

ASA NEWSLETTER

NEW RECRUITS

Our recruitment campaign was a great success and thanks to all of you who passed names on to me. We held a training weekend at the Poplars Hotel in Moulton, the third year we have used that venue and held the training over a weekend. Everyone went home on the Sunday evening, exhausted but strangely exhilarated, and I am pleased to inform you that Synod has approved five new accompanists who will be paired with their first self appraiser in the New Year. They are:

- Barbara Askew from Barwell
- Carol Black from Hinckley
- Mike Collins from Shepshed
- Anne Speight from Loughborough
- Alan Stead from Leicester

If you know them please give them an encouraging word. Anne has written her thoughts about the weekend, and part of this is shared below, with thanks.

"Five of us (3 women and 2 men), met with the trainers, Bernard Gudgin and Christine Hodgson, for an early evening meal on Friday. The relaxed occasion set the tone for the whole weekend, and by the time of formal introductions we had already 'broken the ice'. Personally the residential format suited me far better than consecutive days and I think a much deeper level of sharing is possible.

*We were all over 50, with many combined years of Methodist experience yet none of us had much prior knowledge of ASA. **Why is this programme kept so under wraps?** Although the content of the sessions needs to be kept confidential, I feel the programme itself is something we should be shouting about from the rooftops. We all accept there are an increasing number of pressures on Ministers and Deacons. How much time should be spent on developing learned sermons, how much on practical work for peace and justice? We all have a different idea of what their role should be. It seems crucial that ministers and deacons have a time built into their year for review and evaluation.*

For me the weekend was a time for reflection and an appraisal of my own attributes. I felt a tremendous sense of affirmation, one for another. I didn't let people under my façade, but oh for a second meeting or a follow up year."

NORTHAMPTON DISTRICT

As a result of the District boundary changes, September 2006 will see our District expand to include circuits in Buckinghamshire that currently form part of the London North West District. At the same time we will change our name to the Northampton District. Latest available information suggests we will be welcoming seven new accompanists and twenty new self appraisers! A phased handover is probable, but watch this space.

RECORD UPDATE

If you have email please send me a communication, even just to say hello, so that I can update my records of email addresses. Even if you think I already have your details I invite you still to send me something.

RECRUITMENT UPDATE

As a result of the recruitment campaign we also have seven potential recruits lined up for training in 2006, as they could not make the weekend this year.

THANKS ...

... to you for all you do in support of ASA. I wish you a happy Christmas, may the peace of the Lord be with you. I shall be in touch about the pairings in the New Year and so shall save felicitations for 2006 until then.

ASKING THE RIGHT QNS

20 accompanists went to the Refresher Day at St Andrew's, Northampton, on 8th October when Revd Barrie Cooke spoke about '*Asking the right questions*'. If any one who could not make it wants a set of his notes please send me an SAE and I shall gladly forward a set to you. Everyone thought the day extremely worthwhile.

If I can whet your appetite – he spoke firstly of what an accompanist is not. Not an overseer – that is the District Chair's role; not a pastoral counsellor, whilst there are similarities we are not trained as therapist and should not trespass on that ground.

Accompanists focus on the minister as 'worker' rather than in her/his relationship with God or the 'whole person'. Our task is to actively listen, hearing what is left unsaid as well as that which is said. We should then not be afraid to challenge, not in the manner of a John Humphries or Jeremy Paxman, but by asking probing questions sympathetically.

Areas to probe are:

- **Choice of subject.** Have they consciously or unconsciously stuck in their 'comfort zone'? Ask them to share with you why that choice of subject.
- **Method of obtaining feedback.** Any lawyer will tell you the golden rule of advocacy is that you never ask a question which you do not know the answer to. Has the request for feedback been framed in a way which will elicit useful answers
- **Analysis of feedback.** This is when your support may well be needed. Do not be afraid to give your self appraiser space and time to tell you how they feel about the feedback they have received.

Barrie left us with the thought that Jesus rarely answered questions, but frequently responded to questions with questions, and in doing so invited the questioner to work it out for themselves, to bear the responsibility for the life they lead and the choices they made and through that process discover the dignity and liberty of being fully human and alive.

SPAM

... another well kept Methodist secret!

Not the spiced ham but Spirituality and Methodism. I mention it only because I went on a retreat a few weeks ago organised by SPAM. Two whole days in a Retreat House near Derby 'Listening to God', and for me a very valued part of the experience was the Listening Group I was a part of. When you talk the rest of the group just listens, they do not butt in, contradict or offer advice – they just listen, and when it is someone else's turn to talk you just listen. I simply had not realised before how amazing it is to be supported by active listening – accompanying of course goes way beyond, but do not underestimate the support you give by active listening.

SPAM organises an annual retreat and I can thoroughly recommend it to anyone.

More details available from:
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ASA 10 YEARS ON have your say

The Methodist Church is part way through a consultation on the future of ASA taking a look at the aim of the scheme and trying to stimulate discussion on the subject. You can obtain a copy of the consultation paper by logging onto www.methodistchurch.org.uk/downloads/gi_asaconsultation0605doc or just go to the Methodist Church website and take it from there.

The DAG has submitted a response and I shall happily email a copy to any one who would like one. If you do not have access to email please send me a SAE for a hard copy. There is nothing to stop you responding as an individual, any contributions are to be encouraged.

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