

Celebration Link

Newsletter of Celebration in the UK

December 2002



A cloth with many strands

'Celebration' is more than a single community. It embraces people from different countries and backgrounds, and even generations.

We have spent a great deal of energy, in the last three months, in laying foundations for a new kind of future for Celebration. Through gatherings at Aliquippa and in London, we have begun to draw together a body of people who between them share a common heritage.

Those who have known Celebration over the years have many bonds and memories. People around the world keep in touch. Children of community remain friends. Older members become godparents to their children. We meet up when we can. Some, to be sure, are impatient with memories: Move on! Get over it! But for others the past also contains a hope for the future - and a longing.

'Celebration' actually represents a history and experience stretching back through many



'Celebration' comes in many forms and guises

communities, plus a great deal of post-community experience. The present community cannot contain all of that within itself, but it can provide a focus for a lot of undirected energy and inarticulate desire.

Sometimes, in community, we speak about 'critical mass'. Oddly enough, as community membership has grown smaller, so the body of vision contained in past membership and association has approached critical mass. At least it seemed so, judging from response to the new chapel. So in faith we took these initiatives.

We have been very pleased at the response so far. Celebration is already a cloth with many strands. Here is the potential for many new weavings and designs. We hope the Link will reflect that process as it develops in Britain.

The Link

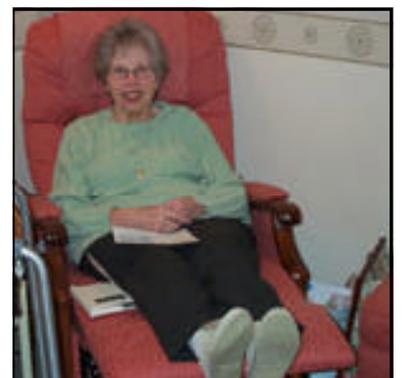
In recent issues we have spoken of our desire to merge the Link with News from Celebration. The reason was to bring together the two main strands of Celebration, USA and UK.

In practice this proved easier said than done, despite a lot of common material. But in Britain there is also plenty of 'weaving' to be done with various threads of Celebration here.

So, for now, the Link will try to reflect the 'tapestry' from a UK point of view. In this issue, for example, we have incorporated news and material arising from Phil and Margaret Bradshaw's involvement at St John's Redhill - never previously featured.

The Link is free, but there obviously is a cost. If you feel able to make a donation, please send to CCCT at the UK address (back page).

Susan Abbott



Due to her illness Susan's home in Redhill has now been sold and she has moved into a care home. This is temporary, pending long term decisions she will make about ultimate location. Those wishing to contact her can do so by writing to her at Room 17, The Westminster Reigate Beaumont, Colley Lane, Reigate RH2 9JB

Working with a church mission Statement



Anyone who has ever tried to work with a mission statement knows what a quagmire that can be. How do you decide what is most important? And what do you leave out? By its very nature, it needs to be something that everyone can understand and own for themselves. But trying to achieve it by committee is like blunting the sharp point of a pencil.

For that reason many people think mission statements are a waste of time. They get written, only to moulder away in a filing cabinet for years, never looked at or remembered. Yet they do have a useful purpose, if we get them right. They can focus the minds of the members of an organisation, so that all activities are related to the core essential goal.

The best mission statements are short and to the point. One imagines a McDonald's having a mission to 'sell a million beefburgers a year'. The fact that they sell chicken nuggets as well is beside the point. Everything falls into place once their core business is given its priority. We might imagine a church with a mission (though I doubt if any such exists!) to 'convert x number of people per year'. Evangelism would certainly be the top priority in that case.

At our own church, St John's, the PCC have been exploring the subject of mission statements recently. As a starting point, we took one that was devised for the Diocese of Southwark by a previous bishop, Roy Williamson. It had six points:

Pray for renewal
Seek the kingdom
Share the faith
Search for truth
Serve our neighbour
Follow Jesus in his suffering
love for the salvation of all people

As part of the process, I was asked to share my own reflections about these bullet points. I found it an interesting exercise for myself, quite apart from any value it may have had for others.

Pray for Renewal

We are accustomed to thinking of prayer as the means by which we address the Almighty, either in praise or petition. There is a certain obvious truth in this, but it isn't the whole story by any means. Surprisingly, prayer is first and foremost God's activity rather than ours. God prays, and always has done. At creation, the Spirit moved ('hovered' in some texts) over the face of the waters. The Spirit intercedes for us with

The best mission statements are short and to the point

'sighs too deep for words' (Rom. 8.26). We pray, not simply because God wants us to talk to him, but because in praying we do what God does.

It follows that prayer for renewal is not a request that God come and 'zap' us, we being entirely passive recipients of his favour. It is to put our hearts and lives on the line to be whatever God wants to do or be in us and

through us. In that sense, our whole lives are a prayer. Going to the cross was Jesus' prayer to the Father, as much as the words he spoke in the process.

There is a certain amount of dispossession in praying. The language is God's, not ours. You can see this best at the extremes. On the one hand, praying in tongues is a way of literally giving over your tongue to God. On the other hand, in contemplation we dispossess ourselves of all categories of language, in total silence before God. In between, the same principle applies.

Worship is not about offering to God what we think is appropriate. Worship is the sacrifice of praise; that is, it costs us something. It is work. It means allowing God to be God, rather than merely indulging in our favourite thing. To take an obvious example, God views us as the Body of Christ and wants us to worship as a body, not merely as a collection of individuals. But to achieve that takes work and the sacrifice of some of the things we may enjoy.

Worship is central to renewal because it is central to what the church is. Eph. 1: we are called to be a people for his praise. If we put anything else at the centre – say evangelism, or helping those in need – we are eccentric, however important those things may be. Worship is the wellspring for all other activities of the church's life, and needs the fullest attention and priority.

Seek the Kingdom

Many people think the kingdom of God means the rule of God in our individual hearts and lives. But that idea leads us to imagine that God has little to do with the structures of this world; he's mainly interested in saving people out of it, and is therefore primarily concerned with our interior lives. But the word 'kingdom' refers not just to individual people, but to all that is involved in human life – its structures and institutions, its laws and regulations, its ways of doing business and organising things.

So to seek the kingdom means to look for God in the structures of this world, to seek for justice, peace, reconciliation; not just helping the casualties, but changing the very structures which cause the casualties. It also means honouring the excluded or the disadvantaged, whatever the cause: economics, education, race, gender, sexuality – you name it. It's a huge canvas, but there are all sorts of levels on which one can seek the kingdom.

There are the 'big issue' types of things: anything from asylum seekers to inter-faith dialogue. It's important that these are recognised as 'kingdom' issues, not just politics. But it's also about little things; about the way we conduct ourselves together in church. It's about everyone being honoured and knowing they have a place. It is a particular challenge for leadership, because the kingdom is about serving, enabling the Body of Christ to be itself rather than imposing policies that control or define its spiritual life.

Share the faith

I grew up in a Christian tradition in which sharing the faith meant telling people they were sinners but if they only believed in Jesus they would be saved from their sins and go to heaven. One problem with that approach is that it can easily become a religious ideology

which is imposed on people apropos of nothing. That doesn't mean their experience of God is not genuine, but they can easily be converted to a form of religion rather than to God as he really is. It may be comforting, but it can be hard to escape from the religious trap which it puts them in – which, as Jesus was constantly pointing out, is not of God.

Like many other things in the Christian life, the model for sharing the faith has to come from Jesus himself

Like many other things in the Christian life, the model for sharing the faith has to come from Jesus himself. Whatever we believe about the cross – and there is certainly a huge amount to be gained from reflection on that event – we have to accept the fact that Jesus shared the faith without reference to the cross. When he did refer to it, he didn't talk about trusting it; he spoke about taking it up, which was when he began to lose people.

Jesus certainly taught a lot about God, but the most potent way in which he shared the faith was by accepting people and through his compassion for their needs. There is not a great deal of dogmatic statement in Jesus' language. When he speaks it is more as if he is explaining his behaviour or elucidating where he is coming from. The first impact on people was the way he reached out in an ordinary human way, often despite major obstacles and regardless of whether they were considered evil. Zacchaeus was a classic case, a man whose life turned around without, so far as we read, hearing a single sermon.

So sharing the faith has little to do with religious formulas but a great deal to do with making God visible. It has been called evangelism by attraction: giving people dignity and worth, a place

of identity and belonging, not in the patronising sense of saying there's a place here for you and we'll tell you what it is, but in the sense that God gives all of us a place and we acknowledge that by acknowledging the whole of who you are.

The best place to start sharing the faith is with ourselves: allowing ourselves to become part of one another's lives, not strangers to one another, not just 'going to church' but constructing our worship and social life together self-consciously to be a microcosm of God's life in human society. The words can come later.

Search for truth

We are brought up to think that truth is something fixed, like the Bible or some form of doctrine. We believe it because God has revealed it. The idea of revelation – truth given to us rather than worked out for ourselves – is part of Christian faith. But God reveals himself characteristically in ways which are not definitive, and some of the worst damage is done by people who think they know exactly what the truth is.

Truth is not a set of doctrines. Truth is something living, which has to be entered into in order to know it. 'Jesus is the Son of God' – is that truth? By itself it's just a statement – who knows whether Jesus is the Son of God or not? But if it is the way you express your faith, that's quite a different matter. To call Jesus the Son of God is not like saying George Bush is the President of the USA. That's a factual statement. A faith statement is a different sort of thing. To say Jesus is the Son of God is to say that the impact of his life and death on you is such that that's how you respond to him. No matter what anyone else thinks, you have to say a man like that is the Son of God.

The Bible says no-one can call Jesus Lord except by the



'Partners in Ministry' conference at Aliquippa

The weather was perfect for the first gathering of 'Partners in Ministry' at the Community's headquarters in Aliquippa in August - just as well, as for space reasons we took most of our meals outside!

Spreading the conference over the Labour Day weekend provided enough time to do justice to all the ingredients of a successful event: catching up with old friends, relaxation and fellowship, main sessions, workshop activities, worship, discussion and exchange of ideas - even a bit of local sight-seeing.

The purpose of the weekend was to gather together to reflect on our collective experience of Celebration and to explore ideas for a future partnership. Inevitably that meant that those attending this initial event would be either previous members or those who had closely associated with the Community over a long period. But that does not preclude new contacts from being drawn in as things develop.

In fact, 'Partners in Ministry' is neither a programme nor a special category of associate. It is

essentially a concept which allows individuals to add themselves to the Community's ministry to whatever degree is appropriate for them, and in the spirit of sharing gifts and resources on the basis of mutual relationship.

The energy generated by this combination of reunion and vision was reflected in the very large number of ideas and suggestions that came from the workshops. We broke these down into key areas of ministry.

Ministry of presence has become particularly important for the Community since the closure of the nearby Episcopal church and the arrival of the Church Army. It covers a wide range of activities. A house close by on Franklin Avenue has been donated to the Community for use as a half way house - a project which excites both Community members and friends who have experience in deal-

ing with problems of addiction. On a rather different plane, there are proposals for landscaping the chapel area and other sections of property which are currently derelict. 'Presence' can also be extended to cover ministry in the town: the Aliquippa Arts Festival, partnership with the Church Army, working together with local business and civic organisations, offering worship training to local churches and choirs.

Hospitality, though local, is in a category of its own. The Community has many visitors, but there is scope to develop hospitality in a variety of ways. Retreats, for example, have proved successful in the past, and are an ideal way to get young people involved in the Community - doing work projects, not just meditating! Clergy and other church leaders will be encouraged to stay for longer periods on sabbatical. All ministry in the town, and that of the new chapel, will create opportunities for offering an open door of friendship to local people. One idea is an Open House for the neighbourhood, involving a meal and activities for local children.

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Community of Celebration at St John's

On 13th October St. John's Redhill were host to the Community who led an evening communion service. The Rev. Phil Bradshaw celebrated. The combination of Community and St. John's musicians and singers produced a powerful experience of worship - with very little rehearsal! The service (including a slide show presentation of the Community's life and ministry) was followed by drinks and fellowship.

Picture (left): rehearsal.



Celebration in the UK

In the heyday of the Fisherfolk, the bulk of the Community's ministry was done in Britain. The legacy of those years continues to inspire and enrich people's lives today. Two nearly identical comments at two separate Community ministries in the London area last October made the point: "I felt at home", and, "I felt I had come home".

What is it about that ministry of worship that so often touches a chord in people's hearts? Whatever it is, it is not the only ingredient to do so. For many former members the life itself generated memories that were unforgettable and relationships that endured, even though time and circumstance required that they move on.

Part of what 'Partners in Ministry' is about in the UK is nurturing that legacy and the informal network of friendships it created.

The idea began over a year ago, at an initial 'PIM' meeting in London. Why not bring Community members in the US to Britain, to join others here in hosting a day event? It would not simply be a promotional event run by the Community, but an example of partnership in practice. Action committees were formed and plans made. Fliers went out and in due course it all happened on Saturday 12th October.

The chosen location was St. Michael's Camden, home church of one of the CCCT trustees, Judy

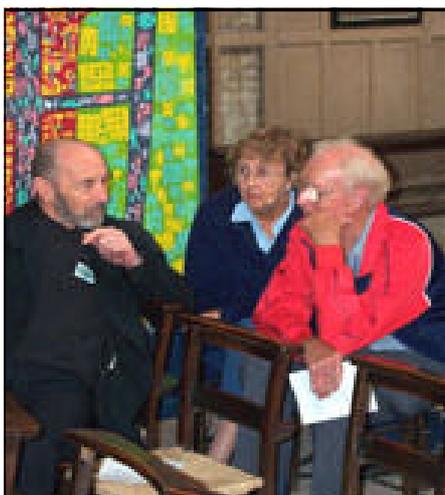
Powell. Standing at the centre of a teeming multi-racial community, close to the heart of London and easily reached by underground, it seemed an appropriate venue. We agreed that the day would be based around the Community's own rhythm of daily offices and Eucharist. It would be entitled 'A Day in the Life of Prayer'.

Just about every Celebration community that had ever existed in Britain – Yeldall Manor, Cumbrae, Post Green, Bletchingley – was represented in the turnout, as well as a good number of friends who have continued with us down the years. As with the parallel gathering in the USA, reunion was an important ingredient in making things gel.

During the morning we had talks on prayer from Jen Hawkes and Abbot Basil Matthews, followed by discussion. One comment from Abbot Basil was particularly striking. When he first encountered the Community in the 1970s, his face ached from smiling. His muscles weren't used to it. Now his face aches when he doesn't smile! It may look a natural trait but you can acquire it!

During the afternoon several people shared their experiences of Celebration and what it meant to them in their own lives: Community members Joe Beckey and Rev. Stephen McKeown; Hakan Joelson (now married to former Celebration member Ruth Wieting), who had come with Ruth from Sweden specially for the occasion; Roger Orr, a trustee of CCCT; Martin Burch, who had recently spent his 'gap' year as a volunteer worker in the Community. The day concluded with a Celebration style Eucharist at which the Rev. Maggie Durran preached.

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Pictures

Previous page, top left: lunch break; top right: main session. This page, top: leading worship at St. Michael's Camden. Upper left: receiving communion at the conclusion of the day. Lower left: Basil Matthews OSB, Abbot of Elmore Abbey, with Rosemary and Desmond Orr. Right: Hannah King and Sue King. Far right: Jen and Martyn Hawkes.





‘Celebration in the UK’ cont.

The day after the meeting at St Michael’s the Community led a communion service at Phil and Margaret Bradshaw’s church, St John’s Redhill. This was a particularly significant occasion for Phil and Margaret, since their situation as members ‘on detached service’ has often meant keeping their lives in separate compartments. It was a great joy to integrate both aspects, and especially so as the service was warmly received by those attending. Joining with the St John’s musicians worked extremely well, and thanks to Hakan’s practical skill even a recalcitrant projector produced its slide show.

What the bare description of these ministries does not tell is the spirit and atmosphere of the occasion and the many conversations which took place both at the time and on other days during the Community’s visit. We felt that something had been established during this time which offers the prospect of continued building for the future. What shape or form that will take we have yet to see. But it will be exciting.



Aliquippa conference cont.

Another important area is publications. This is necessary both for ourselves (to express or articulate our vision) and for the wider public on whose continued support we depend. It includes newsletters and websites, occasional publications, a proposed book of song stories, even a proposed new CD and songbook.

Finally, there is of course the nurture of the network of friends and relationships which have often been so significant in Celebration’s history. One way to increase this is by continuing to make available places in the Community for volunteer service - particularly important for introducing young people to the Community. Visits such as the recent trip to the UK are another. Helping partners with their own projects (e.g. the new CD by Diane Andrew and Wiley Beveridge - see back page) is yet another. There is possibly a need for a publication specially catering for the needs of partners in ministry.

But the most effective way of nurturing the network of partners is by the success of the scheme itself. Most of the ideas generated at the conference will only be truly successful as they involve others outside the Community Chapter, and that in turn will strengthen the bonds. The value of such involvement was shown, for example, during the Youth Pilgrimage reported in our last issue. The challenge is how to build on that experience. It will be the subject of discussion at the Community’s Fall retreat this December.



Pictures

Top group: Aliquippa conference. Upper left: Phil and Margaret Bradshaw, Diane and Bob Andrew. Lower left: Sylvia Hawkes chatting to May McKeown. Right: the Fisherfolk ride again (James von Minden, Bill Farra, Wiley Beveridge, Mimi Farra, Max Dyer. Seated: Maggie Durran)

Centre picture: Roger Orr speaking at St Michael’s Camden.

Lower group: UK Ministry. Clockwise from left: May and Steven McKeown; Ruth Wieting and Joe Beckey; James von Minden and Judy Powell; Hakan Joelson and Maggie Durran.

Spirit. Of course, people call Jesus Lord all the time. What that means is that you can't genuinely call Jesus 'Lord' unless you live your life in the same spirit that he did. It doesn't matter how devotional or religious you are. Jesus respected his own religion but he also pointed out where it enslaved people rather than setting them free.

So the search for truth is the search for authenticity in Christian faith. It's always a place of tension, because God is infinitely creative and cannot be confined to a single mode of being. If we lean too far in one direction, we become overly religious, too obsessed with the right beliefs and the right way of doing things. If we go too far in the other direction we begin to lose sight of God and our dependence on him to be the judge of all that we say and do. Authenticity means steering a course between this Scylla and Charybdis. It means being open to God wherever he may be found – in the Bible, in other religions or in the world.

Serve our neighbour

In the eyes of many, this is almost the hallmark of Christian behaviour. But if we imagine God sitting on his throne and giving orders that we go and care for people on his behalf, we're mistaken. We serve our neighbour because God and our neighbour are effectively the same thing. Matt. 25: inasmuch as you've done it to the least of these, you've done it to me. 'Lord, didn't we do all kinds of wonderful things in your name?' 'Well, I never knew you; perhaps you'd better ask these folk if they remember you serving them.'

Whatever is 'God' to us, that is what we'll give our spiritual allegiance to. If God is in our neighbour, we will love our neighbour not because he is our neighbour but because that is where God is. That's because

love comes from God and returns to God in the form of our worship. If we love each other, see God in each other, hear God in each other, that is the substance of our worship, to which our mouths give expression. Sometimes people think the reference in Matt. 25 to 'my brethren' means that Jesus regards our neighbour as just the person next to us in our little church family. But this is a mistake: Jesus is identifying himself with the poor, whom he sees as his brethren. In fact, neighbours are the entire world out there, which excludes no-one.

Authenticity means being open to God wherever he may be found

Follow Jesus...

What this heading says is that there is a certain cost involved in following Jesus. But the operative phrase is 'for the salvation of all people'. How does Jesus' suffering bring salvation to all people? Some might say Jesus paid the penalty for our sins. But in that case, how does our suffering bring salvation to everyone? To understand that, we need to appreciate that suffering is all about power and its relationships.

What Jesus did was to reveal God's life. God's life is harmless, vulnerable not defensive, non-violent, limitless in generosity (sending rain on the just and on the unjust), endlessly creative and without fear. If you live like that yourself, it's quite likely that people will take advantage and you will have to put yourself out. But that's not the point. The point is that, being without fear, Jesus summoned the institutions and structures of life to also come under the judgement of God's life and Spirit. That was very deeply disturbing, especially to those who held positions of power or control within those structures. So they called Jesus a wrongdoer

and got rid of him. True to God's life, Jesus didn't resist that, and for that reason the image of the slaughtered lamb became the central image of the Christian faith.

But of course that spirit became irrepressible, which is why the suffering of the church became salvation for all people. It was the inevitable consequence of revealing God's life as Jesus did. To follow Jesus, we must be able to bring the institutions of life under judgement, both by our words and by the way we live.

Of course there are many examples throughout the world in which the Christian spirit is ruthlessly repressed today. But for the ordinary local church in England, this truth, like charity, begins at home. Every church has its representatives of institutional power and authority, and that power needs to be under God's judgement too. It may well be that the needs of certain kinds of people require that sacrifices be made in some of our traditions – even hallowed ones. If that is not possible, it is not we who are the suffering lambs; it is those who have no recourse. Suffering is all about power and how it affects God wherever God chooses to be.

The Eucharist gathers all this together. We debase it when we treat it as a personal devotional. The Eucharist maintains the place of tension referred to earlier. The bread broken is the body of Christ; it's not a symbol. We eat it, so it is then part of our flesh and we too become the body of Christ – in a real human way, not in some mystical spiritual sense. Others eat the bread, so they too are part of us. We are one with God and one with each other. The bread is broken, the wine poured out, so we are one with Jesus in his offering of himself to the Father for the salvation of the world. So in Paul's words, Christ is all and in all.



Perhaps the most creative thing to come out of it is that we are 'St. John's' church.

Where does all this leave us in regard to a mission statement? For me, basically at the beginning of a process. It's useful to reflect a bit on what 'church' in general is all about. But will a statement designed for a diocese of nearly 400 churches suffice for each one? Hardly. No doubt one hopes to see certain features present in all churches. But each church has its own unique circumstances, and a parish church (as opposed to a congregational one) must take its agenda, at least in part, from the secular society it exists to serve.

Is there a middle course between a mission that is so general and multi-pronged as to be fairly useless in terms of focusing people's minds, and one that is so driven by local agendas that it loses the all-inclusive character of church?

My own approach to this began by looking back at my reflections on Bishop Roy Williamson's statement. It seemed to me they were coloured by a certain theological outlook. And indeed that is the case. The outlook is not ideological but the product of decades of

community living. Certain themes appear, such as the need to provide a place of identity and belonging for all people. Running through the whole thing is a certain way of thinking about God, a habit of not separating God from our neighbour, or indeed from any part of his creation. The 'otherness' of God is held together in the same frame of imagination as his nearness in the material stuff of life.

It is important for me to recognise this, because in a parish church situation we do not constantly promote the Community of Celebration, or even community in general. The relevance of all that experience is apparent when it is digested and made available in a much broader way in terms of theological understanding or outlook. That way, it is not prescriptive. It opens the door for all kinds of creativity.

But having said that, it remains my own personal outlook. Or does it? In some of the more recent sermons and discussions at St John's, we have thought about some of the

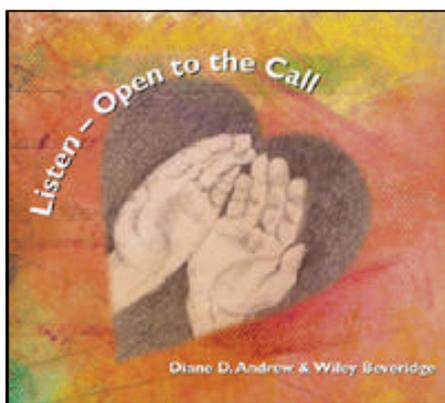
themes from John's gospel. Many of these are quite similar; indeed I would find it quite difficult to say whether my community experience influenced my understanding of John, or the reverse. 'Love one another', 'I and the Father are one', 'heaven open' (the coming together of the transcendent and immanent), the idea that we ourselves are God's word. Discussion on these topics has been fruitful and stimulating.

The most creative thought to come out of it is that we are 'St John's' church, and therefore our mission is to be what we are, an example of his teaching. Whether such use of a patron saint's name is always appropriate is debatable, but at least in this case it is not an idea simply taken off the shelf. It is something that seems to be emerging through a process that is part intentional, part incidental, happening in sermons, talks or informal conversations. Perhaps the most important thing is the process itself. We don't need to just 'go to church'. We need to discover who we are.



We don't need to just 'go to church'. We need to discover who we are.

Phil Bradshaw



Listen, Diane D. Andrew
Come into the Quiet, Diane D. Andrew
Do You Know? Jodi Page-Clark
Shepherd Me, O God, Marty Haugen
A Prayer for Healing, Joy Cowley
Walk in the Light, Traditional
South African Creed, Adapt. John Yivisaker
In the Lord, Taize Community
Blest are They, David Haas



Website: www.sweetsong.org

The Summons, Iona Community Writers
Bring Forth the Kingdom, Marty Haugen
Friend, Joy Cowley
Jesus Loves Me, Adapted Wiley Beveridge
When I Listen to You, Stefan Waligur
God of Hope and God of Healing, Rosalind Brown and Wiley Beveridge

UK price: £12 (incl. P&P)

A new CD by Diane Davis Andrew and Wiley Beveridge

Diane and Wiley are well known to many of our readers for their contribution to the life of the Community of Celebration and especially its ministry in song. Today they continue that ministry in their own lives and have released a CD which will be instantly recognisable to those familiar with Fisherfolk worship.

The CD, 'Listen - Open to the Call' is now available either direct from the US Community website or (if wishing to pay by Sterling cheque) from the Community of Celebration Christian Trust in the UK - address below. UK orders take 7 to 10 days from receipt of cheque. Please state delivery address clearly, including post code.

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