

# CITYtheology

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“We can encourage partnership rather than competition; we can be with those asking systemic questions: Who wins? Who loses? Who decides? Not as gatekeeper or judge, but as accompanier and advocate.”

**Graham Brownlee, Shona Shaw & Tom Shaw** reflect theologically on the education system in Leeds.



What Sort of City is Leeds?

**Ann Nicholl** on city life and our Christian vocation.

**Sarah Derbyshire: Ten Lessons Learnt in Chaplaincy.**

**Leeds, Lent & Prayer: Duncan Stow on the passion and prayer that drives forward ecumenical mission.**

# What sort of city is Leeds?

**Ann Nicholl, Vice Chair of Leeds Church Institute reflects on city life and our Christian vocation**

**'God is in the city, it cannot fall  
at the break of day, God comes to its rescue.'**

*Psalm 46:5*

## **What sort of city do we live in?**

It is ethnically diverse – white, Asian, Black Caribbean, Black African, Eastern Europeans, Middle Eastern – a mix of all nations with over 170 languages spoken.

It houses a variety of religious beliefs – Christian, Buddhist, Islam, Judaism, Sikhism and Hinduism. Of course, add to that, those who do not profess to have any belief or those who are still searching for a belief to which they can adhere.

Economically, Leeds is seen as a growing, affluent commercial place, the sixth richest city in the UK, but there are areas of our city that are economically deprived; food banks and many charities support those who are in need in order to survive. Employment in Leeds stands at around the national average, but there is a sense that the opportunities for young people still need to be addressed. Many schemes to support those who are not in employment or training (NEETS) are available, but still need to be more successful, in order to ensure long term employment for young people.

Educationally, there are primary schools, high schools, private schools, academies, colleges, universities.

**There is an awareness though that there is inequality within the education sector.**

Some schools are overcrowded with not enough places for pupils in some areas of the city and some young people and families must travel long distances in order to access their learning.

The arts flourish with drama, music and art proliferating both professionally and by enthusiastic amateurs.

Sport is high on many citizens' agenda, with many successes by teams and individuals.  
(apart from the lack of a Premier League football team – for now at least!!)

**BUT** – Are we seeing more homeless people sleeping on our streets? Are we aware of more food banks being set up? Are there more people trying to access support for their mental health issues? Is there enough social housing to meet the needs of our citizens? Where is the support for people who are seeking a way out of addiction?

Perhaps there are even more concerns which can be added to this list.

Looking then at some of these facts of our city, it can be seen that there are challenges to be met in terms of attempts to prevent the inequality that is pervasive.

Do we look therefore to Scripture, to our faith, to our deeds and actions, to the way we live our lives in order to make a difference in our city?



William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, is quoted as saying:

**'Faith and works should travel side by side, step answering step, like the legs of men walking. First faith and then works; and then faith again and then works again – until you can scarcely distinguish which is the one and which is the other.'**

On the optimistic side of these questions, we can be proud of the many organisations that are attempting through faith and action to make differences in our city.

Just one look at the Leeds Lent Prayer Diary 2019 will give an amazing picture of the work being done by ecumenical faith organisations to change the balance and bring about a more just society. In the prayer diary there are fifty-nine groups, charities and institutions to be prayed for, who are reaching out to young people, homeless people, people in debt, people with addictions, people who are destitute, people who are hungry, refugees and people who are stateless, people who are disabled - many needs are named and they are endless.

There are many opportunities for those of faith, and those who have no belief, to be involved in making our city of Leeds one which is just, fair and one in which people desire to live.

We look to business, the Council and 'the movers and shakers' of our society to play their part, so that inequalities can be ironed out and the desperate situations in which many of our citizens find themselves can be eased so that once again they can feel valued and wanted.

On a final note, given that in our schools we have an amazing spread of different cultures, languages and knowledge of so many disparate parts of the world, we should not lose the opportunity to enable all our young people to be aware of what is happening, not just in our society but in the wider world. We need to help all our

school pupils to be aware of the wider world and the contrasts of their lives with others who live in far-flung lands.

**The opportunity to use that understanding that comes from our multi-cultural population should not be missed.**

To that effect the recently launched Christian Aid Global Neighbours Accreditation Scheme will be of interest to all primary schools. This empowers pupils to tackle global injustice, giving them a perception not only of injustices in their city, but also those going on in the world around them. Christian Aid believe that our global neighbours deserve dignity, respect and to experience life in its fullness. In partnership with the Church of England's Education Office this accreditation scheme helps young people to understand tackling global poverty and injustice, our Christian responsibility to make a difference and the need to create a more sustainable world. Further details of this scheme can be found on [schools@christian-aid.org](mailto:schools@christian-aid.org).

In conclusion, we leave ourselves in God's hands to continue faithfully to commit ourselves to his will.

**'You are a light for the world. A city built on a hilltop cannot be hidden... in the same way, your light must shine in people's sight, so that, seeing your good works, they may give praise to your Father in heaven.'**

Matthew 5:15-16

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# A Theological Reflection on Education with a Leeds City Focus

Written collaboratively by **Graham Brownlee**, **Shona Shaw** & **Tom Shaw**.



**Graham Brownlee** is Co-Minister of Moortown Baptist Church and a School Governor in Leeds.

**Shona Shaw** is Co-Minister of Moortown Baptist Church and the parent of two children: one in secondary school and one in primary school.

**Tom Shaw** teaches in a Leeds secondary school and is a member of Moortown Baptist Church.

The motto of the Queen Elizabeth High School, Hexham is 'spes durat avorum' which translated means 'let the hope of our ancestors endure'. This school was founded in 1599 at a time when many schools were established to provide grounding in 'true religion, and instructed in learning and good manners' in the face of a dire lack of provision. Many individual Christians and churches made a crucial contribution to these schools as they sought to pass on the hope of their ancestors as a legacy for the next generation.

Around 200 years later and another initiative blossoms, with the beginnings of the Sunday School movement in the 1780s. As the Industrial Revolution utilised child labour, urban poor children worked six days a week and faced a life of illiteracy and denuded prospects.

**Once again, Christians were at the forefront of endeavours for change, challenging the assumption that children were an expendable commodity.**

**Whilst both these movements saw the promotion of religion as key, more fundamentally they brought about transformation for society and opportunities for children.**

Both were an expression of the hope our ancestors had in the potency of Christian education to ensure common well-being, what we might term 'human flourishing' today. Leeds benefited from both these educational initiatives.

Forward another 200 years and the 1988 Education Act stipulated that collective worship of a 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character' should be offered in all schools. This caused Christians in many cities to organise and connect their faith with schools in a new way, and here, Leeds Faith in Schools, was born.

All three reforms were born of a watershed moment in education and society. These enterprises had a broad vision - not just for one school or in one church, but to encompass all. Watershed moments are often born of crisis: an increasing pressure for change renders the status quo unsustainable.

Today we venture to say that the time is ripe for Christians and the churches of Leeds to consider another watershed moment.

**Our children today are currently subject to three forces in their Education: competition, control and conformity. Each force can act to preserve and protect those with power, with the result that our education system distorts the truth, dismembers others and disowns responsibility.**

This is our crisis and one we must face today if we are to offer the hope of our ancestors to future generations.

The education narrative is dominated by talk of a knowledge economy, exam results and judging schools by league tables. These outcomes communicate only a partial truth and so distort the truth. Ofsted has left us with a legacy of school labels, 'Good' or 'Outstanding', being raised up on buildings and in the market place. These judgments are currently based on a narrow range of productivity outcomes. We tell our teachers and children: 'the only way you can flourish is through loyalty and submission to systems that produce these outcomes,' and to our schools: 'you must do what it takes to ensure an outstanding education for our children'.

In a culture that is dominated by the mantra 'I want, I can, I will,' the scene is set for abuses of power that separate and dismember society. Our current Education system is in danger of doing this in our schools. Only a minority can really succeed: the minority with good exam results then move onto further education, professional qualifications, and careers. They will then act to perpetuate a system that has worked for them. At the level of individual rationality this makes sense: 'the system has served me well so if others experience the same they can have the same flourishing and fruitfulness'. Unfortunately, at the level of collective rationality it does not.

**Everyone cannot succeed when the system is founded on competition. What happens to those who are left behind?**

A situation where the minority know flourishing and fruitfulness and the majority do not is not sustainable for a common society. Dismembering is justified by



a system that perpetuates and protects the power of the privileged and also works to ensure conformity and compliance of the majority. A system that conditions people to settle for low pay, poor working conditions, and injustice.

One example of a catalyst for conformity and compliance is the policies used in many schools for 'behaviour management'. They demand conformity through high control and extrinsic motivation. An education system should contribute to the socialisation of children, but it is harmful when a system utilises behavioural conditioning to produce a narrow range of outcomes that serve a distorted truth.

### **The priority subtly shifts to emphasising control and conformity instead of cultivating curiosity and creativity.**

For example: the five year old who, after only four weeks in school, wants a certificate for being kind and

says he/she won't play with a child because he is always 'on red'. The system starts to sort those who can conform early and begins the process of dismembering the other. The extent of dismembering is seen clearly in a national rise of fixed-term and permanent exclusions, off-rolling, and other strategies schools use to protect and produce 'outstanding' outcomes.

The cost is too great. Economically the dismembered others increasingly require additional resource, with pupil referral units and youth offender residential estates at capacity. Politically, people are no longer prepared to accept the distorted truth as they see the impact of a dismembered society in their own families and communities. This, however, is not the greatest challenge.

The greatest challenge is what we seem to be communicating to people who do not flourish in the system: if you do not experience flourishing the problem is you. Two examples will suffice. First, you will find it difficult to find an adult or child in the education system who has not been told that they need 'a growth mindset', 'to think positively', and that 'anything is possible you just need to work really hard'. They are told that your academic qualifications are a passport to the next stage and that this is where success lies. In some settings this is called 'character development'. All these things are, of course, true. No-one in education believes that people should not develop good character. However, this is a partial truth. When we have a system set up such that it is not possible for everyone to succeed but, at the same time, tell people that it is their responsibility to succeed, we are disowning responsibility. Secondly, people in education will repeatedly hear in school that they must be 'responsible for their choices'. Again, a partial truth. The reality is that some people, some of the time, are not wholly responsible for their choices. The situation is far more complex and yet we continue to accept a system that encourages simplistic linear behaviour management, rather than asking what kind of system produces such behaviours. The casualties are numerous: children with unprecedented levels of anxiety and adults leaving the teaching profession in rising numbers.

The current crisis in our education system can leave us in a state of anxiety and helplessness. But how might we see this more positively, as a watershed moment that invites us to act?

Nationally, Ofsted are consulting on a revised framework to focus inspection on what children learn through the curriculum, rather than over-reliance on performance data. The Department of Education is reporting on Exclusions and looking at systemic challenges facing Children in Need.

**People working across the education system are asking how the relationships between children, teachers, parents and the wider community can be reframed in ways that cultivate behaviour for living rather than just behaviour for learning.**

Our watershed moment is to find common cause with those in education to foster communities and build structures that break down isolation. St. Paul writes to the Colossians that there is hope: 'the gospel, which has come to you, indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing.' Colossians 1:5-6. For the Church exists in the complexity of peoples' lives, the gospel is birthed in this complexity, and therefore there is an invitation to engage with hope. Each of us is invited, for we cannot exit the system, neither can we assume power over it. As we take responsibility for where we have been complicit in perpetuating the status quo we can encourage partnership rather than competition; we can be with those asking systemic questions: Who wins? Who loses? Who decides? Not as gatekeeper or judge, but as accompanier and advocate. Therefore, as

we practice reconciliation over dismemberment we can be with parents and children that experience exclusion, and challenge school practices that disown responsibility for repairing relationships. As we affirm the complexity of truth rather than distortion of it we can be with Headteachers who want to put relationships first and focus on equity and not equality. We can be with teachers who pursue 'I-thou' relationships recognising that behaviour is communication of need. We can be with adults and children as they discover their own sense of agency and create space for them to be heard.

And so, we have opportunities to develop new initiatives that work with others, as an expression of our hope in current and future generations.

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# Ten Lessons Learnt in Chaplaincy

By Sarah Derbyshire, Chaplain at Bishop Young Church of England Academy in Leeds

My road to becoming a chaplain began aged 16, when I first encountered chaplaincy during my first week of sixth form and it changed my understanding of how the education sector can support students and staff forever. Whilst sat in our Philosophy of Religion class the smell of toast and freshly brewed coffee hit us. It was the chaplaincy 'Tea and Toast Tuesday'. Since that day, chaplaincy has been at the heart (and stomach) of my sixth form, university and work life. I'm now a chaplain in a high school. I have found taking time out to reflect on lessons I have learnt as a student and a chaplain to be helpful to my current practice. Here are some of the valuable lessons I have learnt, and keep learning:

## Lesson 1: You can never have enough hot chocolate and custard creams.

Food is at the heart of chaplaincy... or at least my chaplaincy experience, and now my chaplaincy. You don't have to turn many pages of the Bible before you stumble across a passage or verse that talks about the importance of feeding people. From feeding the five thousand (plus the women and children) to Jesus turning water into wine and the Eucharist, food is of central importance. The same can be said within the education sector. Having something as simple as an extra cup, a tea bag and a barrel of biscuits can change your chaplaincy from just another room in your school to a safe haven, something familiar and a 'home away from home', especially so for university students. It didn't take long for the word to get around my school that biscuits are in the chaplaincy office. There's no better feeling than students and staff feeling comfortable enough to walk into my office, grab a biscuit and walk out without feeling the need to justify themselves – that's when I know I'm doing something right!

## Lesson 2: Keep it relevant.

It's no secret that the Church often seems out of touch with the rest of the world, like it is 'fifty years behind' everyone else and the things that obviously need changing and updating take decades to do just that. Students often expect chaplaincy to be out of touch and with out of touch messages. Chaplaincy needs to be relevant! As chaplains within education I believe we have a duty to keep up to date with what our students and young people want, need and are experiencing. As a 22 year-old, it's not that hard for me to keep up with the latest trends and frustrations and it's something my students really value and appreciate. It's a door opener to all sorts of conversations.

## Lesson 3: Don't be afraid to take risks.

In my role as chaplain I find myself responding to what is going on in my environment and workplace daily. Different events take place which can put me in a 'first time' situation. First time situations have included something as big as responding to a community event which has changed the needs and hurts of our school, and something as small as starting up a new group. When this happens, it's important to measure and take appropriate risks. Even when the risk I have taken didn't produce the intended or expected results, I don't think that means it shouldn't be refined and tried again.



## Lesson 4: It's okay to play to your strengths.



Taking the time to figure out what my own personal strengths and weaknesses were, and how they could benefit my students, colleagues and chaplaincy, was one of the most pragmatic and useful tasks I have ever set myself. Something as simple as writing a list of what my school wanted to see, how they wanted it implemented and what my skills were has equipped me to take on a whole abundance of different tasks. Often skills have come into play that I would never have expected to associate with my role as a chaplain. I have used my baking skills to help run a Café Church and get my students excited about a new programme of 'School Feast Day' events. Other chaplains in my area have used their skills in origami, knitting, Zumba, woodwork, poetry slam and their pets to get people excited and engaged with their chaplaincy.

## Lesson 6: Good 'staff work' is just as important as good 'God work'.

Whilst at university I took part in a 'retreat in daily life' which was run by the Jesuit Order. One evening, whilst looking at Ignatian spirituality, we were handed a quote which said, 'Pray as if everything depends on God, work as if everything depends on you.' Since first hearing the quote I've come to discover that many people believe it beautifully captures the Ignatian spirit of giving it over to God in prayer before working hard! I often find myself referring back and reminding myself of this piece of Ignatian spirituality. For me, it helps me link back to **Lesson 5** by reminding me that I am a part of a whole team. How I contribute to that team, making sure my admin is done, my targets are hit and that I am a fully integrated member of my school team is just as important as the 'God work' (as my students happily title it) that I am employed to do.

## Lesson 7: 'Ad Hoc' chaplaincy doesn't mean you're not doing enough.



Having a 'free diary' is extremely liberating but I have also found it to be the cause of anxiety. Doing things and responding spontaneously to daily events is a kind of 'ad hoc chaplaincy' but this does not mean I am not prepared and not doing a good enough job. Making yourself available is one of the biggest blessings a chaplain can offer people. I need to remind myself of that at times.

## Lesson 5: Include everyone when making decisions.

Placing chaplaincy within the education hierarchy is a hard task. Talking to chaplains in schools, sixth forms and universities proves interesting in terms of where chaplaincy can and does sit. Whether you're a chaplain within a whole team of other chaplains, woven into a department or on your own it is good practice to involve people in the decision making and implementing. When I come to making decisions, I try and talk to a variety of members of staff to gain their perspective, make them feel included and a part of the decision-making process. I have got into the habit of talking openly about decisions so much so that students will actively approach me around the school and ask if I have anything they can contribute their opinion to. I now have a body of 'Chaplaincy Reps' who I meet up with every half term who journey with me down the path of decision making and help me reflect on our previous decisions. It's my favourite meeting of the half term.

## Lesson 8: Silence is okay.

The old saying goes that 'silence is golden', but it doesn't always feel like that when you're the chaplain and you have someone in chaplaincy seeking care, support and advice. One of the hardest lessons I've come to learn is that you're not going to have an answer or a piece of personal advice and testimony for every scenario that comes through your door. Sometimes journeying alongside someone and sharing their hurt and upset is just as comforting as a piece of advice. Recently, Leeds Church Institute came into my high school and spent a week with our Year Nine students with their Leeds Listening Yurt. When asked: 'how do you know when someone is a good listener?', one student replied: 'good listeners, the people who really care, don't always have something to say or some smart answer. They're the people who are willing to say they don't have an answer but will journey with you and stick by your side and offer you support anyway.' That expresses powerfully that silence really can be okay.

## Lesson 9: It's okay not to be okay.

'Being a chaplain is no easy vocation, that's something we don't remind ourselves of often enough,' was a comment one of the chaplains at university used to tell us. That's another piece of wisdom I've picked up for the journey and is something I've used to help make myself appropriately vulnerable in my role as a chaplain. Figuring out who you can talk to about your own perspective, including your struggles, and where your boundaries are with people is a really valuable thing to do. Since starting chaplaincy I've become aware of stereotypes about what a chaplain is. It can be easy to soak up comments such as 'Chaplains don't question their faith' and 'Chaplains should have a faith strong enough to not let situations impact them'. But, in fact, I am convinced that it's okay for chaplains not to be okay 100% of the time. I have found talking to trusted priests and chaplains out of my workplace to be invaluable in this regard.



## Lesson 10: Have fun!

It's impossible to guess what you're going to walk into as a chaplain. Some events and activities that you do will be serious and challenging, but others are fantastic opportunities to have fun! Being able to have a laugh with my students is the best part of my job. In every assembly I lead I make sure I have an activity where I can get students and staff up doing something funny that relates to the assembly's themes. Not only do students remember what I was talking about, but they also remember who I am and often seek me out as someone they can talk to when they need it... it links back to being relatable!



# Leeds, Lent and Prayer

**Duncan Stow** who works with Horsforth Churches Community Outreach Project reflects on the passion and prayer that drives forward ecumenical mission in Leeds. This article is based on a keynote address given at the launch of the Leeds Lent Prayer Diary at Leeds Church Institute.

In January, I had the privilege of hearing Professor Tom Wright speak at the St. Hild Lecture. He told a story he had heard from Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger of Paris. Decades ago, there were three boys who were bored and up to mischief, and decided to enter the cathedral in Poland where they were living, go into the confessional and confess all kinds of imaginary sins. By the third boy the priest realised exactly what was happening and so in a moment of quick thought he said, 'and your penance is to go up to the altar, look at the image of Jesus there and I want you to say three times, 'I know what you did. I know everything you did for me and I don't give a damn''. The boy thought, 'Oh, this is good sport', went up to the giant crucifix of Jesus and said, 'I know what you did, and I don't give a damn. I know what you did, and I don't give a ... damn...'. He couldn't finish the words. That boy walked out changed, and the Cardinal said, 'I know because I was that boy, changed by the power of the cross, by the passion of Jesus expressed in that image.'

**Hearing this, it excited me that the cross has the power to examine us and our motives at every level. It has the power to cause us to pray, and open up new possibilities in our own lives.**

Lent for me is about taking time to just open ourselves up to the possibilities of encountering Christ.

In Jesus' prayer in John Chapter 17, we can see how he prayed in preparation for his Easter moment. First he expressed his passion for humanity saying, 'the time has come to glorify your son. I want that everyone has eternal life.' Then he reflected on his own life, saying 'I have revealed you to those you have given me.' And finally, he commissioned his followers, 'I'm going to the Father, but I want you to have the fullness of joy', praying that his followers would be united.

Those of you who know me will know that this prayer, that we would be one, has always been central to my life. I was not brought up as a Christian, although my father was a Methodist. I was converted at 17 in an Anglican church. I came to university in Leeds where I was loved and looked after at Lister Hill Baptist Church, before being sent off for a deeper experience of discipleship, then coming back, settling in a house church and marrying a beautiful Catholic woman.

And so my story has always been one that has been ecumenical. My work with Leeds Youth Cell Network where we encouraged young people from different churches and backgrounds to work together was really exciting. There were residential where children from Garforth and Gipton, Beeston and Horsforth worshipped and shared together. And then in Horsforth we have been doing all manner of different things bringing churches together in mission. We have set up a farmer's market, run a Carols in the Park, we do secondary schools work together and work in all seven primary schools. But how do you measure success? Well, in our recent Christmas Rewind event, we had 32 volunteers and they represented 10 different churches, including all five denominations that are present in Horsforth. I just think that is incredible and encouraging.

Working together has made things possible that perhaps wouldn't have been possible otherwise. I want to encourage people who are passionate about mission because I think there is a worry, sometimes, that when you're working across churches you might need to work in a way that is the lowest common denominator. A worry that you might need to water down what you're doing. But that's not my experience because passionate people drive things forward. Yes, I've been in those meetings where we've spent 50 minutes deciding whether the candles on the Christmas card should be red, green or orange. But we should not be discouraged by those sorts of challenges.

So, do not hold back your passion. My experience of turning passion into reality is all about the importance of prayer. I've often been in a situation where those people with passionate ideas rush ahead and others don't have time to really hear what they are saying. Prayer is the time which allows people to start to share a vision and own a vision. Not just prayer on its own, but praying with people, in our different ways, and realising that in that space, with that person whose Christian practice is quite different to mine, whose Christian theology may be quite different to mine, that we are all driven by the same love for Jesus. In that context, trust grows.

What isn't possible for us as ONE church, is possible for us as THE church. So as we journey through Lent; we have to allow the cross and the extravagant love of God to examine us; we need to spend time praying with those from different denominations and growing in trust; and let's not discourage people who are passionate about mission because the Church needs passionate people to move it on.



# LGBTQ+ inclusion in Education

A meeting of Christians in Education

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Tuesday 18th June 6.30-8.30pm  
Includes a presentation, prayer and food

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At Leeds Church Institute with Revd. Anthea Colledge



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