



RE Centres Southern Regional Group

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Letter from the Chair

Having recently returned to my desk following this year's RECSRG conference I appreciate once more the benefits of regularly meeting fellow RE Centre managers in a relaxed, informal and sharing environment.



This year's two day conference, held at All Saints' Pastoral Centre in London Colney, near St Albans, offered us a variety of development opportunities including the use of religious artefacts in the classroom, experiences of a Hindu wedding and the signs and symbols tour offered by the inspirational education team at St Alban's Cathedral and Abbey Church. In addition, we were lucky enough to visit (and admire rather covetously!) Ron Upton's brand new RE Centre and bookshop in St Albans diocesan office. And of course we shared our recommendations for newly acquired resources in our centres.

As usual, I came back to the ranch renewed with ideas and enthusiasm. It is very heartening, as a lone worker, to be reminded there are others out there who are tackling the same challenges as I am. On behalf of all those who attended, I must thank Gill Hunt for organising the conference so ably and Ron Upton for hosting us at his centre for a delicious lunch.

As for future meetings, there have been plenty of ideas forthcoming for the one day meeting in November (see right). I hope you will be able to join us. Next year's conference will be held in Wells and Glastonbury Wednesday 5th - Thursday 6th July 2006.

Our thanks to those who have agreed to continue their work to support the group – to Sue Bloomfield for her management of membership and subscriptions, to Gill Hunt for managing our accounts, to Ian Knight for our newsletters and to Heather Collins for minuting our meetings. Their efficiency and generosity with their time make the running of the group very straightforward. Please visit our new website www.recentres.org.uk and if possible make links between it and your RE Centre website.

With best wishes

Lydia

NOVEMBER MEETING

**A visit to the
Godly Play Room
Conduit Road, Abingdon**

**with Jenny Hyson,
Children's Adviser,
Diocese of Oxford**

**Wednesday 2 November
10.30 am—3.30 pm
(coffee and lunch included, plus
bookstall and ideas for Christmas)**

Please let Ian know by Friday 28th October
if you would like to come.

Read about the setting up and opening of the
Godly Play Room on page 2.



Setting up and opening the Godly Play Room, Abingdon



A dream of having an official 'space' for a Godly Play classroom has finally been realised. After 18 months of work by the diocese's children's adviser, Jenny Hyson, a room at the Trinity Methodist and United Reformed

church in Abingdon was opened and blessed by the Bishop of Oxford.

The room will provide a space for children to experience Godly Play, as well as allow adults to visit, explore and find out more about this distinctive method of working with children.

Those taking part in the service included Bishop Richard, Diana Townsend the interim moderator from Trinity church, Kath Lonsdale the convenor of youth and children's work for the Wessex United Reformed church, Wendy Holt from Wallingford Methodist church, Becky Fisher, Trinity outreach co-ordinator and Jenny Hyson.

After an opening hymn Jenny shared the story of the vision for the classroom emphasising the need for today's children to hear the whole of God's story. At its heart Godly Play values children and recognises their innate spirituality. It offers children a beautiful and sacred space in which to explore the Bible, to worship and respond to God as well as the opportunity to learn more about the language and symbols of the church. The impetus for this vision was summed up in the words of the reading from Psalm 78:1-6 where the call is to pass on God's story to the next generation so that they in turn can pass it on.

After the reading Jenny introduced the children to the Holy Family figures, which told the story of the Nativity. The figures were later placed on the focal shelf in the classroom. She reminded the children that these figures and others in the room are for them and that they can touch and work with the figures whenever they are in the room. Bishop Richard then blessed the wooden figures before they were carried by the children to the classroom. The procession was led by one of the youngsters carrying a candle lit from the Baptism candle in the church. Once inside the figures were placed reverently on the focal shelf, a candle was lit and the Bishop blessed the room. All of this was captured on a video for those visitors in the church to see before everyone was invited to visit this special space. Near the entrance to the classroom are written the words of invitation: 'Enter this special sacred space with the eyes of a child'.

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It's good to talk

Travelling with two others to this year's conference we were exchanging ideas as soon as we were on the way. From then on my mind buzzed with thoughts of what to do on returning to my Centre. Swapping notes on the journey home we found we were each carrying away different thoughts as well as different purchases. Each centre is different, but it is so good to talk to others who understand the problems we all share. Did other users of the bar that evening wonder whatever we were talking about as we discussed how to retrieve Shiva?

Lots of learning but no targets

It is a pleasure to learn so much in the 24 hours, both through the programme and from each other. It was particularly good to have Fauzia with us this year and I am grateful to her for sharing some insights from the Muslim faith.

In a well packed hour, Jean Mead demonstrated how, while respecting artefacts from religious traditions, we could offer them as opportunities for a range of learning methods. We were reminded of the sacramental nature of some objects and also given practical tips like putting an arrow on the back of items (such as Chinese New Year greetings cards) which otherwise might be displayed upside down!

Ruth Bodsworth (from Articles of Faith) gave us the chance to share in the excitement of an Indian wedding with all its colour and ritual and also to purchase wedding related items. Some of our members carried away some impressive head gear.



22nd Annual Conference 5th - 6th July 2005



All Saints Pastoral Centre where we stayed houses a branch of McCrimmons which had kindly added to their stock a number of books specifically for us. It was a good opportunity to browse and purchase (at a discount!). Other spare moments were usefully filled looking at the resources we had each brought. It is always amazing what different items we each find. Our business meeting gave us all the chance to express preferences for the future programme, the only problem being that we can't do everything.

Can buildings speak?

Thanks to Annette Cranston (St Alban's Cathedral Education Officer). I'm sure the abbey spoke to us. St Alban came to life as we heard about his walk to martyrdom up the hill where we had just trudged. The faith to which he witnessed was given meaning for us as it is for thousands of children who visit the abbey each year. Annette's exposition of the eucharist as she slowly and movingly broke a bread roll certainly lives with me.

Our time in the abbey passed all too quickly leaving us time for only a brief look at Ron's handsome new centre where he had laid on a delicious lunch. Closure of the M25 after a fire necessitated a swifter departure than many of us would have wished.

On our journey home we shared our thoughts about what we had learnt and what ideas we would implement. We expressed our gratitude for yet another good conference.

Joanna Bailey
All Saints Resource Centre Bristol



Suffolk Christian Resource Library and Revelations at St Nicholas Centre



Change is good for you – really!
I must be one of the small minority who actually thrives on change. Change is the thing which, for me, brings excitement and variety to the daily routine of life. I admit that the plans for the new Revelations and Suffolk Christian Resource Library went a little astray along the way, but, hey! doesn't that always happen with building projects? However as the plans evolved, it transpired that what was emerging would definitely be better than what was originally intended.



We opened the bookshop and library on 18th April, on time. We had already had a preview day the Saturday before this and *Church Times* columnist and local author Ronald Blythe came to speak and sign his latest book *The View in Winter*.



After skilful negotiation the library forfeited only 50% of its stock instead of the requested 75%. This enabled us to dispose of items that hadn't been loaned out in the last two years, plus a good deal of tatty undesirable resources (you know the type!). The end result is that you can now see what is on the shelf, and the items are more attractive and up to date. Ron will, I am sure, sympathise with the endless supply of growing boxes. We moved into the new St Nicholas Centre which feels peaceful and spiritual - most of the time. The library is housed in cabinets in the nave, that can be closed up and rolled out of the way if necessary when the whole of the centre is needed for a large event. The problems start when you turn up for work and the library has been turned around during the evening. It is amazing what it can be used for now – dressing rooms for dancers and band members.

The Eucharist and daily prayers are said here. We have held the first diocesan synod in the centre and it was amazing to turn up and everything be in place without the endless carting of boxes. Maybe this time next year the volunteers would complain if we had to change from the comfortable state that I imagine we shall be in by then.

Shirley Nicholls

Slough & District RS Centre

After 12 years as Warden of the Slough Centre (including a move to the present location) Heather Collins is retiring.



In her place Jo Osborne becomes Centre Resources Officer. Several members of the Group met Jo when we visited the Slough Centre in July 2001. However, Heather will still be involved with the Centre and with our Group.

Midhurst & Petworth Religious Studies Centre

I was all set to do an "obituary" on Chris Boxley and his Centre, phoned him to check a few details, and guess what! In the best *Times* tradition, he is not dead yet!

We were under the impression that Chris had retired this summer, but he is to continue teaching for another year and very much hopes to come to our November meeting. This will give us the opportunity for the role of RE Council representative to be handed over. We can also discuss how to make contact with other members of the Federation of National & Regional RE Centres. Our Group is part of this Federation, which, in turn, is a member of the RE Council. We shall also, of course, be able to give our best wishes to Chris for his *forthcoming* retirement.

