



The Manna Society Newsletter
Christmas 2011



Joyful Christmas?

By

Bandi Mbuli

Manna Centre Director



For many of us, Christmas provokes conflicting feelings. I like the joyous moments we share during this festive season; the music, the laughter, the excitement and the generous mood we often find people in. This joy is however tinged with sadness. To think of it, Christmas is quite a sad story. The long awaited coming of the Messiah comes through an unplanned pregnancy, as far as the young couple, Mary and Joseph, is concerned. As a family, they are victims of the whims of a tyrannical Roman empire, forcing everyone to travel back to their town of origin for a census. Heavily pregnant or not, very young or old, vulnerable or not, it does not matter; they all have to do as told, no exception.

The Virgin Mary, unprepared, gives birth to her cherished Son in a stable, not so glamorous even in those days. Soon after this birth, they have to flee to Egypt to protect Baby Jesus. The political and social system in their world impacting on their lives; a human story filled with adversities, not unlike those of the 200 or so people who visit the Manna Centre everyday of the week.

This is why it can validly be argued that homeless people and all those fleeing persecution find their greatest defender in Jesus who is born homeless and lives in exile for part of his life; experiencing the very thing they experience, being victims of the political and social structures of the environment he is born in. This is why Christians have always cared, and must care, for the plight of people going through homelessness, asylum and poverty. In spite of the difficult circumstances surrounding this birth, Christmas still is a very joyful occasion and it is proper to celebrate it. There is indeed dazzle and glamour in the appearing of the angels and in the visiting of the three wise men. Life is a mixture of pain and pleasure, and Christmas is no exception.

Like every year, we will be hosting our Christmas dinner a few days before Christmas, on 22nd December. It is the highlight of the year for us all, staff and service users alike. I enjoy the banter between staff and clients, the conviviality, the festive atmosphere. It is the

only time we play any loud music in the centre. At other times, we like to the place to be quiet, it lends more to a meditative mood. It leads you to listen to yourself and even draw you out of yourself. I have often observed some withdrawn people reaching out after they have been around the centre for some time.

The steady increase of rough sleeping in London, from approx 3,500 a year to approx 4,000 a year, is a worrying sign. Not all 4,000 would have been on the streets for a long time, some only for a few nights and others for over 6 months, nevertheless it is a significant increase.

We ourselves have been dealing with an average of 200 people per day, in the centre, including during summer, which is usually our quietest time of the year. Food and the use of our shower facilities have continued to be our most popular services. We normally deal with between 6 and 8 people everyday needing advice. Through this advice service we help people move on. Every year, over 200 people find accommodation through such help. From the 1st December, we will be introducing a new priority system. We will reserve 2 places each day for people based in Southwark. The rest, between 4 and 6, will continue to be dealt with on a first-come-served basis, from anywhere in London and the UK.

Our education and training service was launched at the end of September and we have been largely successful in attracting enough volunteer teachers and teaching assistants to offer 3 subjects: ICT, ESOL and literacy. It is still too early to establish a clear picture of the whole service. There are positive indications that some of our service-users who have not done any kind of formal learning for a long time are seizing this opportunity.

The most popular subject so far is ICT and some of our students are very proud about having their first e-mail address. One such person waved a piece of paper that he had just managed to print for everyone to see, his first printout, "I have done it, I have done it". Small things such as this which most of us take for granted means a lot to those who don't have easy access to computers and the internet.

Most troubling is of course, the fact that like many charities in the UK, we have been affected by the economic downturn. I guess people have

less disposable income than before. Churches and Christians are our largest and most loyal supporters, but like everyone else, they too are struggling. Grant-making trusts are also an important source of funding for us but due to many charities having their government funding cut, the competition for funding (from grant-making trusts) has increased also. The combination of having less income and more clients is a major concern to us. The worry is that we may have to cut down on the level of service we offer at a time when people most need it. Homelessness is on the increase and we need more help to help people as they turn to us.

As we celebrate Christmas, let's not just feel its joy, but also its pain; the Son of God born in a stable, a homeless and a refugee, not unlike those who come to the Manna Centre.

Merry Christmas!



Overcoming Low Self Esteem

By

A Volunteer Teacher's Assistant

So I'm sitting at my computer typing this article up and taking for granted that (a) I can write it clearly enough and (b) that people are going to read it. I can't imagine sitting down and looking at the screen and keyboard and being terrified of them. My computer doesn't scare me, if I make a mistake I'll just correct it and I know that no one's going to shout at me.

Can you imagine never using a computer by the age of 40 years old or even 20 years old? What with computer games, internet, films etc available for all! Well actually not! If I was homeless or under the poverty line how would a computer be available to me?

At the Manna Centre on 26th September we started an Education Centre with ICT classes, ESOL and literacy classes for every one of our clients who would like to join. I teach, well I help to teach ICT. We had 6 people enroll but only 2 turned up.



So we got started and it soon came apparent that one of the clients, John (not his real name) was really very reluctant to even touch the computer. I made him at ease and told him I used to be scared of them but really they're great fun and you can do all sorts of things on them. It started slowly and with great assurance that everything was ok, the client started to relax slightly. He kept repeating "I'm too stupid, I keep forgetting, I'll never learn anything". I found this disturbing but really knew John had no self esteem. At this point I wasn't that bothered about the computer but about getting him to feel better about himself. The teacher explained how to do a few exercises with the keyboard and I sat down next to him and just talked and joked to get his mind off the stress of the exercise. He completed it and sat smiling away. That was enough for me to feel we had achieved something, maybe not what anyone else would have been happy with but enough for me, and more importantly for John.

The following week I went down to the main dining room to call the clients and this time we had 3. Again, the low self esteem was apparent with all three clients. So, again it started slowly but this time a document had to be typed, saved and printed in 2 ½ hours. Sitting down with John, again, we started talking and me peppering him up to give him the courage to do it again. Yes, to touch the keyboard. He wrote the first line and put his head in his hands and said "that's cool". I smiled and said "there you go, told you you could do it." So we, no sorry, *he* continued typing out a poem in front of him. I could see he was doing well so I said I was going to see how the other client was doing but if he needed me I'd come back.

I sat down with the other client, Dave (not his real name) and he was very, very gingerly touching the keyboard. I asked he if was ok and he smiled sadly and said "they terrify me, what if I make a mistake?" Again not that he was incapable, he was just scared. I sat with him for 5 minutes encouraging him and helping him when he suddenly stopped and stared at the computer. "They are the most wonderful things; I didn't think I could do this. Wow, I'm so excited and can do loads of things, can't I?" He laughed.

Returning to John, I was amazed how he had done. Slowly but surely he had worked his way through the poem. When he has finished I

explained about saving the document. I had to explain this about 6 or 7 times but you know I didn't care, he wanted to learn and I was there to help him. He saved the document and when it disappeared off the screen he said "oh no I have to do it again" "No, no look John it's in the computer" I showed him how to retrieve it. A huge smile came across his face and he kept saying "yes, yes, yes, yes" nodding. We tidied the document up and with each correction he smiled and said "oh, that green/red line has gone, that's cool"

"So do you want to print it?" I asked. "Yup" he said slapping his leg "show me." I did and after it came out of the printer he jumped up, grabbed the sheet of paper, had a quick glance and came bounding over to me and gave me a high five with a huge grin on his face. I, of course, was just as happy seeing him like this.

We then sat down and went onto the internet. I explained about Google and he asked "so it's where you can find things". He paused and said "I need to find a flat". At this point I asked if he had anywhere to live. "I do, but I think I have to get out. I have a lot of papers in my flat, I think they're legal but I don't understand them". I've been working at the Manna for 8 months and not one of the clients had ever come up to me and told me, voluntarily, what was happening in their lives. I then explained that if he brought in all the papers, Margaret or Karolina (advice workers) would help him. "What they would help me with this?" "Of course", I replied. "I'll speak to them first and see what we can do if you want?" John was over the moon and I could visibly see him relax.

I feel privileged and honoured to work with the clients of The Manna Centre. It's so much more than education we offer them upstairs in the ICT classes. It's the caring, patience and social contact that give them the self esteem so sadly lacking in their lives. That, I think, is the stepping stone for them to get their lives back to "normality".

Merry Christmas

Christmas wishes

By

Karolina Muszynska

Welfare & Advice Worker



I come from Poland where the Christmas tradition is very rich. We celebrate Christmas Eve with the whole family uniting at the table. On that day, all Polish tables have an extra cover for the unexpected guest. This is to celebrate the tradition of hospitality in Poland. No one should be left alone at Christmas, so strangers are welcomed to the Christmas supper. This is to remind us that Mary and Joseph were also looking for shelter. As a child I cherished this tradition and always wanted someone in need to knock on our door and join us in this feast. No one ever did and I always wondered if there was any household blessed with the presence of a magical wanderer. I wanted to know why this tradition had not been extended throughout the year.

The celebration of Christmas has become less and less profound, devoid of its original intention. Most people's attention has moved toward the commercial side of it. We all know the frenzy of Christmas shopping which, combined with a busy life, does not leave much space for reflection. Sometimes I think that we have missed the point of the whole thing. We spend so much time and money on unnecessary items during the festive period while all these resources could be used to help those in need of essentials. A small sacrifice from every one of us this Christmas can make a real difference to others.

Recently I have come across a theory called the hundredth monkey effect. In 1952 scientists from different countries carried out research on the Japanese island of Koshima. They were focusing on the behavioural patterns of monkeys (macaques monkeys). The scientist fed the monkeys with sweet potatoes dropped in sand. The monkeys obviously did not like it and found it irritating until one young female discovered that if she dropped a potato in water she could enjoy it without the irritating sand. Soon she 'taught' this new skill to other monkeys. More

and more Macaques copied the new skill. Once a critical number of monkeys was reached (the so-called hundredth monkey) this previously learned behaviour instantly spread to other islands.

Even more mind boggling was the fact that monkeys on the islands and on mainland Japan started washing their potatoes. An interesting conclusion has been made: that each species has its own consciousness. With a new skill entering the consciousness of the species at one point, the information about it reaches all of the species. The critical number theory has been criticized by the Sceptics Society, they argued that: 'Rather than all monkeys mysteriously learning the skill it was noted that it was predominantly younger monkeys that learned the skill from the older monkeys through observational learning, which is widespread in the animal kingdom; (Wikipedia, hundredth monkey effect).



Imagine what happens when a lot of people open their hearts to one another. Crossing the magical critical number and we all become caring and loving to one another. And even if you are sceptical about the critical number explanation

and prefer the more rational one, the vision of us all caring for one another is still worth pursuing. Be the change you want to see. Be an angel this Christmas and think about others, who are less lucky.

As Bill Hicks (American stand-up comedian, who died in 1993, at the age of 32) said, we can change the world at any time we want and it is a only a choice between fear and love – "The eyes of fear want you to put bigger locks on your doors, buy guns, close yourself off. The eyes of love, instead, see all of us as one. Here is what we can do to change the world, right now. Take all money we spend on weapons and defence each year, and instead spend it feeding, clothing and educating the poor of the world, which it would many times over, not one human being to be excluded, and we could explore space, together, both inner and outer, for ever, in peace"

Education & Training

By

Esther Torrington

Volunteer Teacher

After all the hard work we put in to create a place of learning, time spent devising course material, we had our first Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) class on the 26th of September 2011.

At enrolment the 12 spaces for Monday and Thursday ICT groups were filled in no time at all and we had a substantial waiting list with students who did not want to miss out on the opportunity to gain new skills or those who wanted to refresh their skills that at some point in their life they had gained and used in one form or the other.

Thanks to our volunteers of Teachers and Teaching Assistants, Becki, Ashe, Matthew, Magdalena and Peter for dedicating their time which in turn brought real changes in some of our service users (students) lives. The students were very motivated and enthusiastic. So much so, that on the first day we had too many students and not enough computers. But we shared the two hours so no one had to be sent away.

At the first session, we asked each person, “What are your reasons for attending the ICT group?”

Some of the reasons given were to:

- Improve my writing and reading while learning IT
- Give me something useful to do with my time
- To be able to use the internet and create an email account
- Read my mail and access Facebook
- Go on YouTube
- Learn to use the keyboard and Word Office
- Get a job
- Go to college
- Learn Access, Excel, PowerPoint etc

As they began their learning journey, our main aim and objective was to provide an ICT course that would equip them during their process of development - as they worked towards making their goals a reality. They had found a class that they could have fun in as they learned and find inspiration, encouragement and knowledge in the contents of their tasks that we devise in order to meet each individual's needs. It was important

that they knew that we cared, and that we were all equal. And most importantly, we were non-judgmental.

The assignments that I devise are theme based e.g. inspirational poetry or lyrics in a song, or inspirational writing. Other themes, are ‘Business Documents’ and we will be doing some desktop publishing soon. We respond to the student's needs, so if one wanted to type their CV, we are ready for that. We use the tutorial I've already designed to teach and show our students how a CV is constructed and work with them for as long as it takes. We also encourage the students to write their own poetry or a mini-autobiography.

We know how difficult life can be for our students and the distress that they may be going through. So it is great when they turn up for the sessions, because it would be easier for them not to bother. And because they took the time to attend, it is only fair that we reward them with useful and stimulating work to enhance their lives and hopefully take their minds off the heavy burdens they may be enduring. We may not be able to solve all their problems, but we can listen or redirect them to someone who could give them the help they need.

When we began, some students felt that they would never be able to do word processing or use the internet. We put a stop to that myth through encouragement, praise for the smallest achievement, patiently working with the student, for example, those who have English as an additional language, those who are unable to read or write, some with learning difficulties and those who have health problems.

The rewards for me are when at the end of the session students say, “It was good, I've really learnt a lot. Thank you.” It's a wonderful feeling after each session when service users leave happy, informed with the desire to come to the next session. Some expressed an interest to come on both days – Monday and Thursday, to which I agreed, providing there was sufficient space. So our regulars grace us with their presence on both days, which is good for them, but is also good for us, in that we get to know them and have a small window into their past and present. We can find out how we can be of further help and we also discover their personality. They often stay a little longer after the session ends to chat and take us down to Memory Lane. We all have a good laugh. So thank you Manna Society Students!



Farewell & thanks

Our Central & Eastern European Advice Worker, Milena Koczaska who has been working with us since September 2008 has decided to move on.

We wish her every success for her future and thank her for her invaluable contribution.



It costs approximately **£34,000** a month to run the Manna Centre. Normally our income keeps pace with our expenditure. This has not happened this year. At the end of October our expenditure had exceeded our income by £20,776. We have had to draw on our reserves to meet this shortfall. If this trend continues we expect to have a deficit of between £65,000 & £80,000 by the end of March 2012. We are dependent on the generosity of our supporters for our continued existence. In addition to the usual ways of donating (cheque, standing order etc) it is also now possible to donate online via our website www.mannasociety.org.uk
On behalf of all who have and will benefit from your generosity many, many thanks.



The Bright Field

By

R S Thomas

*I have seen the sun break through
to illuminate a small field
for a while, and gone my way
and forgotten it. But that was the pearl
of great price, the one field that had
treasure in it. I realise now
that I must give all that I have to possess it.*

*Life is not hurrying on to a receding future,
nor hankering after an imagined past.
It is the turning aside like Moses to the miracle
of the lit bush, to a brightness
that seemed as transitory as your youth
once, but is the eternity that awaits you.*

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FINANCIAL UPDATE

Manna Centre - Christmas Appeal 2011

It costs **£34,000 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 (either by cheque or online)

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 25% 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.

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: _____

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 **