



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION of CIVIL AVIATION CHAPLAINS

IACAC NEWSLETTER

January 2016 Newsletter

Dear Friends and Colleagues.

The next bus from Montgomery to Manderla...

I'm a bit pedantic when it comes to Christmas. I know that for many Christmas begins as soon as the shops take down the Hallowe'en merchandise, or possibly as soon as Santa takes up residence in the department stores of our towns and cities – but I think January is a perfect time for a Christmas message – and take delight in confusing people by wishing them a Happy Christmas right up until the Feast of Candlemas on February 2.

In the Northern hemisphere January can be a bit like how CS Lewis describes Narnia – “always winter, but never Christmas” – but, for me, the first month of a new year, when the decorations have been taken down and everything looks a bit bare, is the perfect time of year to ponder the Christian understanding of the mystery of God made human flesh – coming to us and living among us – not in the chocolate box images of cosy stables and snowy scenes, but in the reality of the life we live now. Today. The ecumenical and inter-faith nature of our Association means that we shouldn't, of course, assume that all our members and colleagues are celebrating Christmas on December 25 – many of our Orthodox and Eastern sisters and brothers are ready and waiting to pick up where other churches often take leave of Christmas at Epiphany, while for our Muslim sisters and brothers December 24/25 this year marks Mawlid al-Nabi (the birth of Muhammed, the prophet of Islam). Many people of all faiths (and of none) will take the opportunity at this time of year to reflect on the birth of Jesus.

Here at Manchester we spent much of the week before Christmas busy assisting passengers needing to get home in time for Christmas, but for various reasons, requiring special support. One showed every sign of having been a victim of exploitation and possibly trafficking – made all the worse by the involvement of a member of her own family. She had been dumped by a main road, picked up by a lorry driver who kindly took her to the airport and brought her to the attention of airport staff (who kindly passed her on to the chaplaincy!). A second, on the same flight, had already been assisted by a homeless charity to purchase a ticket home and the third, a lady with quite severe emotional and mental-health issues was calmed by the support of chaplaincy colleagues until she was able to make the journey home – paid for by her loving daughter.

As I write, (I apologise for an apparent lack of Christmas cheer – but please bear with me!) the reality of Christmas 2015 for so many seems to be a world of broken relationships, in which people make victims of others, exploit the fears and prejudices of others, and where even children are not always safe or loved as we might hope or expect. We see “all human life is here” passing through our airports – and that can be both disturbing – but also delightful. It has been a particular privilege this December, to have been a part of the team welcoming frightened (and somewhat bewildered) refugees from war-torn Syria into our local communities. What struck me was how dignified, gracious

(and very grateful) they were (and how amazingly resilient and well-behaved their children are – after such an arduous journey). After the cosy warmth of the Christmas stable, of course, the Gospel stories continue with a tyrannical leader threatening the lives of his own people and the holy family's escape as refugees into Egypt. To misquote a well-worn English phrase: In Jesus, God has been there. God has done that. God has got the T-shirt. And it is to this world (as the Christmas carol says) ‘the dear Christ enters in’. Different faith traditions emphasise to differing degrees both the transcendence and the immanence of God. Christmas celebrates both simultaneously. As Richard Crashaw, the seventeenth-century Anglican cleric, teacher, English metaphysical poet: wrote, in his poem ‘In the Holy Nativity of our Lord’: “Welcome, all Wonders in one sight! / Eternity shut in a span. / Summer to winter, day in night, / Heaven in earth, and God in man. / Great little One! Whose all-embracing birth / Lifts earth to heaven, stoops heaven to earth.”

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, has recently suggested that Christmas is “about responding to the love we're given by God at Christmas by offering it to those who might be feeling like they are on the margins.” He specifically mentions “our Muslim brothers and sisters who've felt pressured to defend themselves in the wake of horrendous attacks carried out so outrageously in their name.” And also “the fear among Jewish communities, and among Sikhs, Hindus and those of other faiths... as they try peacefully to live, pray and worship in their faith tradition. All who feel that fear will be included in my prayers this Christmas.” Archbishop Welby's message seemed especially appropriate for us who are engaged in airport chaplaincy ministry, and, although directed primarily at Christians, I know that his words have a resonance for my colleagues of other world faiths too: “[As Christians] we are called to be people who take that first step, Who take the risk of kindness because we believe the other person is a gift to us from God, just as we can be a gift to them... For me [Christmas] is about responding to the love we're given by God... by offering it to those who might be feeling like they are on the margins, just like Jesus and his family were.” At the end of a year that began with the “Charlie Hebdo” killings (and which included a gratuitous attack on the Jewish community of Paris for good measure) and which has been marked repeatedly by a terrorist agenda that seeks to divide communities, we face, as individuals, faith groups, communities and nations a clear choice: “We're called to be people who don't accept narratives that seek to divide us as communities – wherever we hear them – because we have a better narrative” continues Archbishop Welby, “that God poured out his love for us by sending his son to be with us in a world of fear and danger. We have the capacity to share that risk-taking love with whomever we discover is our neighbour – not just this Christmas, but always.” As I write, on Christmas Eve, there is yet another depressingly familiar story of Al-Shabaab terrorists in Kenya singling out travellers for their murderous intent – to divide and conquer, kill, and subject terrified people to their twisted ideology. But, as if to make Archbishop Welby's point so much more effectively than he (or I) ever could, the passengers stood eyeball to eyeball with their attackers and faced them down. Things did

not go according to plan! Travelling can be a risky business - there were more than 100 passengers on the bus to Mandera (near the border with Somalia and Ethiopia) when gunmen stopped the bus and ordered Muslim passengers to separate themselves from the Christians. (The group regularly storms buses, particularly at this time of the year, one of the busiest travel seasons in the nation. In one attack last year, gunmen raided a bus and shot dead 28 people who failed to recite Quran verses.) The Muslim passengers (mostly women) refused, giving the Christian women their hijabs and helping others to hide behind bags in the bus, telling the gunmen: "If you want to kill us, then kill us - or leave us all alone". Joseph Nkaissery, Kenya's interior cabinet secretary said: "We are all Kenyans, we are not separated by religion...We are one people as a nation. And this is a very good message from my brothers and sisters from the Muslim community." Talk about reflecting God's "risk-taking love". Travelling is a risky business - "Travel is fatal - to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime" said Mark Twain (The Innocents Abroad/Roughing It). We know that air passengers can also often receive abuse because of their (perceived) faith, culture or race. Thankfully there are almost always other passengers willing to stand up for their fellow-travellers. But I am so encouraged by these latter day Rosa Parkes on the bus to Mandera, who have stood up to violence, hatred and abuse (at immense personal cost). Whether Kenyan Muslims or American Christians, never underestimate the power of women on buses to reflect God's "risk-taking love" and by doing so, to change the world for the better. I'll end with some words from a song that was played quite a lot about a decade or so ago (another contribution to the ongoing reflection of Jesus Christ's incarnation, perhaps). Joan Osborne's What if God was one of us? "If God had a name, what would it be, and would you call it to His face, if you were faced with Him in all His glory What would you ask if you had just one question? If God had a face, what would it look like, and would you want to see, if seeing meant that you would have to believe in things like Heaven and in Jesus and the Saints and all the Prophets and... What if God was one of us, Just a stranger on the bus...trying to make His way home?"

This comes with my continuing prayers for you all in your ministry – and in your personal and family life too – for the coming year. I will be remembering you in my prayers. Please remember me and the Executive Board in your prayers. I hope that this newsletter will be accompanied by the Prayer Diary I'm following this year. Please forgive any inaccuracies and please do let me know how things are going where you are. And do join us in Paris in August!



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News from Our Chaplaincies

Canon Chris Bishop retires from Stanstead Airport on the 15th January. He has been the lead Chaplain there for 29 years. We wish him all the best as he enters this new phase of his life.

Claude Wilhelm from Geneva Airport is also retiring after many years service to that airport. Claude has been an active member of IACAC and regularly attended conferences and made many friends among his colleagues. We wish him well for the future.

Rev Franz Kohlhuber from Munich told of their wonderful Christmas experiences – together with his new protestant colleague, Stefan Fratzscher who had invited a group of musicians. They went on the morning of the 24th December to different places at the airport and brought much joy to the employees and workers here in Munich. He went on to say, "In the afternoon we did two little Christmas-celebrations with the fire-brigades and then we celebrated together again an ecumenical prayer in our crowded chapel. There were nearly 70 persons celebrating and singing Christmas-Carols with us. So now I wish you all a very happy and peaceful Christmas-Time and God may bless the New Year that will come. I look forward to our next meeting in Paris and send you all the best wishes - from me and also from my new protestant colleague!"

From Paris the Rev Marie-Emilie Sébas wrote- "Thank you Franz for having news about your ministry and to see the nice relationship you build both together. "At Roissy and Paris-Charles de Gaulle's Airport" (Roissy is the other "unofficial" name of the airport we have had for several years, some chorale who came and sang for Christmas and Easter. This year Pierre sent an invitation to the Salvation Army and they played Christmas Carols on Christmas morning in some of the terminals. I could not be with them this time because of being part time; I had a Christmas service in my church. But the choirs or group of musicians are always appreciated by the passengers and the workers."

Thank you for the messages. May God bless you! We had a crash with a Cargo flight around 1000km from Lubumbashi Airport at Mbuji Mayi Airport! The crew and pilot are safe but 8 victims died because they were near the airport! We Went there and spent time and prayer with the families. The government members were also there. The cause of crash was a bad condition of visibility. Thank you for your prayer Blessing for Lubumbashi Chaplaincy.

A newly created post of Head of Chaplaincy at London Heathrow has been offered to the Rev Howie Adan, and he has accepted it. Howie and his wife, Renata, are moving to the UK early in the New Year, so that he can start at LHR on 1st March. Congratulations to Howie and welcome back to airport chaplaincy.

Thought For The Month

Well Done is better than Well Said.

Benjamin Franklin