



# CAIM

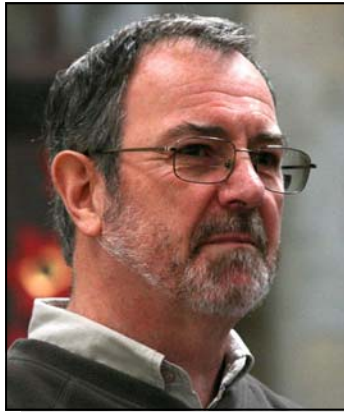
How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?

CAIM is the Celtic word meaning 'encompassment' or 'encircling'

## Inside this issue:

The heart of Vocation	1
The States we're in	2
Community Gatherings	2
Czech Mates	3
Football - mad!	4
Exeter @ Easter	5
Sedbergh Gathering	6
A visit to Cape Town	7
The Anabaptist Connection	8
The Passion of His love	9
Turning the Tide	10
On Being a Man	10
Easter Workshop in the north	11
The newsy bit!	12

## The Heart of Vocation



*Trevor Miller writes:*

**One of God's gifts to us as a Community is that we are all so very different – each of us a wonderfully complex mix of personhood, identity, giftedness, creativity, personality, and temperament.** This is expressed in the context of the various roles, responsibilities and relationships that are uniquely ours. 'One man's meat is another man's poison.' 'One woman's treasure is another woman's trash.' In addition, we all live in diverse conditions and different circumstances, with different limitations and opportunities, varied levels of stamina, coping mechanisms, idiosyncrasies and inhibitions, strengths and weaknesses,

hopes and fears that we take into each day of our lives. Wow?!

In such diversity, what is it that links it all together? Without doubt, one essential factor is an understanding of our inner spiritual journey in terms of our vocation. Vocation: from the Latin Vocare = to call, was used from earliest times as 'a calling from God' to work for Him, often only associated with those in so-called 'full-time' Christian service. However, monastic spirituality (from which we draw so much insight), would stress that our vocation, our calling, is simply to be, to be who you are, where God has placed you. So that, vocation is more about identity, personhood and life actually being lived, about you embracing and expressing you; so as to say from the heart in whatever situation or set of circumstances that constitutes everyday ordinariness for us, 'this is me, this is where I belong, this is home'. So it's not just your job or work situation but you, as God has uniquely made you. 'Vocation,' to paraphrase Dorothy Sayers 'is not primarily a thing one does to live, but the thing one lives to do.'

A good example of this is found in the story recorded in John 1:35-39, where two men, Andrew and probably the writer, John, previously disciples of John the Baptist were introduced to Jesus as 'the Lamb of God'. On the basis of this, they begin to follow Jesus but are stopped in their tracks when Jesus, aware of them following, turns and faces them with the question, 'What do you want?' 'What are you looking for?

Now that's a question and a half, especially when it is the Lord who is asking it of us. But it is constantly with us. We ask it everyday of our lives in the form of 'Who is it that you seek?' Imagine it – Jesus, aware that you are following - turns, looks you in the eye, and asks 'what is it that you really want, what is your heart's desire in following me? What is your vocation?

Andrew and John are thrown by the question but their answer is not only an accurate reflection of their heart but an important insight for all who would follow Jesus. They say 'where are you staying?' Where's home? In effect, we want to stay where you are staying; we want to be at home with you, we want to feel comfortable with you.

*Continued on page 4*

## The States we're in...

Amongst the Gatherings scheduled for this year is one in Minneapolis USA. Several folk from England are making plans to fly out to the States for this event – and if you'd like to be part of that team, you would be made very welcome!

**Northumbria Community USA is growing fast.** There has been much excellent work done recently by a dedicated group of Companions in the States, to carry the legal and 'organisational' aspects forward – we now have tax-exempt status under US law, which is an important step. Last year we held a Gathering in MN, and feel it's right to repeat that opportunity to meet again. Gatherings give us a chance to share the stories, and build the heart-connections.

For us in the UK, it can be difficult to grasp just how vast the geography of the States is, and it has been hard to decide where we should be gathering, when folk are 'spread' over such huge distances. But we have all we need to organise a really successful gathering in MN, and it is also a major transportation hub, so it seems sensible to plan another event there

The folks in MN would love to welcome anyone who wants to 'travel in' to be part of the Gathering. The event is happening over the weekend of October 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup>. You would need to get yourself to Minneapolis - there are several routes into Minneapolis St. Paul (MSP) airport from UK and Europe - and then the local folks would help you with accommodation, either by recommending appropriate places to stay (from 'cheap and cheerful' to 'very comfortable'!) or by offering a room with friends and family members. Sounds fun, don't you think? Maybe it could be a chance to build a bigger trip to the States around the Gathering!

We're also hoping to organise a smaller one-day event the following Saturday, October 11<sup>th</sup>, in Washington DC too. If you're interested in travelling out to the USA to be part of either of these events, then do get in touch by sending an email to [jeff.sutheran@northumbriacommunity.org](mailto:jeff.sutheran@northumbriacommunity.org) or telephone the office on 01289 388235.

### WE DON'T WANT TO LOSE TOUCH WITH YOU!

**So please give careful attention to the important letter and form which is enclosed with this issue of Caim.**

It explains everything about the process of 'database renewal' which we are obliged to engage in - and unless you take a few moments to complete and return the form to us, then your name will no longer be on the list of contacts... So **WHY NOT DO IT NOW!?**

It should only take a few seconds, and then all manner of things shall be well...

Please note that if you are in THE USA, you will get a **SEPARATE LETTER** ABOUT THIS ISSUE VERY SOON!

**Community Gatherings** planned for 2007 - and beyond. Be sure to put the dates in your diary! Here's the schedule:

**2007**

**June 30<sup>th</sup>**

Little Gidding (Cambs)

*Watch the website or contact Ellen in the office for further details of this next Gathering.*

**Sept. 22<sup>nd</sup>**

Birmingham

**Oct 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup>**

Minneapolis, USA

**Oct 11<sup>th</sup>**

Washington DC, USA

*Read the panel to the left to find out how to join these Gatherings if you plan to travel to USA!*

**Dec 15<sup>th</sup>**

Ireland

**2008**

**January 12<sup>th</sup>**

perhaps York?

**March**

(date tbc) -

London



### Welcome to the Summer edition of Caim!

We often talk about 'celebrating our diversity' in Community, but in preparing this issue of Caim it seemed to become very real for me. We are learning to attune our senses to listening and watching for interesting 'things' for Caim, and this time we could have filled the whole issue with stories of things which various Community folk are 'passionate' about!

Now, I can't say that I'm passionate about some of those things myself - but that's the very essence of diversity isn't it!?

It's been very exciting to reflect on the fact that not only has God put the same 'song' in our hearts as we live our life in Him in this strange land...but that some of the phrases in that song are so uniquely our own. It's only when we contribute those phrases that the whole becomes complete.

Enjoy this issue. *Jeff & Ingrid*

## Czech Mates

*In March the Community were invited to host a 'Northumbrian Week' at the International Baptist seminary in Prague. Almost 30 Community folk made the trip, and we asked one or two to tell us about their week. Here are Paul Oliver's reflections:*

**I went to Prague looking forward to meeting new people** who shared an interest in what is happening to the churches in Europe. For some time my wife and I have valued the spiritual model of the Northumbria Community, and I was keen to hear their insights. Little did I think I would be meeting young Christians from as far afield as Azerbaijan, Serbia, Russia, Spain, India, USA, Kosovo, Bulgaria, Ireland, and Australia - to mention a few! Sharing in their stories, and hearing their varied experiences of trying to be Christians in cultures where material and secular values are rapidly squeezing them out, was powerful. I was deeply moved by many who experienced suffering in their life as Christians, some by family members, some by college peers, and many in their communities.

Friendship was wonderful, and three of us men spent a lot of time together visiting the wonders of Prague, walking the woods, and dawdling over Charles Bridge.

My particular interest was served well by the significant input of the community members, and I valued the concept of the church in the west moving increasingly into 'Exile', which was defined by Pete Askew as not being "at home" in a society which we actually helped to create. How then do we now live as Christians?

One of the sessions moved many of us almost to tears as we heard stories from Northern Ireland, of serving people in deep need in a strongly Catholic sector of Belfast. Hearing of their experiences was a profound sign of the Kingdom of God finding a home in that 'strange land'.



"pilgrimage" to a former Nazi ghetto where hundreds of Jewish families lived in penury and punishment. The courage of the children at the time, in drawing their story on hundreds of A5 pages, amazed me. Almost all showed pictures of beauty and happiness.

We were housed in a former castle which had been the depository (for the Nazis) of Jewish documents, and on my last day I decided to make a "solemn



Music featured strongly, along with dance, and of course the wonderful rhythm of the prayer through the day. A room for silent prayer before candles, stones, paintings and places to draw and write, gave us somewhere to be close to God for as long as we needed. The stillness and depth of mediation moved me greatly many times.

We stayed in the International Baptist seminary on the edge of Prague, where students were being equipped for a whole variety of ministries, and many of them had never met the Celtic model of church. I feel sure they will have returned with renewed vision in opening up new approaches to being small churches where they are. Being small is where we are heading in western European culture, and the Community teaching certainly gave us a sense of hope, in learning to become open in the face of isolation, rather than closing in ourselves.

The last evening was a perfect way to gather all our experiences as a community into a powerful focus, where we all walked slowly up the hill behind the 'castle', where, in the dusk, a huge bonfire was lit. As we stood around it, and prayed and blessed one another together, there was a deep sense of being bound together in the fire of the Spirit of God. We embraced, and sang together, slowly returning to our rooms filled with a sense of thankfulness to God.

I was the victim of pickpockets on the excellent metro system, and it only served to prove the love of community, as I was lent money, given huge support and a bit of laughter!

There are few locations where this could have taken place which are more beautiful than Prague, with its museums, its music, its amazing architecture, the ravaged Jewish quarter, and - of course - Charles Bridge teeming with sightseers, artists, musicians, statues and countless nationalities. The Castle, St Vitus Cathedral, Wenceslas Square, the street markets, and all enjoyed in the most glorious sunshine. I'm sure we will all carry this experience into our Christian formation for many years to come. 'Thank you' to those who were part of it.

*Paul Oliver*



### *Continued from Page 1*

A reminder that 'home is where the heart is', where you can be yourself. It is traversing the landscape of the heart, with Jesus. As Jesus said in John 14:23 "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him." Jesus said and still says 'Come and see' – come and join me on the journey.

This is the primary lesson to learn about vocation. To seek to be at home with God - who you are, where you are, what you are. It is being 'attentive to our own distinctiveness' because vocation is fundamentally a call to relationship with God. A call, not primarily to do, but to be. If we don't embrace this truth then the busyness of spinning all the plates of work, study, home, family, church etc. will result in an inner disconnectedness, an inner fragmentation that leaves us all over the place, anywhere but at home in your heart. TS Eliot talked about finding 'a still point in a turning world.'

This is the outworking of our vocation – not only to know where we belong but to actually live there, in our hearts – with Jesus. Henri Nouwen wrote about this in his influential book – Reaching Out. His observation was that more often than not we have an address but we can't be found there, we are pulled in so many directions, and live as if we are homeless, never resting, uncomfortable, resentful, feeling abused.

It has to be as the Desert Fathers taught in saying, 'Do not give your heart to that which does not satisfy your heart.' Vocation is 'God is here, God is now, God is in this, and

therefore I will be attentive to God in the ordinary and the mundane as the person He has uniquely made me.' So, our vocation as Northumbria Community for instance, is an awareness that to live a new monasticism means we are committed to working with our hearts as well as our hands, exercising the soul in prayer, keeping company with God, seeking God in each other, as we live out the normality of our everydayness. It is really taking on board the prayer of Hild: 'Lord, show me the right seat; find me the fitting task; give me the willing heart.'

**Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be?**

Perhaps then we will grasp the truth of this wonderful passage from Nelson Mandela, "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn't serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We were born to manifest the glory of God within us. It is not just in some of us. It is in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our fear, our presence automatically liberates others."

This is the heart of vocation. *Trevor Miller*

*There are a number of things a bloke shouldn't be doing once he's over 40, never mind 50... but since it's all in a very good cause, we can applaud this rush of blood to the head. I think Roy may have written this press release himself, just so he can get the names 'Roy Searle' and 'George Best' into the same football article:*

### **CHURCH LEADERS AND IRISH LEAGUE PLAYERS 'BLOW THE WHISTLE' ON GLOBAL POVERTY (FINAL SCORE 12-1!)**

An "unfair" football match took place today at George Best's former primary school in Belfast to 'blow the whistle' on global poverty. The Church leaders were unequally matched against Irish League players. The Church Leaders Team included our own Roy Searle, who was once a pretty good footballer.

Pupils from Nettlefield Primary cheered the church leaders on, but even so the Irish League team strolled to an easy 12-1 win. The consolation goal for the Church leaders was scored by Roy Searle, hitting a sweet volley from 15 yards out.

The match took place to highlight the work still to be done by Governments across the world to meet their promises to halve global poverty by 2015 and was organised by

Evangelical Alliance and Tearfund, key partners in Micah Challenge, alongside Athletes in Action, a Christian sports agency.



Match referee Drew Gibson, who is also Professor of Practical Theology at Union Theological College, said: "Irish League players in prime physical condition against a bunch of fairly unfit middle-aged clergy doesn't seem very balanced, very fair – but that's just the point isn't it? The game is supposed to be a light-hearted reflection of the unfair world in which we live. The UK Government, along with governments across the world, has made promises to tackle this unfairness and 2007 marks the half-way point to meeting their goal of halving global

poverty by 2015. Some progress has been made but there is still much to be done on issues like trade justice, climate change and the treatment and care of those suffering from HIV and Aids. We are calling on the Government to both honour the promises it has made and encourage other world leaders to effect change in their own countries."

*Roy Searle*



## Exeter Easter Workshop

*Easter Workshops were held in in Huddersfield and Exeter this year. We asked some folk to reflect on the event they attended—here are some words about the Exeter workshop, beginning with Peter & Elizabeth Webb's contribution:*

We were a little anxious how this was going to work out because though we had been asked to host the event, neither of us had ever been to an Easter Workshop before and were not sure what was expected from us. However we need not have worried for under the expert hands of Norma Charlton, Andy Raine and Nick and Anita Haigh, the whole day came together and for those of us who explored together the 'Alternative Story' it was a meaningful and challenging day.

Quite a number of the Exeter Group helped us host the day and the following comments are their reflections on the day.

"I enjoyed meeting other Northumbria Community members and sharing something of their journey."

"Because we were a smallish group gathered together on the day, I was pushed out of my comfort zone and made myself participate in things I would not normally do. So I joined the singing group and particularly appreciated the 'psalm' created from our individual phrases."

"The Listening Groups exercise was a new and difficult experience where in groups of three we were asked to speak to the questions 'How then shall we live?' 'How am I available to God and others?' We were told just to listen and not make any response but just reflect."

"The phrase that stuck with me was one of Andy Raine's 'bumping into God'. He talked about the experiences that we all have of the sudden

awareness of God in our lives, whether we think we believe or not."

"One of the most valuable experiences of the day for me was to be part of And Raine's dance workshop. I have been leading dance workshops and presenting the gospel through dance for about 40 years. I appreciate opportunities to be at the receiving end. There were only five of us working with Andy, a mother and her three children, (who incidentally had come as a family all the way from Orpington, Kent to Exeter for the day!) and myself. Andy used the words of the Expression of Faith from the Evening office. We each had to chose one and then with no time for preparation, get up and express the words in movement. I was amazed at Andy's ability to draw from us and especially the sequences from the three young people."

"I very much appreciated the dance sequence in the final celebration in the final session – an expression of faith in a non-verbal way."

This is just a taste of the day that proved to be a rich and valuable experience. Our thanks to the leadership team who made it possible. *Elizabeth and Peter Webb and the members of the Exeter group.*

The impressions that stay with us from the Easter Workshop in Exeter, back at the end of March are very positive. Any meeting point in a dispersed community is a precious thing and it was good to meet up with old friends and catch up. It was good too to meet new friends. When most of your experience of the daily offices is individual it is a high point to share it with others. So gathering like this is very special and second only to gathering in the chapel at Hetton Hall.

It was so good to hear Andy Raine talk and, in particular, what he shared about the beginnings of the community. His delivery was light

and often amusing but displayed both depth and conviction.

The group sessions were a great way to share. Taking turns to speak without interruption, going twice around the group was a valuable discipline both for the talkative and those retiring ones who normally speak last, or probably, not at all. It resulted in some quite deep sharing, even though we were with some people we hadn't met before. Great idea!

In one of the workshops I (Peter) was able to enjoy the music of the Community with Nick & Anita Haigh. Most of my other experiences of community have been pretty lacking in music so to hear them play and to even sing with them was a treat! It was good to re-dress the imbalance in my experience.

Into this mix add some storytelling with Simon Airey and Norma Charlton demonstrating what a valuable art this is.

The evening celebration was a memorable occasion, rounding off our day. The contribution of one delightful family was the highlight of this as they got stuck into the dance, teenagers included. We found their wholehearted involvement quite moving.

The style of the day was relaxed, informal and carefree. When do we do it again?

*Peter & Margaret Bone*

Although we were small in number everyone seemed to appreciate the day and the opportunity to get to know each other. The Essam family were wonderful! They had set off at 6am from Orpington in Kent. The three teenage children took part in it all, and were a real blessing to everyone. We also appreciated Lizzie Merson who played beautifully with Erin.

*Norma Charlton*

## A day in the hills...

*Last month we held a Community Gathering in Sedbergh, at the foot of the Howgill fells in Cumbria. We asked a couple of folk to tell us about the day - so here are some words from Brendon Hills, and please notice that I have resisted the rather tempting links with his surname...*

On the last Thursday of each month we would journey 45 miles to Sedbergh, at the foot of the Howgills for our Community Group meeting. Our visits to Sedbergh were great fun. We ate cakes - lots of them - and went for days out in wonderful villages like Cartmell with its racecourse, and Bradford with its homely cathedral and chapel of the Holy Spirit. Just before our wedding in 2002, the group arranged a surprise visit to the Cross Keys, a temperance restaurant deep in the Howgills, and presented us with a copy of Celtic Daily Prayer.

Two years ago work took us to Shrewsbury, and a new home in Upper Pulley, south of the town. Contact with our NC friends dwindled to a very occasional phone call and email. However, we accepted that the western borderlands was where God had led us to, and duly set up our own small chapel in the Garden



shed. So when we read in Caim that Sedbergh was having its own weekend gathering, we leapt at the chance!

Saturday started with worship and then a chance to meet with old friends and some new ones. I thought I saw a group of Mystery Worshipers from Ship of Fools, but they turned out to be an Eastern European Choir who wanted to sing in the church at lunchtime! I noticed the scruffy liturgy sheets printed on lurid coloured paper have been replaced with PowerPoint, which although more accessible and very creative it is a shame really, because the words were always good to take and meditate on afterwards. The highlight of the day had to be the 'sacred space' - a challenging collection of images and objects to aid meditation prayer and reflection.

On Sunday we moved to Cautley, and "the Church without heating" (or hot water for that matter), which must be one of the smallest Anglican buildings in the

County. In fact the adjacent vicarage, now a guesthouse, is about three times as big! A gentle time of worship was followed by more cake at Gordon & Margaret Joice's house where "circuit training" means working ones way round the ten cakes on offer at the table. A great weekend, and one we would look forward to doing again sometime soon.

*Brendon Hills*

*Catherine Clasen writes about the same gathering:*

**Just as Nether Springs keeps a rhythm of the day** that helps us find balance, so too the community gatherings have a rhythm that brings balance. I appreciate the mix of music, stories, theological reflection, the Sacred Space stations to be alone with God, and the sacred English ritual of tea and biscuits to be together as new and old friends. At this particular gathering, I was touched by the hospitality of the Sedbergh Community Group. They were obviously chuffed to host the day, and I felt as though all their love for and enjoyment of each other spilled over into their loving, joyful welcoming of us.



Another special part of the day was reflecting on the monastic 'cell', time in solitude with

God. I've found that a favorite desert father saying of the community is "Go to your cell, and your cell will teach you everything" (or maybe I just hear it a lot because others want me to buzz off!). We broke into small groups to discuss how this monastic commitment to being alone with God works itself out in our everyday lives. I was surprised to discover within myself what a literal understanding I have of cell right now. Living in a caravan and keeping the rhythm at Nether Springs means that I have a physical cell that I live in, and at minimum, this hour every day after Midday Office to go there to be alone with God. Soon, however, I will leave the house team to be married, and I will join the other 99.8% of the community who live out their commitment to 'cell' outside of Hetton Hall. Through the teaching and inspiration of others' reflections, I felt the gathering started me thinking about and helped prepare me for living out my community vows in a new setting.

*Catherine Clasen*



*We enjoy inviting Community folk to tell us about some of the things they're passionate about, and here's some words from Bobbie & Rich Johns in Cheltenham:*

## **Cape Town – City of complex contrasts**

Pristine sandy beaches – streets littered with debris; icy Atlantic rollers – hot arid desert; exotic vegetation – dry scrub land; ostentatious wealth – helpless poverty; opulent modern business environments – mothers scratching a living selling home-grown produce; vast sprawling townships against the awesome wonder of Table Mountain. These are just a few of the complex contrasts we discovered on a recent trip to the enchanting yet enigmatic city that is Cape Town, South Africa.

Since leaving my permanent teaching job, and in between various short and long term teaching contracts, I, Bobbie, have been writing and editing educational materials. In February the international department of Pearson Educational, for whom I am currently working, approached me to ask if I was interested in writing maths for Africa – a blue-print scheme to be adapted by local authors of the purchasing countries. I joked to friends that I would have to go to Africa to do the job properly, never dreaming that I would have to. Rich, my husband, offered to 'carry my bags' and two weeks later we were on the plane to Cape Town, for me to meet and work with the South African co-authors and the project manager (a Ukrainian mathematician, Tatiana: my background is Maths and Russian!) and then to spend just over a week exploring the city and its environs together. Here are just a few of the experiences that had such a profound affect on us.

- Robben Island – set in the icy Antarctic waters of Table Bay and where Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners spent so many years, labouring in long daylight hours under the harsh glare of the limestone quarry, damaging their eyes for ever. The prison is now a tourist 'attraction', run by the ex-prisoners themselves – a very sobering experience, yet somehow one of hope. The rebuilding of South Africa is due to men such as these, who were and are determined, not for revenge, but for a stable, integrated country, of which they can be proud. All the people we met, black and white, are very eager that visitors should love their city and country and they are very concerned about the effect of crime there (of which we saw very little, but is obviously still a huge problem).

- The hotel manager telling us about a visit to England during apartheid years, when he received abuse for being a white South African.

- The vibrant, easy-going hustle and bustle of the streets in daylight and the brooding, menacing threat of the same streets at night.

- A visit to three schools, in the vast township area of Khayelitsha, just outside Cape Town: 100% black, teachers and pupils; all surrounded by barbed wire for security; overcrowded (four children to one double desk, 40-50

pupils in a class with one teacher); pitted concrete classroom floors; no pictures or posters; broken furniture; no storage facilities and, consequently, very low morale in the teachers, due to unrealistic targets, taking no account of where the children come from (mainly illiterate homes, due to apartheid) and the lack of even the most basic of equipment and books. However, in the two schools where we were shown around, the children were wonderful – beautifully turned out in their uniforms (their best clothes, we were informed), friendly yet respectful and eager to show off their best work (excellent standards, despite everything against them). We had impromptu musical performances in classes and from the school band (of which, rightly so, the whole school was inordinately



proud). It broke our hearts to see the broken chairs in Reception class (Heath and Safety here would have condemned them well before this – they were little more than four legs with half a broken seat) and the fact that they had nothing to play with. The purpose built library in one school had shelves but no books. In another, mothers sold food to the children for lunch as their main means of financial support. And the 15-years olds, like the whole world over, waited until we had shut the door, then erupted with hysterical laughter at the sight of such odd visitors!



In the few short years since apartheid ended, this society has worked hard to improve the lives of the poor and disadvantaged, but has such a long way to go.

We would love to make a small difference to these three schools. If anyone else is interested or, even better, knows of an organisation we could channel the help through, please contact us: [bobbiejohs@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:bobbiejohs@yahoo.co.uk) or 01242 863317 *Rich and Bobbie Johns*

*Paul Wilson is a Community Companion whose interest has been stirred! So we asked him to tell us about:*  
**The Anabaptist Connection.**



**It has surprised and delighted me to find a growing connection between the Northumbria Community, representing the Celtic tradition, and the Anabaptist tradition.** One expression of this link is the growing partnership between the Community and the International Baptist Theological Seminary, an Anabaptist foundation in Prague. Another is

an event on 3rd May 2008, planned jointly by the Community and the Anabaptist Network, exploring the parallels between Anabaptist and Celtic spirituality.

#### **So who are the Anabaptists?**

The Anabaptists began in 1525, less than eight years after the start of the Protestant Reformation. They shared much in common with the Reformers, but they wanted to be more radical. The Christendom model, shared by Roman Catholics and Reformers, viewed Europe as 'already Christian', and enshrined this in a strong state-church link, in which the religion of citizens was determined by the ruler, and perpetuated by infant baptism. The radicals stood for freedom of religion, and therefore opposed the state-church alliance and infant baptism. By daring to baptise adult believers, who (like everyone in Europe) had already been baptised as infants, they angered both Protestants and Catholics. The term 'ana-baptist' ('ana' means 'again') was a label given to the radicals by their opponents, who felt (rightly) that 're-baptism' implied that their own practice of baptism was being indirectly criticised as invalid. The fact that 're-baptising' was punishable by death simply makes clear how deep the state-church alliance really was.

The Anabaptist movement spread rapidly in central Europe, particularly among the poor, from 1525 to 1540. Few Anabaptist leaders lived long; the State (Catholic or Protestant) executed most of them within five years of starting their public ministries. Their followers spread eastwards to avoid persecution, and some eventually fled to America, forming 'Mennonite' churches (after Menno Simons, one of the few early leaders to survive to the age of 50).

One of the famous Anabaptist stories is that of Dirk Willems, a Dutch Anabaptist imprisoned for his faith. Having escaped, he was pursued over the ice by a prison guard.

The guard fell through the ice. Willems turned back to rescue him, only to find himself arrested, and subsequently burned at the stake.

#### **That was then...this is now.**

Until recently, most church historians regarded the Anabaptists as heretics on the margins of Christendom. So references to them were mainly confined to footnotes, or brief dismissive summaries, based not on their own writings but on those of their enemies. And, to be fair, the movement was not without its excesses, including an attempt to impose the Anabaptist faith on the city of Munster – a contradiction of everything that the founders of the movement stood for.

In 1944, Harold Bender made a landmark speech entitled 'The Anabaptist Vision', which began a wave of interest in Anabaptism as having something to say to the contemporary church in post-Christendom society.

#### **So, what's the connection?**

Although the Northumbria Community's roots are in the Desert Fathers and the Celtic Saints, both much earlier than the Anabaptists, what they all have in common is a readiness to embrace the 'heretical imperative' – to value freedom of conscience rather than coercion, and to take the consequences. All three movements had been marginalized – the Desert Fathers because of the nominality of the Church, the Celtic Saints by the Synod of Whitby, and the Anabaptists by the power of the state-church alliance. Arguably, these all spring from the 'Christianisation' of the Roman Empire by Constantine.

William Stringfellow's words, much loved in the Northumbria Community, could equally have been written of the early Anabaptist communities:

*'Dynamic and erratic, spontaneous and radical, audacious and immature, committed if not altogether coherent, ecumenically open and often experimental, visible here and there, now and then, but unsettled institutionally, almost monastic in nature, but most of all enacting a fearful hope for human life in society.'*

Parallel to Stringfellow's book ('An Ethic for Christians and Other Aliens in a Strange Land') is 'The Politics of Jesus' by the Anabaptist writer John Howard Yoder. Both see the 'principalities and powers' of the New Testament as enshrined in political, economic and religious empires, which hold people insidiously in their snare. The gospel is not only about forgiveness, but also about liberation from these powers by allegiance to a new King. Anabaptists make much of the teachings of Jesus as the basis of community, and so echo Bonhoeffer's plea for a 'new monasticism', based on 'an uncompromising allegiance to the sermon on the mount.'

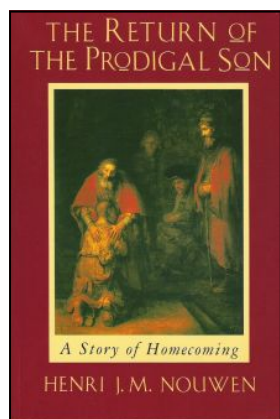
I first encountered Anabaptism in 1987 through attending Workshop, a Christian Study programme on which I now teach. Workshop fits well with my values as a friend of the Northumbria Community; it operates in London, Leeds, Birmingham and Bristol. Anyone who is interested can get more details at [www.workshop.org.uk](http://www.workshop.org.uk) or drop me an e-mail at [ptswilson@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:ptswilson@yahoo.co.uk). *Paul Wilson*



# The Return of the Prodigal

by Henri Nouwen

Publ. Darton, Longman & Todd 1992



**I have read this book several times now, and each time been challenged afresh by its depth and insight.** It is a very readable book, profound and yet so simple. It describes the powerful impact on Nouwen of Rembrandt's painting, 'The Return of the Prodigal' and the spiritual journey that unfolded as he meditated on the parable illustrated by the masterpiece.

Nouwen's exploration touches on the deepest desires of our human spirits: to be embraced by love, to know acceptance, to be cherished, to know homecoming, rest, safety, forgiveness. This yearning often conflicts with those compulsions, fears and anxieties that drive us to run away - physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually.

Nouwen reflects on each character and scene in the parable: the younger son's rejection of his home and roots, and his subsequent homecoming and restoration; the elder son's insecurity, jealousy and vengefulness; and the father's love and compassion for both of his sons.

Sermons about the Prodigal Son, often focus on the rebellion of the younger son, and the need for 'unbelievers' to repent and have faith. Having accompanied Nouwen on his reflective journey with this painting, it struck me that the Elder Son is also a prodigal. His 'lostness' is harder to reach because wedded to his desire to be dutiful, acceptable, and 'good' is what Nouwen describes as a 'moralistic intensity'. He sees his brother as a rival for the love of his father and others, and so everything is a proving ground, whereby his identity is derived from being better, more deserving. I personally found this the most challenging aspect of the book as it describes the snares along my own faith journey of trying to be 'respectable', liked, accepted, and so failing to be authentic.

The book ends with a challenge to love as the father and be loved as the son; to come home, and welcome others as they arrive.

*Anita Haigh*

*You may be interested to know that there is a popular retreat offered at the Nether Springs which is based on this book. It's called 'The Story of a Homecoming' and is next set to run 1st—4th October.*

*The Nether Springs was relatively quiet over the Easter Weekend, whilst the Workshop activities were happening elsewhere...we asked Ann Brown to tell us about what went on:*

## 'The Passion of His Love'

**Over the Easter weekend, several of us gathered to reflect on 'The Passion of His Love'.** Most of us will never forget our pilgrimage to the 'Garden of Gethsemane'. Using a little 'timing licence' and liturgy to focus our thoughts back to Jerusalem, on Friday night we gathered in the Prayer Garden in the chill night air. Two burning braziers gave only sufficient light to see the shadowy movement of those gathered there. It was not difficult to imagine the scene in the courtyard where the disciples stood hidden in the shadows, waiting and watching.

Saturday was a great contrast - in space and visibility! We walked to the high spot of Dancing Green Hill, to the panoramic landscape of hills and fields one way and the sea the other. It was not the crowded scene of Jerusalem of Good Friday but the emptiness of Easter Saturday,

when hope was gone. After sharing a liturgy we lapsed into silence and personal meditation. The words 'He died that we might live' lingered in our thoughts. Confident in the knowledge of Easter morning we could not begin to understand the hopelessness that was felt on that first Easter Saturday, except in the emptiness around us. Sunday was an early start to get to St Cuthbert's cave for the celebration of the first Easter morning. The liturgy was followed by a new joyful song and dance which one of the pilgrims taught us the previous evening. After a breakfast of hot cross buns we were off again, to church on Holy Island, followed by the Renewal of Vows with community folk gathered in the Gospel Garden. This brief description of the weekend cannot begin to capture the atmosphere of waiting and watching, the expectation, and the great sense of Christian community that filled the place. The sense of occasion was enhanced by the creative activities - sharing in making an Easter garden, and cooking hot cross buns. A truly memorable weekend.

*Ann Brown*

*Lynda Gardham is curate at St. Peters, Monkseaton, and when she invited the Community to be involved in this great day out, we jumped at the chance:*

## Turning the Tide

A few weeks ago, six Anglican churches from the Tynemouth Deanery held an event called 'Turning the Tide'. We were given the run of our local Middle School for a Saturday, and presented a variety of workshops and activities. Our aim was to make 'church' more accessible and enjoyable. The workshops varied – from Bishop Paul talking about the Holy Spirit, (surprisingly popular!) to puppets, godly play, dance, prayer and more. The circus skills workshop was one of the highlights of the day, and it was wonderful to see our local M.P. and the Mayor of North Tyneside spinning plates there. (There were lots of comments about 'politicians and spin'!!) We had a Northumbrian piper, a local singer/songwriter, football, magic shows, storytelling, bouncy castle and a puppet show. There were several stalls selling Christian material and fair trade items, including Lindisfarne Scriptorium manned by David & Wendy Ward, and Brenda with a Cloisters stall. We served coffee, tea and smoothies and provided a free lunch for all. Our day finished with a lovely time of worship Northumbria-style led by Jeff & Jill Sutheran.

We wanted to encourage local churches to work together to make an impact on our community. This type of event hadn't been tried here before which is why the support we had from the Northumbria Community was so important. As well as the worship, Norma Wise and Norma Charlton created a sacred space for us, and Claire-Louise Byrne led a dance workshop.

Over 200 people came for the day - a lot of young families but a good spread of ages - mainly church folk but not all, by any means. We hope to build on this and deepen the co-operation between our local Anglican churches, but also move beyond denomination, and maybe hold a coast churches festival next year.

*Lynda Gardham*

**Colin Symes** in Edinburgh told me this a short while ago:

*"I have a wonderful opportunity afforded to me to pray with the Scottish Parliament in their 'Time for Reflection' on Wed 13 June. As it is the first such time after Columba's Day on June 9, I hope to bring to them a remembrance of the original patron of Scotland, and to end with prayer in the Gaelic"*

It's too late to watch him speaking live on Holyrood TV, but you can watch a recording on the parliament's website at <http://www.holyrood.tv/library.asp?title=Time%20For%20Reflection&section=29>

If you can enter that address accurately, that is...

*We asked Bill Seddon to tell us about this retreat he seemed to enjoy:*

## On Being a Man

4th - 6th May 2006

**Our weekend exploring male spirituality began appropriately enough with a journey, as the five men in our Church Home Group started out from North West London.**

On arrival, any doubts we may have had were quickly dispelled by the warm Nether Springs welcome.

After Evening Prayer eight of us gathered together with James (Hawes) who led us through a whistle stop tour of what is masculine spirituality, the state of men in society today and some of the issues men need to address. It all seemed rather daunting but sharing Compline by candlelight brought a tangible sense of peace and a certainty that this was where God wanted us to be.



The rest of the weekend was more relaxed but also challenging. We looked at how boys become men, the lack of role models in modern society to help in the transition and a consequent tendency to continue behaving like boys as we play with our grown-up toys. Some slightly uneasy shuffling was witnessed at this point as we thought about the GPS systems and cameras that we had been playing with on the way! We considered the struggle men have to take responsibility; to be comfortable with our bodies; to explore emotions and to live in the present. Teaching was interspersed with exercises. Would we have volunteered to do them? Probably not, but afterwards we were glad we had. Seven of us walked to Cuthbert's Cave and back; a time to laugh and enjoy being together. There were helpful insights into Jesus, a real man, who faced the same irritations and tiredness that we do. We considered our fathers, celebrating their good points and accepting the negatives. Finally we faced up to the fact that life has two halves. The first is one of growth and competition, whilst the second is a time to rest in God's promises. The danger of course is to believe life is only about ascending and we turn into old fools.

There was something very special and reassuring about fitting our weekend's activities into the monastic rhythm where our relationship with God came first. Too often we squeeze God into the gaps of our busy lives. Perhaps we didn't learn many answers but some of the questions are clearer and I left with a feeling of excitement for the future.

*Bill Seddon*

## *Iona Farley was amongst the group who gathered for* **Easter Workshop in the North.**

**Nestled in the lush green hills of South Yorkshire lays an oasis, and it was to this wonderful place that those who joined the 'Easter Workshop in the North' weekend were drawn** - to drink deeply of relationships, of the peace, the beauty of nature, and of the one who gives us streams of living water.

We came with our baggage, our worries and concerns, our joys and our hopes, and we found a place amongst friends to abandon them. Literally. Under the stars, around a fire, we surrendered symbolically all that we cherish and find security in, to the flames. In an act of faith we gave back to God all the good things he has given to us. Not a comfortable task, to abandon what is good! Burning the rubbish is easy, but to say "Lord you can have my husband, my children, my home, family, friends and my job, and do what you will with them" - there was something very significant in the act of surrendering all that we love back to the Lord.

In our oasis we shared with one another as we ate the fabulous meals prepared for us. We laughed, and sang, and found joy in a swing. We were blessed by the life-giving rays of the sun, which were so welcome after the long months of winter. And we enjoyed having a place to meet on the journey, to share. Through talks, workshops and small groups, we looked at the story so far. To look back over the memory stones was an exhortation to keep journeying, to keep asking: 'how then shall we live?'

But during these discussions a new question was posed: 'who to you are the least of them?' God has laid on the hearts of the Urban Space team the verses in Matthew 25: 31-40, but particularly verse 40 - "And the King shall answer

**"Who to you are the least of them?"...it is a question which requires a response**

and say to them, truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of mine, even the least of them, you did it to me."

They began to share with us their heart for the dispossessed, for the vulnerable, and for those who have no voice in society - and the ways in which they have responded to that call. And this question impacted me. Who to you are the least of them? I think the answer is probably different for us all. But it is a question that requires a response, because we worship the Lord of infinite compassion who has created us in His image. *Iona Farley*

**C**olumba's day was June 9, so this comes just a little bit late...but you may be interested in a download of a modern setting of Columba's acrostic hymn, *Adiutor Laborantium*, which is available at <http://www.triplepipe.net/music.html>

## *We asked Joanna Brown to tell us how things are at* **Nether Springs**

**Here at The Mother House** we are in another season of change, with a number of folks moving on from the monastery team or having less day-to-day involvement. In addition, Norman and Ingrid, who are key to the life here, are having to stand aside to some degree for six months while Ingrid has treatment for breast cancer.

This, and other changes, mean that we are faced with the possibility of having to cancel retreats and close the house at short notice. Please pray with us that God will send the people of his choice, so that the life and work of the Mother House can be sustained over the next few months.

*Joanna Brown*

*Norma Charlton writes:*

## **Requests for the Prayer Guide**

**You may have noticed in the PG that on Mondays we 'Start the Week'** by featuring happenings in the week ahead. We would like to open this up to some of the events that Companions may be involved in - to reflect what is happening in the wider Community.

So if you have things in your diary that you feel may be of interest to the Community, then do please forward them to us for inclusion.

The Prayer Guides run from July to Oct, Nov to Feb and March to June. Obviously, what is published will depend on available space as well as suitability.

Any other comments or suggestions regarding the PG are welcome! Please send contributions and comments to:

**[prayerguide@northumbriacommunity.org](mailto:prayerguide@northumbriacommunity.org)**

**Allelon** describes itself as "a multi-generational network of missional church leaders, schools and parachurch organizations which envisions, inspires, engages, resources, trains and educates leaders for the church and its mission in our culture." Someone spotted an interesting major piece referring to the Northumbria Community in their latest newsletter, which is here: <http://www.allelon.org/articles/article.cfm?id=371>. Type that address carefully...





## The newsy bit

**We've kept our ear to the ground, and here's what we managed to pick up:**

**Pete Askew will be married to Catherine Clasen** in her native USA on August 11th. Then they will have a wedding blessing at Nether Springs in early September. Of course, we don't want them to be away from the house team any longer than necessary... Just kidding. We pray God's blessing upon them in their preparations and in their travelling.

**Liesl Richter, will marry Dom Filippi** on June 23rd in Melbourne Australia. Liesl spent some time on the house team a while ago. What is it about that house team? They will visit Nether Springs together, in November.

It is hoped to start new **Community Groups** in **Keynsham** near Bristol, and in **Staffordshire**. **Drew in Pennsylvania USA** is hoping to start a group there, when he takes up his new appointment with a Methodist church. A new group in **Wyvern** will meet for the first time, August 18<sup>th</sup>. Please contact **Norma Charlton** with any questions relating to Community Groups:

[norma.charlton@northumbriacommunity.org](mailto:norma.charlton@northumbriacommunity.org) or tel. 0191 487 8065 (if any other member of her family answers, ask them to write down your name and number so Norma can return your call!)

The new **Cloisters website** at [www.cloistersonline.com](http://www.cloistersonline.com) is off to a good start! Ian Corsie reported in the last issue about the new, secure online ordering facilities, and the site has already been generating new business for Cloisters. If you've not used it yet, do go have a look. These special offers can't possibly be left there much longer!

Very hot off the press: **Gordon & Margaret Joice** have become great-grandparents with the arrival of baby Amelia Joice, born at 11.30pm on 13th June to Zoe & Philip. She really *doesn't* look old enough to be a great-grandma does she...

Work has started on the **renovation of St Cuthbert's House** in North Sunderland. People in hard hats and big boots (that's us Sutherans) are walking around trying to look like they know what they're doing... It's very exciting and very daunting in waves, so do remember us as we set about creating a place of welcome and hospitality.

Another project underway is the creation of a new book, whose working title should explain all there is to know about it: **'The Rough Guide to the Northumbria Community'** will do what it says on the cover...watch this space.

**Roy & Shirley Searle**, who are presently living in Ballydugan, Northern Ireland, are beginning to think about their re-entry into Northumberland, and have purchased the rather splendid home in Wooler formerly occupied by Nancy Hammond.

See if you can guess what's next:

**Nancy Hammond** has purchased a new home in Alnwick, and will move there when Roy & Shirley Searle return from Ireland.

**Nick Haigh** is preparing to begin ordination training in Oxford, and will be away from home Monday to Friday, just at a time when **Erin** starts school, and **Anita** starts a 'new' job. So lots to be mindful of there in our prayers!

**Rob & Catherine Davies** successfully made their much-anticipated move to Alnwick recently. In order to welcome them to Northumberland, BT seem to be making it inordinately difficult for them to actually communicate with anyone now they're here - so do pray for their new telephone pole to arrive quickly. We're serious!

Do please send us your snippets of news and happenings for this page, just a sentence or two will do! Send it to [caim@northumbriacommunity.org](mailto:caim@northumbriacommunity.org). You wouldn't believe what a smile it brings to our faces when something drops in unexpectedly!

**© CAIM is the official newsletter of the Northumbria Community.**

Northumbria Community Trust, Registered Charity No: 1099503

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