

# LINK

supporting the workplace, caring for people



Welcome to the September edition of "LINK"

There are two courses coming up very soon which we'd like to draw to your attention as we believe them both to be of importance to CIGB's ministry in Birmingham and Solihull. Do check your diaries, and if you are able to, come. There are also articles on two very hot topics, reflections "On the Buses" and some good news from Selly Oak. A lovely mixed bag to whet your appetite.



## "MINISTRY IN THE CITY OF BIRMINGHAM"

This innovative day course is intended as a briefing for those who are new to ministry in Birmingham; and for those who want to be brought up-to-date with their knowledge and experience of the city. There will be opportunities to discuss issues during the day.

### "Ministry in the City of Birmingham"

Thursday 24th October 9am—4pm  
The Council House, Victoria Square, Birmingham

The cost of the day will be £20

Our mission in Birmingham is to a place where God is at work through many communities and organisations. To be collaborating with God we need to understand something of the City's shaping by history, geography and economics; and its future plans. Our vision needs to take account of other partners' agendas. The Church is often asked to contribute to decision-making and activities that affect our communities.

Topics and speakers for the day include:

'The City Council, Changes in Birmingham' with Stephen Hughes, CEO Birmingham City Council (BCC)

'Social Inclusion in Birmingham' with Jackie Mould, Director, Challenge Unit, BCC.

'Voluntary Section/Social Enterprise with Richard Beard of the Jericho Foundation.

'Changes in Education in Birmingham' with Sue Twells, Assistant Director, Education & Skills, BCC.

There will be an opportunity to visit the 'History of Birmingham' exhibition during the morning and an

Open-top bus tour including visits to 'God's Heart for Longbridge' - Churches and Major Regeneration; and 'Church and Community Engagement' in Lozells. The tour will end where it began—in Victoria Square.

Refreshments and lunch are included.

There are limited places available on the course and the closing date for registration is Thursday October 3rd, so if you are interested ... or you know of someone else who might be interested ... please get in touch as soon as possible as the course is filling up nicely and we'd hate you to be disappointed!

For an application form, please telephone the CIGB office on 0121 426 0425 or email [peter.sellick](mailto:peter.sellick)



### Mission at Work—the Church that Helps

With Mark Greene, London Institute of Contemporary Christianity

**Birmingham Cathedral, Colmore Row  
Tuesday 1 October from 2pm to 5pm.**

Come and explore a variety of simple, tested ways in which you can create a church community that helps your people in paid work to be fruitful day by day – without compromising other church ministries or collapsing from overwork yourself.

For further information and to reserve a place please contact Chris Dinsdale at ChaplaincyPlus 0121 236 9742 or email [chris.dinsdale@chaplaincyplus.org.uk](mailto:chris.dinsdale@chaplaincyplus.org.uk)

**QUOTABLE QUOTE** “ ... Nowhere so busy a man as he than he. And yet he seemed busier than he was ...”

Geoffrey Chaucer

### “On The Buses”

Chrissy McAteer reflects on her new chaplaincy to National Express West Midlands buses.

“Imagine you have a pile of £50,000 in pound notes sitting on the back seat of the bus.” said Roy Heath, a manager at Acock’s Green bus depot. “When you have finished your journey I want all those notes to be intact because what you are carrying is precious cargo.” He wasn’t talking about the price of the bus. He meant the value of human lives. This is how he inducts new drivers.



On my first visit to the depot I was immediately struck by the atmosphere of friendly camaraderie among the staff amidst the grimy, noisy surroundings. On subsequent visits I’ve also noticed when people have seemed stressed but generally there is friendly banter and signs of affection among the staff. Shoulder slapping, hand clapping, a cheeky pat on a pudgy tummy, a bit of rib-pulling. Most people say hello and make eye-contact.

The humour and human contact is important in what can be a highly stressful job. One driver confirmed what I’ve seen as a passenger. Many of the public will flash their passes or tickets at the driver but won’t even look at him or her. People forget that a human being is driving the bus.

“But 97% of the customers are good, decent people.” The same driver tells me. “I like my route. I recognise most of the people I see every day.”

A number of drivers quit the job after only a few months but many who thought they’d just do it temporarily stay on for decades. As Stewart Revitt the Finance Manager says with animation, “It gets into your blood.”

The job is undeniably hard work. Drivers have to have a break every 3½ hours. Their breaks may last anywhere between 40 minutes to 4 hours unpaid. One driver typically told me that that day he started work at 6am and would finish at 8pm.

I visit the booking-on room where drivers pick up their shift patterns from and the canteen. Reactions to my presence are mixed.

“You’re the chaplain. Who’s died?”  
“They think we need a chaplain.” Grave head-shaking follows. I can sympathise with their cynicism but stand my ground and join in conversations as I’ve watched others do.  
“You won’t get anyone talking to you, you know.” warned another chap. He then proceeded to talk non-stop for the next hour.

So far it’s been a great privilege to listen as people share snippets from their lives. Conversations range from someone’s life philosophy to reminiscences about the Pope’s visit to Birmingham.

As I travel around the various change-over points on the buses I am beginning to meet various characters. The young, streetwise cleaner based at Solihull Station introduces me to new drivers (they’ve only been driving for about 8 years or so) and retired veterans who drop by to visit old colleagues.

So where is God in all this? The humour, companionship, tears, utmost dedication to service and sincere respect for the value of human life are “in the blood.” God is On The Buses.

Please remember those who work on or use the buses in your prayers. Thank you.



### A DATE FOR YOUR DIARY

Chrissy, John and Peter (N Ex buses) and several other new chaplains will be officially commissioned in November at CIGB’s annual Commissioning Service, which this year will take place ...

at 3.00pm  
on **SUNDAY 24TH NOVEMBER**  
at **Hall Green URC church**

The guest speaker will be Carole Parkes, Course Director, MSc in HRM and Business at Aston University, and a valuable member of CIGB’s Management Council.

### Zero hours ... Zero choice?

Rev Duncan Ballard, Chaplain to Birmingham Airport writes about this hot topic:

Zero Hours contracts are a form of agreement in which the worker is supposed to make himself or herself available each day, and the employer and the employer allocates the work available. Although the employee might sit at home waiting for a phone call that doesn't come, and receive no income as a result, they are counted among the employed in the official statistics. But who really benefits?

The following advertisement recently appeared in a local newspaper. 'Female carer required to support client with all aspects of personal care in own home. Five calls a day between 7am and 10pm over 7days. Driver preferred. £6.75 an hour, 16-20 hours a week.' Imagine being the woman who accepted this job. From early morning to late evening, seven days a week, one's time would be dominated by this commitment. It would be almost impossible to fit in another part-time job to earn more, and a mother would find it difficult to combine it with her children's needs. All for £108 - £135 per week.



Nearly a million people now work to such 'zero hour' contracts - committed and available to an employer, but with no guarantee of work, or income.



They are rife in the worlds of security, catering, retailing, office cleaning and care for the elderly, and even creeping into the charity world.

The church has a long and honourable tradition of reflecting theologically on the place of work in people's lives. Reflecting theologically on the Bible, tradition and human reasoning, the church understands that:

**work is a blessing** rather than a curse (eg Gen 1:1-25, 26, 2:5 - we work as co-creators with God),

**human beings have an innate dignity** derived from their creation in God's image (eg Gen 1: 26,27, 5: 1 - never just a cog in the wheel, but someone created in God's image),

**human contracts are built upon the model of God's covenant** with us (Gen 9: 1-19, 50:15-21, Lev 19:13 etc. - God enters into a defined relationship with his people, ensuring the wellbeing of all parties), and **God has a special concern for the poor** of society (eg Deut 15: 1-18, Matthew 25:40 - (recognising the

vulnerability and voicelessness of the poor, special attention ought to be paid to how actions, structures, attitudes, etc., inhibit the poor from using their talents to transform the world positively).

It is difficult to see how the practice of insisting upon zero hour contracts for workers honours any of the principles that underpin these Christian understandings of employment contracts. Treating people with fairness and respect is not an optional extra for times of economic prosperity: it is fundamental to God's Kingdom.

### Credit Unions



Peter Sellick writes on another very hot topic:

The growth of credit unions is on the Government agenda, as well as that of the Church of England. The Association of British Credit Unions (ABCUL) has been given £36m to help the credit union movement modernise and double in size over the next few years. The law governing credit unions has recently been loosened up - eg to allow corporate customers (like a church) to open an account.



As the Archbishop of Canterbury has pointed out, credit unions help money to stay in the local economy, by recycling it through local borrowers and savers. They also offer more personal, cheaper financial services. But they are limited by their size and the risks they take in their lending practises: many credit unions find it hard to break even without some sort of grant support.

Churches have also been slightly wary of credit unions. Credit unions are businesses and businesses are compromised organisations. They need to be sustainable; that is to generate income by lending to people who do not have a lot of money. To some extent, that means encouraging borrowing, which may be part of the problem. Credit Unions would say that their work is about redirecting borrowing from expensive pay-day lenders. They also need to encourage local saving, in order to have the money to lend.

There are a number of different operating models of credit union. Some are very small local organisations with a few hundred members; some have long term savers and occasional large borrowers; others have thousands of members with frequent transactions and many small amounts of borrowing. Some require customers to be saving members for a period of time (eg 3 months) before they can borrow; others may allow borrowing (after an assessment about affordability) on the second day of membership. Some derive income from making small charges for extra services (eg able to use a

use a Mastercard); some pay little interest (or annual dividend) on savings. Some credit unions target their membership at those who are 'financially excluded', some focus more on payroll giving and membership through organisations and enterprises.

The opportunities for churches include investing, or borrowing, from a credit union; encouraging use of a local union and advertising its value; or allowing the credit union to set up an 'access point' at the church for certain times of day/week, to get around the difficulty of travelling to the office itself. A number of church organisations have set up their own credit union themselves, but may require financial subsidy to cope with necessary costs (eg the required annual audit itself may cost a few £thousand).

Peter Sellick is very happy to come out and talk to church groups about the various possibilities and explain the opportunities in more detail.

More information about Credit Unions is available from [www.abcul.org](http://www.abcul.org).



### 'Socks 'n Chocs'

Last year over the Christmas period, homeless people in Birmingham were given socks, chocs, sleeping bags, gloves and hats—a campaign that was successful and is being run again this year by P C Ian Northcott.

P C Northcott is trying to raise 16,000 pairs of socks and boxes of chocs in an attempt to beat last years record.

Dear readers

Would you be able to donate a pair of socks or a box of chocs to this appeal? Christmas seems a long way off, but the collection has already started.

John Butcher, lead police chaplain will be able to tell you more. Please contact him at [jabutcher4@googlemail.com](mailto:jabutcher4@googlemail.com)

Read more about PC Northcott and this appeal at the following URL:

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2336320/Policeman-joins-buskers-shoppers-rendition-Oasis-Wonderwall-Birmingham-city-centre.html>



### Selly Oak Job Club

"When they go out of here, they feel lifted up" – a comment from a new volunteer helper at Selly Oak Job Club in August. Many of their clients are referred by the Job Centre around the corner, and most are not sure what to expect when they arrive. What they do find is a welcome, relaxed atmosphere and friendly support. The Job Club has seen about 70 people since it started its weekly drop-in last year. There are stories of those who have gone on to find just what they were looking for – from medical technicians to dog-grooming assistants – as well as those who have been happy to find any work. There are job seekers with language barriers, as well as IT barriers. The new government 'Universal Jobmatch' requires access to an online computer and some understanding of IT – and the Job Club can provide these. Some people arrive having no idea what a 'CV' is: they are impressed when they see the CV all put down on paper. A clothing store HR manager came down to give the clients some advice and experience around Job Interviews. Selly Oak Job Club emerged out of a meeting between St Mary's Church Selly Oak, Christian Life Centre and CIGB: with training and ongoing support from the Jericho foundation ([jcp.org.uk](http://jcp.org.uk)) the idea has grown and flourished.



Selly Oak Job Club  
Thursdays 10-12noon  
Christian Life Centre  
2-4 Frederick Road B29 6PB  
0121 471 3677  
[sellyoakjobclub@yahoo.oc.uk](mailto:sellyoakjobclub@yahoo.oc.uk)

### LAST WORD ...

"Inspiration comes of working every day"

Charles Baudelaire

### DON'T FORGET ...

Send us your news, your stories, your pictures, your quotable quotes and your jokes and stay in touch:

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