

The Manna Society  
Newsletter  
Christmas 2009



*Working with those in need*



*Merry  
Christmas*

## The Heart of Christmas

By

**Margaret Shapland**

Welfare & Advice Worker



*“To celebrate the heart of Christmas is to forget ourselves in the service of others” - Henry C.*

[Link](#)

I was looking at the people who had merited blue plaques in Southwark, the borough in which the Manna Centre is based, and was surprised by the number of those who were involved with social reform such as Charles Dickens, Octavia Hill (who was a pioneer of low-cost housing schemes) and Una Marson (the first black programme maker at the BBC). There are also blue plaques for those who had documented social conditions such as Bert Hardy, whose photographs of deprivation in Britain (especially of the Elephant & Castle) are a lasting testimony to a world where there was little support for those unfortunate enough to be poor or disadvantaged and socially marginalised.

These reformers were struck by the daily experience of seeing poverty on their doorsteps – Dickens, Octavia Hill and Bert Hardy walked the streets of Southwark and I wonder what they would have thought of our centre if they had walked through the doors. One would hope that they would approve of what we do there and why we continue to do so.

### **Being “open to all”**

One of the founding principles of our centre is that the doors would be open to all - to serve anyone who is in need. In recent years, the number of day centres who operate an “open door” policy has been impacted upon by the funding policies of local authorities, as this quote from an eminent researcher in the field of cultural geography notes

*“And, when they do turn to homeless services, they often have to conform to increasingly strict rules and regulations that may not be helpful to them or may not be able to access those services at all. – Jon May, Professor of Geography, Queen Mary College – Geographies of homelessness, hopelessness and hope.*

Centres find themselves unable to serve those who have no local connection to the borough in

which they are seeking help. The reasons why people move around are many; to move from somewhere where there is no employment to where they believe that they can get a job, from other parts of the European Union where London is the stepping-off point for integrating and moving on into employment throughout the UK, from other parts of the UK where they have suffered harassment due to non-acceptance by the established community, for women who are escaping domestic violence, the list goes on. We are lucky in that, thanks to those who help us stay afloat, we can offer a service to such groups

### **Being a place of respite**

Recently, we have seen a number of local authority initiatives that have impacted on rough sleepers.

*“Too often the suggestion is that welfare cutbacks, coupled with more aggressive attempts to ‘reclaim the streets’ by introducing, for example, new police powers and no-drinking zones, have left homeless people with no where to turn” - Jon May (Queen Mary College)*

The centre was definitely a source of respite for many of those who had been sleeping out in the city and been impacted upon by “Operation Poncho” where rough sleepers were woken in the early hours of the morning and their sleeping sites hosed down so they could not return to their sites. Being able to open every day – unlike many other centres in London and having an earlier start at 8.30 a.m. enabled the centre to offer that welcome first hot drink to those who had spent a cold night outside.

### **Being a place where you can get yourself together**

Most of the clients that we see in the advice office are truly trying to get themselves together to make a life for themselves whether it is temporarily on benefits while they look for work, to get the necessary items such as a CSCS card if you are looking for work, to get a roof over your head so that you can give a proper address to a prospective employer.

Most applications for benefits take about one month to process particularly at this time when the number of applications to the DWP has grown. Without proof of a benefit in place, many

hostels or housing projects or private landlords will not entertain a referral to their project.

We are lucky in that we have access to projects such as the winter night shelter – ROBES – in our area and over the months from November to the end of March, we can offer some of our clients a bed for a month while we work together to get them into more permanent accommodation, to find work or just some respite if they have no entitlement to benefits or the right to work in the UK.

*"Christmas will always be in the hearts of God's children everywhere as they extend a helping hand to a friend in need ... as they go about reflecting God's goodness in the little quiet and unheralded expressions of a loving heart ... as they share the light of the world with those who live in darkness." - Jane Hillsmen*

### **A Christmas story for this year**

I feel I can write this story as the individual concerned has moved on but it is a story which started two Christmases ago and has had a happy ending as we come to the close of this year. Two years ago, we put a young man into the ROBES project. He had a substance abuse habit and he was linked into a suitable service and into the ROBES project while we re-settled him.

We found him a place in a hostel and he continued to be "clean" and returned to work. Due to personal circumstances and increased stress, James (as we'll call him) returned to his drug of choice and become homeless and jobless again. He came to me and not to put too fine a point on it, we had a frank discussion about how we could work towards avoiding such a relapse in the future.

We placed him in ROBES again while we looked for suitable accommodation. We found a very good project in an abstinent shared house with others who were going through similar experiences and where peer support was an important strand in recovery, where he would be tested each week and which encouraged people into college, training to help them move on in their lives.

To our great joy, he applied for a job in a charitable organisation where we know he will be well supported in his recovery and he got it.

He is, too, carrying on the tradition of serving others who have fallen upon hard times or whose needs mean that they should be supported in the community. It is a great story of a journey, one that continues still.

*"Christmas is not a time nor a season, but a state of mind. To cherish peace and goodwill, to be plenteous in mercy, is to have the real spirit of Christmas" – Calvin Coolidge*

I would like to offer my thanks to you all for helping us to carry on this work and to wish you a peaceful and joyous Christmas.

### **WE WOULD APPRECIATE DONATIONS OF THE FOLLOWING CLOTHING ITEMS:**

- **Trainers**
- **Jeans**
- **Underwear**
- **Boxer Shorts**
- **Socks**
- **Winter Coats**



## Not to let them “drown”, the art of patience.

By

**Milena Koczaska**

A10 Advice Worker



What is patience? All of us can agree there is one, general definition of patience (maybe each of us would use slightly different words when describing it):

**“Patience** is the state of endurance under difficult circumstances, which can mean persevering in the face of delay or provocation without becoming annoyed or upset; or exhibiting forbearance when under strain, especially when faced with longer-term difficulties”

However, different sorts of patience exist. It is a very simple statement, but I realised it only recently. My friend who used to be my houseguest for a few days made me aware of it during one of our conversations. He is working as a nurse in a hospital, supporting seriously sick and very often older people. My main task as the A10 Nationals Advice Worker at the Manna Day Centre is to support homeless people. We both were a bit surprised when we admitted to one another that neither of us would be willing to swap our roles. He is happy to wash patients, feed them etc and I am happy to carry out my everyday duties, offering my experience and heart to homeless clients (whose problem quite often is alcohol misuse).

Homeless clients often fall into trouble simply because they are living on the street (or squatting). Their environment creates a perfect ground for problems to arise. On the other hand, alcohol makes it difficult for them to settle. The result is that they are continually addressing the same issues.

For example, B like every person who is without a home, job, or income and savings and who wants to survive, needs to use centres such as the Manna Centre, Dellow Centre or another centre offering meals, showers etc. It is very tempting in a city like London where you can travel on certain buses without having to show a ticket to seek a free ride. However, travelling without a valid ticket is an offence. B is a man who does not like to lie, thus each time he travels by public

transport and gets caught (without a ticket) by Ticket Inspectors, he always provides his real name and correspondence address. This means that he receives many penalty notices. To date he has received seven but this number will probably increase. B comes to see me regularly for help with these penalty notices and the resulting fines.

Mr W does not like to be hungry in the evening. Day centres do not operate in the evening, so each time he is hungry, he enters shops and treats himself with bread, ham etc. This behaviour is illegal of course and sometimes he gets caught. Once caught the same procedures repeat themselves again and again: security guards, police, custody, penalties, and then letters, telephone calls, attending courts to pay fines. When we get to the end of this cycle and his fines have been paid we both are pleased and feel relieved. This particular person does not have any qualms in providing false identity details when stopped by a Ticket Inspector ... Although dishonesty and stealing are wrong and should rightfully be condemned, one’s financial and social circumstances has a bearing as to how easy these principles are to live by.

Z and I worked very hard to find him a job. Eventually we managed to do so. After one month Z quit the job because he did not like the atmosphere there. There was a very bad feeling between many of the employees. Z found it very difficult to work in such an environment as he is a very friendly and sensitive person. We are now looking for another job for him once again. Despite the difficulties we had in finding him the original job, I can understand his point of view and feelings. Hopefully we can find another job with a better working environment.

K lost his job and because he was unable to find another one he also lost his accommodation too. He felt that he may be eligible for benefit and so I helped him to complete and submit an online application form. K received a telephone call from a Jobcentre shortly after this and an appointment for K to attend the Jobcentre was booked. Unfortunately K has an alcohol dependency problem and finds it very difficult to stop drinking. As a result of his drinking he could not attend this appointment. A second appointment was made but once again K was unable to attend. Eventually he made the appointment at the third attempt. K admits that alcohol causes most of his problems but at this

moment in his life he feels unable to stop drinking. I hope that one day he will be able to do so.

The friend that I have already mentioned above said he would never have the patience to support the people I see here at the centre. However, he is always patient and caring to those who are sick. Alcoholism is a disease, a very cunning and ruthless one. Homelessness can happen almost to anyone. That is why it is necessary for us to continue to help such vulnerable people struggling with alcoholism and homelessness. I believe that one day some of them will see the light, stop misusing alcohol and/or drugs and will find a home. When such a day occurs, it is important that there are no outstanding issues with banks, police, courts etc. Then they can start their new lives with a clean slate.

I really admire those who use our services who are struggling with homelessness and substance dependencies. They come down to the Centre early in the morning to put their names on the list and then wait to see an adviser. It means that they still care about themselves and their lives and that they are not losers. This is not a waste of time, not letting them “drown”.

I wish you all (and myself too) lots of patience, calmness, serenity and smiles for Christmas time and other days of the 2010 New Year.



## *Christmas greetings in some of the languages of those who use the centre.*

*Tezze iliniz yahsi olsun  
(Azerbaijani)*

*Щастлива Нова Година (Bulgarian)*

*Veselé vánoce a šťastný nový rok  
(Czech)*

*Joyeux Noël et bonne année (French)*

*Kellemes karácsonyt és boldog új  
évet (Hungarian)*

*Nollaig shona duit (Irish-Gaelic).....  
Buon Natale e felice anno nuovo  
(Italian)*

*Priecīgus Ziemassvētkus un laimīgu  
Jauno gadu (Latvian)*

*Linksmų Kalėdų ir laimingų Naujųjų  
Metų (Lithuanian)*

*Wesołych Świąt i Szczęśliwego  
Nowego Roku (Polish)*

*Feliz Natal e próspero ano novo  
(Portuguese)*

*Crăciun fericit și un an nou fericit  
(Romanian)*

*Veselé vianoce a šťastný nový rok  
(Slovak)*

*Vesel božič in Srečno novo leto  
(Slovenian)*

*Ciid wanaagsan iyo sanad cusub oo  
fiican (Somali)*

*¡Feliz Navidad y próspero año  
nuevo! (Spanish) -*

Courtesy of Wolfestone Translation

## **Christmas still has meaning!**

**By**

**Bandi Mbubi**

Campaigns Worker



Many Christians have reservations about the way we celebrate Christmas. They point out that Jesus was born in a manger, that is in poverty, which does not fit in well with the image of luxury that our modern day Christmas has come to represent. Our beautifully decorated nativity scenes and Christmas trees, they argue, mask the harsh reality of that original Christmas day when Christ was born in a stable, not a mansion, with all the inns being full with no doubt 'very important' people.

Consumerism is often blamed for corrupting what is supposed to be one of the most important events of the Christian calendar, by shifting our focus not on things eternal, but on things temporal.

I used to share these reservations, less so now, perhaps because I now have children and they love Christmas so much that they have helped me look at it from a different angle.

So, I now find that Christmas still has meaning, in spite of all the consumerism that goes with it. The times are different, and however much we try to recapture the original Christmas scene, we would not succeed in recreating it perfectly. It is a matter of recapturing its essence and what it represents for our modern times.

There is no other period of the year that generates as much joy and celebrations as Christmas. The mood is usually uplifting, even if we don't always feel uplifted. Everywhere we go we meet people singing carols in public places, on TV and the radio. Our streets look a little brighter in the midst of these cold winter nights.

To their credit, those who dislike the very materialistic way in which we celebrate Christmas are conscious of the illusion which all the festivities around Christmas may create, that everything is just fine.

The harsh reality of Christmas is that the Person whose birthday we celebrate was homeless the day he was born. Our reading of the scriptures

help us understand that Mary and Joseph were very responsible parents. Of Mary it is said that she was full of grace, not even on Moses was such a thing said, and it is only when we read the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55) that we understand why such a title is bestowed on her. And of Joseph, we learn that he was a righteous man.

The Holy Family being as responsible and prudent as anyone could ever wish still experienced homelessness and a period in exile in Egypt because of the harsh reality of life. If they, as prudent and responsible as they were, could be homeless and exiled, if we're honest with ourselves, it can very much happen to anyone. It is therefore imperative that we do not lose sight of those who like the Holy Family would not have an inn in town, not just on Christmas day but throughout the year.

Christmas time often generates heartache for our service users. A good example of this is when benefits are suspended; it takes longer to reinstate them or to restart a claim. The social pressure to buy things even when we cannot afford them or borrow money can trigger problems whose consequences will be felt long after Christmas has gone. Sometimes rent or services-essential are withheld to help pay for non-essentials.

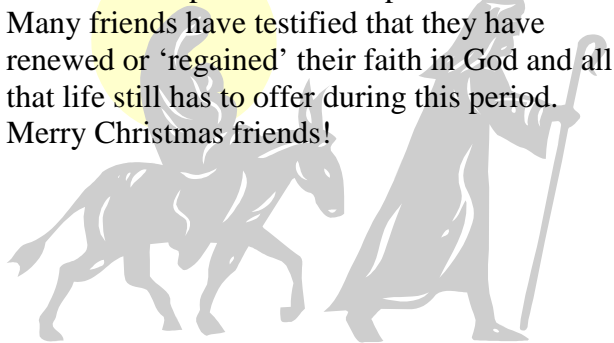
Often benefits are paid two weeks in advance to avoid interruptions as public offices are closed for a few days during this period. If this money is not spent wisely, then people find themselves without anything to live on for a further two week-period or so. And when you are on a tight budget, it is really hard.

In spite of all that, let's not overlook the positive side of how we celebrate Christmas in our modern times. It is not just about extravagant things; it is also all the loving acts that we carry out for one another, in families and among friends. The gifts we exchange, even if they are socks or ties we would be embarrassed to wear. Some goodwill has come out of Christmas and now and then musicians who do not necessarily call themselves Christians offer their voices to raise funds to help all those, who like the Holy Family, experience difficult circumstances. All these songs have captured the popular imagination of what Christmas is all about. My favourite one, which can still bring a tear to my

eye when I hear it, is “Do They Know It’s Christmas”.

For many of us, it is a time when we make resolutions, which we often break when we get to February or March. Usually there are only a few which we are able to keep.

Christmas is one of the most profound periods that modern day Christianity has to offer. It is a time of renewal, a new beginning, a second chance and hope on earth in spite of adversities. Many friends have testified that they have renewed or ‘regained’ their faith in God and all that life still has to offer during this period. Merry Christmas friends!



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**Manna Society’s New Patron**

The Rt Revd Christopher Chessun, Anglican Bishop of Woolwich, has very kindly agreed to become one of our two Patrons. He will be replacing the Rt Revd Peter Price, Anglican Bishop of Baths & Wells. Bishop Peter has been a Patron since 2001 and we are very grateful for his support over the years.

Bishop Christopher is committed to tackling urban deprivation and to working for community renewal. Our other patron is the Most Rev Kevin McDonald, R.C. Archbishop of Southwark.

# Manna Centre - Christmas Appeal 2009

It costs **£30,000 a month** to run the Manna Centre. The work we do here is a compassionate Christian response to homelessness and poverty. We are dependent on the goodwill of our supporters for our continued existence.



Would you like to support the work of the Manna Centre by making a one-off donation

or

perhaps consider funding our work on a longer term basis by filling in a **Standing Order** form? If you are a taxpayer and would like to add another 28% to your donation, at no extra expense to yourself, you can do so by simply Gift-Aiding your donation.

Perhaps you would consider leaving us a **legacy** in your will?

However you choose to support our work we are indeed most grateful.

May God bless you in this holy season & throughout the coming year.

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I would like to donate £\_\_\_\_\_ to the Manna Centre. (Cheques payable to "The Manna Society")

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

If you are a taxpayer and would like to Gift Aid your donation please tick here  and sign below.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Standing Order Form

Name and Address of your Bank/Building Society;

To the Manager of \_\_\_\_\_ Bank/Building Society

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Post Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Instruction to your Bank/Building Society Manager:

*Please pay into the account of the Manna Society – Co-operative Bank plc account No. 50109537, Sort Code 08-92-99,*

*The sum of £\_\_\_\_\_ (amount in words: \_\_\_\_\_)*

*Commencing on (date) \_\_\_\_\_*

*And also the same amount in every succeeding MONTH / 3 MONTHS / YEAR (circle one as appropriate)*

*On \_\_\_\_\_ (date of month)*

*Until further notice, charging the same to my account:*

Name \_\_\_\_\_ (BLOCK CAPITALS)

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Post Code \_\_\_\_\_

**Bank/Building Society Details:**

Account Name:.....

Account Number:.....Sort Code:.....

\*\*\* Please return completed form to The Manna Society, 6 Melior Street, London SE1 3QP \*\*\*