In recent years our society and culture has undergone tremendous changes which have in turn presented the church with a variety of new challenges. One of these has been to find ways of engaging with communities who are increasingly reluctant to come into church buildings or attend church events. For those who are at home in church it can be hard to imagine just how alien and uncomfortable it can be for others. Church for many is a stifling, constricting place - an institution in an age where people no longer trust institutions (often with good cause). The worship service is often a place of passive receptiveness rather than interaction, - probably one of the few places where this is still true. In education and the workplace learning and motivational techniques have changed drastically, with far greater engagement by the student or employee, yet the general impression of church is that it has not changed (this is not necessarily true, but it is the perception that many people have).

For many the pressures of both work and home are increasing - people have less time or inclination to attend church, especially if it is perceived as a place of additional commitments and pressures. The nature of community has also changed. Families are often spread over huge geographical distances, and more people are prepared to travel considerable distances for their employment.

Community has less to do with geography than the individual's own social networks, and people identify and form community with those who share common interests or concerns.

In this setting, the concept of a third space or a third place has become increasingly significant. This term relates to the concept of building communities - it is neither home nor workplace (first and second space), but a place which fosters and encourages a broader, more creative interaction between people. There have always been places in society where people interact informally, but what is new is that this third space is now being intentionally sought out as a vital part of our lives as social beings. Some of the hallmarks of third space are that it is local, accessible, inexpensive (e.g. no entry charge), welcoming, comfortable, preferably involves food and drink, and has regulars who frequent it. Think of the bar in the popular US sitcom Cheers - the one where everybody knows your name - and this will give you a good idea of some of the characteristics of third space.

One of the most popular environments for third space is the café or coffee shop. A café culture has grown up around the big high street brands such as Starbucks, Costa Coffee, Café Nero, etc., and replicated in a host of independent cafes. No longer there just to service a basic need for food and drink, they encourage customers to linger over the newspaper, a book, or catch up...
with work on their laptop. It is a place where people meet for business or to catch up with old friends and meet new ones and they are the venues for book clubs and hobby groups.

Costa Coffee estimate that 50% of adults in Britain regularly visit a coffee shop (compared with around 8% of adults who regularly attend a church). In Britain there is a shift from pub culture to café culture - every week in 2008 five pubs closed in England alone. One reason for this may be because coffee shops are family friendly places; groups of mothers can often be seen with their young children, perhaps having a coffee together after picking the children up from nursery.

One of the ways in which the church has responded to this is the development of a café church concept. The Church of England Mission Shaped Church¹ Report describes the term as:

‘an attempt to group examples that seek to engage with café culture and whose external characteristic is a deliberate change of ambience and feel” when people meet corporately. In short, gatherings are around small tables rather than in pews. Drinks and often nibbles are routinely available at the start, rather than an option at the end. People characteristically sit and talk, rather than stand or defend their personal space. Interaction rather than spectating is encouraged. The venues are often secular: community centres, youth clubs, cafes and pub rooms…”¹

Café Church events are typically informal and interactive, with food and drink available at the start, or throughout the event. They may include quizzes, music, discussion and guest speakers. However, they tend not to have other elements associated with a church service such as public prayer, singing hymns, liturgy or the sacraments. Events will normally be planned around a theme which concerns people, such as dealing with stress, parenting issues, the environment, finance, etc. There is an opportunity for Christians to inject a faith perspective in all these issues, and while it may seem to lack an overtly evangelistic thrust, all of these issues are discipleship issues, and areas where the church can genuinely offer guidance or challenge preconceptions.

Questions naturally arise from this:

- Is this primarily about building community with no other agenda?
- Is it just a way to get people to come to church?
- Is it a useful forum for teaching and exploring issues of faith and discipleship?
- Is it / can it be church?

The answer to all of these questions can be either yes or no. It is the responsibility of the church to reflect prayerfully and appropriately how they will engage with people through this medium, and where it fits into the overall life and witness of the congregation. As a method of engagement it certainly follows many scriptural precedents where Jesus, and later Paul, were often found in the public spaces, discussing and debating the issues important to the people, and presenting a Kingdom perspective.

There are two main ways that the church can use this concept. Firstly, they can use existing venues, and seek the permission of shop owners and managers to use their premises. The Café Church Network has already done a lot of work in this area and has secured agreements with the Whitbread Group (which includes Costa Coffee, Gloria Jean’s and are piloting schemes with other prominent brands, to allow local churches to hold café church events in their premises. Where an agreement exists with the Café Church Network (as with Costa Coffee), the company asks churches to work through the Network rather than approaching their shop managers directly. For more information about this contact the Café Church Network via their website www.cafechurch.net.

Over 30 Costa Coffee shops in England, and now two in Scotland, host Café Church events.

¹ Mission-Shaped Church (Church House Publishing), P. 50.
Recent research to assess the value of church from the un-churched in today's community has now been completed. After hearing the views of 54 people from all over Scotland, a working group from ACTS Mission Network has carefully assessed the findings and the report is now available to download from ACTS new website at www.acts-scotland.org

You will find the report under the Mission tag at the top panel on the home page. There are a few hard copies in the office if you can not access the website. I am sure you will find the results an interesting and thought provoking read. Please call Shona Paterson on 01259 222362. There may be a small charge.

We all hope you like the new website which is presenting a challenge to us here in the office, trying to add and delete articles while aiming to keep things updated. Hopefully it won’t take us too long to become familiar with the processes but if you see anything which has become outdated please call us to let us know on 01259 216980.

Prescription for Life: Take action to help children living with HIV

The vast majority of children living with HIV around the world lack access to HIV testing and treatment. The Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance (EAA), in collaboration with partners around the world, is embarking on a year-long action with governments, pharmaceutical companies and media to improve access to medicines for children with HIV. Children and young people are invited to take action with their school, faith community or family to help make this happen.

This action guide builds on the EAA’s teaching resource on advocacy and HIV and AIDS, which is available for fuller information about teaching children about AIDS and advocating for progress in prevention, treatment, care and support www.e-alliance.ch/keep_the.promise/ It is for teachers and schools, parents and families, faith leaders and their communities, and all who play a vital role in making young people more aware of the world in which they live and empowering them to take action on behalf of, and in solidarity with others.

Young people, especially 11-16 are encouraged to write letters to governments and pharmaceutical companies asking them to improve the treatment and services available to children living with HIV and to raise awareness through local press and radio. Letters should be sent directly to the Minister of Health and copies should be sent to: EAA, Box 2100, 150 route de Ferney, 1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland.
Church Leaders to attend Royal Highland Show: 25 June

For the first time Church Leaders from six of Scotland’s mainstream churches will unite in their support of the Royal Highland Show by attending the event at Ingliston on 25 June this year.

For many years the Scottish Church has been represented at this event by a Church of Scotland stand. More recently, the Church of Scotland generously invited other churches to join them in this venture, bringing into existence the Scottish Churches Pavilion. While the Pavilion continues to be organised by a group led by the Church of Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Churches’ Rural Group (SCRG), a part of the ACTS Mission Network, and continues to provide most of the funding for the event, the number of denominations helping to run the stand has increased over time. This year helpers come from the Church of Scotland; the Congregational Federation; Roman Catholic Church; Scottish Episcopal Church and the United Reformed Church. Church Leaders visiting include the Moderator of the Church of Scotland, The Cardinal from the Roman Catholic Church, The Primus from the Scottish Episcopal Church and Leaders from the Salvation Army; United Reformed Church and the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers).

This year presentations in the Pavilion and in the Education Centre will cover subjects of: fair trade and food miles; alcohol and drug misuse; HIV/AIDS – and contrasting the lives of children in Scotland with those in Africa. In addition, SCRG will be highlighting: Care Farming; Scottish Food Policy; The role of genetic modification (GM) in food production; and opportunities for rural churches to take on a Post Office role.

These events provide an opportunity for the churches to illustrate the involvement it has in rural communities and also as a place where information on topics currently under active consideration by the churches is made available. The stand and other areas also provide a place of relative quiet for visitors and, if wished, may receive prayer. More importantly the event demonstrates Christian Churches in Scotland uniting by far more than which divides them. A ‘not to be missed’ event this year.

A Quiet Day for Scotland

A large group gathered recently at St Ninian’s SEC Cathedral, Perth, in preparation of the next Quiet Day for Scotland which takes place over the weekend nearest to Saint Andrew’s Day (30 November). While these events are the initiative of ACTS and form part of a national event, all those taking part do so by arranging their own day in a way which is most suitable to their local churches and communities.

Those who gathered enjoyed sharing their experiences as well as hearing about many other ways in which this event may be offered.

The resource material for this year is now available on the ACTS website and can be downloaded freely from www.acts-scotland.org QDS will have their own website by the end of the summer. More details in next issue.
African Children’s Choir

If you aren't already hosting an African Children's Choir concert in your church, I encourage you to not miss out on the great ministry which these Children bring. There are not many dates available now, but there are still a few free dates in the calendar, or you could find out where the nearest concert is to where you live to both support and enjoy the wonderful song and dance of the African Children's Choir.

The children arrived in Scotland on Friday 12th June, to embark on their Scottish Tour. Please check our website for concert dates www.africanchildrenschoir.com

or contact Kathryn Neill directly. She will be delighted to hear from you.

Tel: 075 4080 4130
Please note change of mobile number

Email: kathryn.neill@africanchildrenschoir.com

Office: 02892 666611

‘Helping Africa's vulnerable children today, so they can help Africa tomorrow’

Children & Church

- What's happening for children in our churches?
- How are children being encouraged to use their gifts?
- Do children feel part of the Christian community?

These are some of the questions being addressed in a series of 5 regional Consultations exploring themes of children and church and seeking ways to work towards truly all-age Christian communities. These events build on the results of the questionnaire that was sent out to around 3000 churches across 12 denominations in 2008.

The results of the questionnaire have now been discussed at regional consultation events throughout Scotland. The key points emerging around children's participation in church life will be picked up in a major conference planned for:

Saturday 21 November 2009
Glasgow Premier Inn
187 George Street
from 10am to 3pm.

For further details please contact:
Tom Moyes tommoyes@acts-scotland.org
or tel: 01259 222363

trypraying

An excellent resource aimed at those who don't normally pray offers something to those who may be facing difficult times but who do not think of themselves as religious. Although it is not designed as a resource for Christians I think it would be a very good tool in outreach. The booklet has stories of answers to prayer, biblical themes to help people widen their understanding and simple action ideas to help faith grow. It would be an excellent resource for those planning a Quiet Day* in November. (page 4)

Website: www.trypraying.org

Or to order booklets call 07903547401
Email: trypraying@thereishope.co.uk
New Primus for Scottish Episcopal Church

The Rt Rev David Chillingworth has recently been elected Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church. He succeeds the Most Rev Dr Idris Jones, Bishop of Glasgow and Galloway, who stepped down as Primus after his recent announcement to retire from the position. This means Bishop David’s title now changes to Most Rev (the title given to a Primus).

Bishop David is a regular broadcaster on BBC Radio Scotland’s ‘Thought for the Day’. He believes in the values of modern technology in communicating the church’s voice, and writes a blog at:

www.bishopdavid.net

Care Farming Scotland

Promoting mental and physical health through giving people the opportunity to spend time working on the land

Those who can benefit include people with learning difficulties, work-related stress, mental health issues, drug and alcohol problems or employability challenges. Care farming is a partnership between land manager, service provider and client. Participants can work on traditional farms or in forestry, horticulture and other land management activities.

Care farming combines care of the land with care of people and there is evidence that it can deliver great personal, social and economic benefits for everyone involved. It boosts the rural economy by helping farms and other rural businesses to stay economically viable through diversification into an activity that can generate significant income.

For more information please visit:
www.carefarmingscotland.org.uk

Faiths in Scotland Community Action Fund

Faiths in Scotland Community Action Fund who work with local faith groups as they build hope and struggle against poverty by providing grants and support for their initiatives in Scotland’s most fragile urban and rural communities?

This new grant-making fund was launched in March, building on the pioneering work of the Scottish Churches Community Trust, and is an initiative of Faith in Community Scotland.

If you would like to know more about this please contact: email: info@fiscaf.org call 0141 221 4544 or visit their website at www.fiscaf.org

KINHARVIE institute of facilitation?

Kinharvie can work at all levels within your congregation/diocese. This is done in detailed consultation with you, carefully tailoring the appropriate intervention(s) to achieve your intended outcome(s).

They offer help so you may successfully achieve your aims, objectives and mission through the delivering of the following services:

- Facilitation of meetings
- Trustee Induction/Development
- Organisation/Project Reviews
- Strategic Planning
- Senior Staff Recruitment
- Facilitation Skills Training.

To find out more about Kinharvie email: angelamurphy@kinharvie.org.uk or call 0141 337 1070

Website: www.kinharvie.org.uk
Doctor Nelu Balaj, the Scottish Churches’ Racial Justice Officer, attended his last meeting of the Racial Justice Group at the end of April.

Rob Whiteman, Co-Convener of the Group, paid tribute to the work which Nelu had done in his six years as Racial Justice Officer, drawing particular attention to Nelu’s work with Black Ethnic Minority Churches and during the 2007 commemoration of the passing of the Act which abolished the Slave Trade. He wished Nelu well as he moved on to complete his training for the ministry of the Church of Scotland.

Increased funding for the post will mean that the new Officer will be employed for 28 hours per week rather than for 17.5. This will enable her/him to spend more time continuing the work begun by Nelu with the Minority Ethnic Christians Together in Scotland (MECTIS) group as well as tackling the other exciting and challenging tasks which feature in the post’s job description.

Advertisements for the post will be published during the Summer with the closing date for applications to be sent to ACTS, who employ the Racial Justice Officer on behalf of the Racial Justice Group, expected to be 10th August.

Ever heard of…..

### Zoroastrianism?

What do Freddy Mercury (lead singer of Queen) and Nina Wadia (actress of Goodness Gracious Me and Eastenders fame) have in common? This could be the question in a tabloid newspaper or popular magazine. But the answer is surprisingly nothing sensational. Both are, wait for itÉ, followers of a religious tradition known as Zoroastrianism. This is one of the oldest religious traditions that survives today. As Nina’s TV exposure increases people are increasingly asking what is Zoroastrianism? As the Zoroastrian New Year’s Day (Jamshedi Noruz) approaches on Monday the 20th July this month is as good a time as any to explore this tradition.

Zoroastrianism is arguably the world’s oldest monotheistic religion. It is centred on the words of the prophet Zoroaster below and focuses worship upon Ahura Mazda, the Lord of Wisdom. He is said to be the one universal and transcendental God the one Uncreated Creator to whom all worship must be ultimately directed. The birth anniversary of Prophet Spitaman Zarathushtra (Zoroaster), who founded Zoroastrianism, is celebrated on the Zoroastrian New Year’s Day.

The exact year of Zarathushtra’s birth is not known, but it is generally accepted that he was born in the beginning of the first millennium BC. The fixing of Jamshedi Noruz at this time is symbolic.

Zoroaster; portrayed here in a popular Parsi Zoroastrian depiction. This image emerged in the eighteenth century. It also acknowledges two competing principles representing good and evil: Spenta Mainyu (“Bounteous Spirit”) and Angra Mainyu (“Destructive Spirit”).

Humans are said to be intimately involved in this struggle, holding off chaos and destruction through active goodness. Zoroaster rejected the old Persian gods and in their place believed that a single wise god, Ahura Mazda, ruled and created the world. The name Zoroaster is the Persian version of the name of this religious prophet. The Greek name of Zoroaster is Zarathushtra or Zarathustra. Zoroastrianism was the main religion of the Persian Empire around 600 B.C.

Zoroastrianism is still practiced throughout the world, especially in India and Iran.

From RWOF June 09 edition
I had the pleasure of representing ACTS at the General Assembly of the United Free Church of Scotland, held in Perth, 9-11 June 2009. Over 200 delegates and visitors took part. I was able to join them for Thu 11 and Fri 12. As in 2008, I was warmly welcomed and felt very much at home, meeting friends old and new. The atmosphere in and around the assembly was both businesslike and convivial. Many familiar themes were presented, discussed and prayed over, including: education, evangelism, administration and finance, church and society, overseas relations, ministry, youth and ecumenical relations.

A good number of the delegates contributed to the discussions. There was much sharing of stories and much laughter. Some key issues are still works in progress and will be reflected on further. The process of discernment and decision making worked well and was owned by the group.

It was clear that the United Free Church gains a lot from its relationship with their partner church, the Congregational Church of South Africa. This has led to highly successful projects involving youth exchange visits. The church also has strong relationships with the Maxie Richards Foundation and the Scottish Bible Society. Elaine Duncan (Chief Executive of SBS) led a very participative evening session where everyone shared scripture together in small groups.

I found it encouraging to be reminded how well the United Free Church is represented in different ecumenical areas. This is clearly evident in their engagement with ACTS and the work of the Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office. Naturally, I would encourage the church to foster ecumenical engagement even more, especially at the local level. The ACTS staff team would be very happy to help out make connections and resource initiatives wherever we can. ■

While some economists talk of the current recession “bottoming out” and house prices are starting to rise again, the recession is having an increasing and very real impact on people’s lives, with rising unemployment, repossessions, debt and other causes of poverty. Church leaders and congregations are concerned about the situation and how they can respond to it. In many instances, churches and other faith communities are the first or only agencies providing support for vulnerable people affected by the crisis.

As part of Church Action on Poverty’s effort to help churches respond, practically and prophetically, to the recession, I’d like to invite you to be part of a group which will meet four or five times between September 2009 and Easter 2010, to explore what we (as churches and as individual Christians) bring to the discussion around the current crisis.

There is, I believe a small window of opportunity for creative thinking here. Questions which were off the public agenda are up for debate; a leading banker recently diagnosed what went wrong as an attempt to “create value without values”, and a Newsnight Scotland presenter spoke of a society where some of the old certainties have gone and “any sense of morality has gone out the window”. Yet the same presenter saw the churches as focussed on sexuality and, by implication, irrelevant to the real debate. Of course, that’s unfair … isn’t it?

Do we have something substantial to offer? Is that something about starting with poverty and with people who are experiencing it? Is it about key values that, for us, are bound up with our faith but resonate well beyond church walls?

These are the kind of questions I hope we will look at as a group. As well as being part of CAP’s resourcing of churches, this will also be part of the project I am engaged on here at the Centre for Theology and Public Issues at Edinburgh University, helping Scotland’s churches develop theological perspectives on public issues.

I hope you will feel this has the potential to be something worthwhile to be part of; I’m sure you are someone with a contribution to make.

A first meeting will be in Glasgow on Friday 4 September from 1pm, starting with a sandwich lunch; further details (including a precise venue) will be confirmed later. Meanwhile I’d be grateful if you could indicate whether you want to be part of this, by replying to me at graham.blount@ed.ac.uk or Centre for Theology and Public Issues, University of Edinburgh, New College, Mound Place, Edinburgh EH1 2LX, 0131 650 7912. Please feel free to pass the invitation on to anyone else you feel might be interested.