

CITYtheology

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“Imagine Leeds as a forest in a fairytale. What characters and stories would emerge from that fictional landscape?”

Daniel Ingram-Brown, asks if an imaginative experiment can reveal the heart of the city.



I write to learn how
to fly, lifted on rising
breeze, over mountains.



#TrulyHumanLeeds

Unfurling poetry, performance
and prayer

Revd **Tom Lusty** on the power of
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#StoriesOfLeeds

Daniel Ingram-Brown takes us on a journey through the city's literary forests and festivals.

Stories from the Forests of Leeds

Imagine Leeds as a Forest in a fairytale. What characters, stories and values would emerge from that fictional landscape?

Over the past year and a half, commissioned by LCI, in partnership with *Leeds Big Bookend Festival*, I've been working with different groups of creative writers to answer that question. From the Morley Minstrel, who always sings the truth, to Harehills the Rabbiter (featured on the coming pages) the characters that have emerged are fun and colourful, often with a serious edge to them. The collection of tales has now been drawn together to create a book. The overarching story that emerges from the book is the struggle between the haves and have-nots, the long coats and the short coats, as one of the stories puts it. The book's main character, Clarence the Water Rat, guides the reader through the thickets and swamps of Leeds, a place of benefit sanctions and burdens to be hefted, where Forest Folk struggle to understand the gifts they have, as they search for keys to transformation. The final treasury is divided into four 'books', *The Book of Seeds: Spring and Beginnings*, *The Book of Toil: Summer and Conflicts*, *The Book of Fruit: Autumn and Transformations* and *The Book of Shedding: Winter and Endings*. This is a nod to the patchwork canon of scripture – for *Stories from the Forests of Leeds* is the scripture of the imaginary world we've created.

Why a forest?

The idea of imagining the city as a forest occurred to me after reading Sara Maitland's book, *Gossip from the Forest*. In it, she talks about the city as a complex, diverse place with no wide landscape, where roads thread between buildings, connecting people and communities. In this, she says, cities have more in common with the natural landscape of forests, than they do with, for instance, deserts or mountains. She posits that certain types of story emerge from certain types of landscape. That made me wonder what sort of stories would emerge if we spent time working with the landscape of Leeds.

Stories, like dreams, are a way of exploring our collective and personal subconscious. What would such an imaginative exercise reveal about the city? Would the stories that emerged carry clues about the sort of spiritual, emotional and practical work needed to be undertaken for the welfare of Leeds? I'll leave you to decide!

The tales in *Stories From the Forests of Leeds* range from those written by an 11 year old, to poems penned by a professor of English. They are beautifully illustrated by Si Smith, who spent time exploring the city, sketching the people and places mentioned in the tales, rooting his vision of the Forests of Leeds in the real life of the city. Si has crafted some wonderful detail into the book. For instance, the illuminated letters that start each of the stories can be found around the city – the 'F' from First Leeds buses or the 'I' from the tourist information centre. When you read the book, see if you can spot where they're from.

Alongside the book, there is also a wonderfully illustrated map and a set of twelve character trading cards which can be stuck into the book, making it interactive!

Stories from the Forests of Leeds is being launched on Saturday 4th June, 5.45-6.45pm at the Carriageworks Theatre as part of the *Northern Short Story Festival* (part of *Leeds Big Bookend Festival*). Please contact the Carriageworks for tickets (£4). The book will be available to buy from LCI at a special introduction price of £15. Please email events@leedschurchinstitute.org to order your copy.

The Leeds Big Bookend Festival 2016 - Crossing City Limits

This year's Leeds Big Bookend Festival, which LCI is excited to partner with, takes place between the 27th May - 14th June (the main weekend being the 4th and 5th June). The theme for the festival this year is crossing city limits. This idea was partly inspired by Mark Powley's article in issue 4 of *City Theology*, entitled *City Limits? Where that article talked about the limits we need to remain within, the festival's theme is about challenging boundaries we*

need to push against. The festival programme puts it like this:

“Boundaries define us - the geographical boundaries of our city, the ethical or moral boundaries that help us to live alongside one another, the boundaries that shape our communities. Sometimes these act as frames of reference, helping us understand who we are, giving shape to our identity, creating a sense of belonging or home. Other times, however, they can become rigid, limiting our imagination, confining and separating, rather than providing new horizons. We need to push against such limiting boundaries, challenging, questioning and often crossing them. This year's Leeds Big Bookend Festival invites you to journey to the edges of the city, to reassess and re-think Leeds' limits!”

There are some real treasures in this year's programme, including Lucy Burnett's installation about climate change, *Inside African Forests* (hosted by LCI), *Index On Censorship's* 'Big Debate', which this year asks whether journalism or fiction has the biggest impact, and the launch of Jamie Fletcher's *Alphabet Club Anthology*, about faith and sexuality. The full programme can be downloaded from www.bigbookend.co.uk or picked up from LCI.

The Nemesis Charm & Richard Rohr's Immortal Diamond

The first event in *Leeds Big Bookend Festival* is the launch of my own book, *The Nemesis Charm*. It's the second book in the *Firebird Chronicles* series,

about Apprentice Adventurers Fletcher and Scoop and their relationship with the mysterious Storyteller, king of Fullstop Island, their home. Although written with a readership of 9-12 year olds in mind, many comment that the book is a good read for adults too. Rt Revd John Packer, said,

“Like all the best stories, it can be read on different levels...at times there are echoes of C.S Lewis. Young people and adults alike will be taken up by the tension of what will happen to the Apprentice Adventurers...A thoroughly absorbing read.”

One of the inspirations for *The Nemesis Charm* was Richard Rohr's *Immortal Diamond*, in which he states that, “Love is stronger than death”, a theme picked up in *The Nemesis Charm*.

I'll be exploring the book, *Immortal Diamond*, and its connection to *The Nemesis Charm* in LCI's monthly theological book club, *Lunchtime Conversations*, on 5th July, 12.30-2.30pm at LCI. To book a place, email events@leedschurchinstitute.org

The Nemesis Charm will be launched at Waterstones, Leeds, on Friday 27th May, 7-9pm. To book a free ticket, visit www.bigbookend.co.uk. *The Firebird Chronicles* are available to buy online or can be ordered from your local bookshop.

“Trust me. In losing you will find. Walk forward in the knowledge that you are loved with a love that can never be lost, a love that is stronger than death.”

The Nemesis Charm, out 27th May



Lunchtime Conversation: 5th July at LCI

But what of the Forest now, I hear you ask. It's all very well telling tales of the dim and distant past or strange prophecies of the yet-to-be, but what of the here and now, the people on the ground, caught in the heat of the Forest's steamy summer, alert for predators, defending their territory? What of them?

Well, I know them. I keep a watchful eye, as any Water Rat should. I see their trials, their fight for survival, their struggle with scarcity. I know. I'm one of them.

So, let me introduce you to the Forest folk. They're a colourful bunch. I'll take you to the places I've seen them scurry, to their nests and holes. So grab your map, make sure your shoes are sturdy, and follow me.

HAREHILLS THE RABBITER

Watchful look in his eye.

He carries his family history on his face.

A ready smile.

A long inheritance of wheeling and dealing.

His great, great grandfather ran from the law, surviving in similar 'entrepreneurial' ways, not a stone's throw from these very bushes.

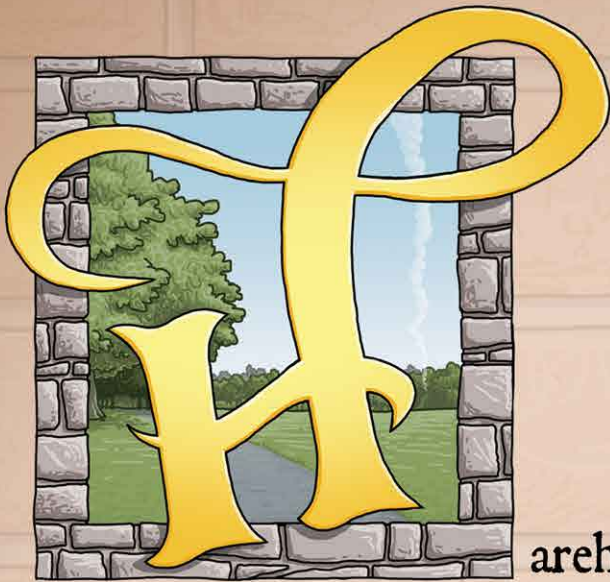
Bony and quick on his feet

His many-pocketed jacket was his grandfather's.

Ragged brambles, hawthorn, snowberries - a secret place at the bottom of Pottenenton Park.

Rabbits are food and fur in any century, and redundancies have cruel effects in every decade.





HAREHILLS THE RABBITER

by Ali Phelps

arehills' phone vibrates deep within

one of his pockets. With a quick glance at the screen - its unnatural glow eerie in the gloom and a final inhalation of his roll-up, he disentangles himself from his prickly hiding place. The park is frozen, still in the winter dusk, the leaning lime trees dark against the red and violet sky. A few dog walkers are hurrying home. The steady rush of home-bound traffic washes the park. In the deserted playground his hunched and hooded contact waits, swinging slowly, alone.

"What you got?"

"Trust me, it's good."

Out of an inner pocket, Harehills finds a tiny plastic bag of white powder. It's rapidly exchanged for a couple of notes.

"How you doing?" says Harehills.

"Got sanctioned again."

"Bummer."

"Yeah, had to take my sister's kids to school, she went to the doctor, so I was ten minutes late for the Jobcentre."

"Guess I'll be joining you there soon. My work's finished. Council's cutting back on outsourcing all the grass cutting now, and we're all on zero hours contracts. See that stone building behind them trees? Weird to think my mowers are in same place where my great granddad looked after horses. He worked for big man Jowitt in that there mansion house. But he got the sack after one of the horses kicked him half to death. No wonder he took to rabbiting. Rich and poor, worlds apart then, worlds apart now, it don't seem right somehow."

We'd better not hang around here too long. Don't want to be seen. Don't want to draw attention. Come on, follow me, let's head to the other side of the Forest. Gotta keep you on your toes. Gotta keep moving. I want to introduce you to someone else, someone most people don't see, busy as they are...or perhaps they choose not to see him, lest they recognise his face. It's a dangerous business, living in the Forest. If you're not trying to outrun the wolves in the trees, you're trying to wrestle the beasts within. Who knows what you'll come across on the pathways. Who knows what curiosities are out there just waiting to be picked up.

What attracts churches to Leeds Citizens?

Dr Helen Reid asks how participating in Community Organising can be a distinctively Christian endeavour.

Perhaps the most common way Christians seek the welfare of their neighbours is through the pastoral care of individuals, families and groups, in contexts ranging from the local to the global.

These approaches do not often have an intentional political component, and many Christians are wary of getting involved in 'politics'. An awareness of our calling to seek earthly peace in the here and now, however, has led many local Christians to pursue other options too. One that is gaining ground and developing impact in Leeds is Community Organising through the movement of *Leeds Citizens*. Many churches, and *Leeds Church Institute*, have become members of *Leeds Citizens*, along with Muslim groups and a synagogue, Trade Unions, educational institutions including a university and several schools, and community-based secular groups. When we join with others in the political arena, are we being distinctively Christian or pragmatically engaging in lowest common denominator team work?

When we join with others in the political arena, are we being distinctively Christian or pragmatically engaging in lowest common denominator team work?

Community organising is a movement that involves people living in urban settings, and particularly those who find themselves excluded from the mainstream. It is about diverse groups of people building relationships and sharing in actions that improve life locally for all. Its most famous practitioner is Barack Obama who has previously worked as a Community Organiser.

Community Organising certainly speaks to our Gospel concerns to include the marginalised when seeking justice and peace. Luke Bretherton (a faith-based activist and academic) also argues that it is supportive of our Christian distinctiveness.

Using examples from Abraham and Jeremiah to Jesus and Pentecost he shows that Christians have an essential calling to be hospitable to the 'other' or the 'stranger'. Community Organising can be the tent for Christian hospitality, the place where we can get to know and seek the common good with those who are different to us.

Community Organising actively invites people of faith to participate as people of faith, recognising that belief and worship is not an 'additional extra' but intrinsically of value.

Community Organising actively invites people of faith to participate as people of faith, recognising that belief and worship is not an 'additional extra' but intrinsically of value. This approach supports churches to guard against worship being seen as simply generating an interior motivation for being better citizens. It is conducive to seeing worship and the reading of Scripture as an opportunity to be open to God's involvement in the world. When we are aware of worship and Scripture as covenant, not a tool or something to be achieved, it can be our primary experience of prevenient grace.

Leeds Citizens provides us with a unique and current opportunity to live out our Gospel calling that is compatible with and recognises Christian distinctiveness. This is a particular attraction to churches. Have a look at the storyline from twitter of recent *Leeds Citizens* actions to see how Community Organising is working in Leeds. If you would like to discuss the theology further, come to ***Oakwood Book Club at Oakwood Church on 28th June 2016 at 7:30*** when we will look at Luke Bretherton's book, 'Christianity and Contemporary Politics' which includes a chapter on Community Organising. This article draws on Luke Bretherton's work.



Leeds Citizens
@LeedsCitizens

Follow

Great team at @LeedsTrinitySU planning an awesome road safety campaign action
1:46 PM - 5 Feb 2016



Leeds Citizens
@LeedsCitizens

Follow

Stainbeck Church @urcmedia hosts Beckhill Estate residents meeting. Now hearing from @HousingLeeds & @LeedsCC_News.
6:20 PM - 1 Mar 2016



Leeds Citizens
@LeedsCitizens

Follow

Cllr Cleasby met our @LeedsTrinitySU team today & pledged his support for a safer crossing outside @LeedsTrinity
12:31 PM - 1 Mar 2016



Leeds Citizens
@LeedsCitizens

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Our @LeedsTrinitySU road safety campaign in today's Yorkshire Evening Post (@LeedsNews): bit.ly/1QyomOw
7:24 AM - 23 Feb 2016 - Leeds, England, United Kingdom

Helen Reid
@HelenReidLCl

Follow

Great to hear. Keep our students safe in #Leeds @LeedsCitizens twitter.com/leedsCitizens/...
3:45 PM - 1 Mar 2016 - Leeds, England, United Kingdom

tafazal
@tafazal

Follow

Safe spaces, Muslim Youth Work and the need to invest in our youth. Some of the points I raised @CUKPublicLife @CitizensUK @LeedsCitizens
5:45 PM - 8 Feb 2016

4 7



YorkshireEveningPost
@LeedsNews

Follow

#University #students launch road safety petition amid fears lives are at risk tinyurl.com/hlgzxcy #Leeds
7:45 AM - 23 Feb 2016



Thomas Chigbo
@TomChigbo

Follow

Just spotted @LeedsTrinitySU on @madeinleeds campaigning for a safer road crossing with @LeedsCitizens #OnTheAir
9:17 PM - 22 Feb 2016

Esther Hugenoltz
@RabbitHugenoltz

Follow

@LeedsNews Glad 2 hear it! With @LeedsCitizens, we'll keep on working 2 get the best bus services that our beautiful city deserves.
12:47 AM - 9 Feb 2016

4 7

Unfurling poetry, performance and prayer

Revd Tom Lusty reflects on the experience of the 'Unfurling' poetry event at LCI on 21st April.

This year as a family we have once again become addicts of Britain's Got Talent. A lot of the offerings have moved us. A case in point was two ballet dancers, now retired, performing a short dance which represented their love for one another. One of the judges David Walliams said at the end, "I felt it was so personal, I wondered, should we really be watching this?"

That is what I feel about performance poetry. Poets can distil human experience and express it so succinctly that, on delivery of the poem, it can feel like being wounded with the reality of things that are true to human experience. I remember that sense when watching (and subsequently reading) John Hegley's poems about emotional abuse from his collection *Can I come down now Dad?* It packs a punch.

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I have, since before Easter, been reflecting on *From the Ashes*, one of Ian's poems, a copy of which was gifted to each young person at Abbey Grange C of E Academy from the Leeds Church Institute, as well as being sent out to LCI members. It is a poem that works on lots of levels. To me it captures the moment in the grief journey when someone makes a massive step away from loss and towards transcendence. So, I already knew I liked this poet and wanted to hear more at the event at LCI. When Ian read this poem, he did indeed bring it to life.

When performing his poetry, Ian comes across as both shy and confident at the same time. That confidence increased as he got to know us and as we started to engage with his material. He has a way of expressing a poem that is understated, but

is perhaps more effective for being so, you have to concentrate. We were quite a small gathering, and that enabled him to make eye contact with each person present. What he offered was something precious.

Ian's principle theme was changing the world for the better. He also spoke, amongst other things, of romantic love, of finding the one important thing in life (whatever that was for each of us) and of doing it, and of the struggle to pray. The poem *Prayer Flag* was my favourite: a prayer shredded down to single thread that is our condensed hope, our hope that it has the power to move mountains.

I have long been interested in the connection between prayer and theology. When we pray our prayers should be theologically informed, that is to say, they must be true to what we fundamentally believe and trust about the reality of God. When we get the connection right, prayer can be like good poetry, being both truthful and honest. We achieve such poetry in our lives only after struggling with God to make that connection. An understanding of Christian discipleship which speaks to me is that 'making disciples' is about authentic living, and that includes when our prayers are in tune with the God we truly believe in. Having such integrity has, I believe, a converting power. Some of that power was present when Ian performed his poems.

*In the lead up to Ian's event, LCI ran a series of social media images based around a collection of haiku's called **Some Slow Epiphanies I/ We** feature some of them here. To see the others, visit www.LCILeeds.org.*

*Ian's book, **Unfurling**, is published by Canterbury Press and is available to buy online or from bookshops.*

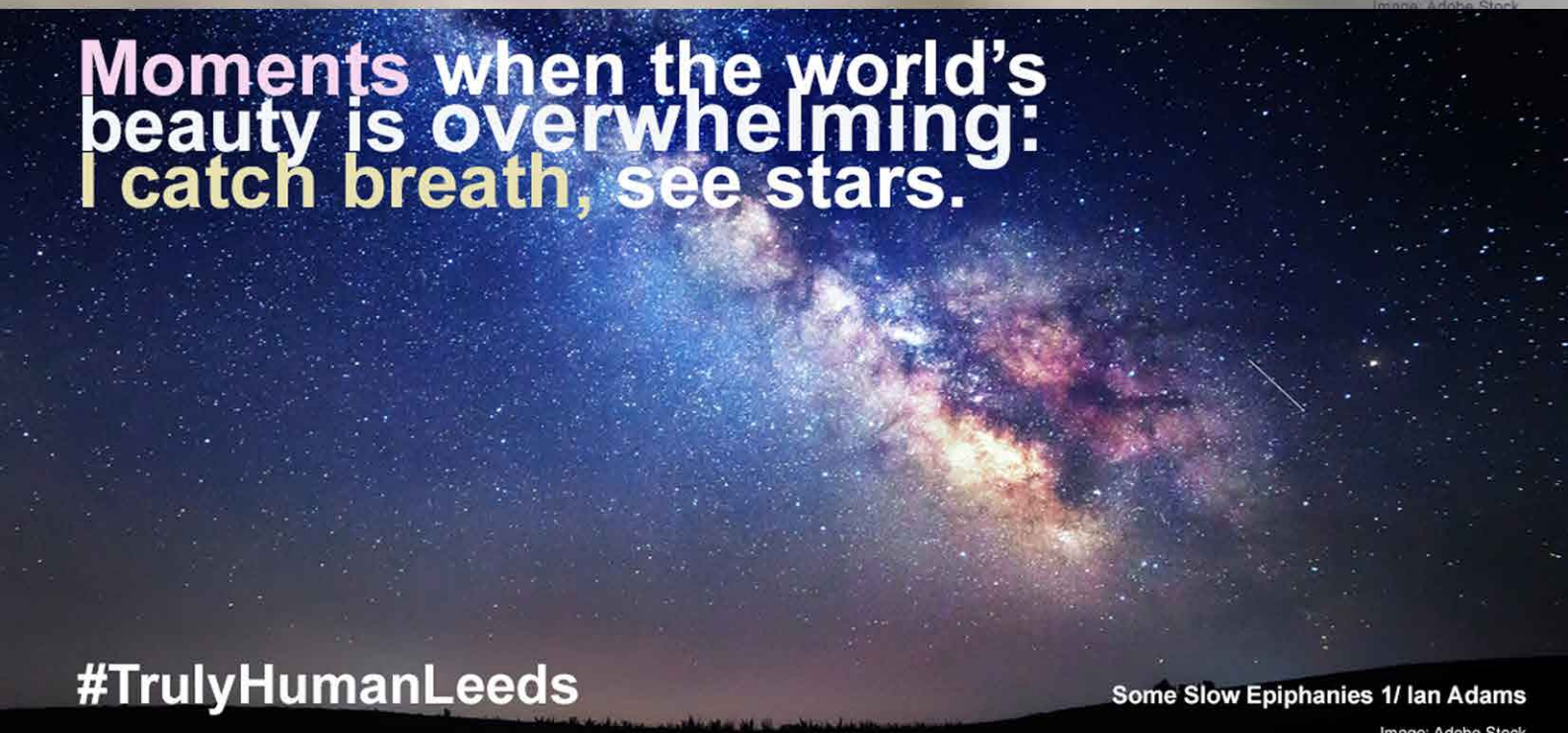
I write to learn how
to fly, lifted on rising
breeze, over mountains.



#TrulyHumanLeeds

Some Slow Epiphanies 1/ Ian Adams

Moments when the world's
beauty is overwhelming:
I catch breath, see stars.



#TrulyHumanLeeds

Some Slow Epiphanies 1/ Ian Adams

Image: Adobe Stock

I am loved; how strong
this sense, how fragile: a leaf
falling in autumn.



#TrulyHumanLeeds

Some Slow Epiphanies 1/ Ian Adams

Image: Adobe Stock



in **What is it I see**
your eyes that could make me
return **to the wild?**

#TrulyHumanLeeds

Some Slow Epiphanies 1/ Ian Adams

Image: Adobe Stock

Some nights foreboding
rushes in, deepening storm
front. I fight for breath.

#TrulyHumanLeeds

Some Slow Epiphanies 1/ Ian Adams

Image: Adobe Stock



Always returning
from some Atlantic; will I
find my river home?

#TrulyHumanLeeds

Some Slow Epiphanies 1/ Ian Adams

Image: Adobe Stock

What's new in ecumenical mission in Leeds?

Clive Barratt maps the ecumenical Christian landscape, past, present and future, and asks where we're headed.

MEMORY AS FOUNDATION

"Leeds is a place where ecumenical things happen".

So begins the doctoral thesis of the late Lewis Burton, the first County Ecumenical Officer for West Yorkshire Ecumenical Council (WYEC), that looked at the history of inter-Church movements in the city.

Leeds was one of the earliest cities to have a Council of Churches, 75 years ago. It represented around sixty congregations and aimed "to foster and express the spirit of Christian Unity in Leeds". It helped still topical campaigns like "Save Europe Now" and the "Inter Church Aid and Refugee Service", i.e. Christian Aid, as well as promoting prayer and social justice in the city.

In the 1980s, another age of cuts and Government-imposed poverty, the Leeds Churches Community Involvement Project, later known as Faith in Leeds, predated the national publication of the famous Faith in the City report, and was a vehicle for the Churches' joint concern for those "urban priority areas" which experienced significant deprivation. Faith in Leeds, along with such groups as Mennonite-inspired activists known as ASLAN (named after the lion), ensured the Leeds was in the national forefront of theological reflection and action for social justice.

Time would fail me to tell of the Council for Renewal And Mission, of the Council Of Leeds Churches Together, of Leeds Churches Together in Mission... who through faith promoted unity, challenged injustice, worked to overcome poverty, shut the mouths of lions...

The past has built a strong foundation; what next in Leeds?

PRAYER IN THE PRESENT

There is far more cross-denominational and non-denominational Christian life in our city than we often recognise, own or appreciate. That became evident last year in a WYEC-initiated event, alongside Network Leeds and Leeds Church Institute. Representatives of local Churches Together groups and

of city-wide Christian networks met together at LCI to share their experiences and encourage each other. There was much to share and much encouragement!

Churches Together groups represent Christians of different traditions who are living in and committed to the well-being of their part of the city. Through these groups diverse Christians pray together, worship together, study together, have street processions together (often on Good Friday), have public witness at Pentecost, or open-air carols at Christmas, or organise Christian Aid Week collaboratively, or run shared youth projects, or set up joint mission projects of many kinds. This is the heart of local Christian experience, in community, for the community. On top of that there are local ministers' cells, the Women's World Day of Prayer and many other inter-church initiatives. Unity is alive and well in Christian groups across the city.



Alongside these local perspectives are those churches, networks and projects which draw people from across the city and have a whole-city appreciation of mission. Some of these have a longstanding record of engagement with local communities, not least the Leeds Christian Community Trust, or Kidz Klub – extraordinary work with young people in several areas of the city. Food banks, soup kitchens and other service providers find encouragement and support in the Christian-initiated Food Aid Network.

The international dimension of Christian life in the city is upheld and promoted by Hope for the Nations, with African and Caribbean traditions particularly represented in the TEAM network of churches.

Increasingly, unity begins to look like a network of networks. It is all held together in prayer for the city, not least the Lent Prayer Diary, now the responsibility of Network Leeds, the principal Christian communications hub. Add to that the prayer promoted and inspired by Prayer for Leeds, now a significant feature on the spiritual landscape of the city.

FAITH IN THE FUTURE

What does the future hold? There will be opportunities to grasp and obstacles to overcome. Let's rejoice in new opportunities for the Holy Spirit, especially through new alliances, mutual appreciation and awareness that come from such shared activity as the 11th May mapping. Let us take every chance to tell the stories of our city, to

reflect on God's presence in the stories of our city, to pray for the people in the stories of our city, to create the future stories of our city.

There are many fine individual Christians in all sections of society, but how many people – intentionally on behalf of the churches – are engaged with the local authority, or the structures of the voluntary sector, or the city region, going to all the boring meetings and building up that host of significant relationships through which the Spirit so often acts? Can this be something that we can support and focus on in the future?

Let's think together about Leeds; let's do theology together in Leeds; let's tell people about Leeds; let's pray together for Leeds; let's be the change together for Leeds.



The Leeds Church Institute is a not-for-profit organisation that delivers life long learning through events, publications & social media.



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