



100 Club

Recent winners were Ann Walsh (December), Pam Jones (January) and Pauline Roberts (February).

Christmas at Ammerdown

Christmas 2015 at Ammerdown was once again a great success. "Thank you for all your warmth and welcome this Christmas and for providing such superb hospitality and fun. The spirit of Christmas is definitely alive and glowing at Ammerdown!"



Photo by Leonie Theodorou

N.B. Our Christmas Houseparties are always over-subscribed so don't leave it too late to book if you would like to spend next Christmas with us...

Receiving future newsletters by email?

Several supporters have told us that they would prefer to receive the newsletter by email, thus saving paper and postage. We plan to start this with the next newsletter (pending some minor tweaks to our database and website). If we have your email address you will receive the newsletter by email, unless you tell us you prefer post (email us or use the response form). Similarly, if you would prefer email but are not sure we have your email address, please email centre@ammerdown.org with 'email newsletter' in the subject.

A Big THANK YOU

In our last newsletter, we asked for help to buy a new dishwasher, and you once again responded very generously. We raised £2,200 which, together with a £2,000 legacy received in January, gives us exactly what we need to make the purchase. The new machine will be in place by the end of the month. A huge THANK YOU to all who sent a gift.

Can you help?

Our next project is to replace the carpet in the reception area. It is over 10 years old and is beginning to fray in places as well as looking generally shabby. This sadly does not give the best impression of Ammerdown to our guests and visitors as they arrive. A hard-wearing but smart replacement carpet will cost £2,000 including fitting. As always, every gift, however small, will be gratefully received. Many thanks in advance.



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A Place of Hospitality, Spirituality and Growth
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'Will we only act when we are absolutely forced to by massive environmental catastrophe?'

This is one of the questions discussed last month by a small group of Jewish, Muslim and Christian leaders all actively engaged in environmental issues. They had been invited by Ammerdown so that they could encourage, and learn from, each other, and also harness their collective wisdom to find ways for faith communities to work even more closely together for our planet.

The event more than fulfilled its objectives: the insights and dedication (sometimes against fierce opposition) shown by this small group literally took my breath away at times, as did the remarkable openness in the sharing. So much was discussed that I would need pages and pages to do it justice. I will therefore focus on what were for me, a mere observer, some of the key highlights.

There was a general consensus that, in the face of possible environmental catastrophe, we need big radical thinking AND small individual steps. The two go together. The size of the challenge should not deter us from our personal responsibility. On this point, Rabbi Debbie Young-Somers's story of giving up shopping for a whole year (except for food and medicine) was particularly inspiring. She did it in 2014/15 to mark 'Shmita' (also known as the seventh year or the 'year of release') in the Jewish calendar - and what a rich experience it proved to be! It has, in turn, already challenged me in many ways: do I, for example, really need to buy new clothes when my wardrobe contains items I hardly ever wear? Or why buy yet more books when our bookshelves are filled with books I haven't read yet? Debbie has, in fact, been so inspiring to me that, with her permission, I have shared overleaf relevant extracts from her blog, in the hope that it will inspire you too!

Another highlight was the news that an initiative called 'Eco Church' was just about to be launched. It is a really exciting and creative scheme which aims to help churches 'go green' in all areas of church life, including building management, outreach and personal lifestyle. It caught the imagination of all those taking part in the conversation, including our Muslim and Jewish friends who were soon asking: 'Why not an eco mosque or an eco synagogue too?'

By the end of the event, I was left hoping and praying that we will not leave it until it is almost too late before we take action. As one participant said, "Even the longest journey starts with a first step". Let us all make a start.

With best wishes,

Benedicte



From Debbie's Blog - 'When is enough?'

23rd September 2014: I was inspired by the Siach Shmita summit in May to make this coming year meaningful for us as a UK Jewish community and also for me on a personal level. How can I embody release, rest, just economics and healthier relationships to consumption? In the end, I set myself a 7 part Shmita manifesto:



1. No shopping apart from food and medicine - addressing how our focus on continual consumption enslaves others and ourselves and is also causing untold damage to our eco-systems, not to mention continually depleting our planet's finite resources.
2. No 'products' - we as a family will endeavour to make our own bread, produce our own stock, pasta, cakes, biscuits, etc. We have a kitchen full of gadgets. It's time to get our monies worth and spend more time engaging with, and getting to know, our food.
3. Every shop will include a donation to a foodbank, and every donation be followed up by a letter to our government demanding change to the systems that leave people unable to feed themselves and their children.
4. No social media before 7am or after 7pm. I can phone and skype as these are about bringing people together. I fear I am becoming enslaved to my smart phone, and I want to be smarter than it. I also want to be more present with the people I am in the room with.
4. More time spent on reading, focusing on books that help me grow.
5. Creating 'gifting communities' which provide opportunities for people to share skills, swap goods and organise ways for things to be shared.
6. Developing meaningful 'shmita liturgy' throughout the year.

19th May 2015: Half way through the shmita year, the pieces that truly stand out for me as I walk through, and teach about, shmita is that this whole exercise is about relationships: between individuals and other parts of their communities, between us and the environment, between us and the anonymous makers of what we consume, and between each one of us and God.



12th September 2015: The sense of having taken a year to experience 'enoughness' is very powerful. Many of us need it personally, and our environment is crying out for it. The faceless nature of our world's economy has made it possible for us to disregard the humanity of others - others who produce our goods, or who are going hungry in the next street. Shmita asks us to let go of our sense of want and possession, and focus on need and sharing instead. I have in fact come to realise that

shmita is not just about how we live every seventh year: it is also about living better in the other six years!

N.B. If you are interested in exploring further the ideas of 'enoughness', the forthcoming Ammerdown guided retreat by Sr Germaine O'Neill on 'A Spirituality of Enough', from 11th to 15th April, could be an ideal opportunity...

Security for the future - in search of a new vision

In January 2014, 22 peace-builders and conflict analysts were invited to come to Ammerdown to discuss their concerns about the state of the world. They decided to launch a public conversation about how best to build long-term security in the UK and worldwide. Their starting point was the release of a public statement, known as 'the Ammerdown Invitation', which provided some initial suggestions on how local governments and citizens might begin to turn around the world's worsening security situations through local, national and global action.

In the last two years, the group has quietly consulted with a whole range of individuals and groups, from grassroots activists to Parliamentarians, refining their ideas in the process. I was particularly struck by a response to the 'Ammerdown Invitation', written by a reputable expert in support of the group's initiative: "One of the most pressing issues of the 21st century is whether in international conflict the use of armed force to remove an 'unjust' social order makes the world safer. We seem to be trapped in a crude, bipolar choice, in which we either use military force to remove an oppressor, or we do nothing. Perhaps there are alternatives. Non-military options are insufficiently considered, and there is little place in the relevant systems for serious, well-resourced early intervention and mediation to attempt to prevent the outbreak of violence. In the weary debate on intervention of recent years, more nuanced and subtle voices questioning the consequences of using force as a means of intervention have often been dismissed as naive left-wingers. People of all shades of opinion get caught up in debate about 'doing the right thing', but insufficient thought is given to how we do this and whether we can get serious about non-military intervention."

These are voices which need to be heard more than ever, especially in the light of the recent debate about Syria. Ammerdown will continue to support the group in any way it can, including offering its facilities free of charge for meetings.



Exploring the theme of 'Mercy'

2016 has been declared by Pope Francis an 'Extraordinary Year of Mercy'. He has said that he wants to make it evident that the Church's mission is as a witness to compassion.



The theme of mercy is particularly close to our heart at Ammerdown, given our focus as a charity on peace-building and reconciliation. We have therefore decided to host a special day on Saturday 2nd July to look at what God's call to mercy means to us individually and to our churches. Bishop Crispian Hollis (retired Bishop of Portsmouth) and Carmody Grey (Tablet columnist and Catholic chaplain at Bristol University) are amongst the confirmed speakers.

A discounted price of £20 has been agreed (including lunch and all refreshments) for a day that will be relevant to Christians across all denominations who wish to be faithful and fruitful witnesses of Christ. You can book now by phone or online (www.ammerdown.org). Do please also help spread the word if you can.