

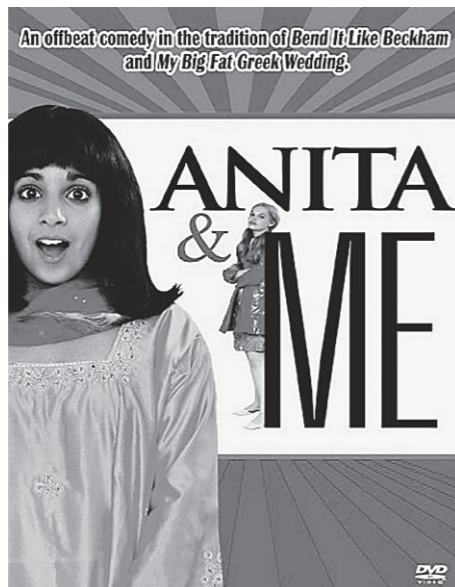
## 'One World Week' - Film Discussion Night - 'Anita and me'

... seeking to engage with the issues raised by mixed race and religion in society

In a new venture for WRB, we were encouraged to rent, buy or borrow the film 'Anita and Me' by Meera Syal, and then we arranged to meet together to discuss the issues raised.

The film focuses on the relationship between Meena - a teenage Indian girl with a traditional Indian family and upbringing, growing up in the midlands Black Country in the early 70's, and her friend Anita - a typically rebellious British teenage blonde from a broken home. It is a gritty portrayal, not only of life at that time, but also of the tensions felt by Meena; with her cross cultural life. It is in a large part a biopic of Meera Syal's own experiences of growing up in Britain.

Our discussions focused on these tensions and particularly whether it is an accurate portrayal of our own reactions to meeting and befriending people of other faiths and cultural backgrounds. For the most part, we found ourselves being quite inspired by the committed and disciplined style of life embraced by the Indian family, and recognised that we actually knew little about



the tensions that they, and other cultures, still face in this country.

Whilst the film was sometimes difficult to follow and didn't have a concise and clear ending, we recognised that it didn't shirk the issues and brought us into sharp debate about how our lives have all been influenced, and all for the good, by those who embrace a far different background, culture and religion to ourselves. For these reasons, it was a fitting end to the 'One World Week' celebrations.

Phil Dunning

## WRB Churches Together

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St Andrews	Ann Merrick	20626068
St Teilos	Chris Lewis	20657477
St Mary's	Mr Lynne Clarke	20626315
St Thomas'	Mrs Rhona Evans	20628784
Whitchurch Methodist	Chris Stanley	20613552
Tabernacle	Gwyneth Llewellyn	20628094

## Dates for the diary

Gathered Together for Prayer meetings are held at 10.30am on the last Friday of each month, followed by tea and coffee. See noticeboard in your churches for the venue. **Everyone is warmly welcome** to attend these services and we look forward to seeing you.

**Book Group** 15th January: 'What's so amazing about Grace' by Philip Yancey.

**Week of Prayer for Christian Unity** 18-25th January 2009.

**Next Meeting of WRB CT Council** 7.30pm 13th January 2009 at St Thomas' Church

## Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2009: Reconcile Your People

God spoke to the Prophet Ezekiel and said "they shall be one in my hand... They will be my people and I shall be their God".

Each year the theme for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is developed by one country which produces outline material that is adapted for use in other parts of the world. Korea is the selected country for 2009 and they have chosen Ezekiel 37.15-28 and have prepared material to be adapted for local use. We are delighted that Rev Jacob Jin Chul Park of the Wales Korean Church in Cardiff will be our speaker at the Service of Unity on Sunday 25 January 2009.



The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity traditionally takes place between 18-25 January lasting for 8 days and was originally called an Octave of Prayer. Details of church services throughout this week will be advertised in all churches in January.



Whitchurch, Rhiwbina and Birchgrove

# Churches Together

Issue No 3 December 2008

Summer has passed; the holidays are over. As autumn fades into winter we can look back over the past few months in thanksgiving for the blessings received by WRB Churches Together.

We have joined over supper in support of the Home4U project, and been humbled by the moving personal stories of visiting asylum seekers; we have taken over the RGN minibus operation and are finding our way forward with this exciting addition to our work in Whitchurch, Rhiwbina & Birchgrove; and we have continued to meet and pray together at our Gathered Together for Prayer meetings remembering that 'where two or three come together in my name, I am with them'.

We have also enjoyed the first meeting of our WRB CT Book Group which meets at St Mary's once a month and been enlightened and uplifted by the greatest lesson of all as seen through 'Tuesdays with Morrie' by Mitch Albom.

As we look forward to Advent, it is a time for us to prepare, reflect, and wait in joyful anticipation of the coming of Jesus our Saviour. There will be many opportunities for us to share in fellowship over this period, whether it be at services, reflections, advent house groups, or prayer groups. We look forward to another year which will bring us more challenges and I hope that we can continue to approach these with our deep sense of unity. May the good Lord continue to bless us and unite us in His love.

Rosemary

## A garden as a place of Sanctuary

Gill: 'We need to find a way of raising the profile of the Home4U project and asylum in Cardiff to reach a wider audience'.

Fenella: 'Well, you could always enter a garden at RHS Cardiff in the Spring which could depict the plight of asylum through the medium of plants'

So began our journey. What started as a casual exchange between friends has taken us on the most extraordinary and exciting journey towards RHS Cardiff 2009.

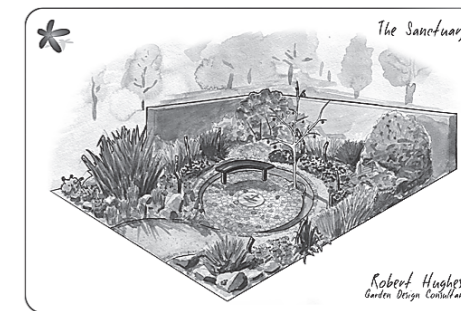
It has been a step of faith, believing that if this was meant to be, then God would find us all the resources that we would need; and He has not let us down thus far.

We have been blessed by the arrival of an inspiring young designer, Rob Hughes, who had been looking for an opportunity to design a Show Garden but lacked the subject; and the willingness of a fabulous landscaper Paul Melvin who also wanted to exhibit but needed the opportunity and confidence to take that step.

Between them they will work with us throughout our project.

Rob has worked up the final design from our perceptions of asylum, and from speaking to asylum seekers themselves.

We are in awe of his design skill and as I write our design, which is called 'Sanctuary', is being considered by the RHS panel.



We are indebted to Rob and Paul for donating their time and talents, and at no cost - a truly generous gift. And it is a tall order for these young men who will be allowed only 6 days to build the garden, in time for the 3 day show starting on April 10th; and just one day to demolish it!

Assuming that our design is successful, we shall be looking for volunteers to help with manning the garden throughout the Show, and engaging with visitors on the asylum issue. More about that in the months to come.

Sponsorship for the garden in terms of materials and plants is beginning to come in.

Please pray that we shall be able to meet the costs of these. If you know of organisations who you feel might be willing to sponsor us, or feel that you would be able to make a small donation, please have a word with Gill Peace or me.

And please pray that God will enable us to use this opportunity to reach thousands of visitors to the RHS Spring Show and open their eyes to the reality of asylum in our city.

Seeking every opportunity to worship, witness and work together as one sign of God's Kingdom of Unity, Justice and Peace for all people

# A night on the streets of Cardiff

On the wet and windy night of 23rd October, from 7pm to 7am, the five members of the Home4U team slept out on Queen Street.

The purpose of the sleep-out was to raise awareness of the Government policy which makes refused asylum seekers destitute, a policy that is both unjust and ineffective.

In addition to raising awareness, sponsorship of the sleep-out raised funds for Home4U, a project that provides accommodation and subsistence money for destitute asylum seekers. The total amount raised is not yet known, but it will be in excess of £1500.

Many passers-by, including Jenny Randerson AM and Julie Morgan MP, stopped to ask what we were doing and without any hint of a request many people made donations. Most were from young people and students, each giving small amounts, and by

the end of the sleep-out we had been given £182.40 on the street.

Sadly we met other homeless and destitute people in the course of the night too. One was a young Polish boy who had been homeless for six months, mostly sleeping on the streets. Another, a destitute asylum seeker managing by working illegally - what choice has he? ...and he donated £10 to us and encouraged us.

Roy Jenkins, well-known broadcaster, Baptist minister and Chair of Christians Against Torture, sums up beautifully what the sleep-out was all about in the following statement:

"There are people living on our streets, or sleeping on borrowed floors, terrified of being returned to countries which they have fled hoping to find freedom. Some have been traumatised by war, or endured the horror of torture. They know that their

lives will be in danger if they are sent home. But their claims for asylum have been rejected. Now only the support of friends and caring strangers saves them from complete destitution.

"The local people sleeping out this week know they can never enter fully into the experience of the frightened asylum-seeker - they have warm beds, secure homes and supportive communities to return to. But their one chilly night will be worthwhile if it reminds us of some very vulnerable people living among us. It will achieve even more if it shocks us into demanding that these people are treated with humanity, compassion and justice. I hope it achieves exactly that."

The five Home4U team members are: Frances Ballin, Helen Harries, Steven Hill, Isaac Ukackukwu, Sr Ruth O'Neill.

## Whitchurch, Rhiwbina and Birchgrove Churches Together Book Group

The Churches Together Book Group held its first meeting on 9th October in the Benefice Office above St Mary's.

A group of us, men and women, of different backgrounds and from many different churches, gathered to discuss Mitch Albom's "Tuesdays with Morrie" over tea, coffee and biscuits.

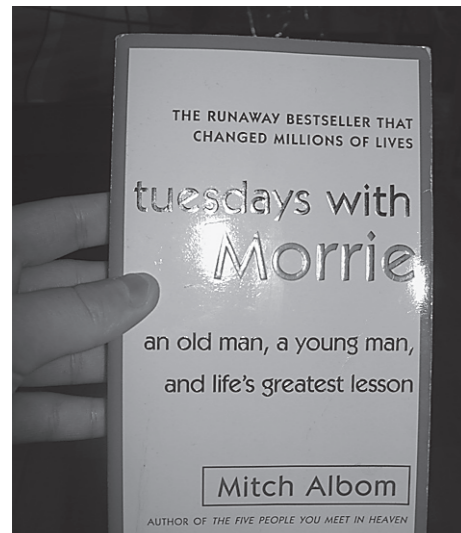
As it was our first meeting, not all of us had managed to

get the time to read the book, but that fact did not seem to hinder conversation. The Rev Dr Trystan Hughes provided a framework for our discussion by highlighting a number of central themes in the book - relationship, suffering, awareness, acceptance, love and today's culture.

We found these useful as a starting point for our thoughts, and they helped stop us from straying too far from the point. We found, as a group, that we shared some opinions and differed in others, but felt we gained much from listening to each other.

The meeting was relaxed and welcoming, so we felt free to share our reflections, even though some of us did not know each other beforehand.

Our next meeting is on 15th January at 11am in the Benefice Office. We shall be discussing 'What's so amazing about Grace' by Philip Yancey. Please come and join in.



## Candles in the Dark

St.Thomas's Birchgrove

Wednesday 3rd, 10th and 17th December at 7.30pm

In the midst of consumerism which we are drawn into, take time to pause and 'be' with God.

Relax with music, readings, silence, candles and prayer, rest in His presence



# 'Birds in a Cage' - Christian Hope for Detained Asylum Seekers

Revd Dr Trystan Owain Hughes, Rectorial Benefice of Whitchurch

A few years back I worked as chaplain's assistant at Campsfield House, Oxford. Campsfield is a Home Office removal centre, where asylum seekers with rejected asylum-claims are held before being sent back to their country of origin. There are 180 male detainees from wide variety of cultures held there, and, while the average stay at the centre is 5 days, some detainees who are on appeal are incarcerated for many months. Eighteen-foot fences, topped with barbed razor wire, surround the centre itself, and the windows are all barred. One detainee summarised his feelings of bondage, oppression, and constraint in a poem:

*'To be in Campsfield is to be a bird in a cage,  
To be Human is not to be an animal,  
I am losing Patience  
Losing Reason'*

Before I started working there, my knowledge of detention and removal centres had been almost exclusively based on the views that I had read and seen in the press and media. These give two polar views of asylum seekers. Many newspapers paint a very negative picture of detainees. A myth of asylum cheats, bogus scroungers, and terrorists has been popularised, and asylum seekers face a culture of disbelief in the United Kingdom today. On the other hand, some present a very different view of the situation. These see the government and its structures as oppressive and harsh. This viewpoint often demonises those who are part of the establishment in detention centres.

At Campsfield, I learnt very quickly that both these pictures are biased, and are the result of fear and prejudice. I discovered that Campsfield is simply a community of people, doing their best to live and work together



in harmony. It is a community that is surviving and functioning in spite of the attitudes from outside. The situation is certainly not ideal for any party. There is, after all, much pain and hurt inside the centre, and I witnessed numerous detainees who show signs of intense anxiety and distress, both as a result of the horrific situations in their home countries from which they were attempting to escape and as a result of their incarceration. They feel they have broken no laws, yet are being treated as criminals by their imprisonment. By seeking asylum they are, after all, simply exercising their fundamental human rights under international law. By and large, staff members at the Centre recognise this and are generally realistic and sympathetic to the detainees.

During my time there, I also realised how integral the chapel is to the community at Campsfield. Those Christian detainees held at the Centre hail from a plethora of denominations. There are Catholics (largely from South America), Orthodox (largely from Eastern Europe), and a large contingent from Pentecostal Free Churches (from various African countries). Many of these are already practising Christians, while others have drifted away from their Church and find that the experience of separation, detention, and removal draws

them back to their faith. 'The poor asylum seeker,' noted one of them in a recent book, 'he has no helper but only God'. Many asylum seekers there, then, find solace in faith and, in particular, in the message of hope and liberation in Scripture. The suffering they encounter in their situation could be described as their own 'desert experience', as they are stripped of everything and face isolation, despair, and loneliness. Through this, many are re-introduced to their faith and to the God of hope and promise. As one detainee wrote in a poem:

*'A voice crying in the desert,  
Echoing,  
Seeking and re-seeking  
The one.  
My soul longs for the one  
Who will bring joy  
And push away my grief'*

Within their solitude, then, a longing for God is reawakened. The chapel team are always there for those Christians who feel this way, and it was inspiring to see the team give comfort and love to such detainees. Yet the security firms who run asylum removal centres are constantly involved in cost-cutting, and there is a real threat that full-time chaplains will be phased-out and will be replaced by chaplains bought in on an hourly basis. 'They will cut corners to save money', asserts Campsfield's chaplain, 'and chaplaincy is the easiest place to save money. The chaplain is a financial liability, he is not value-for-money, you can't quantify his work'. Faith, then, is increasingly sidelined in a place where it is estimated that over 50% of detainees are practising their religion.

Clearly, the Church has little choice but to get involved in such issues. Neutrality is not an option. We must suffer with the marginalized and by doing so we will manifest the mission of Jesus.