte meeting, neither of which is ideal.

Many thanks to all who give so generously of their time and energy to this valuable work with the children and young people.

There is always need for further help so if anyone is willing to join us, please do talk to me about what you might be able to do. We particularly need help with Megabytes and Minibytes. These are monthly occasions on a Sunday afternoon so the commitment is not large – but it is seriously needed.

*Jean Harrison*

## **Choir, Orchestra and Organ**

The international nature of the choir continues to be commented upon and during the past year we have been favoured by additional contributions from a visiting Ugandan trio as well as the recent participation by members of the Filipino Fellowship. The Japanese Christian Fellowship which is richly blessed with a number of excellent soloists and instrumentalists continues to enhance our morning worship services from time to time with solos, duets and trios.

The more flexible approach to instruments in worship alluded to in last year's report continues and a piano-based ensemble is used to accompany at least one hymn in most morning services. In church music in general there is now a burgeoning new repertoire of lyrical, meditative texts and melodies and it is so often in the quieter, reflective moments of worship that instruments such as the flute and violin have a special significance. In some of the evening services we have experimented with music led by piano/guitar combinations and there will be others of this type in the coming months.

The annual Carol Celebration included the Japanese Christian Fellowship Choir and the concluding item - Handel's 'Hallelujah Chorus' - was powerfully rendered by massed voices including many from the congregation who came prepared with their own scores! This enterprise was part of the BBC's 'Sing Hallelujah' project which was designed to encourage the singing of Handel's great chorus and also to raise funds for Children in Need. The Bloomsbury Choir was listed on the BBC website.

The organ is now complete having acquired a large extra stop called a Polyphone which has been accommodated under the rose window. This is a very real bonus and produces very deep sounds indeed. It is more of a 'felt' experience and can be used with both very soft and loud combinations.

To everyone involved in the church's music programme I would like to express my sincere thanks.

*Philip Luke*

## **Churches Together in Westminster**

It has been 'all change' on the executive committee of CTiW in the recent months. With Seyan's departure I became acting secretary for the period of August '09 – January '10. At the January AGM Christoph Warrack was appointed the new Chair and Revd William Pearsall of Farm Street RC Church became the Secretary. Bloomsbury continues to host the meetings of the executive committee and I represent Bloomsbury in these meetings still offering support to the new Secretary.

The annual meeting held at Methodist Central Hall remains the focus of the administrative activity of CTiW when appointments are made and accounts and reports are received. The speaker this year was Anne Widecombe.

The series of visits to member churches has continued with informative evenings at Westminster Cathedral, St James's Piccadilly and, most recently, St Michael's Chester Square. In addition to learning something of the work of each church, these occasions have provided an opportunity for members to get to know each other better.

Bloomsbury hosted a well supported ecumenical Pentecost Service led by our minister Simon Perry.

Events arranged by CTiW seek to promote understanding between churches and their different traditions and bring together members of their congregations. Bloomsbury is often well represented but, if you've not participated in an event yet, watch out for publicity of future events.

*Andrea Kvackova*

## **Concerts**

### Instrumentalists

The greatest achievement of one of the past performers at a Bloomsbury concert over the past twelve months has been in an unexpected quarter. Christian McKay has given two piano recitals and also rehearsed a Mozart piano concerto for public performance on our instrument. This though could not have been regarded as a natural stepping stone to a BAFTA nomination for an award as Best Supporting Actor for his performance as Orson Welles in the film 'Me and Orson Welles' in which he was directed by Richard Linklater. Sadly, he was not to prove the winner on this occasion. He promises that he still plays the piano every day, wants to keep up to performance standard and would like to return to Bloomsbury in this capacity.

The three seasons of Wednesday evening recitals have continued throughout the year. With Seyan's departure, it seemed appropriate to adopt a different format for the programmes and this responsibility has been enthusiastically taken over by Margaret Bevis. She has managed to put together illuminating notes on the works to be played, often at very short notice and the performers have all been delighted with the results.

It would be invidious to single out individual names, particularly as the standard has been unfailingly high. There have been some old friends returning (we were particularly grateful to the Swedish violin and guitar duo which stepped in at a week's notice following a last minute cancellation in November) but the flow of

new faces has not abated. Another group, different from the one in 2008, came across the road from Rhinegold's and this connection is one that deserves further exploration. The three series have included little in the way of brass (that being a previous Rhinegold speciality) but more programmes by singers than in past seasons. As well as piano recitals, violin, cello and oboe have featured as solo instruments and, besides the familiar string quartet, a number of varied ensembles has appeared. Two composers have been present to hear, and be applauded for, works performed by their dedicatees.

Diego Carneira has continued to raise money for his AmazonArt charity with monthly recitals on Tuesdays. The innovation this year has been two concerts following Saturday organ recitals (see below), the first a piano recital and in June a first appearance at Bloomsbury by the Elgin Trio, all members of the BBC Symphony Orchestra. This format seems to have appeal, so if the opportunity arises, it will be repeated on future occasions. The Bloomsbury acoustic continues to draw admiring comments from all who perform in the church, whether the audience is numerous or less so.

*Timothy Gee*

### Organ

As a new initiative, the Organ Concert Series (4 ~ 5pm on the last Saturday of each month) has been, dare I say it, encouraging beyond my wildest expectations. Dozens of different people have been introduced to Bloomsbury at each event and we are acquiring a growing audience base. I desperately hope that this can be sustained!

The lavish online free listings has certainly helped together with a time-slot which has worked very much to our advantage. The buffet has added a unique dimension to the proceedings and I would particularly like to thank Margaret Bevis for her untiring baking for each concert as well as programme preparation and general publicity. Margaret's heroic efforts have earned well-deserved praise from both performers and audiences alike and I am pleased to record my gratitude here. John Winn's double-screen projection is also proving to be a hit for those who like to see the performer in action - yes, those feet again! - as well as just listening.

Please make these events as widely known as possible. Many of the concerts contain 'easy listening' and even Scot Joplin rag arrangements so do try us out.... and the buffet, too!

*Philip Luke*

## **Crèche**

The Friendship Centre and crèche room continue to be lively places to play during the morning service for our youngest friends.

It is good to see the babies and toddlers grow in confidence and independence when they attend regularly. Occasionally some do find it difficult to leave Mum behind and I'm sure the congregation can hear them.

The crèche provision not only caters for the babes and toddlers but it is an opportunity for their parents to have a time away from their offspring in the service.

I would like to thank Alexi for helping regularly and other members of the congregation who 'fill in' when I am away.

*Libby Brown*

## **Diaconate**

Although our constitution makes clear that the ultimate authority for decision-making on all church matters lies with the church members' meeting, the diaconate are our "charity trustees" and as such are collectively responsible for the day to day management of Bloomsbury.

Bloomsbury's diaconate comprises 15 deacons each of whom is elected by the church meeting to serve for a period of three years; re-election is permitted. In addition we have (currently 5) "life deacons" - deacons whom Bloomsbury has wanted to honour in view of their exemplary service to the church over many years. In addition, the ministers, secretary and treasurer, and our pastoral and community worker are members of the diaconate. Bloomsbury's diaconate is therefore quite large – 25 people at present.

We meet monthly (except in August) and endeavour to oversee all aspects of the church's activities. In view of the size of the diaconate and the range of topics for which we have responsibility, rather than touch briefly on most topics at each meeting, we tend to focus attention at any one meeting on each of the following areas in turn - ministry and worship, pastoral matters, finance and administration, and community. We receive reports and recommendations from the relevant working groups and committees in the church and take decisions or, in the case of significant issues, decide to refer the matter to the church members' meeting with or without a recommendation.

*John Beynon*

## **Disciples on the Way**

*Disciples on the Way* is the overall title we give to our ways of learning together and exploring different aspects of following Jesus. Part of this is done in Home Groups, covered elsewhere in this report – but we want to say “thank you” to those groups who open up their life to the whole church on occasions so that we can all learn. One of the most memorable experiences of that this year was the chance to visit Wormwood Scrubs and learn about life and work there.

We also met during Sundays afternoons in Advent to look at “Matters of Life and Death”, examining issues as varied as climate change and assisted suicide. As well as this we have had the chance to develop our communication skills. We are grateful to Sylvia Barr for the courses on “Speaking with Confidence” that she ran, and to Nick Busk for classes in “Sign” (sign language for the deaf), which started in the spring. These have gone so well, that we are planning to run a class on the afternoon of each second Sunday in the month, to which all will be welcome.

Our training for Open Doors staff and others involved in keeping the building safe is getting underway, and we look forward to developing that further. Learning together is an important aspect of our life – and we have much to teach each other. Deacons are looking carefully at how best to make this work – finding good times to meet, and exploring what areas we would find most useful to explore.

*Ruth Gouldbourne*

## **Ethical Living**

We continue to take environmental issues seriously at Bloomsbury in our life as a church and as individuals. The challenge remains to ask: what aspects of our lives do not conform to Kingdom values? A question of increasing importance relates to our finances and banking practices. We have significant sums invested. Some of this is with banks that use that money to invest in projects that have unwelcome environmental side-effects, such as tar sands projects in Canada. This has been raised at a deacons meeting and will be followed up to ensure that the church’s banking policies are as ethical as possible.

*Robert Bryce*

## **Fairtrade**

We continue to be faithful in our commitment to fair trade, which guarantees decent wages and conditions for poor and disadvantaged workers, producers and communities. Importantly, we promote justice and sustainable development through fair trade not merely in theory but in real action.

As a Fair-trade church, we offer only Fair-trade refreshments insofar as it is possible for our own events, and we encourage those who hire our building to do the same. Our Fair-trade stall has 30 to 40 items available at all times and is on display in the foyer every day for our loyal customers, who range from one-time visitors to regular hirers and worshippers. Furthermore, on every third Sunday of the month the stall is wheeled out into the Friendship Centre where those who are not around during the week have the opportunity to make Fair-trade purchases. As always, muesli, snacks and chocolate are popular items, while some new products like crisps and orange juice are also favoured by buyers. Some items have even made their way to Walmer to be sold by Seyan!

Although our main supplier is a company called Traidcraft, which distributes goods carrying the Fair-trade mark, we also have other suppliers for some popular items, such as Fair-trade Divine Chocolates. To help the most disadvantaged workers and producers, it was agreed by the deacons that fairly traded coffee could be sold on our stall even if the suppliers had not completed their registration and were therefore not able to display the Fair-trade logo.

We are grateful to the Open Doors team, evening doorkeepers, office team and everyone who oversees the stall during the week. Special thanks go out to Peter, who diligently looks after the stall during the week, and to Margaret Bevis who organised and everyone who was involved in Fair-trade Fortnight.

*Suan Khai*

## **Filipino Fellowship**

The Filipino Fellowship continues to be an active constituent of Bloomsbury. While there were no permanent additions to our fellowship, the group continued to welcome Filipino friends who were visiting London for a short while - either on a brief holiday themselves or because they were continuing to work for an employer who was on vacation in London.

One of our main activities is our regular weekly meeting for Fellowship and Bible Study in the Howard Williams Lounge after morning service. Our current study course is entitled *Worker to Witness*. This course/book caters for anyone who wants to participate in seeing Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) become faithful and effective witnesses for Christ.

We contributed to the fellowship at Bloomsbury by helping with Sunday lunches and by serving coffee once a month; our older children, Ana and Alexie, have become regular assistants at the crèche; and several members of the group have once again helped with the church's *Open Doors*.

We also contribute what we can to a fund which we have set up to help five local churches and also individual members in need of emergency assistance. But the most significant and effective support that we can give to those in need is prayer and comfort.

We give thanks for the fact that Evelyn and her daughters Ana and Nica, have finally found and moved into a two-bedroom flat, having for nearly 2 years been living in a single room. Ryan and Ruschelle have also managed to move into a council house - a far better, more spacious and healthier place for them and their growing son, Raven.

The group said their "sad and happy" goodbyes to Arjel, Lu and their daughter, Aquila, who are moving to Canada. Arjel had served as a Deacon and also helped with the sound system during morning services. Both Arjel and Lu had also been active Bible Study Leaders in the group and had always willingly helped with Sunday lunches.

*Sally Calimoso*

## **Finance Committee**

In 2008, the Church set up a Finance Committee, to meet four times a year and to be responsible for oversight of the Church's finances, budgets, financial accounts, audit arrangements and investment policy. The Committee is chaired by David Porter, other members being Jim Barr, Jean-Marc Peterschmitt and, until his move, Seyan Tills, plus the Treasurer, who provides the material for discussion. The Committee does not have executive authority but makes recommendations to the Deacons.

The Committee met regularly during the year. It has carried out its remit, spending time discussing investment policy and reviewing the Church's finances. It also dealt with the annual accounts and audit.

*David Porter*

## **Friends**

The *Friends of Bloomsbury* was formed several years ago to strengthen the link that the church has with a number of people from overseas who worshipped with us when they worked or studied in London, and have been in the habit of visiting

us, sometimes over a period of many years, whenever they have subsequently returned to the capital.

Since the *Friends* were set up, a number of our own members have moved away to other parts of the UK, or even further afield. Even though they may have found a spiritual home in their new surroundings, many have been anxious not to sever their links with Bloomsbury and have asked if they, too, could become *Friends*. This seemed an entirely appropriate idea and so our concept of the *Friends of Bloomsbury* has widened somewhat.

We have never seen fundraising as being the primary function of friends - the main objective has been to maintain our contacts around the country and the world, and to invite *Friends* to remember the church in prayer and to support (financially and otherwise) and commend it as opportunities arise.

Anybody interested in becoming a friend is invited to contact one of our ministry team - Ruth, Simon, or Andrea - or me.

*John Beynon*

## **Health & Safety**

It has been a good year as far as Health and Safety is concerned. No one has brought any safety concerns to my attention since my last report, and I hope we will all continue to be careful so that we can look forward to another accident-free year.

We live in an era when Government keeps thinking up new safety requirements. It is no longer sufficient to say that our Managing Trustees (better known as the Ministers, Officers and Deacons) all share a concern for the safety and welfare of all who come to Bloomsbury. We have to have a written statement showing that we have considered all the possible risks inherent in coming to Bloomsbury and what we are doing to protect against those risks.

Quite apart from legal requirements safety requires constant vigilance, and two particular matters will be receiving attention during the next few months. One is the periodic testing of electrical equipment around the building - and we have a lot of electrical things. The other is clearing out the junk which accumulates in odd corners, and which could be a fire hazard. So if there is anything around the building which *you* know is useful or valuable but the Property Committee might think is junk, please make sure it is clearly labelled!

*Brian Bowers, Safety Officer*

## Home Groups

The four home groups have continued to meet through the year, though some have been more successful than others in arranging meetings. Each group has about a dozen members but not all are able to attend every meeting.

The Western Group sessions during the past year have included presentations by Will Henderson (a student from the USA who spent some time with us last summer as an intern) on the Jonah theme in modern books and movies, Faith Bowers on Bernard Green's book *European Baptists and the Third Reich* and a visit to Her Majesty's Prison, Wormwood Scrubs to hear a presentation by David Redhouse (Deputy Governor and a former regular attender at Bloomsbury).

The Northern and Southern Groups (which have been going the longest) have had useful times of fellowship and lots of stimulating discussion. The meetings have mostly been led by group members though both groups have also met less regularly – mainly for organisational reasons connected with finding good topics to discuss and the number of members able to be present. Members of both groups also joined the Western Group on their visit to Wormwood Scrubs. The Southern Group is also indebted to Faith Bowers for her fascinating presentation on *European Baptists and the Third Reich* and to Brian Bowers for his *illuminating introduction to 'Light in the Bible', complete with appropriate visual aids*.

The Central/East Group's programme has included a mixture of Bible studies and the discussion of topical issues. The bringing and sharing of food continues to be an important aspect of the meetings.

The Central/East and the Southern Group have each prepared and led an evening service – which were significant experiences for all who took part, whether as leaders or as congregation members.

I would like to encourage those who are not yet part of a home group to join the one most conveniently located for them, so benefiting from the closer friendship and support that a smaller group of people can provide.

*Jean Harrison*

## International Group

The group continues to meet every two months. We aim to explore ways of helping the church stay in touch with issues from around the world.

We produce *Just Living* after each meeting, reporting on a variety of topics, such as issues of persecution, climate change, increasing our links in Gulu, aid and

development. When appropriate, articles have also appeared in the magazine. During the World Cup we produced a smaller leaflet each week highlighting issues of justice and peace connected with the football. The group also planned and led a service in July, again using the World Cup as a starting point.

Items for prayer are offered to the church, sometimes in the intercessory prayer we share in at public worship, sometimes through the Shared Prayer leaflet.

We have put up a map in the foyer, indicating areas where we are involved in supporting work in other parts of the world.

The members are Paulet Brown, Robert Bryce, Ruth Gouldbourne and Jean Harrison.

*Ruth Gouldbourne*

## **Lettings**

It is good to be able to report that our lettings activities are substantially up on last year. This is primarily due to the completion of building work on the large Central St Giles development immediately behind the church (and the cessation of the noise associated with this activity) and the installation of air-conditioning in the Forum (which has always been uncomfortably hot on sunny days in the summer, and not always as warm as we would like in the winter).

Two other improvements, in the IT field, have also made the building more attractive to hirers. One is that we have made it possible via the WiFi facility we installed last year to allow not only our office computers but also our laptops (which we make available to hirers if required) to communicate with our sophisticated office printer thereby rendering redundant the several inkjet printers (and their associated expensive ink cartridges) which we used previously. The other has been the installation of data projectors (3 in total) in the sanctuary and one in the Friendship Centre, together with the acquisition of a portable projector for use in other locations. These additional facilities are much appreciated by users of the building.

Our clientele and activities range from read-throughs by professional theatre and TV groups (you never know who you might meet in the foyer or lift!) to local community groups and choirs to whom we make our rooms available at a substantial discount. We have been pleased to be able to offer accommodation to the small staff of the Swiss Church from nearby Endell Street - who are still with us! - while awaiting completion of a major refurbishment of their building.

We continue to offer an almost entirely paperless booking service via e-mail; but as ever our customers very much appreciate the welcome, assistance, and flexibility offered by both our daytime volunteer receptionists and paid evening staff.

Whilst it is good to welcome the community into our building, the weight of Health and Safety legislation referred to last year continues to increase, adding to the burden of responsibilities on our receptionists. Ever mindful of their responsibilities in this direction, our managing trustees (the deacons) arranged a "Health and Safety in the Workplace" training day last autumn.

*Vilem Kriz*

## **Membership**

In order to comply with the revised registration requirements of the Charities Commission, Bloomsbury - in common with many churches - adopted in 2008 a revised church constitution based on a model offered by the Baptist Union.

On the matter of church membership the BU draft constitution reminded us that membership is open to those who:

- accept the Beliefs of the Church;
- meet the Church's qualification on Baptism;
- commit themselves to serving Christ within the Church and beyond;
- abide by the decisions of the Church Members' Meeting;
- acknowledge their responsibilities as Church members; and
- have their membership application accepted by the Church Members' Meeting.

It also states that the responsibilities of membership normally include:

- attending worship and participating in Church Activities;
- personal prayer and Bible study;
- participation at the Communion of the Lord's Supper as a privilege and a priority;
- helping the Church whenever possible by using gifts and abilities to advance the Purpose of the church through its Activities;
- attending and participating in Church Members' Meetings;
- giving regular financial support to the Church in proportion to personal resources and circumstances;
- upholding Christian values.

In common with all churches, Bloomsbury has always taken a responsible attitude towards the acceptance of new members. But, also in common with many other churches, we have probably been less diligent in dealing with members whose links with the church have diminished over the years. The BU's reminder of the responsibilities of membership have prompted us to review our membership list as a result of which we decided, albeit reluctantly, to delete the names of 27 people with whom, despite our best endeavours, we had lost contact.

As is the case in so many churches, a number of members move away and are

unable any longer to attend their “old” church but nevertheless want to retain a link with their former spiritual home. As a central London church Bloomsbury probably has a higher percentage of such people than many churches. Some years ago we established the *Friends of Bloomsbury* (described in another section) for people - often from abroad - who have made Bloomsbury “their” church whenever they come to London. The *Friends* seems to us to be a very appropriate vehicle for members who have moved away but who want to keep in touch. We are therefore in the process of approaching such people to ascertain whether being a *Friend* would be a more meaningful way of maintaining contact rather than remaining a member.

Last July our membership stood at 208. During the last 12 months we have welcomed six new members, one (Jill Clark) following baptism at Bloomsbury the previous month, and five (Alena Faltova; Evelyn, Anna and Danica Seguros; and Vivienne Stockley) by profession of faith. We are sad to have to report the deaths of three loyal friends - John Britt, who had been a member for 46 years, Gwen Haddon (Collins) who joined Bloomsbury in 1996 and Susini Wijisekera who became a member in 1968. All three served the church in exemplary fashion and we remember them with gratitude.

Our membership as of July 2010 is thus 184.

*John Beynon*

## **Open Doors**

Bloomsbury’s ‘Front of House’ team continues to do an outstanding job. On the front-line to meet, greet, smile and welcome all who pass through our doors each day and each visitor often offers a new challenge and opportunity. Whether it’s directions for out on the street, directions to a meeting room in the building or a request for a drink or to see a minister, our team of weekday volunteers represent the church of which they are part with sensitivity, genuine interest or concern and even sometimes appropriate firmness when some visitors are potentially troublesome. The theatrical companies add excitement when the ‘stars’ arrive. We have seen an increase in the number of people who seek a time of quiet and sometimes prayer in the Sanctuary or Chapel. Some are regular; some only come once to meet a particular personal need.

Our ability to open our doors to visitors and those who hire our premises would be severely restricted without ‘the team’. Since I have taken over managing the rota some friends continue to offer a regular session whilst others gladly ‘fill in; when asked. Vilem and Andrea cover whenever people are delayed or unable to come. They are also around the building to offer support and information when necessary. Andrea also looks out for new recruits from the students who sometimes have some spare time to offer.

Whilst from 10am – 4pm we rely on volunteers, for the evening shift (often until 10pm) and on Saturdays, we rely on our paid Receptionists to keep Bloomsbury functioning. We thank Doris, Nicole, Nikki, Ros and Katarina.

*Libby Brown*

## **Pastoral Groups**

Having been appointed as Pastoral and Community Worker, I took over responsibility for pastoral groups from Hazel Beynon last August. The pastoral committee has held one meeting when we reviewed the list of members and regular attenders at Bloomsbury. With a number of new people in our midst, and a couple of additional pastoral leaders, we have revised our 'link' arrangements with our fellowship.

We have also held one meeting of all pastoral link people when we reviewed the main focus of this ministry and discussed a way forward.

I would like to thank all the pastoral leaders for their willingness to undertake this important task of keeping in touch with our geographically widespread fellowship.

Pastoral committee members: Margaret Bevis, Hazel Beynon, Jean Harrison, Sandy Porter, Jackie Somerville.

*Andrea Kvackova*

## **Prayer**

"Prayer at Bloomsbury" is an area we continue to explore. Meeting together is not straightforward, so we look for more creative approaches. There is time to meet in the chapel before the morning service on a Sunday, and we also leave a leaflet with prayer topics for anybody who is interested to collect, so that as many as possible can share in prayer, even if they are otherwise engaged on a Sunday morning.

*Shared Prayer*, a leaflet that is put in the foyer each week, and is emailed to anybody who signs up to the list, gives us topics for intercessory prayer for our world, our neighbourhood and our community, as well as different practices of prayer to help us open our lives to God.

We have discontinued Friday Prayers at the moment, since it was no longer proving a good time for people to meet.

On the website, each week an encouragement to prayer and to explore new ways of prayer is posted.

During Advent and Lent this year, on Twitter (a social networking website) we

posted several times a day prayers and encouragements to prayer. If you are a Twitter user and would like to sign up to follow this, the name is bloomsburyprayer; yes, there is a missing r, since that makes it fit the site's protocol.

We have also been exploring prayer together with others. At the beginning of Advent and of Lent, and at Ascensiontide, we met with friends from St Anselm's & St Cecilia's for a morning of reflection, quiet and prayer. We are planning another such meeting on October 2<sup>nd</sup>, marking harvest. We are also planning a morning's retreat here in August called "Playing at Prayer", in which we will explore prayer without words, and using our creative aspect.

*Ruth Gouldbourne*

## **Property Committee**

As its name suggests, the Property Committee is responsible for the general oversight and maintenance of the church building and manses . The Committee has continued to meet regularly throughout the year.

The air conditioning on the fourth floor has now been operating for about a year and has been much appreciated. In an attempt to reduce our fuel consumption, we installed a "reversible system" which enables us to heat as well as to cool the various rooms, including the flat, as required. There have been some minor problems and consideration is currently being given to improving the programmability of the (larger) system in the Forum. Possible ways of improving the ventilation in the flat are also being considered.

Some additional light fittings have been installed to improve the level of lighting under the gallery in the sanctuary but professional advice is being sought with a view to making further significant improvements.

As anticipated in last year's report, we now have a permanent installation of data projectors, cameras, etc in the sanctuary. The increased flexibility which this allows has been of considerable value to us in our services, and to hirers of the building. It has been particularly good to be able to view the organist at the many organ concerts we now have.

The installation of motion detectors in various parts of the building is now complete, including toilets and vestibules, providing a valuable saving in energy costs.

Eleven years on from the major refurbishment of our building, the vestibule was beginning to look distinctly "tired" – hardly surprising, since we estimate that about half a million people have passed through it in that time. Earlier this year Legal & General and Bovis Lend Lease Ltd., the owners of, and the main

contractors for, the huge Central St Giles site immediately behind the church, offered to redecorate and re-carpet the whole area. We are immensely grateful to them for carrying out this work free of charge as a charitable contribution under their community projects scheme.

Members will have observed the unsightly build-up of 'clutter' around the building and action is planned to improve the situation in the near future. This is a health and safety issue and such issues appear frequently on Committee agendas. A Health and Safety training course was held during the year for Deacons, 'Open Doors' helpers and others who staff the building for various activities.

As always, we are greatly indebted to Colin Watson, Peter How and John Beynon for their continuous and dedicated attention to a multitude of repair and maintenance problems. Their efforts result in significant financial saving.

Members of the Committee: John Beynon, Brian Bowers, Howard Brown, Vilem Kriz, Maurice Johns (chairman), Colin Watson and one of the two catering officers (Hazel Beynon and Margaret Cooper-Johns)

*Maurice Johns*

## Publicity

### **Website**

Updating our website is going well. We are aiming to:

- **create a new look and feel for the site;**  
Retain the identity of the present site, but with pages that are clearer and making better use of images.
- **give the site a simpler structure;**  
Make it easier for visitors to find what they're looking for and encourage them to stay on the site. One of the pieces of feedback we received regarding the old site is that it had too much information. Downloads will now be placed where they are needed on different pages throughout the site, rather than given a section of their own. The new sections identify key reasons why people come to Bloomsbury e.g. Church, Music, Room hire.
- **put the site into a content management system.**  
Enable a small editorial team to update the site regularly, while maintaining the professional look of pages.
- **create a "members only" area**  
We are looking at the possibility of introducing a "members only"/"password protected" area.

All being well, the new site will be launched in the Autumn.

*Easter.org* went live in time for the Holy Week reflections and *Christmas.org* was updated at the beginning of Advent.

Thank you to all those who now participate in the web group: Doris Barrera; Jean

Harrison; Tim Jones; Vilem Kriz; Simon Perry; and to Simon Jenkins for his continuing involvement.

**General:**

The new publicity group – Frank Brown, Charisse Fradejas, Ruth Gouldbourne, Suan Khan Khai and Margaret Bevis – has met and agreed that we should:

- ensure that the “family” is made aware of what is happening within the church. This may be in the form of support to those who are making things happen.
- raise the profile of the church in the neighbourhood. Highlight our presence, what we believe and what we do.

We are currently:

- reviewing the existing welcome pack
- exploring ways to welcome the new St Giles community (residential and working) and to expand coverage of the existing local community.
- working on a proposal to make improved use of the notices displayed on the front of our building

When this is done, the next tasks include:

- a review of the magazine and *Bloomsbury News*
- re-igniting “Friends”
- the establishment of regular events to replace the Winter Fayre

In the past year we have:

- produced the magazine on a two-monthly schedule – many thanks to many people for their contributions to this;
- represented the church at The West Central Forum - a group of organisations and statutory bodies in and around Covent Garden;
- continued to administer the S106 Community Chest Fund - a fund established to provide funding for Camden community facilities and services around Central St Giles;
- produced fliers and programmes for Saturday Afternoon Buffet Organ Concerts (monthly), Bloomsbury International Recitals (weekly), the Carol Celebration and the Friends Lecture;
- made a Fairtrade input to the Organ concert during Fairtrade Fortnight;
- produced a combined flier with other churches for Christmas and Easter;
- been involved in the organisation of London-wide Christian Aid events.

*Margaret Bevis*

## **Social Programme**

During the summer in 2009 we had a variety of outings in the evenings, and people came along to various explorations of our neighbourhood – and we are

continuing the pattern in 2010, including a visit to see the painted elephants in Chelsea.

We also gathered to celebrate harvest, and had our usual Maundy Thursday meal and Easter morning breakfast. We are grateful to all those who managed to feed us on these occasions – and to do the clearing up!

We have re-established the social group/committee, and are looking forward to seeing what ways they devise to bring us together.

*Ruth Gouldbourne*

## **Stewarding**

Each service - morning and evening - there are Door Stewards on duty whose task is to welcome everybody, members, regulars and visitors to the Church. For visitors the Steward is often the first face of Bloomsbury many will see and the manner of greeting and friendship (where possible visitors are introduced to people with a similar interest or background) sets the tone for their visit.

Before the service the stewards also hand out the service sheets, (and hymn books in the evenings) and if required provide directions for visitors. After the service duties include tidying the sanctuary of service sheets, hymn books & lost property, whilst being attentive to the visitors, especially if no one is talking to them, inviting them to have coffee, and introducing them to other Church members. The door stewards also have a role in the emergency evacuation procedures.

I am grateful to the regular band of stewards who participate in the roster I prepare, and organise themselves into working teams. Anyone wishing to join the team would be welcome - there are always vacancies, and it is a rewarding way of demonstrating the "Spirit of Bloomsbury".

*Colin Watson*

## **Treasurer's Report for the year ended 31 March 2010\***

Bloomsbury has had a satisfactory result from a financial point of view. The surplus for the year on General Account is £5,785, compared with a deficit of £1,745 in the previous year.

Income amounted to £321,560, compared with £267,914 in the previous year. The increase of £53,646 is largely attributable to an increase in legacies of £34,446 and an increase in lettings income of £13,339. Giving has, however, decreased by £8,286, with a sharp drop in the last quarter of the financial year.

Interest received increased by £13,675, as more interest was allocated to the General Fund rather than the Development Fund.

Expenditure increased by £46,116 to £315,775. Ministry costs increased by £39,045, which reflects the cost of employing an additional member of the ministry team, together with increases in pension contributions and other employment costs. Maintenance costs were down by £3,595, reflecting the considerable amount of work done by volunteers. Gas costs were reduced due to a favourable deal, and most other costs showed small variations. The increase of £5,314 in the charge for depreciation reflects the increase in money spent on the air conditioning and audio visual system. The level of general costs continues to reflect the tremendous efforts of many people in cutting costs and carrying out maintenance at low cost to the Church. Our particular thanks go to the maintenance group and to the caterers.

In the light of the financial result for the year, we are proposing to make our contribution to the denomination £32,000.

Our balance sheet at 31 March 2010 shows that we are well placed to ride out the recession. Looking ahead, the budget for 2010/11 shows a deficit of £72,000 and I propose to meet that deficit out of our accumulated reserves. However, the level of projected deficit demonstrates that we are heavily reliant on legacies and on giving to achieve break-even. The drop in giving is therefore a cause for some concern.

My thanks to the Treasury team of Ros Johnson, Tim Gee, Hilary Taylor and Bill Somerville. Without their collective help, we would not be in such good shape.

And my grateful thanks to all who give their time and money to the work of Bloomsbury.

*Howard Brown, FCA.*

*\*Detailed accounts are available to members from the church office.*

## **Tuesdays at Bloomsbury**

This has been a particularly exciting year for Tuesday Lunch and we continue experiencing God's blessing in many ways. Numbers attending average around 50 with new faces appearing most weeks. Last summer we enjoyed a number of successful day trips as part of 'Summer Days at Bloomsbury'. Trips to Cambridge, Hastings, Lambeth Palace, The Geffrye Museum and Amersham were appreciated. Will Henderson was able to join us for most of these and his friendly conversation was appreciated by all. October saw us recommence the regular Tuesday Lunch format of coffee, chat, lunch and guest speaker. The

speaker slot is always a highlight of the day and those that have joined us have not disappointed in their renditions – talks on Baptist Missionary Society and Westminster Care and Counsel were particularly memorable.

An excellent lunch is provided by Hazel Beynon or Margaret Cooper-Johns together with a cohort of willing volunteers. We are indebted to those who willingly give of their talent and time - we couldn't continue without them. Thank you to Hazel and Margaret and everyone that serves in the kitchen and in setting tables and collecting the money. Thank you also to Andrea, Vilem, Ruth and Simon for their ongoing pastoral and practical oversight. And our thanks to Libby Brown for finding and booking the speakers. Finally, thank you to those that come.

*Martin Taylor*

## **Wider Ministry**

Bloomsbury has always been an outward looking church having concern for the wider world - locally, nationally and internationally. Through the Baptist Union, the church as a body donates 10% of its turnover in support of small Baptist churches in the UK, missionary activities overseas, and the Baptist colleges in Britain and the international seminary in Prague.

In addition many of our members and friends individually support a wide range of worthy causes from Camden to Cambodia. As is appropriate, they do so privately according to their personal concerns and their financial situation.

We have also invited the congregation to respond to particular international appeals and to various causes, usually but not always, abroad involving communities with which we have particular links. We do this through special appeals and offer the money together with our normal offerings in services. In the last year for example, in addition to gifts for the work of the church, we raised over £6,000 for a variety of causes, including Christian Aid, the DEC Haiti appeal, a health project in Burma and two children's charities. Much of this was gift-aided directly to the charity concerned, so the amount given was increased by about one third.

However, although financial support is important, we also want to highlight the links members of our congregation have with other communities. We have therefore started a project to find out more about the ways in which we are linked to the wider world through the various activities people undertake. We have begun with deacons and found that various individuals are involved as follows:

- *educational* – both teaching and managing,
- *pastoral/people caring work, committee work* – making various organisations and institutions, especially voluntary ones, work more effectively, and
- *practical work* - making it possible for people to stay in their own homes as their capacity to care for those homes becomes less.

We are hoping, at the Church AGM to look further afield, and get some ideas of what the whole congregation does. As the Body of Christ, we have all sorts of gifts and

capacities – and all sorts of contexts in which we can serve. Knowing a little about how we serve and where we serve, we are better able to encourage and support each other – and to celebrate what God has given and what God is doing.

*Ruth Gouldbourne*

## **Worship Group**

This group continues to meet every two months. There is a core group, but each meeting is open to anybody who is interested in coming – and we have been glad to have a whole variety of people come at various times.

The group has reflected on several aspects of how we worship together, including the order of the service, the managing of communicating information in notices, the forms of the Lord's prayer and the use of music in various ways.

The group also planned two services during the year, one shortly after Christmas and one for Easter evening. This has been part of the impetus in encouraging other groups to lead services, and we are grateful to the various groups who have created and led worship, including the home groups, Xchange and other special interest groups.

Worship and its conduct remains a high priority for the church, and the worship group is one of the important places where we continue the conversation about how we worship together. The meetings are announced in advance on the notice sheet, and are open to all who interested in coming – please feel free to come along if you can.

*Ruth Gouldbourne*

## **Xchange**

The first part of the year saw Xchange make it through two long Bible Studies, one on Colossians, the other on James. When I went off sick, however, Andrea took responsibility for Xchange, transforming it into a more self-sufficient group. Each week, a different member has been invited to prepare a meal, before leading a discussion of their choice.

Given the diversity of backgrounds of those who attend Xchange, the meals were as interesting as the studies that followed them. The prominent theme to surface was money! What does it mean to be responsible with money when, relatively speaking, most of us have so much of it?

The make-up of Xchange has become noticeably different since I returned after being away for several months. There seem fewer people dropping in and out, and attending occasionally. On the other hand, there is a much stronger core of

those who are deeply committed, regular attenders. The visit to the pub afterwards, no longer feels “afterwards” so much as an integral component of the evening’s activity. Whilst we continue to have ‘social’ evenings, the importance of socialising together is no longer deliberate, but woven through the fabric of a group that continues to evolve.

*Simon Perry*

## Appendix: A Report on the 2010 Baptist Assembly

My first impressions and last impressions of Assembly reflect life here more than the Assembly itself; both before and after, several people in the church expressed sympathy with me for having to undertake going to such an event. And to them before and after, and here, my response is that I go to Assembly willingly and I enjoy it, and I am grateful to the church for allowing me to attend each year.

That said, there were several things that stood out for me this year. Overshadowing the whole thing was the fact that I was making a presentation this year, and that was demanding, but went well. (I gave a lecture, entitled *In Praise of Incompetence - looking at aspects of ministry and ministerial formation*; anybody who wants to read it is welcome to ask for a copy)

Apart from that, I enjoyed attending two seminars, one of which enabled me to reflect more on how we read Scripture in the context of our own cultures. It left me asking how, as a church that takes pride in its international identity, we take that seriously and read Scripture effectively reflecting our variety of backgrounds. Another one opened me up to the possibilities of looking at the Bible in new and creative ways, in particular next year, as we celebrate the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of the King James version of the Bible.

I also valued being present at the AGM of the Baptist Union, hearing more about the exciting things going on in all parts of the country – and of the need to find ways of supporting churches with fewer resources than we have. There is a shortfall in the funding of Home Mission, the common purse of the Baptist Union, and this is limiting what we can do in various strategic situations.

The AGM of the Baptist Missionary Society again was inspiring, telling stories of how men and women around the world are working out the gospel imperatives of making disciples and living out the Kingdom. The BMS video this year is about work among sex workers in Thailand. We now have some copies of this, and I recommend watching it. It is an eye-opener.

The evening sessions had a variety of speakers, and a variety of worship styles. Some I felt at home with, some I didn't – but that is as it should be; the Union is a family of churches and therefore of styles and approaches, and I value feeling at home in some of it and being challenged by other parts.

There were two particular highlights that I save till last; one is meeting friends, including Seyan (who looked after me and Andrea with his normal care, a care for which I remain very grateful) and many others, and the second was hearing the Bible study led by a friend from College, who encouraged us in trusting that

learning to love God and others was a good way of faith. I end this report in the way I ended my comment on the blog.

One of the things that I learned by being at Assembly was that Bloomsbury is a very special church, but we are not as special as we think we are; much of what we value – rightly – about ourselves is not possessed by us only; others do what we do, and sometimes do it even better, even more, even more Christlikely, and so meeting others, hearing their stories, discovering what is going on and being challenged by it matters. We are not alone and isolated, we are not the only ones who are doing what we do, we are not the only faithful people in the world. And knowing our family can only help us know ourselves better. So, maybe next year, somebody will come with me to Assembly.

*Ruth Gouldbourne*





## **'The *spirit* of Bloomsbury'**

Like the Church, our logo has the cross at its centre but instead of the conventional cross we have a symbol that is less traditional, and perhaps a little intriguing, to those not familiar with the Christian faith.

The two sweeps form, with the cross, a notional 'B' for Bloomsbury. But they can also be interpreted as groups of people gathered around the cross, all equidistant from it. The two groups suggest that there is more than one approach to God: no one has a monopoly on the 'right' way and each of us travels by their own path.

We like to think that Bloomsbury is both a place of worship and a meeting place where people from different walks of life and a great variety of backgrounds and countries come together in a spirit of friendship and acceptance to worship God. In faith and with openness to different points of view, we search together for a better understanding of life and a deeper awareness of God.



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