

## Final letter from Barbados May 2009

We were sitting out on the porch one evening recently, taking advantage of the last half hour before dark would fall at 6.30pm and the whistling frogs begin their nightly concert. We found ourselves naming the people, places and things about Barbados we expect to miss when we return home to the UK in June. Alison found a piece of paper and we listed (after whistling frogs!): screeching parrots, sparrows in the house, fireflies etc....etc.....etc.....



As we look back over the last eighteen months, we have much to be thankful for. The knowledge that the prayers of so many people were sustaining us through this experience; the friends that God placed alongside us who have helped us keep our feet on the ground and our heads above 'water'; the beauty of Barbados which has grown on us as we have explored both the popular tourist attractions and the more remote hiking routes on the wild east coast. There have been opportunities to discover where God is at work here in the South Caribbean and the chance to join in: sharing the love of God with individuals with a very different life experience, but knowing we serve the same Lord. Visiting in homes and breaking bread with centenarians; leading a group of class leaders in a training session about their role and good practice; radio evangelism and school assemblies, and a developing men's ministry.

One development that has been particularly encouraging to us has been how each congregation has responded to a challenge to attempt a new mission initiative. In British Methodist terminology it would be called a 'fresh expression of church'. It was at a circuit Lenten meeting that each church announced its mission focus. There was a growing sense of excitement as each steward explained what they intended to do within the next three months to meet the challenge.

In the back streets around Bethel church there is a rise in teenage pregnancies. Bethel young people are going to erect a stage adjacent to the community basket-ball play area and through drama, dance and song convey the message of 'abstinence till marriage'. They will give out ATM cards, inviting youngsters to sign a pledge to abstain till marriage. T shirts will be given out together with tracts encouraging people to take another look at the church. Another congregation, considering the plight of young people, is adopting a class in the local school, issuing bibles and offering to be mentors to each of them especially at the critical time of the year leading up to the 11 + exam. After school care and tuition classes will be offered. A third congregation, still not far from the centre of Bridgetown, is organizing a health fair giving advice on health, exercise and diet. There too, the emphasis will be with the younger person. All of this coincides with Child Month and a government initiative which was announced to raise awareness of Child Abuse. The Barbados *Advocate* newspaper heard about these projects and highlighted them on an inside page.

The three other churches are also trying to do things differently. One is going to set up garbage bins in their local area so that people may take more care of their streets. These garbage cans are to be stamped with 'The earth is the Lord's'. They are also going to

establish a bottle and tin-can bank, so the community can start recycling these items. Aware of the economic downturn that is beginning to affect the community, another church is going to develop a food and finance programme for the elderly and vulnerable. The final project is to be set up by the church near the airport where returning nationals are building their new homes. This church is going to establish an outreach visitation programme. It is hoped that a 'welcome home fellowship base' can be established.

These projects are just now getting under way. Every year in the middle of July, the circuit has a mission deputation. It is a time when each of the churches announces its missionary collections for the past year and thanks all those who have been engaged in the mission programme of the church. A guest speaker also comes and teaches the gathered circuit meeting nightly about an aspect of mission. This year, those meetings will also be a first opportunity to report back on the projects. Alison and I will be anxious to hear how well they have done.

Whilst our thoughts are beginning to turn homeward, there are still things to do here. Much is simply tying up loose ends, but there are also significant events to plan for. Aldersgate Sunday is always a day of celebration. At an evening circuit rally, Alison will be introducing Susanna Wesley and John Wesley will speak of his experience, the service finishing with a crescendo of Charles Wesley's hymns. Les has been invited to St Lucia to preach at the circuit Aldersgate service there. The following Sunday is the Connexional Conference Sunday, and the Sunday after that we will have our farewell service.

Somewhere in there we have to begin to arrange for shipping things home, catering for our



guests coming to the conference, complete the communion visitation for this month's sick and shut-ins, complete the circuit report and leave notes for my successor. This will be Rev. Lesley G. Anderson who worked in Britain for a number of years before returning to Jamaica where he has been the senior tutor of the United Theological College of the West Indies. The final thing is to try and leave everything in ship-shape condition at the manse.

There is still plenty to do, but how we thank God for the opportunity and privilege we have had working here. We can think about the paradigm shift in our perspective, which will leave us different to the way we came.

Blessings and Best wishes

Les and Alison