

The Voice



Spring 2021 No.420

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THE
CONNEXION

The Sierra Leone Mission

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WELCOME From The Editor

HELLO everyone, and welcome to the Spring edition of the Voice magazine. We have started a new year, and I'm sure you will all be with me in thinking that 2020 will not be difficult to top! Just a quick reminder to everyone that you can now find the SLM History videos on the Connexion website under the '*Sierra Leone Mission*', as well as on the YouTube page by the same name. Go and check it out to learn more about the how the SLM began, more will be coming soon!

Following on from the last editions, we have more stories of how our churches are coping with mission during lockdown, as well as updates from the Health Centre and Bethesda, news from Magnus in Sierra Leone, an introduction from the behind-the-scenes pastoral support, and many more! Also, don't miss some more exciting stories from the past of our very own Connexion, here in the UK and in Sierra Leone.

As you may gathered, my love of history runs deep, so I am asking if anyone would be interested in sending me an account of the history of your church, to then be made into short videos to share with the rest of the Connexion. Wouldn't it be great to compile our past so that it is never forgotten? Just email me at the address below; long or short, I would love to hear it!

Finally, any articles or photos of news from around the Connexion are greatly welcomed and appreciated to be included in the magazine. The deadline for our next addition is 15th of May 2021. Just email me at: estherkerengreen@gmail.com.



Bible study:

By Nigel Gordon-Potts, Goring Free Church

An easy Easter?

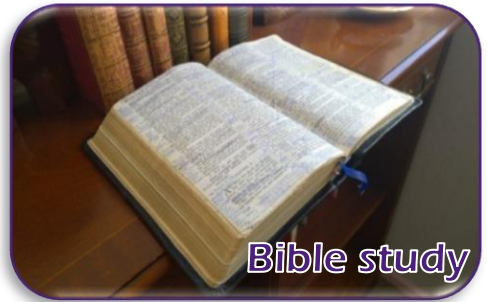
‘Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me’ (Lk.9:23).

March usually finds us in the season of Lent. A season in the Christian calendar when we spend time in preparation for Easter. Traditionally, it is a season in which people deny themselves something. Ever been asked, ‘What are you giving up for Lent?’

We may not acknowledge Lent this way, although as a result of COVID, all of us have probably given up certain things over recent months! However, this season ought to cause us to consider this concept of ‘denying oneself.’ For isn’t this central to the Easter message, and therefore, to the whole of our Christian faith. The Lord Jesus certainly denied himself. Indeed, he literally took up his cross! Oughtn’t we to do likewise?

The above words are taken from Luke’s gospel, but you will also find them in Matthew and Mark, and whilst not explicit in John, the sense of there being a cost involved in following Jesus is clearly evident. Often this is seen as hugely burdensome – as if we are to carry a great weight of hardship; to deny ourselves pleasures; and to settle for a pretty drab and unfulfilling existence! Some have taken it to mean that believers are to be solemn, even miserable, creatures. Sadly, it is the impression that some Christians give!!

However, that really doesn’t square with Jesus’ instruction to his followers to: ‘Take my yoke upon you and learn from me...For my yoke is easy and



my burden is light' (Mt.11:29-30). So, which is it to be? Should following Jesus involve carrying a heavy load, or a light one? Well, to answer this question, we need to understand what exactly is meant by denying oneself, taking up one's cross, and following Jesus?



Firstly, to deny oneself isn't so much about giving up chocolate, alcohol or anything else. The word translated 'deny' means 'to say no to.' But who or what are we to say 'no' to? The answer is: ourselves! We are not to be self-focused and chase after our own wants and desires, for when we do, our lives will always be unfulfilled, a disappointment – meaningless, as the author of Ecclesiastes puts it! Instead, we need to remind ourselves constantly that God knows what is best for us. So ultimately, denying ourselves is good for us!

Secondly, taking up one's cross does not mean carrying an unbearable weight – some heavy load, but instead, heading in a certain direction. Jesus' original audience would have been familiar with the sight of a condemned man carrying the beam of his cross towards his place of execution. When that beam was upon his shoulders, he was only going in one direction! And when we become a follower of Jesus Christ, isn't that true of us?



he will be with us always! Hence, when we deny ourselves, and commit ourselves to only going his way, he walks alongside us. He shares in

Thirdly, Jesus calls us to follow him. And he does so because he wants us to be with him where he is! It's all about relationship. Following him involves 'remaining in him' as we read in Jn.15; it means developing our relationship with him. He longs for us to be with him and he promises that

carrying our load. The yoke, like the beam of a Roman cross, was also made of wood. And when Jesus is carrying it with us, it is indeed light!

Lent points us towards Easter, and as we reflect upon the events of that first Easter, may we consider afresh the call of the Lord Jesus Christ upon each one of us. Will we seek not to go our own way, but his? For his way is best for us. Will we carry our cross? Persevering through whatever life holds; daily committing ourselves to going his way and his way alone. And will we remain in him? For then we shall know what it means to walk closely with him each and every day. How necessary is this given the times in which we live!

Easy? No. But rewarding? Eternally so!

A little notification...

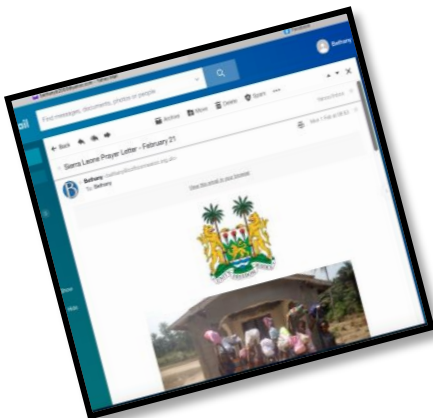
SLM Prayer Letter!

Would you join us in praying for our brothers and sisters in Sierra Leone?



Each month we send out a short e-mail of prayer requests.

If you would like to join our mailing list please e-mail: bethany@cofhconnexion.org.uk



Report from the SLM Committee

By Tim Wells

The Sierra Leone Committee

I wonder how many people could point out Sierra Leone on a map? Often when I talk about the work we do as a Church group in Sierra Leone it results in raised eyebrows and a slightly puzzled look - why Sierra

Leone and where exactly is it? On the face of it, Sierra Leone is a surprising subject that binds us together as a Connexion, and an extraordinary story that combines John Wesley (most people have heard of him) the slave trade, Nova Scotia, the Countess of Huntingdon, 200+ years of history and thousands of miles of travel. However, of course, the real thing that binds us is Jesus - and he is the same for John Wesley and the people of his time as he is for us today - in Sierra Leone or here in the UK.

Charlotte and Esther have done a great job with presenting the history -

look at the videos and learn how we got thus far!

The underpinning to the story is that Jesus transforms us and makes us a part of his family and so we have the privilege of brothers and sisters in every part of the world and families to support one another. Over the years the SLM in the UK and the Huntingdon Church in Sierra Leone have built strong links of fellowship and learned from each other and

shared one another's burdens; the SLM Committee have been a means of keeping open the communication between us.



Our circumstances are very different to each other and so our needs differ. Because of the generosity and sacrificial giving of God's people in the UK, over the years we have been able to help build schools and churches, fund teachers and students, support food programs, send gifts, provide for street children to be cared for and loved and started to support a new Health Centre, plus many other projects along the way. In all these things, we have found, together, how God provides beyond our imagining.



We meet as a committee four times a year - in the old days it used to be in London but of course for the last year we have met virtually - less travelling so a good use of time and money even if it's not quite the same as actually seeing each other!

When we meet, we often wrestle with the problem of how to balance our limited resources with the seemingly unlimited needs. Sierra Leone is a poor country financially though rich in so many ways and with great potential. Can we bring our 5 loaves and 2 fishes and allow God to do great things with them? He is able to do far more than we ask or imagine.....

One of the great blessings over the years has been the relationships we have built with our family in SL. It would be lovely to build on that and see more people making friendships and sharing stories from both our countries so that we begin to understand each other better. We are so grateful for the many ways folk have shown their support - in faithful and sacrificial giving, through prayer and encouragement, the shoe bags, fees for university for some of the Bethesda children (How amazing is that?????) and thousands of other ways. We long for God to give us a vision of how he sees us - not as two



separate groups but as one family, sharing together in the love that he has poured out on us and growing in our faith as a result. If you feel that God may be calling you to join in, in a new way, don't ignore his call - Sierra Leone may be a fruitful harvest field so come and talk to us!

Isaiah 6:8 NIV

[8] Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

A Glimpse into Selina's Childhood

**By Robert (Bob) Webb,
(Formerly of Wormley)**

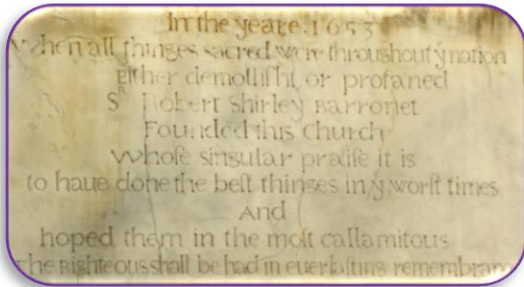
Towards the end of summer 2019, I visited the church at Staunton Harold, or, to use the correct name, the Chapel of the Holy Trinity. It is one of the few churches dating from the period between the outbreak of the English Civil War and the Restoration of the Monarchy. It was built between 1653 and

1655. It was the church in which the Shirleys, their retainers and estate workers worshipped for generations, including the young Selina, who was to become the Countess of Huntingdon.



The story of its creation shows faith in the face of oppression, particularly by its creator, Sir Robert Shirley. Sir Robert was a Royalist, who believed that the Anglican church and the state were inseparable. At a time when parliament under Oliver Cromwell were removing decorations and imagery from churches, Sir Robert courageously had his new church built in the

traditional Gothic style, with stained glass windows and carved wooden panelling, his wishes being completed by his widow after his early death. The wooden ceiling was painted to represent the creation of the world and the altar was covered in an embroidered cloth.

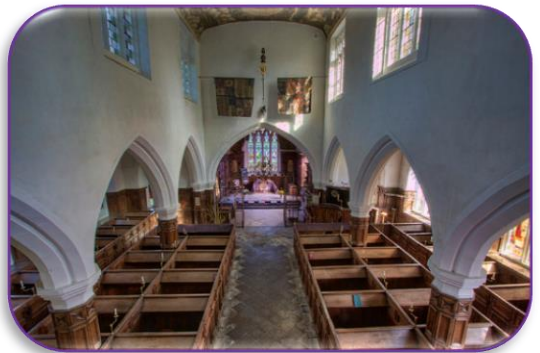


Carved into the stone over the entrance are these words: *'In the year 1653 when all things Sacred were throughout ye nation, Either demolisht or profaned, Sir Robert Shirley,*

Baronet, Founded this church; Whose singular praise it is, to have done the best things in ye worst times, and hoped them in the most callamitous. The righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance.'

As you can imagine, Sir Robert's project was regarded by the political powers of the day as a blatant display of disregard for the edicts imposing Puritan beliefs and this was one reason why he was committed to the Tower of London, where he died aged only twenty-seven.

When you enter the church, you are transported back to the Seventeenth Century. The church has been altered very little since it was built and still has the original features and fittings. It has no electricity but is lit with candles. The small pipe organ has to be pumped by hand. As I sat in the church, I began to realise how much this church from her teenage years influenced the Countess' designs for the features and furnishings of some of her chapels and her preference for the prayer book service.



The church is now under the care of the National Trust and is open to the public. However, the timings are restricted by the lack of proper lighting.

But planning a visit to coincide with the opening hours is well worth the effort. Staunton Harold Hall adjacent to the church is privately owned, but the stable block has been converted into the Ferrers Centre with craft outlets and a very nice teashop. There is also a small garden centre close to the entrance.

For more information see:

<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/staunton-harold-church>

<https://www.ferrerscentre.co.uk/>

<http://www.stauntonharoldestate.co.uk/>

[With acknowledgement to the National Trust web-site.]

Brama Health Centre

Did you know?

- The child and infant mortality rate in England and Wales in 2018 was 3.8 per 1,000. In Sierra Leone it was 78 per 1,000.
- Between January and March 2020 in Freetown alone there were 581 maternal deaths.
- Maternal deaths account for 36% of all deaths amongst women aged 15 – 49 years.
- Sierra Leone is the most dangerous place in the world to be pregnant.
- There are only 245 doctors in Sierra Leone serving 7 million people.
- 1 in 17 women won't survive pregnancy or delivery.
- 60% of population live below the poverty line.



- 1 in 3 people do not have access to clean water.
- 3 in 5 people live in rural areas.
- MOST deaths could be prevented!

In Sierra Leone, the majority of maternal and infant mortality; caused mainly by birth asphyxia, prematurity, sepsis and congenital deformity can be prevented.

A pregnant lady living in a rural setting cannot easily access medical help. There is usually an elderly woman who ‘assists’ when the time to give birth arrives. These untrained women have been identified by the S.L. government as the primary reason for the country’s maternal deaths. This ‘support’ is now illegal. Often when problems occur it is too late to travel to a Health facility and usually there is no money for transport or health care.

Good News

The Health Centre for children at Brama will serve 35 villages in the local vicinity. There will be trained staff in attendance who will also work in the villages, encouraging general hygiene regimes, implementing a vaccination programme and delivering post-natal health care for mum and baby. Magnus is confident that he will be able to staff and fund the Health Centre on its completion.



The service provided will be accessible to all.

Please check out the latest video on the Sierra Leone Mission YouTube page on the amazing creation and building of the health centre, wonderfully put together by Nina. Find it at:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kxR9TltcTC4>

Work has now started on the interior of the Brama Health Centre but will only be able to proceed as funds allow. The Sierra Leone Mission is unable to support this project financially because it is already committed to the pastors, teachers and the children of Bethesda. However, Janet Foord would be very willing to transfer any named donation to this incredible project.

(data obtained from Unicef, Hope organisation, Home Leone and UNFPA)

Wordsearch

O	B	J	I	G	P	J	Y	S	E	I	R	A	N	O	I	S	S	I	M	W	T	Z	P
P	T	D	U	F	E	W	T	R	P	Q	S	L	G	F	A	R	V	A	E	H	J	A	R
D	X	G	O	L	G	R	G	H	B	E	T	H	E	S	D	A	M	N	F	G	G	D	A
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LOCKDOWN

FISHING NET

PRAYER

MISSIONARIES

CONFERENCE

SHIRLEY

EASTER

WANTED

FOLLOW

LENT

BETHESDA

Conference 2021!

We are thrilled to announce that, although we cannot meet at Easter, a new date has been set for the annual Conference.



God willing, we will be meeting at High Leigh Conference Centre on the 25th – 27th of October.

We will be delighted to gather together as a Connexion family after so long.



More details will be forthcoming.

Throwing the Nets on the Other Side!

By Rev Simon Allaby, Bolney Village Chapel

In John 21 we read of Jesus asking the disciples to throw their nets 'on the right side of the boat'. They have spent the night fishing but without success. Now Jesus prompts them to do it differently and suddenly the nets are full. As with the similar incident, recorded in Luke 5, the disciples have to swallow their pride and allow Jesus to show them how to do the thing they thought they were the experts at!

Well, this time last year we all thought we knew what we were doing when it came to mission and evangelism and most of it was based around meeting people face-to-face. Certainly, at BVC most of our engagement with those outside the church involved food – men's curry night's, ladies' dinners, café church etc. But then along came Covid19 and all of that ground to a halt. So, what to do now? We could just haul in those 'nets' and wait for things to get back to normal, or we could find different ways of throwing the nets out.

Like most we quickly discovered a net we had had for years but barely used – the internet! While the world had been using it to great effect to proclaim a godless agenda, it was a tool we barely knew what to do with. That all changed with the first lockdown as we were propelled into taking our services online so that our existing congregation could stay connected. But then we noticed that lots of other people were watching as well, some of them known to us but many who were not. We hope and pray that all those watching will be touched by the Holy Spirit as they listen and hear God's word.

With our services online we turned to Alpha. Having run in-person courses in the past we took the plunge and ran one online. We had a few takers – half from the village and half from further afield - who quickly formed a bond and looked forward to joining the Zoom call every week. At the end of the course no-one wanted to stop meeting and so we have continued with a fortnightly Bible study.



As well as BVC my Turn the Page posts on social media also went up a notch at the beginning of lockdown with a series of short videos addressing key questions people raise and issues they grapple with. Each week I write two new posts and record two new videos. These culminated at the end of last year with an online Advent Calendar – 25 short video stories – with several hundred people opening each door.



Covid and repeated lockdowns have forced us to re-imagine how we continue to be 'church' and present the Good News of Jesus to a lost world; and God has given us a 'net' fit for the 21st century so that we may continue to do just that!

Update from Bethesda By Janet O'Shea



Just a few miles from Bethesda is Hope Village; another inspirational project funded by British people. Last Christmas the children of Bethesda were invited to spend Christmas Day with the children from Hope. There were

70 children altogether and they had a wonderful time on Bureh Town Beach and shared food, fun and games. This treat was funded by the Hope Village Project and was very much appreciated by our children, 'Thank you Hope'!

Since the last edition of Voice the finances needed to enable Abdul and Mariatu to study law and medicine at university have almost been fully realised...huge thanks to those who gave. In 2019 and 2020 four containers

arrived in Sierra Leone, one container is at the Health Centre and the other three were sited within the walls of Bethesda. The idea is that the



containers should be converted into additional living accommodation for the older children in Bethesda. Wouldn't it be wonderful to convert two of the containers into study bedrooms for Abdul and Mariatu in the coming months? Is there an architect in the Connexion who could design this project?

The children at Bethesda work extremely hard and are a great help to Magnus when shipments arrive. They also work hard at school and three of them: Abbie, Fatmata and Ibrahim, have recently passed their exams to enter senior school! They know what it is like to have nothing; to live on the streets and only own the clothes on their backs. They really appreciate that folk in the U.K. want to help them, and they believe that God has rescued them. They pray for us every day, please continue to pray for them.

Paul Woodbridge- Pastoral Support for the Connexion

My name is Paul Woodbridge, and my role in the Connexion is to be a pastoral support for its ministers and leaders. I started this just over two years ago, and I thought it might be helpful to introduce myself to you and tell you something about my life.

I was born many years ago in North Wales. I'm married to Sarah, and we have been married for 43 years. We met in Bangor University, North Wales, where we were both students. We've lived in Basildon, Leicester and North London, before moving to Ely 16 miles north of Cambridge when I retired just over 2 years ago.

I am a sports' fan, supporting Spurs, the Welsh rugby team, and the England cricket team! I also love opera, and until we left London, regularly visited the London Coliseum, home of English National Opera!

We have four sons, 2 granddaughters (with another one due in April), who all live and work in London. We miss not being able at present being able to go to London to see them but are grateful for zoom!



I was converted at the age of 12, in July 1965! My father had been struggling at work and trying to find solutions to his anxiety and restlessness. A woman at work invited him to go to a little village church near Royston, Herts, and Dad's testimony is that while he went to the church to hear the music that had been recommended, after his first visit, 'I was amazed to find that I had followed the service in very detail and the minister had got more than a human message – for me'.

We started to go to this church regularly, and about eight weeks later, the pastor paid us a visit and try and answer various questions my father had. Dad wrote, 'When I tell you that this young man held all four of us to a gospel study (John 14) until 10.15 at night – and you could hear a pin drop, there must have been a greater power at work'.

A couple of weeks later, we went to the pastor's house and that evening, my parents and myself knelt in his lounge and put our trust in the Lord Jesus. The following day, the pastor came to our house and led my 10-year-old sister to the Lord. So, a family conversion!

My parents died some years ago, both following the Lord through the rest of their lives. My sister works at a church in East London, where she has been for over 25 years. I have worked with theological students as part of UCCF (Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship) in universities and

colleges around the country in the 1980s, and also taught in a secondary school for a few years. I spent from 1988 to 2018 as a tutor at Oak Hill College in North London, an Anglican Evangelical training college, teaching New Testament and overseeing church placements in the later years. So, I have seen many men and women go out and service the Lord in ministry around the UK and over the world – what a privilege!

Our present church involvement is at St Mary's Church in Ely, where we enjoy fellowship and are involved in a number of its ministries.

Involvement with the Connexion opened up shortly before I retired, when Bethany Green, pastor of Rosedale Community Church in Cheshunt, visited Oak Hill to seek to develop its links with the Connexion. She happened to mention a search for someone to support the ministers, and the Principal thought that this might keep me out of mischief in retirement! So, I subsequently met with Bethany and the Chair of the Connexion and have had the privilege of seeking to support pastors and leaders in the Connexion since then.



I endeavour to keep in touch with leaders through regular emails which have contained some message perhaps from a blog or website that I hoped might encourage and support them. I am also available to preach and have had the privilege of visiting some Connexion churches.

Being church leaders today has its special challenges - and not just as we wrestle with the present situation that the virus has brought us. So, I would value your prayers as I seek to develop ongoing support, as well as encouraging you to encourage and support the leaders in your own church – they all value your care and prayers!

Word from the Trustees: WANTED

By Ben Quant

As you know, The Connexion needs more Trustees. I suspect most of you reading this (yes, I'm talking to you!) will already have turned off at this point. Let's face it, dealing with the administration of keeping a charity on the road, juggling with legislation, health and safety, and the joys of old buildings, is hardly going to get your pulse racing. It's not the most glamorous of jobs. So why bother?

It's a good question, and so I thought I'd write about why I'm a Trustee, and what excites me about the work.

I guess the best place to start is the beginning. I became a Christian through the Connexion. Its churches in Ely, Westcott and Wormley introduced me to God and have shaped and formed my life with him. At the risk of sounding over the top, they've changed my life. I'm reminded of Paul's statement in Romans 8:13, NIV: 'Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law' - this is how I'm trying to pay back what I owe.

As a young Christian I cycled around the Connexion to raise money for a school building for the folks in Fufu Water, Sierra Leone. Through this and Youth Conference, I came to know and fall in love with the wider Connexion. You're a wonderful bunch of people! Every church has its own character, and the Connexion is stuffed with personality. We may all be different in outlook and approaches, but together we form a precious blend - a family. As a Trustee I get to spend time with and working for this



diverse family. What could be better than that? Our duties are all about supporting this family, strengthening our links, helping our outreach and as Romans 12:15 calls us, rejoicing with those who rejoice, and mourning with those who mourn.

Recently we've been trying to support our churches and their leaders during the pandemic, keeping them abreast with legislation, sharing ideas for what church could be during this time, and organising online joint services for congregations unable to provide their own and those who can. We've been developing a trainee minister scheme, to develop new leaders within the Connexion and maybe through that support both larger and smaller fellowships. We've also been reviewing our online presence and communication, safeguarding and finances, to ensure we are able to continue our mission in the contemporary context.

As Trustees we gradually develop our own areas of responsibility, usually growing out of our own interests and skills. I was given responsibility for ministerial matters, especially our ministers' gatherings, giving grants for training through the Cheshunt Foundation, and heading up Conference and Youth Conference. I also get to represent The Connexion at Free Churches Group meetings. All of these fall into the remit of developing family and mission - as all our work does, ultimately this is what we're about, not maintenance and bureaucracy. We are each assigned churches which we act as a contact Trustee for, and that's what helps ground our work in the daily lives of the congregations. I'm the contact Trustee for Turner's Hill, Bell's Yew Green, Rosedale and Mortimer West End; it's been wonderful gradually growing a relationship with them.

Of course, if you were to become a Trustee, your involvement would be different from mine. You would bring your own outlook and talents to the table, and your own particular niche would emerge through which you would be able to serve our family. There are particular areas we are interested in; we do need people with skills around handling premises and

The logo consists of the word "JOIN" in white, uppercase letters inside a purple square, positioned above the word "TRUSTEE" in purple, uppercase letters.

contractors. Being comfortable in dealing with legal documents would also be a bonus. But don't feel discounted if you don't have these. If you've got a passion for God's people, a commitment to mission and can cope with a few more committee meetings, you may still be who we're looking for. Get in touch and have a conversation with us!

** I fear the Connexional Trustees work for the love of God and the Connexion. There may be a reward in heaven and the appreciation of churches on earth, but no dollars for now...*

Conference 2021 in Sierra Leone Celebrating 229 years of God's Love

By Magnus Bendu

Conference in Sierra Leone is divided into three set of activities referred to as: Pre-Conference activities, Plenary Session and Post-Conference activities. It all begins with a meeting of the Managing Committee

(Comprising all Ministers, all Circuit Secretaries and Treasurers and all Officers and auxiliary groups heads) on the last Sunday of November to debate or discuss and disagree or agree on various dates for conference activities including an endorsement of the theme and venue. This means that the Executive Committee (I.e. the head of Church/Bishop and Officers/cabinet) must have met to make proposals which are presented to the Managing Committee. The venue is only endorsed and not debated as we have three permanent venues on a rotational basis. The theme can be refined, but also not subject to debate as it comes from the Bishop or any mechanism



they put in place to come out with it. The theme becomes the theme of the year in all Churches and it is discussed and used exhaustively in all programs, retreats and Bible studies. Our theme this year is “Living in Love” taken from 1st John 4:16.

Pre-Conference Activities

Our Pre-Conference activities always begin with the Ministers Retreat. We renamed this retreat as the ‘Gladys Durant Memorial Ministers Retreat’ after Gladys Durant who was the wife of a Minister at Weston Church in a suburb near Bath in the U.K. Gladys was a generous woman who funded this retreat from its beginning in the early 90’s (could be earlier than that, but Ken & Christine can help with more information on Gladys). After her passing on to glory, Gladys’ legacy was dedicated to the Connexion and was used to support many things in Sierra Leone including the Ministers Retreat through the Friends of Sierra Leone under the management of Ken, Christine, and other members.

Our Ministers’ Retreat always takes place during the third weekend of December. In years past we have had a permanent venue at the boarding home of our secondary school in Jui, but in the past five years it has been rotational and moved to distant parts of the country based on the observation that Jui is closer to most Ministers homes. This strategy has proven very well. Our 2020 retreat was held on the 18th to 20th December at a guest resort in Bureh Town which is a little closer to all of us, though farther than Jui, due to the Covid-19 pandemic regulations.



At the ministers’ retreat, we discussed contemporary issues affecting the Church, studied the Bible especially on the theme of love and listened to speakers who exposed the theme both from among our ministers and others invited. We have also added outreach activities among others, and

we ended on the Sunday with a worship service at Bolney Church, Bureh Town. This meant that lay leaders conducted worship services in our Churches on that Sunday.

After the Ministers Retreat, we should have had the Youth Camp which comes closer to Christmas immediately after schools close. This time it did not hold in fear of Covid-19 regulations. This was followed by a Ministerial Session which is an official and mainly business-like session for all Ministers where we discussed proposals and recommendations to conference on issues affecting ministers. This normally takes place at the First monthly Pastor's Fellowship meeting in the year which is now on the last Saturday of January. On the same day in the late afternoon, we had the youth program which is called Connexional Youth Singer fest. Youths came together and sing songs, pray, listened to a Bible exposition and then this year they had a Bible quiz as well. This was very helpful.



On the Friday before the plenary session aspect of Conference, all of the women in the Connexion met for a program called: "Great Women's Day". At this program, the women listened to Bible expositors and then sang songs from various languages through different circuits of the Connexion in attendance. This program is always held at the venue for

plenary sessions and it is very 'celebrational' and spiritual. There is dancing, drumming, prayer and singing all led by women. In our plenary session this year, the men have asked for their own 'Great Men's day.' Following this was the Sunday following the Women's program which is called Conference Sunday. On this day, Ministers exchanged pulpits in an organized manner announced by the Superintendent General.

Plenary Session

Plenary Session is the business session of Conference and that is what normally attracts the name Conference. At this session we sing, pray, listen to exhortations and sometimes Bible studies, but we mainly look at reports, discuss them and ratify recommendations. The sessions this year were held at Ebenezer Countess of Huntingdon's Church Lumley, which is referred to as Conference Host. The Host is led by their Superintendent Minister, who is Daniel, and they do the organization in consultation with the Bishop and Officers and the Connexion funds. Plenary Session always begins with an Opening Service where Ministers wear their robes, process to the alter, sing hymns, do 'singspiration', drum and dance, a sermon preached by the host Superintendent, communion celebrated by the Bishop and fraternal greetings from invited Church and Para-Church denominations and from the SLM are delivered. The SLM fraternal greetings were read by Daniel, the Agent.

After the opening service, a roll call was done, and the bar of Conference was set to distinguish delegates who have voting rights to observers who can be involved in the discussions and debates but cannot vote. Then an episcopal address was delivered by the Bishop. This address may cover a wide range of issues including comments on the theme, appreciations, partnerships, achievements, projections, and challenges.



The Plenary started on Friday 12th and ended on Sunday 14th after a grand combined Thanksgiving service with a sermon from the Bishop and awards presented to deserving members of the Connexion.

Post- Conference Activities

These are activities which are considered Connexional in their nature but done at various dates after Plenary Session. These include Confirmation

services by different Circuits and the celebration of Lady Selina Day. The Conference theme is used in all of these programs and Connexional Officers and Ministers organize them.

This commentary may not be detail, but it is my pleasure that you have got a general understanding of how it is done in Sierra Leone. Unfortunately, we know that you may not be able to hold your Conference again this year due to Covid-19 and we can understand how that feels. We are in solidarity with you in Christ and we join you in prayers that the Lord will deliver the world from this pandemic in Jesus' name. As we wait on the Lord, I pray that He keeps you safe and that He continues to hold you with His right hand of righteousness as promised in Isaiah 41:10.

Presidential Jottings By Ken Hart

Greetings everyone. I hope that you are well and safe at the moment, and that the continued restriction on personal and church activities is not too trying. I'm sure that you must be frustrated, even worried, at times, and you may have said as much to the Lord. That's all right; He knows anyway, and wants it out in the open between ourselves and Him. Once it's in the open, He can speak to our situation. I've come to the conclusion over the years, and probably you have too, that while we might "put a brave face on it" with other people, He isn't impressed.



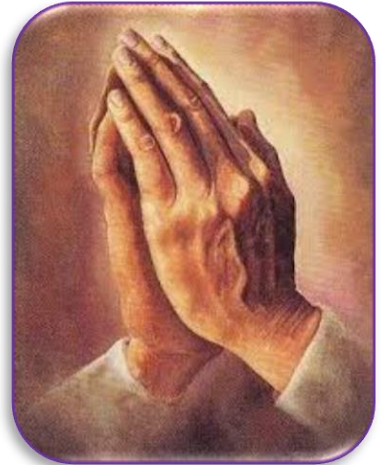
Have you noticed that, in the Bible, people are often quite open and direct to God about how they feel? They never seem to forget that He is God, and

they're part of His creation, but they still voice their frustrations, their questions, their fears - yes, even their anger. Jeremiah appears to have been a sensitive soul and poured out his heart to the Lord. The Lord encouraged him, challenged him, even corrected him, but never once did He say, "How dare you speak like that in My presence!"

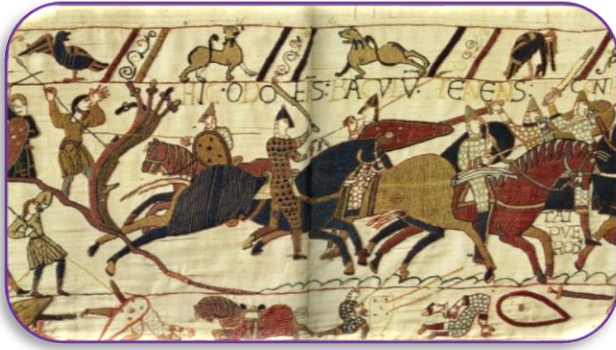
I know of one man, called to pastoral ministry, who resisted at first, then was suddenly stricken with illness and hindered by setbacks, who poured it all out one night. He felt an inward response - ever had that? "Look, you have given me your life. If I say you'll be well, you'll be well. If I say you'll be ill, you'll be ill. It has nothing to do with doctors or leaders."

Tough stuff indeed. Perhaps it shocks you; but this is what it did for the future pastor: "It was exactly what I needed. Not so much the telling-off, but the utter certainty and reliability of God's hand on my life. I was taking God seriously...brought my complaint to the right quarter, and He could deal with it and with me." Incidentally, in the end he recovered, the obstacles were overcome, and he trained for the ministry.

I think the point is, not that we all take the same line, but that "this God is our God. He will be our guide, even to the end" [Psalm 48: 14]. He truly understands; we are His very own. He knows that we're pouring out our heart to the One person who we can trust with our deepest feelings and secrets. We can trust Him to deal with them for the best - by encouraging, or challenging, or correcting, or comforting; but deal with them He will, He is our Father in heaven.



It's quite possible you're saying, "But Ken, I don't feel like that at the moment - hardly ever have." That's great; but perhaps it's useful to store these things up in our hearts and minds; who knows when we might need them, or who knows when we might have to draw on them to help others. To help others.



One of the Bible's great themes for believers together; encouragement. That comes in different forms. On the Bayeux tapestry there is a spot where the soldiers are being prodded from behind with a spear. The Latin, translated, reads;"

Duke William comforts his troops". Really? Well, at that moment they're faltering. They're in need of what used to be called "a bit of backbone". It's what the prospective pastor needed; not to find his own strength, but the Lord's. There are also the times when encouragement means a hand on the shoulder, or a calming word, or a thank you, or a suggested alternative.

These are all things we're called on to do for each other. They can't be stopped by Covid-19. There's always the phone, the mobile, the e-mail, the letter, the "Zoom" link, the word over the garden fence. The Lord will point a way if we want one. It's what we can do for each other, and it's not one-directional. We all need encouragement, even if we don't seem to. If that weren't the case, the Lord would have said so. And Lastly, we can talk to ourselves; recalling God's blessings to us, reminding ourselves of who He is and of previous "deliverances" (as they used to be called), and telling ourselves to "Take it to the Lord in prayer".

When I started this article, I didn't see it developing like this. But, on reflection, I'll leave it as it is. One other thing; I'll go away and put it into practice (with the Lord's encouragement), for others, and for myself.

May the Lord bless you all - trustees, leaders, churches and individuals, as you continue to find ways of serving Him at this time. Whatever the limitations, the Lord is not limited. Who knows in what direction He will lead us over the next weeks? That said, I look forward so much to the day we can meet again as the gathered family of the Connexion. Till then, in the words of someone I value, "Keep on keeping on".

Sierra Leone Mission History: The First Missionaries

The first missionary to visit Sierra Leone from England was the Rev. George Fowler in 1853; he was given a very enthusiastic welcome, and during his stay he sailed on a boat named 'Selina' on its maiden voyage to a Holy Communion service at Waterloo attended by 480 people. After 4 months visiting all the Connexion churches and mission stations he returned home to England.



The second missionaries were sent in 1857 and were Rev. J. Trotter and his wife (who sadly died of fever 8 months after they arrived). They set up the first official Training Institution for preachers before returning home in October 1859.

Then came a gap of 40 years when occasional visitors went over to Sierra Leone and continued aiding in spreading the gospel. In 1898 it was agreed that Christians in England should make a real effort to give guidance and training to the Sierra Leone churches.

The next missionary was sent in 1899 for 18 years, Rev. William Groves, who was appointed Superintendent of the Colony Churches, before retiring in 1918. Following his retirement, missionary superintendent Rev. H.H. Keyes visited Sierra Leone to do a survey of Groves work, identifying work needed at the town of Baoma.

As a result of this, the next missionary sent was Mr W.D. Kinnimoth in 1921, who worked in Sierra Leone, mainly in Baoma, until his death in March 1926.

He was succeeded by Rev. Arthur Kew in October of the same year; Baoma remained the centre of activity where Kew laboured faithfully, also visiting the other Colony Churches until he retired in October 1958.

Soon after, another survey was conducted by Rev. W.C.C. Broadwater, after which he felt the Connexion should join with another mission in order to support the base in Baoma, leading to it being passed over to the E.U.B, The Methodist Mission Society.

In 1959 the Rev. C. Roger Grundy accepted an invitation to serve in this Joint Appointment for its four-year trial period. He set out with “the object of pioneering the training and nurturing of African leaders, pastors and teachers, and young people, acting generally as adviser and friend”. He set up a young peoples Training Centre for general and Christian education; he spent little time working with the Methodists, leading them to suggest that the joint Appointment not be continued. However, Mr Grundy continued being a full-time missionary for the Connexion until 1966.

In 1962-64 Mr Grundy was joined by Rosamund DeAth who helped teach at the Training Centre for 2 years and appealed for a secondary school to be located there. This was later funded and became Huntingdon Secondary school. A church was also started in Jui named the Rodger Grundy Memorial Church in honour of the work done by Mr Grundy during his mission stay there.

In 1966 another missionary, David Pavitt, visited Sierra Leone, followed by Rev. Tom Rowley (nothing else known). Since then, visits have been more frequent to Sierra Leone.



How to give to the Sierra Leone Mission

You can give by Bank Transfer to:

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Account number: 30799076

Account name: Sierra Leone Mission

Or, perhaps you would prefer to send a cheque to:

Janet Foord, 2 Cheyne Close, Church Milton
Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 2SQ

Every pound given, goes to support our brothers and sisters in Sierra Leone.

Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

2 Corinthians 9:7



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