

THE SIERRA LEONE MISSION

THE VOICE



Ema and Zeeshan on their wedding day at Cophorne Chapel

Brilliant turnout at Rosedale's Warm Welcome



WHAT ELSE IS NEW IN THE CONNEXION TODAY? FIND OUT WITHIN!

SPRING 2023 NO. 428

THE CONNEXION₂₀



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WELCOME FROM THE EDITOR

Hello everyone, and welcome to the Spring 2023 edition of the Voice magazine. Raise your hand if you enjoyed some snow this Spring – mixed feelings about that one.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to this edition, especially to our first-timers like my little sister, kicking us off with a bible study much like the ones she delivers to her classmates at school.

With Easter arriving soon (and hopefully some warm weather) I know many churches will be preparing new ways to share the gospel, so why not share it as an article for the Connexion? I always welcome new contributions for the Voice, or you can send any news to our wonderful website manager Christine at christine@cofhconnexion.org.uk. As always, you can email me at estherburrage22@gmail.com, and please consider donating to the SLM to support all the amazing projects taking place in Sierra Leone.

-Esther

Summer 2023:

Deadline for next edition:
15th May 2023.

Articles required:

- Bible study
- Outreach and church projects
- Testimonies

If you would like to contribute to the next Voice, simply send me an email by the deadline with the document included.

DISCOVER MORE ON OUR WEBSITE:

<https://www.cofhconnexion.org.uk/>



Bible Study: God of the Here and Now

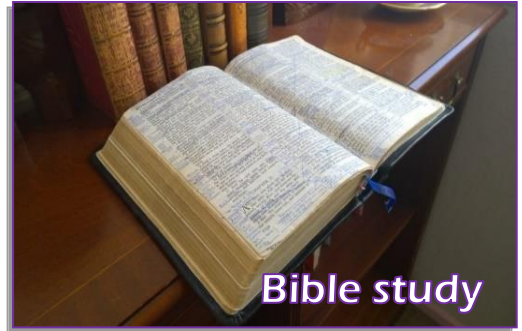
By: Hannah Burrage

I once read a poem called *'Begin every day like a new life'* by a monk called David Hodges. The first lines went like this:

"Stop. Stand still.

Meet Him,

In the here and now."



As a high school student about to take my GCSE exams this spring, it's easy to get lost in the stress and chaos of school and life. But in a beautiful moment of contemplation as I read this poem, I had to stop everything and remember that the only thing that matters is the One who made all. So often that can be forgotten in the busyness of our lives, whether you have exams or deadlines, to-do lists or other responsibilities, the Lord is a rock who gives peace to those who need it.

Matthew 11:28 says *'come to me all who are weary or burdened and I shall give you rest'*. Our God is not a God who lays a heavy hand on his fighting soldiers, but rather a God who picks up our sword to fight for us. All He wants is for us to keep our eyes on Him, not the work load or the trouble with money or the storm raging, but simply to walk by faith along with Him. He picks up the burden and carries the cross for us. These are all the thoughts that keep me going through the day, when more homework is due and there are more exams to study for.

When we meet with Him, we meet in the present. In the storm and the trials and the journey. So, stop. Stop working or worrying and rest in the peace of here and now.

This is Your President

Speaking Part 2

By: Joe Gregory

A new beginning:

I arrived at Balls Park Teacher Training College, Hertford in September 1975 ready for a fresh start. It was a small college, with almost a family feel to the place, where everybody knew everybody else.

I remember being interviewed by the Principal, Paul Sangster, son of the great 20th century Methodist, Dr W E Sangster, for a place at the college. I didn't know who he was at the time, but he immediately put me at ease, and although he was searching in his questioning, there was something godly about him.

The social life at Balls Park was good, I grew in confidence and had a great circle of friends.

Salvation:

My Irish-Catholic upbringing had left me with a sense of God as a being who was distant. He had created an amazing world and universe but was generally aloof from everything that went on.

In late October 1976 the Christian Union organised a visit from Youth With A Mission, YWAM. There was a promise of fireworks and hot drinks, so I went along. The fireworks were brilliant, but the words of the speaker lit a fire in my heart as well. She told us about Jesus, how He came to live on earth to provide us an example of how to live with compassion and justice. She told us how Jesus died in order to reconnect us with our Father in Heaven. Shockingly God wasn't this distant figure who created the Universe, He was a good Father who wanted to be involved in a personal way in our daily lives. After Jesus conquered death on the Cross, He sent His Holy Spirit to be with all those who believed.



I remember crying in response to all this and I then prayed with someone, and my life was forever changed. I had a Father in Heaven who loved me with all my fears and imperfections.

A Second Chance and Renewal:

I moved to the Isle of Sheppey in 1979 to take up a teaching post in a middle school and started attending a local Baptist church. There would be many challenges in the coming years. My first marriage came to an end and that was a particularly difficult time. I remember lonely hours spent in a cold damp bedsit in Sheerness questioning God's plan.

Then He sent a student to Danley Middle School. Elizabeth Russell wanted to help out on an Activity Week. I was organising a week in France, and I duly snapped her up as an extra member of staff. We had an instant connection.

I remember Elizabeth's parents agreeing to let me tag along with them (and Elizabeth!) for the first ever New Wine week down in Somerset. It was an amazing time of worship and teaching and an opportunity to listen to God in a Spirit-filled environment. It was as if He was saying, "See, trust in my plan. I am the God of the second chance."

We were married a year later in July 1990, and I feel truly blessed having had her in my life for the last 34 years.

Elizabeth and I started attending Sheppey Evangelical Church in September 1990, and we have been there ever since.



Forgiveness:

The Salvation Army got in touch with me asking if I knew a Thomas Gregory. Apparently he was my father and living on the Isle of Man. I really struggled about how to respond because of the way he had treated my mother while I was growing up. Whenever I thought about him, I would be filled with anger and bitterness.

However, Jesus taught us to forgive. If I was to be serious about my revived faith as a disciple of Jesus I should agree to be contacted by my father and see what happened.

I then discovered that he was being treated for liver cancer in Liverpool hospital. I went to visit in the school summer holiday and Elizabeth came with me to offer support.

A short while later my father was taken into a hospice on the Isle of Man. I travelled across the Irish Sea to visit him in the October half-term. I took along New Wine worship tapes, and I was able to pray with him. He came to accept that Jesus loved him and enjoyed the worship songs which gave him comfort at night in the weeks ahead. He died on Christmas Eve.

I truly believe that if I hadn't been able to forgive him, I would have been left bitter and resentful. Forgiveness is good for the mind and the soul. Jesus knew what he was talking about!

God's Plan:

I spent nearly thirty years as a primary school teacher and then fifteen years in ministry at Sheppey Evangelical Church. I retired last September and as I reflect, I can see that God is sovereign and has a plan for our lives and a plan for His church.

In September 1979 in my very first teaching class, was an 11-year-old boy called Trevor Jones. Over the years we became good friends. He got to know Jesus in a powerful way as a teenager, and in the time since we have supported one another and prayed with one another.

It's awesome that he has now taken on the role of Pastor at SEC. I look forward to seeing what happens next.

Isaiah 43:18,19:

¹⁸ *"Forget the former things;
do not dwell on the past.*

¹⁹ *See, I am doing a new thing!
Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?*

*I am making a way in the wilderness
and streams in the wasteland."*

Invitation:

Retirement has been very busy so far. Elizabeth and I are looking forward to visiting churches around the Connexion during the next couple of years. My diary is filling up, so Church Secretaries or Ministers, please get in touch if you would like me to come and preach. You can email me at josephegregory@hotmail.com. God bless.

Christmas Sheppey Style

By: Brenda Riddle

Having endured so many Christmas Covid restrictions in recent years, we couldn't wait to pull out all the stops and get cracking. We had a busy calendar ahead of us so we decided to begin our preparations on the first of the month. Out came the Christmas decorations – boxes and boxes of them. Baubles, tinsel and garlands were draped on every wall, shelf and column. To top it off, we festooned everything with hundreds of fairy lights. Did I mention the six chandeliers? You can never overdo the 'bling' can you? Some would say the effect was stunning, others would compare it to Santa's Grotto. Anyway, we'd enjoyed a very happy evening and we were ready to honour Christ's birth in all our activities henceforth.



Our first event was a Praise and Pizza service. We filled our tummies with pizza and then sang our hearts out to the Lord. Given that December is usually filled

with shopping and parties we were delighted to enjoy the company of many of our friends and families too. We were also relieved that we'd brought extra pizzas 'just in case'.

We've not been able to hold our usual Carol and Nativity services for a long time. The children who used to enjoy wearing costumes back in 2018 are older now and far too sophisticated for such shenanigans. So, we had to think out of the box because we're aware that the local folk really looked forward to their performances, and it was a great opportunity to drip-feed them the Gospel of Jesus.

We hit on the idea of getting the teens to read different monologues that observers of Christ's birth might have related back in the day, had they been asked, i.e. A Roman soldier's insight; a village busy-bodies interpretation of the Virgin Birth; the recollections of the story a shepherd told his granddaughter, etc, etc. It was quite complex, so with only 2 weeks to go we needed to fit in some rehearsal time.



Alongside the rehearsals, our new Pastor, Trevor Jones took several of the congregation to Sheerness one Saturday morning to join with all the Island Churches to sing carols to the shoppers. Sheerness is our only town and has a Victorian clock tower where three roads converge. Everybody knows where to go if told to 'meet by the clock'. It's got seating and is ideal for Carol singing.

On the 18th we held our long-awaited Carol and Nativity service. We grabbed visiting children and squeezed them into angel or shepherd's costumes, with instructions to decorate the Christmas tree on the stage while the readers did their Oscar winning performances. Honestly, they were terrific! Unfortunately, our draftees were so overwhelmed that they looked like rabbits caught in the headlights. There's nothing like a sub-plot to keep the audience guessing.... and that was nothing like a sub-plot!

Our next excursion was to meet the villagers at the Leysdown Bandstand. Last year, this had been the only public Christian event held on the Island. The darkness was lit by Christmas lights on the bandstand bouncing off the Salvation Army's brass instruments. Despite it being freezing cold, it was very well attended, so the Salvation booked the bandstand again for Christmas 2022. Unfortunately, it was pouring with rain but with a bit of quick thinking, they set up in our Village Hall. It was amazing! There were so many people there that they ran out of chairs! The account of Christ's birth was read by various locals and everybody was in such high spirits. What really impressed us was that people on the Village Hall committee graciously prepared a wonderful soup supper for all of us afterwards. This could be a regular event by the looks of it.

Christmas morning was a more intimate gathering and gave a time of blessing as we reflected on God's amazing gift of His only Son for the sake of our salvation.

On the evening of 29th of January twelve of us attended a New Wine praise evening in Canterbury. We also met up with June Collins and her friend Sarah from Broad Oak and shared a wonderful time of praise and ministry. Many of the songs and lyrics were new to us and so beautiful. Perhaps our Church can update our own repertoire a little. The event was to advertise the **New Wine, Christian festival on Kent County Show Grounds on 26th - 30th July and 1st - 5th August**. Many in our Church camped there last year and thoroughly enjoyed God's rich blessings. For those who don't do camping you can get a day ticket too. Hope to see you there.

Olivia's Testimony

By: Olivia Burdett

Olivia is a member of Bolney Village Chapel where she serves as the leader of our Mini Connect group (Friday afternoon club for 5-6 year olds) and our Kids Club on Sunday mornings. This is her testimony of coming to faith a few years ago. One detail she doesn't mention is that on the day her sister wanted to take her to church they were planning to head to one of the bigger churches in

Haywards Heath or Burgess Hill. But the car wouldn't start and so they had to walk and BVC was the first church they found!

When did Jesus come into my life?

It was not till I was in my mid-forties that I came to acknowledge Jesus as my Saviour.



How did it all happen?

Through days when it was a struggle waking up and having to put on a false 'I am good!' face in front of others. From a sister, whose faith and trust in Jesus that brought me back to the Lord. Although at times, she felt discouraged on her sharing of Jesus due to me dismissing Him most times, the Lord never lets her give up. In her obedience, the year where I received Jesus as my Saviour, she felt a prompting from the Lord, to visit us in the UK (my most needed time). With courage, she asked the Lord if He really wanted her to and HIS reply came with a special promotion on flight tickets the very next day! She came and after all the years of trying to share Jesus, my heart opened to Him! A huge weight had been lifted off me, I could breathe again!

Going forward from then, I found strength and courage, together with my sister, went to our local church, which to this day, I am still attending. My faith and trust in Him is continuing to grow each day, after nearly 10 years of receiving Jesus in my life. I do, at times, feel the fiery arrows coming towards me but putting my faith in the one who created and loved me from the very beginning, brings the strength I need to face them. My days now start and end with Jesus who never gave up.

Rosedale's Warm Welcome

By: Bethany Burrage

So, have you looked at your smart meter recently? Or did you decide that you prefer not to know what the daily damage is and have locked it away for the sake of your sanity?! For so many people the cost of electricity and gas to heat and light their home has been a real source of worry this past winter, and, like many churches, we at Rosedale decided to open once a week as a Warm Welcome Space to provide care and support to our local community.



The Borough of Broxbourne has an excellent community partnership group and the plans for the network of Warm Welcome Spaces were drawn together with the other Churches Together members and community groups. Hertfordshire County Council offered funding and we were able to qualify for a grant. October was spent organising ourselves, drawing up the necessary policies and asking for volunteers. We opened on 9th November and were delighted to have six guests on our first day!

Since then we have opened every Wednesday from 10-3.30pm including over Christmas and New Year. Folk are free to come and go as they wish.

There are always hot drinks and biscuits available and a hot lunch. People can bring their laptops and work or study if they wish and we offer free Wifi. On the tables are Scrabble and other board games and a (really difficult 1000 piece) jigsaw. When youngsters attend during school holidays we have a small pool table and playdough.

The comradery and friendship that has grown among the volunteers and guests has been truly wonderful. Although the initial idea was that it would help people to stay warm, the needs have been far more complex than that. We have a couple of people who come for the food and we arrange for a food bank

box to keep them going for the rest of the week. Several of our guests suffer from anxiety and it was a brave step for them to come into the building and join us. They are neighbours and if they don't turn up we have built the rapport with them that we can go check and see that they are okay. Loneliness has been another key theme. A couple of the older people have been recently widowed and coming to us each week has got them through the winter. Our volunteers have loved it too! Our amazing cook is an answer to pray. She arrived at the beginning of December, and being a retired school dinner lady knew exactly how to feed us all and released me to be able to talk with folk instead of making the soup.

Each week, just before lunch, we offer a short Communion with prayers in the church lounge for anyone who would like to join in. It has been a real honour to minister to our people in this way and many request prayer. For one troubled man the Warm



Welcome and our church has given him a family where he feels accepted for the first time in his life. One Wednesday in January he declared he was ready to be born again and I had the privilege of introducing him to Christ.

I am writing this on a Wednesday evening and reflecting back on our day. These past two weeks we have had the honour of welcoming several asylum seekers. As we begin to get to know them our hearts are broken by their stories; they are Christians from Iran who have had to flee the country and their families due to persecution. We are praying that our brothers and sisters feel welcome to be 'family' with us. Such as been the positive outcome of this initiative that we are now looking to access further grants to continue the group beyond the end of March. In our endeavour to make Rosedale church a Christ-Centred Community, this project has been such a blessing to us we are deeply grateful to the Lord for His faithfulness.

The 19th annual

S.L.M.

**Charity Golf Day
22nd September 2023**

9.15am Bacon sandwich and coffee/tea

18 hole Stableford (9.30am 1st Tee)

Plus meal afterwards + prizes £45

Horne Park Golf Club

Croydon Barn Lane, Surrey

RH9 8JP

Speak to Gordon Hamilton if interested

07551199897

Or email gordon@hamiltonshouse.co.uk

Please pay before the day by Bacs if possible:

G.T. & S.L. Hamilton.23.05.80 Acc: 31900751

Everybody Sings on Friday!

By: Hazel and Rodger
South Street

Friday is for us, a couple of octogenarians sitting in our Eastbourne flat, 'Connexion Prayer Day'. On the morning of that day our prayer diary reminds us to pray for our Connexional Churches. So, we blend our wavering voices in prayerful song and it never fails to make us grin as we think and pray for you all.

Now, the tune is Franz Joseph Haydn's 'Austria', to which we usually sing John Newton's hymn which begins with the words, 'Glorious things of Thee are spoken'.

So, let's start! Sing – Pray – and you will Smile, even laugh in the presence of our Saving Lord!

Here we go: 1 – 2 – 3

Bells Yew Green, Bolney and Broad Oak,

Copthorne, Cradley, Eastbourne.

Ebley, Ely, Goring, Hailsham,

High Barnes, Middleton, Mortimer.

Rosedale (Herts), Sheppy, Shoreham,

St. Ives, Slough, Turners Hill.

Wivelsfield and Woodmancote

And Wormley, we commit to The Lord.

Now, I know the purists will cringe and the perfectionists will groan, but, for many a year, it has never failed to make us smile on Friday's Connexion Prayer Day! And for that we are thankful!

Crying out to God with

Psalms – Part 3

By: Paul Woodbridge

In the first 2 articles, we began to consider how we might respond when different types of suffering happen to us, and looked at what are called The Psalms of Lament which can help us to be honest and say how we really feel to God. We usually think of the Psalms as expressions of praise and worship, yet in fact a third of the Psalms may be described as Psalms of lament, which give vent to strong feelings of sadness and despair, both corporately and individually.



If we defined ‘worship’, we probably wouldn’t class lamenting (expressing sorrow, pain and regret) as worship. But the Psalms disagree! Do you know of any churches which make lament a part of its worship? I suspect the answer may well be ‘No’. That being the case, why do you think that is?

While lament in worship may not be very common in today’s church, this was not always so. To take one example, John Calvin, the French theologian, pastor and reformer, called the Book of Psalms ‘An anatomy of all the parts of the soul’ and continued:

‘There is not an emotion of which anyone can be conscious that is not here represented as in a mirror ... all the griefs, sorrows, fears, doubts, hopes, cares, perplexities with which the minds of men are won’t to be agitated’.

As mentioned in the second article, these psalms usually conclude with a confession of trust in the midst of lament. So it’s not merely complaining (which I’m rather good at!). But the problem is laid out bluntly, and as well as asking God for the ability to trust in the midst of laying out our problem, there is also a request that God will answer and give necessary help and relief.

So as well as saying lament is a form of praise and worship, we may also say that lament is evidence of our relationship with God our Father, who loves us and wants a transparent and honest relationship with us. And as we are honest and lay our emotions and experience before God, so we can gain a new bond of intimacy with him.

As one writer puts it,

‘Lament talks to God about pain. And it has a unique purpose: trust. It is a divinely-given invitation to pour out our fears, frustrations, and sorrows for the purpose of helping us to renew our confidence in God.’ (Mark Vroegop ‘Dare to Hope in God - How to Lament Well’)



In these lament Psalms, the writer pours out to God his sorrow (Psalm 137), anger (Psalm 140), fear (Psalm 69), longing (Psalm 85), confusion (Psalm 102), desolation (Psalm 22), repentance (Psalm 51), disappointment (Psalm 74), or depression (Psalm 88) either because of something going on outside of him, or something within.

A recent article sums up well how lamenting can turn to trust and joy:

‘God desires we bring our complaints to Him because we can’t praise or experience joy if we bypass the process of lamenting our suffering. We don't have to be afraid of offending God because lamenting is not complaining about God but rather complaining to Him. We can cry out to God about our trials. And allow Him to turn the pain into praise so we can experience joy that transcends our troubles.’ (Ashley Moore, ‘A Prayer for Suffering’).

This song is a good example of setting a lament Psalm to a tune and maybe you would bring this to your church service:

‘Lord From Sorrows Deep I Call’- a lament from Psalm 42. Words and Music by Matt Papa and Matt Boswell: O my soul Put your hope in God My help my rock I will praise Him Sing o sing Through the raging storm You’re still my God My salvation (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KYGhnbXtqbU>).

One writer sums up these psalms:

‘The psalms of lament are treasures for the saints. They give inspired voice to our troubled souls. They model for us how to complain to God in a way that honours him. And they are themselves expressions of God’s care and compassion for us because in them we see that we are not as alone as we feel and that God indeed does understand.’ (Jon Bloom, ‘God wants you to complain’, (<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/god-wants-you-to-complain>)).

So may we be ‘faith-full’ complainers! It’s worth remembering that Jesus said,



“In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world”. He even lamented himself in the final days of his life, especially at the cross - ‘My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?’ And resurrection followed!

It's worth remembering that one day, all lament will end – ‘He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.’ (Revelation 21:4). Even so, come Lord Jesus.

How to Give to The Sierra Leone Mission

We support the work of our churches in Sierra Leone through contributing to ministers' wages, providing funding for ministerial training, and building and maintaining churches. We also support the care and education of children through the Bethesda Orphanage and The Connexion's schools, helping with teachers' salaries and teacher training. When necessary, we help to restore homes damaged during unrest, and can assist in times of emergency or urgent need.

You can give by Bank Transfer to:

Barclays

Sort code: 20-16-08

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

When you donate, please ensure you clearly label which area of SLM outreach you wish for your donation to go towards. To do this you can also email Janet Foord at norman.foord@yahoo.co.uk.

You can find out more about where your donations go by going to WHAT'S NEW at the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion website.

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

The Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion

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