

From: [Inclusive Church](#)
To: [Roger Mills](#)
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Inclusive Church Newsletter October 2022

The Inclusive Church Newsletter is a digital publication produced every month. It aims to provide supporters and members with the latest news and information from the life of Inclusive Church and our partner organisations.



From the National Coordinator

Hello everyone, and welcome to your monthly newsletter.

I love this time of year. As we approach the important festivals of All Saints Day and All Souls Day in the church calendar, remember that Hallowe'en is really just a sideshow to those church festivals, and those church festivals were themselves cleverly and purposefully (and some would say cynically) placed on top of the old pagan Celtic festival of Samhain, in which the dying of the season of summer (and autumn) was marked, but also the barrier between the dead and the living was said to blur. In some ways, Christians might see it therefore as a spiritually 'thin time' (in the same way that some places are 'thin places'). The blurring of barriers between dead and living might sound scary to some, and Hallowe'en places a lot of emphasis on that scary side of it - ghosts etc - but the dead coming back to life and the barrier between death and life being broken down is kind of what Jesus is about, isn't it? Jesus went down to the dead and spent time there and then came back. Ooh

spooky!

Some churches now celebrate Light Parties because they don't like Hallowe'en. They keep some of the fun (and consuming of sweet treats) relating to Hallowe'en but often lack the depth of All Saints/Souls. They remove the history and meaning of the Samhain/Hallowe'en/All Hallows/All Souls period, because they don't go to the heart of what this period is all about. It is important that we are given space to remember, grieve and celebrate those we've loved (and we've seen recently how important it is to help people with their grief, with the events surrounding the death of the Queen). It is important to think about what it means for us to enter into a colder, more precarious time of year and even for us to think about barriers being broken down between life and death. There is so much meaning in there that Light Parties just don't even begin to tackle. I know they are aimed at children, but I think children also deserve meaning and depth. Children too should be spoken to in age-appropriate ways about death and grieving. This is important for them as they grow up.

If we want to have a meaningful Christian festival around this time, which grieves our dead loved ones, opens up about death, marks the changing season, but also brings some fun and colour into a dark and changing season, I suggest we look to Mexico and the Day of the Dead for some inspiration. They truly know how to celebrate their dead - there is no death avoidance in that culture! Also, keep on doing the wonderful services for All Souls Day that you do as churches - my beloved Grandma died on All Souls Day and I love to remember her at services each year on

that day.

Thank you for all your support. Enjoy the newsletter!

Ruth Wilde, National Coordinator

IC Stories: Colin Townsend



My Christian experience has helped shape all the reasons why I am passionate about IC – and that passion has swung from one end of the pendulum to the extreme other. My first few years in the faith, which hindsight informs me were fundamentalist churches, exposed me to theology that told me that ‘same-sex attraction’ was anti-God and that those feelings needed to be dealt with, and groups like IC were heretical. Subsequently, I endured conversion therapy. I knew no better back then, but it taught me whole new ways to hate myself – and fired me up to convert all my LGBT+ friends and contacts to ‘the truth’.

I got married – that was no mistake (we have an amazing son) – and life went on, though the feelings within me never went away, and I tormented myself with the inner voice of ‘I am sick for having these thoughts’. We moved home and joined the local CofE Church -a very different environment.

My marriage ended in 2011 while I was an independent theology student, and it was then that I first encountered alternative theologies, and my eyes started to be opened, and I finally saw the true beauty of the rainbow reflected in what I was learning. I started to challenge my identity and finally accepted that I was not straight, and that I’m gay – or maybe even pan, though I told very few people. I met my now partner, but again, it was all secretive... and still felt ‘wrong’. I was reintroduced to IC, which further opened my mind and faith to how God’s love is shown through people of all backgrounds. During this time my health went downhill, and I became physically disabled and also (much to my relief) diagnosed as Autistic and ADHD. I’ve had to stop work – I was an Educational Sign Language Interpreter and Note Taker - so ironically I now find myself in many of the groups supported by IC.

Through the previous Regional Ambassador, Rev. David Babbington, who was based locally to me before moving to Mirfield as Dean of Pastoral Studies, I became more and more involved in the work of IC, visiting churches with David, and also by myself, showcasing all that IC does to congregations eager to learn more about God’s inclusive love for all. This has awoken a deep-seated desire to see all on the margins – where I am myself – acknowledged, recognised, seen, welcomed, and affirmed for who they – we – were made to be. So many live behind a façade imposed from the outside, that imposition often being unconscious until someone offers them that red pill. It is this drive that has led me to be selected for Reader training within Lichfield Diocese, and alongside this, I lead a British Sign Language worship group, Signs for Worship Walsall (we’re on Facebook and we visit churches!), with Deaf and hearing members coming together on Friday evenings in worship and praise. I see the colours of that beautiful rainbow shine in so many ways, in so many places, from so many hearts. It’s an honour to be in that position, and I hope that through all I do, alongside so many others, the cause of IC will be forwarded to the point where we’re not needed, and radical inclusion becomes the norm.

Colin Townsend is the Regional Ambassador for Inclusive Church in the Lichfield area. If you would like to give to Inclusive Church to support our work, please click the button below.

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Wholly Holey Holy: An Entire Success!

Aside from having an inspired title, this year's Conference on Disability and Church, in partnership with St Martin-in-the-Fields, was again the place to be on Saturday.

The day began at 10am with an introduction from the chair of the planning team and main coordinator of the conference, Fiona MacMillan. This was followed soon after by a brilliant and personal story from Erica Thomas, a Quaker who has been attending the conference for a few years now. The main talk followed. This was by Jennie Hogan, the author of the book 'This is My Body'. It was powerful, moving and honest - an account of her experience of multiple brain hemorrhages as a child and then as an adult, and the subsequent epilepsy, disability and vulnerability that she lives with in her life with her partner and her work as a priest.

After the talk, we had a very interesting theological conversation between the authors of the book 'At the Gates' - Naomi Lawson Jacobs and Emily Richardson - and Sam Wells followed by some facilitated conversation in small break-out groups. It was a very full morning and we needed the full hour for lunch.

After lunch, it was a much shorter afternoon, with another personal story from Ruth Lampard and then a multitude of different workshops to choose from. Finally, Rev. Richard Carter from St Martin-in-the-Field's led us in a liturgy, reflecting on the theme of the day and the fragility and diversity of autumn leaves. It was quite beautiful and artistic.

This write-up was by Ruth Wilde, National Coordinator. There will be much more comprehensive write-ups of the conference to come.

Blogs and News

IC Blogs

On the IC blog this month, there are three new posts. Firstly, there is a talk Ruth gave to the Swedish Lutheran churches in September entitled '[Shiny Happy People](#)' about how churches which are only for one kind of 'perfect' person can never be inclusive. Secondly, Professor Helen King has written for us about the next steps for the process of Living in Love and Faith in the Church of England: '[Over to the Bishops?](#)'. And finally, the IC Story by Colin Townsend which you can read above can also be read [here](#).

News

There is a job going at Hull Oasis church - Lead for Theology and Pastoral Care. They are particularly encouraging applications from people who are from minority ethnic backgrounds and underrepresented groups. Find out more on the [website](#).

Events

Every Wednesday, between 6 and 6.30pm, OneBodyOneFaith are hosting an online space for prayer and community called 'Rhythm'. Find out more on the [website](#). Drawing on monastic patterns, Rhythm includes resources to download and a [rule of life](#) for people to embrace.

St Bueno's annual LGBT+ Retreat is back for 2022. The retreat is led for and by LGBT+ Christians and takes place from **Friday 28th October to Sunday 30th October** at St Beuno's Jesuit Spirituality Centre Tremeirchion Saint Asaph LL17 0AS. Kieran Bohan, Open Table Network National Co-ordinator, is part of the team leading the retreat, along with Sarah Hobbs OTN Co-Chair, Cate Jacobs and others. For more information and to book, visit [this page](#).

On the **1st November**, there is a book launch and panel discussion at St Martin's Hall in St Martin-in-the-Field's Church. The book is Peacemaking and Peacebuilding in South Africa by Liz Carmichael. The event is a 6.30pm for 7pm start. Entry is free. More information and to book your place, email tricia@actsa.org

Progressive Christianity Network have two events coming up in their Thinking Science Thinking Faith series: Wednesday **26th October** @ 7.30pm (BST) Current Issues in Medical Ethics, led by Emeritus Professor Ian Cooke (Sheffield) Wednesday **2nd November** @ 7.30pm (GMT) Thinking Science, Thinking Faith, led by Professor Andrew Steane Professor of Physics (Oxford). More details on the [website](#).

OneBodyOneFaith Members Day is taking place on the **11th December** at the Royal Foundation of St Katharine, London. Please join us for lunch at 1pm followed by a guest speaker, with time for prayer and reflection before finishing before 5pm. For more details and to register your attendance, please email hello@onebodyonefaith.org.uk

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You can see an online version of this newsletter and previous newsletters by going to the [newsletters page](#) of the IC website.

office@inclusive-church.org

07935 374877

