



# Federation of RE Centres

[www.recentres.org.uk](http://www.recentres.org.uk)

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## Letter from the Chair

Writing this in a rush (as ever!) as the end of the summer term approaches, I am mindful how fortunate I am to benefit from six weeks off—a chance to be with my family and generally unwind from the frenetic pace of running an RE Centre.



The 26th Annual Summer Conference earlier this summer in Gloucester proved an enjoyable and valuable opportunity to meet up with old and new colleagues from the world of RE. From the splendour of Gloucester Cathedral to the quiet contemplation and useful workshops at Glenfall House, it was a really worthwhile couple of days. Mindful of how difficult it is to escape from our centres at times, I must say once again that I found the effort to be definitely beneficial! We shall be meeting for the day in November at the RS Resource Centre at the Nottingham Bluecoat School (details opposite). The location was proposed in order to encourage newer members from the more northern Centres to come to our meeting (older members from more southern Centres are also very welcome!) We would really like to see you there, it would be brilliant to come and join us so that we can put a face to a name and continue the vital networking function of our organisation.

Many thanks to those others who continue to support the group – with its finances, membership, subscriptions, newsletters and minute-taking. I look forward to seeing you in November in Nottingham.

With best wishes

Lydia

## Nottingham in November

**Tuesday 10 November 10.30 am—4 pm**  
**Nottingham RS Centre**

**See the Resource Centre**  
**Discover the Hindu Experience**  
**in the Multifaith Room**  
**Browse and buy from the**

**Stapleford Centre and TTS**

**THE HOLOCAUST CENTRE**



**bookstall**

**Visit the Beth Shalom Holocaust Centre**  
[www.holocaustcentre.net](http://www.holocaustcentre.net)

A limited amount of overnight accommodation for members wishing to travel to Nottingham on Monday 9 November is available at St John's College, Nottingham, £31.25 for bed and breakfast. Please contact Lydia if you would like to stay at St John's (first come, first served). Otherwise, you may wish to make your own booking for one of the following:

**Nottingham Gateway Hotel** £60  
Nuthall Road, Nottingham, NG8 6AZ 0115 9794949  
<http://life-hotels.co.uk/nottinghamgateway/>  
**Travelodge** £26.05  
Moto Service Area, M1 Motorway, Trowell,  
Nottingham NG9 3PL 0871 984 6093  
[www.travelodge.co.uk/search\\_and\\_book/hotel\\_overview.php?hotel\\_id=162](http://www.travelodge.co.uk/search_and_book/hotel_overview.php?hotel_id=162)

## Moodle – a virtual learning environment for RE teachers in Hampshire



<http://hias.hants.gov.uk/re/>

Schools have had their own websites for a decade or longer, but their purpose is changing. Increasingly schools are establishing virtual learning environments (VLEs) – essentially a place on the Internet where school can happen 24/7. For example, homework can be set, collected, marked and returned without so much as an exercise book being doodled on. This is happening right now.

Collaborative groups of teachers have grown over the past few years. The Hampshire RE team continues to run Continuing Professional Development courses, but has also greatly increased its involvement with development groups/clusters of RE teachers. In the light of these changes there was a perceived need for an interactive website quite similar to a school VLE, but for groups of teachers rather than pupils.

This moodle site has now been set up, alongside our Hampshire RE website which is a more traditional site providing information about the agreed syllabus, local contact details, GCSE results, curriculum planning, current and archive RE newsletters, SACRE and much, much more. Moodle, on the other hand, provides a forum for interactive collaboration through sharing ideas and resources between teachers, for discussion forums and for supporting clusters and course delegates. There is the facility to make sections of it open to everyone who visits (guests) but also to make parts with access restricted to named individuals. This is useful when teachers have paid to come on a course or join a development group, so access to shared resources can be restricted to nominated delegates.

The RE Moodle is still in its infancy, and is bound to change and develop over the next few years. Moodles are designed to be flexible and can adapt to need so this platform is going to stay around for a while. As someone who often asks my 14 year old son for help on the IT front, I personally find it much more user friendly when loading up items of RE news on the front page or setting up new support areas.

Lydia Revett  
Hampshire County RE Centre

## Members' News

Welcome to members of the Federation who have joined recently:

- Uell Kennedy, Bradford Diocesan Resource Centre
- Bev Smerdon, Plymouth Centre for Faiths and Cultural Diversity
- Ken Johnson, RS Resource Centre, Nottingham
- Kathryn Bliss, Sheffield Diocesan Resources Centre.

We look forward to getting to know them at future meetings.

At All Saints Centre, Bristol, Denise Flanders is now the contact. Kelly Rutter and Paul Bartle-Jenkins also work in the centre.

Fauzia Ali has just had funding for her centre in Croydon confirmed and we were delighted to hear at the conference that she may even get new premises!

Linda Rudge reports that Keswick Hall Centre at the University of East Anglia is soon to be relaunched under a new title. They will continue their work with schools but will also be encompassing Adult Education in a lifelong learning context.

Sue Bloomfield  
Bath & Wells Resource Centre



## 26th Annual Conference 1–2 July

Being new to the world of the Resource Centre (I joined All Saints, Bristol, ten hours a week, just last year), not a teacher or librarian, simply a Christian keen to see the treasures contained in our centre flying off our shelves and doing what they are intended to do, I felt excited, and it has to be admitted, a tinge of fear, at meeting all these experienced, clever people.

A warm welcome from Jenny at the Gloucester Centre immediately set me at ease (thank you, Jenny!) as she introduced those already there – one of whom had been guided by the police through the streets of Gloucester to the Centre, causing much merriment as well as giving a refreshing glimpse of the humane side of our police force!

One by one we gathered, traffic dictating journey times. I was introduced and included in the conversations as we ate lunch with Sandra Millar, Children's Officer at Gloucester, who explained her role and told us about the plans for a huge fun day being held the following Saturday.

After lunch it was back to the Resource Centre to browse the shelves, just what I wanted! I was particularly impressed by the labelling system for the puppets with photos of the contents on the outside of each bag. Gleaning ideas as I went!

Then along the road to the Education Centre with its higgledy-piggledy floors and walls, up the stairs to the very top floor where we enjoyed a talk on the work undertaken by the team, followed by a browse round the room filled with things to delight and stretch young minds as they learn.

Just a few very hot steps across the Green produced a collective sigh of relief as we entered into the cool of the Cathedral. There we were treated to a guided tour of this historic building, full of mysteries of its own, with our verbal questions answered as we wandered around; the rest we must continue to seek for ourselves.

A short drive took us to Glenfall House near Cheltenham – what can I say? I quote from the brochure, "Nestling in the quiet wooded hillside . . . . Glenfall provides a secluded, peaceful retreat for those in need of relaxation and refreshment." Nothing but green countryside whichever direction you looked, silence apart from our own voices, sheep bleating, horses neighing and the odd hoot from an owl during the night. I'm sure we all remember the foal.

Despite all the above, I had trouble sleeping! My mind was so full of all I'd learned from the afternoon and evening. And there was more to come - Shahne Vickery and Margaret Cooling, both names very familiar to me from my hours of cataloguing, were coming to speak to us in the morning!

Inspiring is the only word I can think to use as Shahne and Margaret spoke, each of them enthusiastic about their work and the materials they had produced. They were thought provoking with lots and lots of ideas of how to use them, some of which we tried out. Although the theme was education in schools, I saw many ways in which they could be used to enhance our church / Christian lives too.

There are three sheets of A4 notes tucked in my drawer at work, just waiting to come out and be put into action. And I have invitations to visit a couple of the Centres not too far from Bristol. At present I work alone, but

shortly a colleague will be starting work with me – I can barely contain my eagerness to get the notes out and produce what should benefit all our users!

This is my personal perspective on the conference, and what I took away with me; there was so much more than I have mentioned, or there is room for here. I'd like to encourage anyone who has yet to attend one of these conferences to do so – you'll be amazed, encouraged, given hope, information and a warm welcome.

Denise Flanders  
All Saints Resource Centre, Bristol



## Margaret Cooling



Margaret Cooling is a writer and freelance trainer; she also works with the University of Gloucester and the Stapleford Centre. Her talk on the second day of our Summer Conference aimed to be practical and to show what we, as RE Centre staff, could do to help teachers in classrooms. She demonstrated the ways in which teachers can use stories and artworks in creative ways and how we can help them by putting together packs and enhancing the use of posters.

### Storybags

Margaret gave a quick run-through of the Christian parable of the Good Samaritan using the contents of a storybag. She called the story "The road of choices" and commended it as a good example of reflective learning. Her book *Bible storybags* gives suggestions for making 16 storybags (Bible Reading Fellowship 2008 £12.99 9781841015323). There is also on-line access to a free website [www.barnabasinschools.org.uk/cooling](http://www.barnabasinschools.org.uk/cooling) which has video clips of someone telling the stories; these can be used directly or downloaded and used on whiteboards. The storybags can be made quite cheaply using home-made or bought objects.

### Other ways of making stories come alive

Choose stories that help pupils to "engage with the story not just regurgitate it." Although Margaret's examples are Christian they are easily transferable to other faiths and to secular stories. Margaret gave us a useful handout and explained some of her suggestions such as the Silent Telephone Conversation, Faces, Recipe, Time-Person-Place-Weather and Senses Walk. She recommended <http://commons.wikimedia.org> as a source of copyright-free images.

In putting together stories and themes we should show integration: how stories can link to themes at a conceptual level e.g. forgiveness or justice. We should indicate some of the issues and questions a story raises. "Beware superficial links! Joseph is not about colours; Noah is not a nice story about animals and water." *RE Thinking 8: Concept cracking* (Stapleford Centre £5 1902234383) is a useful book and includes a reference to a very useful webpage giving connections and conceptual links.

The question of the increasing use of thematic rather than subject teaching gave rise to a short discussion about the use of Agreed Syllabuses, the International Primary Curriculum [www.internationalprimarycurriculum.com](http://www.internationalprimarycurriculum.com) and the Rose review of primary education. Progression and development could be lost within a thematic curriculum and teachers may be tempted to make tenuous links. We should not make teachers feel guilty about their lack of knowledge about religions – we are there with our experience and resources to help them.

In September the Stapleford Centre [www.stapleford-centre.org](http://www.stapleford-centre.org) is launching 40 weeks of downloads which will build up into a bank of RE activities. They are "content free" i.e. they are not linked to a specific religion or story.

### Exploring paintings

Margaret scattered a large number of laminated pictures of paintings around the floor and invited us to select an image. She then looked at the different images and talked about ways of using them. Her handouts included "Poster activities" which we could put with posters to enhance their use. She used a PowerPoint to show examples of the Annunciation by different artists: Botticelli, Fra Angelico, Rossetti, a West African and an Aboriginal artist.

She suggested that her large-format books (written with Jane Taylor and Margaret Walker) should be cut up, laminated and put with the relevant notes (in a plastic bag) to enable more people to use the resources:

*Jesus through art*

(RMEP, 1998 £29.99 9781851751198)

*The Bible through art: from Genesis to Esther*

(RMEP, 2000 £29.99 9781851752157)

CD-ROMs of these titles will be available soon.

*Christianity through art*

will be published in September 2009

(RMEP 9781851753826 £39.99)

Margaret's talk gave us lots of ideas about how we can "add value" to our resources and make them more teacher-friendly. We went to lunch full of enthusiasm.

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Mary Bryceland  
Leicester City RE Centre

