



*An open temporary community, creatively exploring continuity and tension between the world and church, nature and grace, psychology and theology.*

#### Newsletter

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**Conference dates**  
**28th April - 2nd May 2014 in Swanwick, Derbyshire**  
*Put the date in your diary today and book soon!*

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## Editor's Note

By the time you receive this newsletter you might well be entering into the pre Christmas 'madness', so go on, put on the kettle on, relax and have a read through this, our last newsletter before the Conference in April/May 2014. Hopefully, it will encourage you to book if you haven't already done so. I for one, am really looking forward to it having been in correspondence with two of our speakers, Trevor Dennis and Roy Searle, whose lively and thought provoking accounts of their journey to date and their hopes for the Conference have really inspired me.

Last month I was fortunate enough to be walking the Thames path with friends, in glorious late summer warmth. As I reflect upon this experience, I am struck by the differing configurations in which we walked. Sometimes alone and at times in groups of two, three or more. Our conversations flowed and ebbed and there were times of companionable silence.

As well as the flow and ebb of our conversations and groupings, I couldn't help but also be aware of the flow and ebb of the river, the falling leaves carried in the current; sometimes slowly and gently and sometimes swirling restlessly before moving to the shelter of the bank,



the rush of the water through the weirs and the slow ripple of the tributaries joining the great river, the majestic willows providing both shelter and gracious beauty and the bridges allowing us to safely cross to another path. Each of these images provide useful metaphors to contemplate.

At one of our many 'tea stops' and in conversation with my friends, I spoke about our forthcoming Conference. The title and, in particular, the subheading 'playing in the shallows ....diving in the depths' caused some merriment as they considered the theme and decided that 'floundering in the shallows....drowning in the depths' was more appropriate to them! It struck me then, that each of us will be able to substitute our own subtitle depending on our own experience and

our mood and that it might well change daily, maybe even hourly!

However, the theme for the Conference, I believe, provides a rich and fertile metaphor for life. This, combined with the varied and creative approaches the Conference offers; worship and time for contemplation, keynote talks, workshops, time in group discussion and reflection with plenty of opportunity for delegates to relax in the beautiful surroundings of the Hayes, provides something unique and special. For further information about the Conference see [www.continuingthejourney.com](http://www.continuingthejourney.com)  
Tel: 0115 871 8564



Linda Watkinson

## Roy Searle tells us more about himself and something of his heart to help and encourage growth in others, both within and outside of the church.

A Geordie by birth and persuasion my childhood held nothing but love, security and a great deal of happiness. My parents were amazing. It's true that they went through a slightly difficult stage during my teenage years but they grew out of it! Life during my adolescent years was not easy. Moving away from my home town to a very different area and starting a new school was challenging. Sport and socialising took precedence over study and it wasn't until several years later that I engaged with formal learning, something which I look back on with regret.

I come from an unchurched background and came to faith whilst training to be an Outward Bound instructor in the Cairngorms of Scotland, disciplined in those early days by a Catholic charismatic and a member of the Brethren assembly. The miracle was not so much that I was nurtured in my new found faith but that these two believers discovered that they were brothers in Christ. It was an experience that was to be deeply formative, as I have carried a heart for peace and reconciliation and a passion to remove the prejudices, misunderstandings, ignorance, fear and other obstacles that get in the way of relationships and community. Nurtured by Christians from opposite ends of the theological spectrum, in my confusion, I became a Baptist! Married, I studied at the Lebanon Missionary Bible College, Cardiff University and later Newcastle University. Following ordination, I spent most of the 1980s church planting in Teeside before moving on to lead a ministry team in Sunderland. During this time I was at the forefront of charismatic, evangelical ministry yet combining it with a strong commitment to be good news to the poor. I witnessed the damage that political and economic policies wreaked upon individuals and communities, as we saw unemployment rise dramatically. Along with this came an increase in physical and mental health issues, breakdown in relationships, damaged or low self-esteem and the loss of hope, creating innumerable challenges and opportunities for the church to be both prophetic, apostolic and pastoral in its response. This experience, together with a disillusionment with some of the attitudes, expressions and power plays within church life, caused me to ask some searching questions about what faith really meant and what the nature and purpose of the church had become.



Photograph by Kim Gooding

**Whilst we were singing songs of growth and blessing, pronouncing great and extravagant faith claims and promises that spoke of revival, I had this unerring feeling that we were being taken as a church in the West into exile. We were increasingly being captured by a consumerist spirit that not only had the power to deceive but to damage and destroy individuals and societies. In my questioning I drew coherence and inspiration from the Desert and Celtic monastic traditions.**

Seeking God and asking some radical questions about what it means to be a disciple of Christ in a changing world, led to the formation of the Northumbria Community back in the late 1980s. Since 1992, we have lived in the Cheviot Hills of Northumberland and as one of the founders of the Community, my role has changed over the ensuing years. I spend a lot of my time now, still asking questions, travelling extensively across Europe encouraging people to seek and love God, to realise the journey of transformation that Christ makes possible and to live thoughtfully and generously with a heart for justice, peace and the poor.

The focus of the Conference, 'Flow and Ebb', conjures images and memories of sailing around the Scottish Inner Hebrides

It also speaks to me about the rhythms, patterns and seasons that shape and influence our lives, intentionally and unintentionally, of periods of engagement and activity, being proactive, of movement and momentum as well as those times of withdrawal and of change, being reactive, reflecting and stillness.

In my keynote address I would like to explore something of what it means to practice

the presence of God in the midst of ordinary life, how to create awareness of the sacred in the midst of busy activism, how to appreciate life's seasons and how the transforming grace and love of God brings depth, meaning and hope to human life in society. However, I am INFP in Myers Briggs terms so it will probably change by the time of the Conference!

For those who will be attending the Conference, I would like to bring encouragement, hope and a desire to seek God and to nurture an openness to new possibilities and opportunities.

I look forward to meeting individuals from all walks of life. I loathe the sacred secular divide which permeates large sections of church life. I would say that over half the people who connect with the Northumbria Community are those who are unchurched or dechurched and much of my own time is spent with people beyond the walls of the church. For example, my closest friend is a counsellor and psychotherapist and I am privileged to work with her as an Associate of the Baobab Centre, which is based in York. She has provided me with the opportunity of seeing how faith is deeply transformative and how spirituality can majorly influence for good, relationships and practices in the secular workplace.





## Trevor Dennis writes about his personal journey and his thoughts about the Conference.

I was brought up as a Christian in the Church of England, low church, singing as a boy in the choir. I wanted to be a priest but I went up to St John's College, Cambridge to read Classics. 'Don't do Theology, dear, it'll spoil your faith,' my Mum had said. When I was at St John's I fell under the spell of Stephen Sykes, the Dean and Keith Sutton, the Chaplain, two quite outstanding people and full of enthusiasm for theology and the doing of it. I enjoyed my Classics, and it was when I read Homer's Iliad in the original that I first knew I was reading great literature. I was a bit of a



late developer on that front but when I did change to Theology, I at once felt in my element and it did radically change my faith. It took me to a place my Mum wouldn't have begun to understand.

In Cambridge I met Caroline and we fell in love. 'Is she a Christian?' was my Mum's first question. I still recall the look on her face when I told her she wasn't and alas, she never really came to terms with that until she was near death. Parkinson's somehow released her from the narrow confines of her faith and allowed her true humanity to show itself.

I stayed on at Cambridge to do a PhD on Gregory of Nyssa under the great

Geoffrey Lampe. 'Remember, you'll be the expert on the subject' he told me. For him to say such a thing to me, when he was a scholar of international repute, was extraordinary but that is how he treated me. It was truly humbling.

Cambridge marked me for ever but I often say that if you want to understand where I'm coming from, then you have to understand Caroline and Salisbury and Wells Theological College, where I taught Old Testament Studies between 1982 and the end of 1993. Caroline is an atheist, very supportive of all I do, always playing a significant part in the communities we've belonged to over the years but still an atheist. That means she doesn't have much patience with the Church when it gets silly! Salisbury and Wells was perhaps the most liberal and most comprehensive of all the Church of England colleges, and the academic staff taught and preached as we believed. We did it straight and it got me into a habit I've never lost. My colleagues at Salisbury wrote books. So I did too, following their example, and to date I've written six books on narratives in the OT and the Gospels, six collections of stories and poems composed for preaching and a children's Bible.

After Salisbury, I went to Chester Cathedral, where Caroline and I spent over sixteen very happy years. I retired in 2010. In two sabbaticals I started attending the local Quaker Meeting. Now I attend Meeting every other week and my parish church in between. My parish church is great but the Quakers, turning their backs on hierarchy and its absurd trappings and their not forming their boundaries out of blocks of doctrine, have come to mean a great deal to me. Then there's that *silence*, of a depth and a lack of self-consciousness I've encountered nowhere else.

I've never lost my faith. It has grown with me, as has my passion for teaching the Bible, exposing its glories, and being honest about its flaws. I once accused Matthew of blasphemy from the pulpit in the Cathedral! I count myself very fortunate indeed, a terrific education (I was the first to go to university in my

family), Caroline (we're still married), four great children, three lovely sons in law, one lovely daughter in law and four amazing grandchildren, who all by themselves remind me of what matters. There is still enough work to do such as contributing to the Continuing the Journey Conference but not too much.

**My own journey feels like one of slow, continual growth but I'm still such a long way from coming to terms with the love and forgiveness of God. The wonderful title, 'Flow and Ebb', puts me in mind of the prayer of lament and complaint that bulks so large in the Hebrew Scriptures. The Christian Church has never embraced it and most Christians are not aware of it. I wasn't myself, until I discovered it through my teaching at Salisbury. It's so poignant, so brutally honest, fiery, heart-rending; it demands God's attention, creates intimacy. That's clear from the Moses narratives and in my reading of the book of Job. I mean to concentrate on those works in my keynote address. They are so important for our approach to God, for our work with those in trouble, for our own dark times. Moses is described as 'soothing God's face' (a literal translation of Exodus 32.11). Writing of such daring and poetic power is exhilarating.... but he shakes his fist at God too and Job does that for twenty chapters, until finally out of the pitch black God appears. I hope those of you who come to the Conference might be as excited by these works as I am and might be reminded once more of the importance of honesty and straightforwardness in all our dealings with God.**

As for me, I'm looking forward to meeting people, listening to them and learning from them. After all, such encounters are almost always the best bits about conferences.

## Alison Balaam writes about her experience of Conference.....

I am a counsellor and a Christian. I try to live reflectively and to integrate all the different aspects of my life into a cohesive whole. Often I feel on the edge of things, which can be a very lonely place to be. When I first came to Continuing the Journey in 2008, encouraged by my sister-in-law, I was bowled over. Here was a large group of people who, though massively varied in their personalities and life experience, shared my passions and concerns. Everything about the Conference nurtured me: the stimulating talks by experts in their field; the extraordinarily uplifting worship each morning; the informal conversations over meals; and most especially the members of the small group, who graciously accepted me, as and where I was but then lovingly, graciously and persistently encouraged me to move on from that place.

I didn't go to the Conference in 2010 as I was having too much of an exciting time doing other things. In 2012, mindful of the old proverb about never being able to step into the same river twice, I couldn't quite believe it would be the same again but it was. I arrived exhausted, discouraged, jaded and almost ready to give up. When I left four days later, nothing in my outward circumstances had changed, yet I felt that I was on the edge of a new way of living. There's been much to work through since then but Continuing the Journey was a real turning point. I've never been anywhere like it before or since, which is why I shall definitely be there in 2014, making the very most of this extra special Conference.

.....and looks forward to the next

.....playing in the shallows



**Come on in, it's lovely!**

Use the details below to ensure your place

## Our Conference is nearly here!

.....diving in the depths



Photographs by courtesy of Keith Evans.

## Conference dates: 28th April - 2nd May 2014

Further details about the Conference can be downloaded from our website

[www.continuingthejourney.com](http://www.continuingthejourney.com)

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