

Together

No 78 Autumn 2011

in Sussex

Why Voices in Exile call for churches to Sponsor a Cook.
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When a voice said, 'The poor in our community are behind closed doors' Jean Forster set out to find them while two MPs set out to find the hungry and those who care for them.
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ABZORBING

What's going on here?

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JUST WHAT DO THE CHURCHES DO?

When asked Brighton & Hove churches responded with a substantial report

In a word, the churches meet an incredible number of varied social needs in our society, contribute to the musical and cultural life of the city, support political and civic life, provide informal counselling for residents and visitors and make a contribution to the overall quality of life way beyond their own walls, and observation and anecdotal evidence suggests that if the survey had taken in the whole of Sussex the picture would not have been radically different.

*Being Here Revisited** is a story in three parts: Services, Projects and Activities. **Services**, such as lunch clubs for the elderly, hospitality and safe havens for people of all ages, regardless of race, faith or gender, are now becoming the staple diet of church life alongside worship and prayer meetings and need neither defence nor elaboration.

Projects are more specific, usually set up to meet a particular need and sometimes going on to have a life of their own while still drawing strength from the overall church community. Off the Fence, for example, focuses on the most vulnerable and marginalised, addressing issues of street homelessness, women in times of crisis, schools and youth, and The Clock Tower Sanctuary runs a Day Centre for homeless young people (16-25) offering one-to-one support, confidence building and emergency financial assistance.

Brighton & Hove City Mission, with 'Treasured Moments', addresses the needs of marginalised communities on estates and their Basics Bank programme provides food parcels for the needy and start-up packs for those moving from homelessness or temporary accommodation.

St Luke's Advisory service offers a holistic approach for those going through any and every

kind of crisis, giving professional pastoral and legal time to enable clients to talk through their problems and difficulties.

City Gate Centre Church offers counselling to women with problems related to unplanned pregnancy, termination or miscarriage alongside a befriending service, free baby clothes and help on a whole range of related issues.

Activities range from youth football groups like the one provided by the Downs Baptist Church to a variety of holiday clubs for children and young people, through to gardening and allotment groups for older people like those provided by Christ Church in Preston Park.

The object of the Report is not to beat either the ecclesiastical or the ecumenical drums but to provide a basic understanding of what is going on 'in each place' as an expression of 'good news'. It is to encourage others to do likewise and for the most part what lies behind most of the programmes nowadays is every bit as much by a commitment to create a caring and loving community as to fill pews on Sunday.

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Is not this the fast that I choose . . . to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house? . . . Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly . . . Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer. (Isaiah 58: 5-9).



Ian says . . .

Defining broad agreement on the role of the church has already taken nearly 2000 years and whilst there is much to be thankful for there is still plenty to discuss. Bearing in mind that Together attempts to reflect the work of churches across Sussex such lack of clarity could be seen to be an obstacle for us. For some, an inability to define the church means that working together is pointless; for others, clarifying the role of the church is vital if we are to plan together effectively. Yet, despite these uncertainties, this edition (like its predecessors) reports many examples of the value of local church cooperation. This is not due to a suspension of discussions on truth and validity but because some people have found a way of cooperating in meeting social need despite their differences and in some cases the shared commitment has provided the relationships needed to further and inspire the discussions.

I am constantly encouraged by stories from around Sussex of how different groups and their plans connect with one another. One example is the arrival of foodbanks and the FareShare project in Sussex (see pp 4-5). Reports might suggest they are the result of some strategic plan. First, set up an industrial scale project in the largest population centre of Sussex, followed by a series of smaller scale initiatives spreading east, west and north and gradually tackling food poverty together. In fact, at least on a human level, they have been established more or less in ignorance of each other.

Had we spent a bit longer gathering stories for this edition we could have reflected a similar story with the work of people like Mary-Jane Burkett at Brighton Voices in Exile (see page 3), with similar initiatives in parts of East and West Sussex, each welcoming strangers in their midst. Such patterns of activity reflect the sense of One Church and One Spirit in our actions as well as in our theology.

The scale and breadth of these stories has also led to the church beginning to re-emerge as a key player in the thinking of many of our public agencies whose decisions used to be based simply on which organisations had the greatest budgetary power. As

a result of recent financial challenges, strategic decisions are being taken at the table of the willing, and that can include the church if we are ready to join in, taking advantage of our ability to reach into each neighbourhood of Sussex.

Not that we lack financial clout (our combined budget and property holdings would surprise us all) and it is encouraging that we are some way to agreeing to hold these assets in common (despite the challenging words in the New Testament). A recent decision by Central Government to encourage local mapping of public assets has been extended to include the voluntary sector which includes the church.

By way of response, East and West Sussex took different routes. Sadly, the early starter, West Sussex, all but ignored the voluntary sector but are now wishing to look more widely, while East Sussex kicked off with a much more inclusive group of partners including churches. With a potential to release the capital value of underused buildings, both however took it as an opportunity to look at public services and find the right location from which to deliver them.

The value of the church getting involved in such an exercise may seem peripheral, but some readers will recall how in the late 1980s, a forward thinking vicar in Hove began (as a result of pressing social need) to transform a large and underused place of worship into a building that still enables the homeless to live in comfort whilst the worship space was transformed into a more manageable setting. Others, in Worthing, may remember that the highly successful Worthing Churches Homeless Project had a similar origin, and a church in Devonport now shares its space with a public library. In other communities the police, fire and rescue and health services are sharing accommodation and there is no reason why the church cannot be part of these discussions too.

Such explorations inevitably challenge our thinking but they may also allow some of us once again to see our place of worship becoming a new focal point in the community.

Ian Chisnall
Mission and Unity Co-ordinator

THE DIGITAL SWITCH – Volunteer Helpers Needed

In the next six months information on the Switch to Digital TV may well reach saturation point and there will be no end of publicity but there are still liable to be people around us who are confused, anxious and in need of help. Action in rural Sussex is supporting the local roll-out of the Switchover Help Scheme and we need to spread this message through all our usual channels to ensure no-one in Sussex gets missed.

To achieve this, Action in rural Sussex is looking for trusted local volunteers with local connections, knowledge and networks, likely to know people who are most at risk of not switching and people in whom Sussex residents can feel confidence in those who come into their homes to help. Full training, information and support are available from Action in rural Sussex.

Further information and enquiries about volunteering to Joanna Harper, Action in rural Sussex, by telephone (01273-405880) or email (joanna.harper@ruralsussex.org.uk)

Can Your Church SPONSOR A COOK?

Voices in Exile is looking for churches to sponsor the costs of a weekly Cookery Group (about £250) for immigrants for one month in the year. It is a golden opportunity for sympathetic churches with no immediate outlet for this form of Christian service to support those who have and to enable a much neglected section of our community to feel the warmth of Christian love and proclaim the gospel at the same time. Twelve would mean it only came round once a year. With getting on for 100,000 members in 1,000 churches in the County we can leave you to work out statistics.



Courtesy, Creative Commons

The Group of fifty immigrants, many with no recourse to public funds, meets on Fridays in Brighton, from 1 to 2.30, and offers training courses in cookery and a support group to help them feel at home and welcome in our country as they cope with delays, waiting and the intricacies of the British legal system, knowing full well what is going on at home and what they might have to face if they return. Once the training is done and the food is ready they then conclude with a shared experience as clients, helpers, volunteers and advisers eat together and invite representatives from their sponsoring church to join them.

The Story of Bakri

Bakri was 34 when he arrived in Brighton from Darfur. He was homeless, destitute, suffering from severe depression and post traumatic stress disorder, having just witnessed his wife being killed and his shop destroyed. He was sleeping rough and was seen regularly by a case worker at Voices from Exile for support and practical help.

They helped him to register for regular sessions with a psychiatrist at their premises where he received medication and was monitored. Thanks to their social group he received weekly groceries, had a hot meal and met with people in similar situations to his. There

too he met another Sudanese man who offered him accommodation in his flat.

All the time he was a member of the cookery group and involved in producing food for their monthly café and outside catering group. Through these activities he gained in confidence and his mental health improved as well as his English.

Now he has the benefit of Refugee Status, is living in a one-bed flat, attends college regularly, no longer has to see a mental health professional on a regular basis, and despite the improvement in his situation remains a member of the cookery group and is always on hand to support others.

VOICES IN EXILE is a registered charity with two part-time staff and eighteen volunteers. Case Work, mainly one-to-one support for immigrants with voluntary professional support from consultant psychiatrists, lawyers and social workers, is at the heart of their programme. New clients arrive from a wide variety of countries (Zimbabwe, Sudan, Iraq and Afghanistan in particular) at the rate of two a day, recommended by word of mouth (families

and friends previously helped), hospitals, police, lawyers and the social services, and they work closely with other organisations such as the Gatwick Visitors' Group and organisations specialising in immigration advice and human rights issues.

Current sponsors include St Mary Magdalens Church and St John the Baptists in Brighton and Sacred Heart in Hove

Please give this very worthy project your consideration

Bishop Kieran Conry, Bishop of the Diocese of Arundel and Brighton

VOICES IN EXILE

Brighton Voices in Exile is unique in Sussex. It exemplifies the Christian mission to be a voice for the voiceless, to seek release for the oppressed and freedom for prisoners. It is a part of the great mission to see justice roll on like a river and to show compassion to the needy. Its scope is wide, across Sussex and beyond, and serving asylum seekers and refugees from many parts of the world.

In times of financial stringency the burden must not fall on the neediest. This is why the sponsorship scheme is so important and timely.

I hope and pray that many parishes in the Diocese of Chichester will take up the challenge to contribute £260 for one month in the year. I recommend it to you unreservedly and hope that many individuals will also offer their support.

Bishop John Hind, Bishop of Chichester

Some Personal Testimonies

'I enjoy cooking as it helps with language, it's good to be with different and new people. Every Friday we eat healthy food'. (A couple from Sudan granted Refugee Status).

'I come because I have no food at home. It's very nice and I enjoy the food from other countries'. (A failed asylum seeker from Zimbabwe).

'By taking part in the Catering Group I feel like I am an active part of society and it's a good image for asylum seekers'. (A 25 year old man from Afghanistan seeking asylum).

Voices to plead the cause of those who can't speak'

Graham Kendrick

Further information from Mary-Jane Burkett (Tel 01273-328598) or see www.brightonvoicesinexile.org) to whom we are indebted for this page.

Worthing has a Foodbank

If next time you visit the supermarket you are accosted by someone, given a leaflet listing a dozen items of food and asked to purchase one in addition to your requirements and donate it as you leave to provide bread for the hungry, pause, and check their credentials. You may discover that they are volunteers of a local Foodbank, one of more than a hundred and growing rapidly, with a commitment to those in need.

In Worthing the Foodbank is the offspring of the Jubilee Community Church in Dominion Road. and is about to celebrate its sixth birthday. Like other Foodbanks it operates under the aegis of the Trussell Trust and follows a similar pattern to Foodbanks elsewhere.

The beneficiaries from a Foodbank are not primarily the homeless but low-income working families who hit crisis, people who have been made redundant, victims of violence, or people experiencing benefits delays faced with impossible choices between paying the rent and buying food, often parents skipping meals or contemplating crime to feed their children.

Front line professional care workers such as social workers, benefits agencies, doctors and other health care workers are given vouchers which they can pass on to such clients who can then present them at the local distribution point in exchange for a food pack containing three days of nutritionally balanced, non-perishable foods such as tinned fruit, vegetables, meat and fish, as well as pasta, cereal, UHT milk, sauces, tea and long-life juice. The process may be repeated on two successive occasions, each voucher providing food for at least three days, with a maximum of nine vouchers per annum and the possibility of longer term support in exceptional circumstances, but the system is essentially short-term after which they are passed to the professional caring agencies.

Food is donated by schools, churches, businesses and individuals in the local area and is sorted by volunteers.

The Worthing Foodbank, which is open every day from 2-3.30 and helped over 1,000 clients last year, has regular collection facilities at Tesco, Morrisons and Sainsburys (both Worthing and Rustington).

Staff (trained befrienders) are on hand for a friendly chat and with a listening ear, offering a hot drink and something to eat in a comfortable environment. Sign posting for further help, including debt counselling, advocacy and the like, may be offered and an assessment of further needs developed in co-operation with other agencies to support independence.

Cash investors can provide vital funds to underpin the running costs; volunteers can help in the Store Room (weighing, date code sorting, shelf storing and box packing), and because Foodbanks are variable and flexible any church, however large or small can organise one or participate in one run by someone else.

Further information from the Trussell Trust (www.food-bank.co.uk/).

Two Sussex MPs commend 'FareShare'

When two Sussex MPs recently visited a service delivering food to the hungry in their constituencies they could hardly believe what they found. When they were told that the source was FareShare, an independent Brighton charity nearby and the brainchild of Citygate Community Church in London Road, they decided to take time out to have a closer look, only to find themselves face-to-face with a vast operation delivering bread for the hungry right across the county on a scale the like of which they could hardly imagine.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton Pavilion) described the work as 'intensely inspiring' and deserving of 'far wider recognition and support' and Mike Weatherley (Hove) spent a morning in the van helping with food drops, hugely enjoyed it and wants to have another go soon.

FareShare is one of 16 national FareShare groups which rescues good quality food (300 tonnes last year alone)



FareShare Project Manager Nathan Au introduces Caroline Lucas to how it all works

otherwise heading for landfill or rendering, and distributes it to 43 local charities with the help of volunteers, some of whom are ex-offenders or recovering from drug or alcohol addiction. It is then passed on to over 3,000 people, including the homeless, women's refuges, young people at risk, vulnerable children, those with mental health issues, the unemployed and people with terminal illness.

With support from Rotary clubs and Citygate Church. FareShare also provides training and work experience for the volunteers which helps to improve their employment chances, self-esteem and interpersonal skills.

'It is an incredible service with community involvement at so many levels', says Mike, and Caroline adds, 'Such hard working volunteers play an invaluable role in helping to make Brighton a better, fairer and greener place.'

For more information about the Brighton and Hove service see www.citygatebrighton.org.uk.

In a time of extreme stringency and poverty one of the major contributions to the community from the churches is to ensure that people have something to eat as the miracle of the Feeding of the Five Thousand is still being worked out in our midst and the disciples are still busy with distribution. Food is one the churches' major projects and there is more than one way of doing it.

But Do You Need a Foodbank Where You Are?

Jean Forster set herself the task of finding out

Following a visit to the offices of the Trussell Trust in Salisbury, responsible for over 100 Foodbanks in the UK, and after walking the streets of Haywards Heath, I asked God, 'Where are the poor in Haywards Heath?' 'They are hidden behind closed doors', he said, and a local church leader suggested I check it out.

My first call was to a local community care officer. If we had a Foodbank how many Foodbank vouchers might she have given out in the last month? Answer: five or six. A GP guesstimated twenty over the last year and when a Social Services Care Assessor told me that she had rung Worthing Foodbank to ask for a food box for a client living in our area I knew it was time for action.

A national helps Bureau reckoned that of their local clients, one person or family per day would be receiving a Foodbank voucher to tide them over their financial crisis and the manager went on to say that 'the problem is compounded in an affluent area. The middle class delay asking for help, expect to get a job fairly quickly and resolve their own crisis. They then take refuge in credit cards, get deeper into debt and come to us six or nine months down the line when their home is about to be repossessed. In this area the problem is hidden.'

Further enquiries revealed that in West Sussex one in eight dependent children (under 19) are living below the HM Customs poverty line figure for 2008-09, 15,275 in lone parent families. These are the ones who know the difference a Foodbank package can make to their lives, by providing them with basic food items, albeit a short term measure to bridge the gap for three days until additional help is offered by professional caring agencies.

This was the evidence I was looking for. Haywards Heath is the epicentre for all the Mid Sussex Benefit Services. With annual food prices increased by 5%, benefit claims locally up by 50% and fuel costs soaring, even our affluent area is struggling. Low static incomes, work-hour cuts and redundancies have left even educated and hard working people in dire financial crisis.

Now in August 2011 there are 120 Foodbanks in towns spread through out the UK all successful and experiencing a huge demand to feed those suffering poverty. National media coverage of amazing stories from different Foodbanks is constantly increasing and the Foodbank Network has the highest level of Government support and public acknowledgement.

Experience shows that outside local supermarkets the public respond willingly by giving generously. Collections can be held as often as monthly on a main shopping day. This gifted food stock of packets, tins and cartooned food is then safely stored in use-by-date order ready for distribution. Wonderful testimonies of hope restored and lives turned round have regularly come from voucher holders as they encounter encouragement and discrete support from distribution centre staff.

Church Leaders need not fear excessive demand on their church resources. All we need for a start is one person to 'champion' the cause in each church. The Trussell Trust Network is a well managed facilitator with significant experience. Excellent training for all volunteers is available and many churchgoers who might otherwise not find an appropriate 'ministry' may find that this daytime voluntary work provides an encouraging outlet for their skills.

Eastbourne has a Foodbank

Eastbourne foodbank, the brainchild of former debt counsellor Howard Wardle, opened as recently as June and the organisers are still feeling their way. Asked how it came about Howard said, 'First I saw the need, partly as a debt counsellor and partly as a result of providing food for people in need through my church community. I then saw the price of food, people on reduced incomes, and a benefit system which, though good, does sometimes take a bit of time to get things sorted, and I felt the pressure, especially when I saw people forced to make a choice between paying a bill or buying food'.

As an elder of the Community Church in Eastbourne Howard was in a position to do something about it and he did. He turned for help to the Trussell Trust, a Christian charity committed to community action against poverty and marginalisation in the UK. The Trust, with much experience to share, encourages the development of Foodbanks, offers training facilities, provides status and recognition as a national coordinating group, and maintains a degree of quality control for the Foodbank movement as well as maintaining common standards and practices for operating procedures.

Eastbourne headquarters, in the Bridgemere Centre. are open Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday from 10-12. One of their first tasks is to gain the support and confidence of the supermarkets to enable them to organise a collection service. Sainsbury's, says Howard, has been 'fantastic'. Unfortunately other supermarkets seem more cautious but Howard has no doubt that given time they will win their support. Next comes the confidence of the churches, some of whom also are hanging back to see what happens, but if the Foodbank is to succeed it is important that it has the support and confidence of the churches and is owned and acknowledged by the community. By contrast, support from the Mayor, the local MP and individual Christians has been 'excellent' and volunteers come from a wide variety of traditions, including a significant number with no church connection at all.

Howard is very excited about the project and has high hopes for its success. 'If the churches work together on this,' he says, 'we could massively meet the need. Imagine the result if every Christian in Eastbourne undertook to provide one tin of something we would be there.'

A Foodbank Shopping List

Milk (UHT or powdered)	Rice pudding (tinned)
Sugar (500g)	Tea Bags/instant coffee
Fruit juice (carton)	Instant mash potato
Soup	Rice/pasta
Pasta sauces	Tinned meat/fish
Sponge pudding (tinned)	Tinned fruit
Tomatoes (tinned)	Jam
Cereals	Biscuits or Snack Bars

'Being Here' in Central Brighton

*Cynthia Park, Methodist Minister at Dorset Gardens,
reports from St James*

For the Methodists of Dorset Gardens 'being here' has meant many different things since the first building was opened in 1808. We worship now in the third building built on the site and when they were preparing to demolish the second they considered moving to a more visible, prestigious location at the corner of Edward Street and the main thoroughfare.

However, after much prayerful deliberation (and the failure to get planning permission), it was decided to honour their historic commitment to the St James's area of central Brighton and continue to 'be here' for the community they had always served.

When Methodists serve God they have in mind John Wesley's instructions: 'Go not to those who need you, but to those who need you most'. In the St James's area those one might call 'the neediest' have been changing constantly ever since 1808 and when the present building opened in 2003 the neediest were alcoholics, drug addicts and those who identify as transgender in the LGBT (Lesbian Gay Bisexual & Transgender) community.

So Dorset Gardens hosts groups for recovering alcoholics, drug addicts and a group for people with gender dysphoria (people who present as one gender but have a deep feeling within themselves that they are another). This is a very distressing condition which colours every moment of every day and makes everything about life — relationships, employment, education — profoundly difficult.

Horsham Matters where 'Being Here' led to Recycling Furniture

Four years ago Horsham had three independent church-based outlets for collecting second-hand furniture for the benefit of people in need, each wrestling with problems of storage, transport and management.

On the other side of the counter people were busily replacing a coffee table here, a bookcase there and a television somewhere else. Their problem was what to do with the old one. With rising costs for disposal, tradesmen reluctant to 'take the old one away' and fewer outlets for small ads, many people, anxious to avoid the hassle of personal selling, were more interested in finding a good home than making money.

Around this time Horsham District Council was anxious to work more closely with the churches but with thirty different churches, mostly independent, the logistics were not easy. Horsham Churches Together therefore decided they needed a Development Officer for two days a week and appointed Richard Webb, a retired water engineer who had recently set up his own consultancy business with a commitment to help charities to deliver a project in a business-like way.

Richard's first task was to persuade the three existing outlets for re-used furniture opportunities to share their problems, pool their resources and work collectively under the aegis of Churches Together. Thus 'Horsham Matters' was born. The aim is to be self-sufficient, and as a Company Limited by Guarantee with no shareholders a 'not for profit' organisation. Two years on they have fresh premises, a turnover of £300,000 pa and a dozen people on the pay roll.

Our support takes the shape of a drop-in safe space (the Clare Project) offering advice, friendship, support and psycho-therapeutic counselling. Based at Dorset Gardens for four years it is one way in which many people have been helped through the painful process of transition into a new life where they are finally at peace with themselves. Wonderfully, because the church actively supports the project, many have also made discoveries about the unconditional love of God which have astonished and delighted them.

Now, being accepted and loved by the church family of Dorset Gardens has become part of the journey of many of Brighton's transgender folk. Through such affirming love, some have decided to become Christians; others have taken other faith paths but all are in no doubt about God's presence in their lives through his people.

Blessings have rebounded also on the church family. Dorset Gardeners have always lived by the 'divine economy' (the more you give the more you receive) and everything they have discovered through serving the most needy of their community has convinced them that 'being here' is not only what God wants from his people but also what brings great joy. Their joy in the Lord is their strength (as Nehemiah promised) and they look forward to many more years of enjoying the privilege of 'being here' in central Brighton.

Next, premises. A local garage, having closed down its Citroen franchise, had 5,500 sq ft of very accessible frontage, an excellent workshop and no desire to pay taxes on an empty building. The owners were willing to make it available to Horsham Matters which turned it into a charity shop.

The Charity has set aside 10 per cent of income in a community fund to provide grants for other projects. To date these include help for the Youth Advisory Service, a Homelessness Summit to establish the true picture of homelessness in Horsham, and a schools inclusion project.

Horsham Matters liaises closely with Horsham District Council, a recent example of which concerns a mum with two children forced to leave home as a result of violence and with nowhere to go. The local authority provides emergency accommodation but unfurnished. In such cases the Charity can suspend its commercial acumen to meet a specific need and furnish the accommodation for little or no cost.

Similar situations, described as 'people in need', arise five to ten times a month and the co-operation with the local authority ensures that when they 'provide the roof' Horsham Matters can chip in with the furniture and furnishings.

Richard Webb describes it 'a Social Enterprise . . . demonstrating how a business model can be efficient and sustaining if it does not have to provide cash for investors or loan repayments'.

'Being Here' for the church means all places and all times and nobody knows where unexpected initiatives may lead.

Christian Aid with an 'abzorbng' programme

Kate Parr, Christian Aid Regional Co-ordinator, explains

Here at Christian Aid we are always astonished by the creativity and enthusiasm of our Sussex supporters. There are so many fantastic ways that individuals are using their talents, skills and voices to stand alongside the world's poorest communities and challenging poverty and injustice.

So when somebody suggested a first-ever Sponsored Zorb down Devil's Dyke as a fund-raising fun day Christian Aid workers and supporters were clearly up for it. Thirty-one brave supporters signed up for it and a date was set for May — when the weather would be just right. Unfortunately it wasn't. And it wasn't again in June. By July we were into the main holiday season and so (with a commendable willingness to know when they were beaten) the event was called off.

Cat Goldson, Christian Aid's Sponsored Zorb organiser said 'It was really disappointing to have the Zorb rained off three times, but our Sponsored Zorbers are an intrepid lot — they won't be put off by a few showers.' All zorbers were given vouchers so

that they could complete the Zorb at a convenient time and date of their choice and that was all it needed to inspire Olwen and Emma to take up this adrenaline-pumping challenge and finally roll down Devil's Dyke in a giant inflatable ball on Sunday, June 19.

Although nervous beforehand, both Olwen and Emma really enjoyed the experience. You may think they are barmy but it certainly paid off with the Sponsored Zorb total rolling in at over £3,000 which will help support Christian Aid's partners round the world.

Asked what motivated her, Olwen said:

'In this day and age there is no excuse for the poverty we see in the developing world. I wanted to do my bit to help Christian Aid in their fight against poverty. The sponsored Zorb grabbed my attention as something I could do to raise funds for Christian Aid and challenge me at the same time.'



Olwen Ringrose from Portslade and Emma Robertson from Hove

Time also to RAISE YOUR VOICE for Justice and Peace

One simple but important way for everyone to get involved is to spread the news that besides feeding the hungry and responding to disasters Christian Aid is equally engaged in challenging poverty and injustice. Hence the need for supporters across Sussex to continue to campaign both locally and nationally, challenging and changing systems that favour the rich and powerful over the poor and marginalised with a readiness to raise your voice for justice and peace.

Two Christian Aid campaigns in particular currently call for our support. One is **Climate Justice**. The world's poorest people live on the frontline of climate change. They are affected first and worst, yet have done least to cause the problem. So we continue to demand a fair, ambitious, binding and effective global climate change deal for the world's poorest people.

The other (launched this year) is **Trace the Tax**, with a campaign launch calling on the G20 leaders to take action. Why? Because our global culture of financial secrecy

allows some unscrupulous firms to dodge tax — and rob poor countries of more than \$160bn a year. That's more than the entire annual global aid budget. We are calling for the G20 to end tax haven secrecy that lets unscrupulous multinational companies dodge the taxes they owe to poor countries.

Yet another way is to join our movement for change. There are many simple ways to get your church and community involved, from organising a creative campaign stunt or a campaign workshop in your church, house group or local action group, collecting packaging from household products or writing a letter to your MP.

Meanwhile, thank you so much to all those already involved in supporting Christian Aid's work. Your gifts, prayers and actions make a huge difference to communities living in poverty around the world.

For information, ideas, actions, campaign details and resources see www.christianaid.org.uk/act or get in touch with me. Tel 0207-523-2376. Email KParr@christian-aid.org.

'Behind the Mike'

Gavin Ashenden, Chaplain to the University of Sussex, recently retired after three years early Sunday morning mainstream broadcasting on BBC Sussex & Surrey

Alec Gilmore encouraged him to share his experience

Gavin. Preaching is one thing. Religious journalism is another. But mainstream broadcasting at crack of dawn on a Sunday morning . . . how is it different?

It's completely different. My academic work in the Psychology of Religion taught me that there was a lot more genuine spiritual experience around that we clergy, who are often a little busy talking, never discover. My radio work was allowing the personal authentic experience of God to enter the public sphere, often in ways I didn't expect

But in broadcasting you never know who your listeners are. They are a mixed company, the faithful, the hostile and the indifferent. How, for example, do you cope with all those tricky doctrinal and ethical issues that churches get bogged down in, that divide society and people write letters to the press about?

My main duty was avoid a sterile argument.

I've always been interested in the assumptions that lie behind people's anger or frustrations in religious conversation. Getting at the root of the pain or misunderstanding is so much more important than swapping sterile arguments. Often when you do, the conversation takes a very different direction from the one you were about to have.

How does that affect your own prejudices, because I never thought of you as someone with a closed mind?

Neither did I. I have rather prided myself on having an open mind, partly because I am instinctively curious and would always like to know something rather than miss out on it simply because I thought I knew. But week after week I was taken aback with delight in the studio in Brighton by the astonishing experiences people had of God; and then I was taken aback by some of the private things that were going on in the back of my mind — some of them not at all complimentary. I was also always being challenged and invited to see afresh things which eroded my own solid group of residual prejudices.

Why do we all find this both surprising and difficult?

I'm not entirely sure. It may have something to do with fear and gravity. Fear, because there are many things that we are all uncertain about and anxious when confronted — especially anything unknown or half known; and possibly also because it is very easy for us, as we pile on the years of experience, to

get used to 'life as we know it'. So God becomes a series of propositions or ideas we have arranged and organized in our head. It feels almost as if we are being held down by the gravity of our own complacency and self-sufficiency when we are in fact designed to fly. Faith is about flying. So much of the time, we are content to waddle on the ground.

So what do we have to do to get our wings?

I think the radio taught me a lesson I need to learn over and over again; just as Jesus taught, one needs to suspend one's judgement. This allows us also to cultivate the habit of being open to surprise. Maybe an openness to see people in a new light. I discovered in practice, for example, what I knew mainly in theory — that God is widely, deeply and daily at work in the lives of ordinary people; and it's the personal stories that jemmy open one's mind.



What is it then for you that makes you so passionate about Christianity?

On the one hand, I am convinced that Christ rose from the dead, which changes everything, and changes everything for the better — a better way of living than any other way on offer — and it corresponds most closely to the truth about the way things really are. This may jar with some people who have been brought up with the shallow theory of cultural relativity, but in my judgment over a lifetime, it is better than any other way of providing hope, forgiveness, joy, and an accurate diagnosis of the human condition.

Just one outstanding example?

Yes. A woman whose jealous lover had put her in the bath, covered her with petrol and set her alight. 'If he couldn't have her no one could'. She had been horribly disfigured, yet the surgeons had done a miraculous job in giving her back a face. But she had later become a Christian and had done the impossible: she was radiantly free of resentment and had forgiven this perverted man and his wicked act.

One day she heard an inner voice telling her to go to church. And there she found the reality of Jesus and the reality of forgiveness. There too she found the most wonderful young man, who when he saw her fell in love with her. They married. They were radiantly happy. Surprised by what God can do in our terrible human mess? Yes, I was . . . very.

Together is the Newsletter of Churches Together in Sussex though views expressed are not necessarily those of Churches Together in Sussex, its leaders or its officers

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