

From Experience through Reflection to Transformation

by Linda Granville

I was born in 1946 in a north east working class family and brought up in a patriarchal household. Being the only female sibling among three brothers, a slow realisation taught me that I was at the bottom of the pecking order. Dad's word was law and then came my brothers in order of age. Mam was never 'allowed' to go out to 'paid' work. Her job was the home and family whose sole purpose in life was to serve us.

William Beveridge, (significantly a man) was the architect of the post war welfare state, He advocated adult women would normally be economically dependent on their husbands. His 'norms' legitimised the status quo. They revealed the power relations in society and were a post war basis for poverty and oppression for women.

Throughout childhood, the patriarchal 'high' Church of England compounded my situation. Men made the decisions and women made the tea. There was always a man in the pulpit. The disciples were men. God was a man? Jesus was a man. The early Christian Father's were men. The stories in my head around biblical women were that of the temptresses Eve or Salome or the woman being stoned for adultery . The positive stories of women in the bible were subtly hidden only revealed to me 40 years later at theological college.

I could see myself being subtly groomed for 'serving'. This didn't always come without any contention from me. I didn't mind serving now and again but why always me and never my brothers?

"The family becomes the nucleus of the patriarchal relations in society. To that extent parenting language for God reinforces patriarchal power rather than liberating us from it."

R, Radford Ruether.1983: p70

Throughout my childhood I was in constant conflict with the interjections, "You have to do it because you're a girl" or "You can't do it because you're a girl." With such acute low self-esteem compounded by this subordination, being pure and clean to emanate the Virgin Mary 1

solely for a potential future husband was my only pathway to heaven. If I wasn't, it would be a pathway to hell.

This feeling of subordination led me to leave my home and family to emigrate by ship alone to Australia on a government £10 emigration passage. I returned home by ship in the other direction for a holiday three years later so having travelled around the world by ship I then returned to Australia alone again, overland on a Greyhound bus as far as Nepal then on completely alone to Australia. sleeping in a tent for most of the way without a sleeping bag. (I had forgotten it in England and couldn't afford a new one) I travelled on an absolute shoe string. I had many, sometimes scary adventures, but all with the support of my constant companion, my pocket sized new testament bible. All this showed them what a girl could really do!

Three months **before** starting my nine years of travelling I was raped. Then, this was the greatest, but by no means the final, humiliation of male dominant power over me. The patriarchal system had already, since childhood, very subtly taken over my mind and now it blatantly took everything else.

I was nothing ... I was, a clod of dirty clay; which was more or less what some perceptions from the pulpit told me in the first place.

Martin Luther said, "God creates out of nothing. Therefore, until a man is nothing God can make nothing out of him".
I would argue 'her' too.

Nine years later I returned home from my many travelling adventures but this time pregnant and soon to become a single parent living in a society advocated by William Beveridge.

Three years after the birth of my first child, at the age of 38 I got pregnant again by a man I thought I loved. He told me he'd had the 'op' and could never have children. However he got somebody else pregnant at the same time as me, and I was left alone, now with two children with both fathers disappearing before they were born.

Mixed with interjections from my childhood, my one concern was God. God couldn't possibly love me now. I could be forgiven once , but couldn't possibly be forgiven a second time. *I knew that absolutely empty feeling of utter desolation. I was without God.*

However, three weeks after I found out I was pregnant it was my turn to read in church. By this time the whole church knew about me.

I didn't at all feel worthy to go to church or even face their judgemental glances, but even if God didn't want me, I needed God. I didn't look at the bible passage to practice reading it. But wow! In church a major miracle happened as I finally read the passage. It was Romans 8: 31-end. It began,

“If God is for us...who is against us? He who did not withhold his own son but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against Gods elect? ... It is God who justifies .. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus who died, yes who was raised, who is at the right hand of God who indeed intercedes for us. Who will seperate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship ...or distress... or persecution...or famine,... or nakedness,... or peril,... or sword? As it is written “For your sake we are being killed all the day long : we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.” No in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loves us.

For I am convinced that neither death... nor life,... nor angels,... nor rulers,... nor things present,... nor things to come,...nor powers,...nor height,...nor depth,...nor anything else in all creation... will EVER be able to seperate us from the LOVE of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

I broke down in tears of joy.

From that moment I knew I was stood beside and loved, warts and all...and so was every other living being.

Meanwhile, a short time later, I was contemplating on a Cedar tree outside my kitchen window and I wrote the following poem.

THE TREE

*God created me so perfectly,
God fashioned me, just so.
A Grand, Majestic, living tree
To grace the earth below.*

*God created me so perfectly
And yet, with one accord,
Men cut me down and made a cross
To hold my dying Lord.*

*I held Him there. I felt His pain.
I was His destiny.
And when they drove the nails in Him
They drove them too, in me.*

*I was the one He prayed to miss.
The one He had to face.
And man had shapened me to this,
A cross in deep disgrace.*

*I didn't want Him hanging there.
I wanted Him to live.
But me, an instrument of death
Was all I was to give.*

*And yet I know....and know I should,
Your love was holding Him.
I know that through my shameful wood
He took away all sin.*

*Why me!? Why me!? I'm bound to cry.
For ever I will wish
to know, because I wonder why
You fashioned me for this.*

*Then, through Your Sons forgiving word
Great understanding bled.
A still small voice within me, heard,
And this is what YOU said.*

*"I created you so perfectly.
I fashioned you,... just so...
A grand, majestic, LIVING tree,
To grace My earth below"*

Linda Granville (1985)



Holy Island of Lindisfarne: Picture: Linda Granville

However even though I knew I was completely loved , and I also had two wonderful children and we love each other to bits, it was obvious society and maybe even some of my family still had their doubts.

My home town of Middlesbrough once boasted 2 ICI Chemical plants, Iron & Steel & Shipbuilding Industries. They were all disappearing before my eyes with tens of thousands of people out of work. Some housing estates had 80% unemployment.

I was living at the beginning of an 18 year, unemployed single parent poverty trap.

Every effort was made by the government to send single parents into patriarchal work structures. Women earn less than men. Most women's paid work is insecure low paid, part time or temporary.

Inflexible conditions did not allow me to stay at home to look after a sick child without losing pay.

Unpaid home- work is oppressively undervalued. This was proved by the first act of the newly installed labour government when they cut single parent benefits. Today help with childcare (working tax credit) is only linked to (paid) work' Single parents, dependant on benefit, who for one reason or another have to stay at home to look after their children are among the poorest in society. They're labelled 'dole scroungers'. Gender reinforces Poverty.

Years ago, I took a part time cleaners job. I wasn't allowed to earn more than £15 per week.

1 woman colleague was only earning £1 per hour because she desperately needed the job and there were loads of unemployed people to take her place in Teesside. Also if she earned more than £1 per hour it would effect her measley, **but regular** benefits. When the minimum wage came in, it took me over the £15 a week I was allowed to earn.

I asked my employer if he could reduce my hours from 6 to 5. He refused and so to keep my job I had to take home less than the minimum wage, the alternative was for me to break the law. There seemed no comeback to the fact that he was breaking it.

Many women were exploited in this way. We couldn't take another part time job because the only place in the area without having to pay extortionate bus fares out of this very isolated housing estate was the

local supermarket and a part time job in that meant that although it was part time, employees had to be available for work morning afternoon or evening whenever they were ordered to come which couldn't guarantee being home for children. It also stopped any woman to get out of the poverty trap if they wanted to take another part time job at the same time or regular education courses.

With the cleaners job, two people were sacked and I was given their work cleaning urine and vomit in men's toilets, without any change in pay. Sadly, I had to leave my children with my mother one Christmas night so I could go to work on Boxing day. To spend Christmas night alone without your kids is a miserable experience for any parent. When I finally trudged a mile to work on Boxing day morning in deep snow I was the only person to turn up. All the rest of the staff had a hangover from the Christmas staff party the night before; a party that I was not even asked to attend, but only I cleaned up. I was a 'non person' yet again!

At the same time, apart from doing a hard job bringing up my two children, I was voluntarily running a teenage drop in centre, helping people with learning difficulties, had a weekly column in a local newspaper to write about good community initiatives around Teesside. I taught English to Asian women, a few times with only £1 in my pocket wondering if I should feed the children or pay bus fares to teach English, with the same TESOL qualification working next to somebody earning £28 per hour. Later I worked with the homeless, counselled people with disabilities and rape victims. All this voluntary work had flexible hours around my children, Even though I was trained to do all this work Nobody could afford to pay me, or offer me enough paid hours to get out of the poverty trap. Yet I allowed myself to be grossly exploited for the sake of £15.

And where was the justice when for a few years my children and I had to depend on charity food parcels to survive over Christmas?

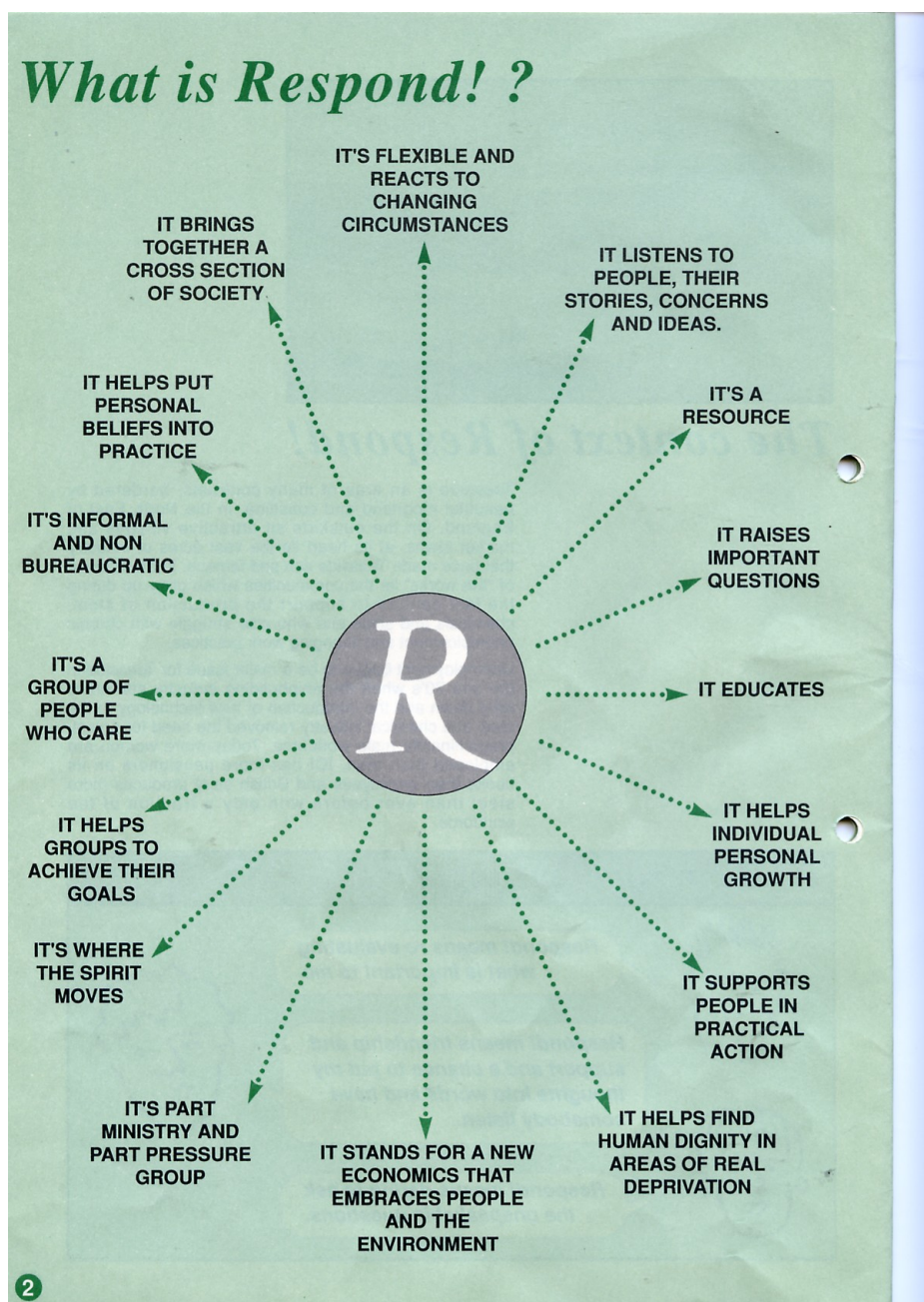
This 'non person' oppressive experience was the catalyst to encourage me to find ways to value all people in or out of paid work.

Luckily, for 10 years I belonged to a very 'person centred' voluntary ecumenical church organisation called 'Respond!'.

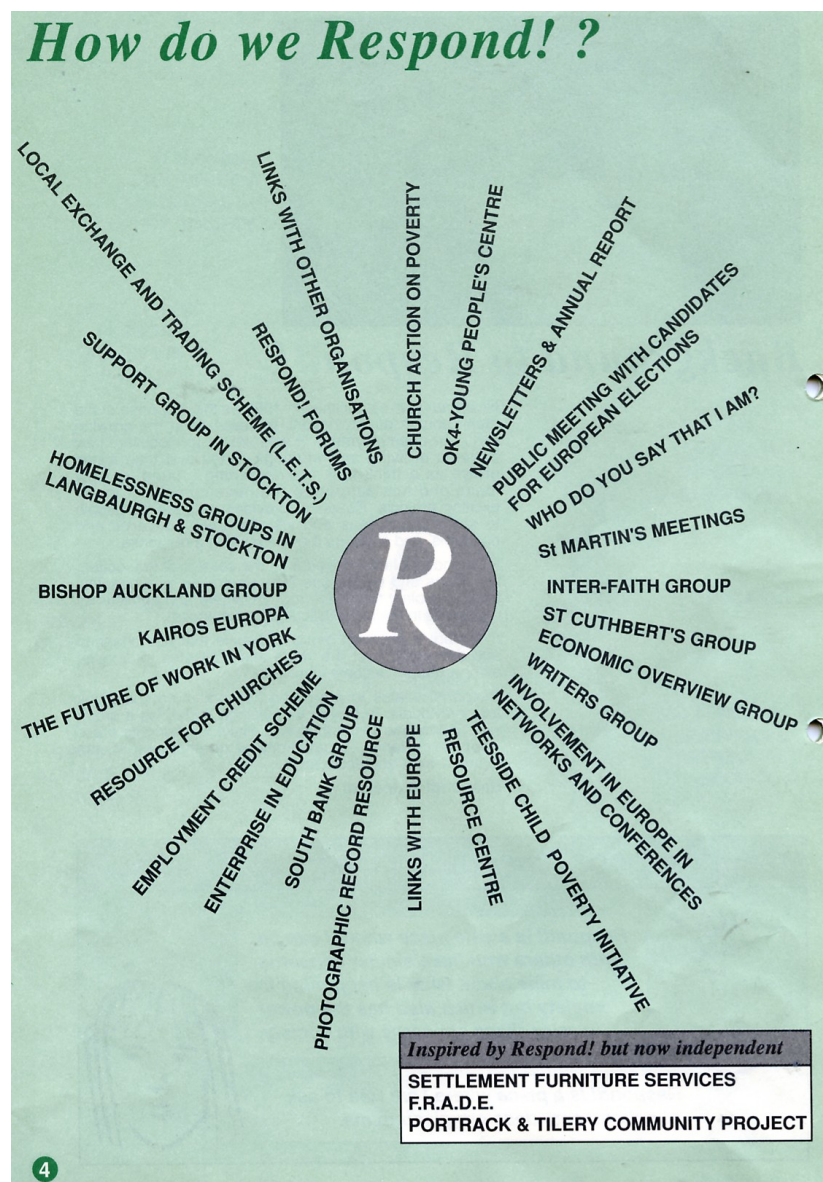
Respond!, set up in 1986 was a 'Faith in the City' response to the demise

of the Chemical, Shipbuilding and Iron & Steel Industries in Teesside. It looked for more holistic ways of valuing all people in or out of paid work. The Aim of 'Respond!' was to facilitate the discovery of practical new responses to the social and economic crisis that embraced the spiritual, physical and wealth creating potentials of all people.

The people of 'Respond!' stood beside me, listened, accepted me non-judgementally, trusted my opinions and enabled me to think. It had 4 overview groups. 'European & Economic,' 'Spirituality,' 'Grassroots' and 'Communication'. I joined all of them. And 10 years later became its chairperson for a year before I left to go to college.



With 'Respond!' together with National Church Action on Poverty I listened to other unemployed people experiencing the brunt end of the trickle down system, both locally, nationally & with meetings with the 'European Contact Group' in Bonn and 'Kairos Europe' in Strasburg and '4th World ADT' in Brussels, I listened to the poor European wide. We all were the experts on economic systems that *didn't* work. 'Respond!' resolved to believe that **jobs should be for people and not people for jobs.**



We opened our eyes to the changing scene that was unfolding before us. Richard Douthwaite in his book 'Short Circuit' told us "Global economic changes first started taking place in 1971 when America came away from

the gold standard, which was the last fixed link between real goods and paper money. The monetary world had no foundation. Britain joined the EEC in 1973 curtailing our economic freedom. The Kennedy and Tokyo GATT treaties reduced the rates of duty they imposed on imports from other participants. Britain then had a flood of clothes, shoes & textiles from cheap labour countries & employment in British firms manufacturing them fell from 973.000 to 412, 000 between 1973-1993. Other industries followed suit. With Margaret Thatcher came complete abolition of exchange controls in 1979. Concessions enabled the banks and financial institutions to move money to where ever in the world they could obtain the highest return."

This proved that, contrary to popular belief, unemployed people were not responsible for their own unemployment.

The change in wording of 'unemployment benefit', to 'jobseekers allowance' emphasised responsibility on the unemployed person to find a job and therefore blame for not getting one.

Richard Douthwaite shows how grossly unjust that is.

"In some areas the ratio of job vacancies is 30-1" Russel,H,1995:Poverty Close to Home p69

The government answer to these economic changes was to advocate full employment as a normal undisputed goal in life at any cost. Why?

"The setting up of norms is an important part of ideology An ideology legitimises the status quo and will establish what is 'normal and therefore what is abnormal... .. it is part and parcel of the power relations in society." Berger .P. 1966 p 40

The ideology of full employment is so ingrained that when people are outside of it, they're labelled dole scroungers, always living with the threatening dark cloud of losing benefits, *for ever* hovering over their heads and treated with contempt.

"When I speak to people in extreme poverty they tell me...

***'It's not so much the lack of a job that despairs me
or the lack of bread on the table...***

It's in the contempt of my fellow citizens.

It is this contempt that lies between Despair and Justice and Basic Human Rights. Fr. Joseph Widlenski

Fr. Joseph Widlenski was the founder of '4th World ADT'.

On October 17th 1998 (World Day to Overcome Extreme Poverty) with Respond! I attended a seminar in the European Parliament in Brussels chaired by Jack Santer, the then, European President.

Organised by '4th World ADT', representatives of all the extreme poorest across Europe told their stories.

Members of 4th world ADT in different countries across Europe would meet monthly in their own areas and in all meetings they would discuss the same issue related to poverty. This gave a wider perspective and voice to the issue. Every two years representatives would meet to speak to their own Parliament and every 4 years they would speak at the European Parliament. My visit coincided with the 50th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Industry was constantly adapting to Market Capitalism. Some years ago a large company would employ its own teams of people who could repair anything that went wrong, drivers, cleaners, etc. Today, many fewer people are employed who work longer hours, paid more highly and constantly re-trained. Almost everything else is *competitively* tendered out to the lowest bidder. Local authorities followed industry. There were also big changes in terms of ethos and structure with Social Services, Health and Education. Professional workers still have to meet an array of performance indicators imposed from above.

Large competitive business conglomerates rule the world often influencing and overriding a country's democratic political system.

Competition inevitably implies more losers than winners. What happens to the losers? What happens to the millions of people who don't wish to work in competition and prefer co-operation?

Poverty is manifested but not only in long term unemployment and families struggling with very few resources, but also in an upsurge of homelessness, crime & disorder inter racial tension and prejudicial scapegoating. Individuals, neighbourhoods and sometimes whole regions are shut out of the mainstream of social and economic life.

The downside of economic competition was revealed to me when on one occasion in Teesside, I visited two very deprived housing estates just across a minor road from each other. In one of them the local council had replaced their windows with double glazing. Double glazing is important for people in poverty because it is better for their health and helps with crippling fuel bills. A short while later both communities had to be in competition with each other vying for the Government 'Single Regeneration Budget'. The one with the 'best bid' got the money.

The best bid depended on the expertise that helped put it together not necessarily the greatest need.

The community with the double glazing 'won' and the 'government quangos', while implementing other regeneration initiatives on the estate, took out their brand new double glazing and replaced them with even newer double glazed windows. This especially led to a lot of anger, resentment and feelings of worthlessness from the community that received nothing. Neighbours that had been friends for years, with only a narrow minor road dividing them, were now alienated from each other. The competitive market economy was setting poor against poor.

Although the Global Market has given us many positive things, the downside is gross pollution of the seas and the environment.

Any market depends on consumer spending so is only available to those who have the resources to go shopping;

In the 1980's the credit market was relaxed. More people had credit cards, mortgages, high interest loans, interest free credit, student loans etc. TV adverts arrogantly still invade our living rooms and thousands of children are bullied at school, sometimes with suicidal results because they don't have the 'right gear' and there's a seriously growing trend for many people fearfully confronting loan sharks and a serious spiralling abyss of debt.

People are constantly having to train for new skills to fit into the whims of the market without any basic sense of security. They have to be adaptable, have confidence to move freely between employment self employment and unemployment. Unfortunately many don't have these skills and feel thrown on the scrap heap.

I knew a number of unemployed people who were doing very worthwhile voluntary work but told to leave it, forced into 6 month work programmes with £10 dole top up with threat of losing benefits which often had nothing to do with their inner yearning to reach their potential. It was a grossly unjust scenario when unemployed people only received a £10 dole top up working next to others who earned a living wage and doing exactly the same job. However society stood back and let it all happen.

" During 1995-1996 over 300,000 people had their benefits cut for failing to attend these programmes. There's a massive increase as compared to 1993- 1994 when it was 100,000. The regime is being made stricter." (Unemployment & the Future of Work 1997: p137)

The stricter the regime became, the more people opted out, hence the rise in homelessness.

With this in mind 3 of us from Respond! visited a three year pilot part time work programme organised by the 'Religious of Ireland'

'The Part Time Jobs Opportunities Programme'

We visited it mid term of it's three year pilot and it was a joy to see self worth in the eyes of all the participants.

The ethos of the pilot programme originated for a concern for the unemployed.

- Firstly the income they receive is inadequate.
- Secondly most of them are forced to remain idle as a condition to receive social welfare and be available for work even though the jobs didn't exist for them.
- Thirdly as a result of their non involvement and inadequate income unemployed people are alienated from the mainstream of society.

The AIMS of Part Time Jobs Opportunities Programme were to:-

- Enhance the dignity of unemployed people by giving them an opportunity to be involved in some meaningful work.
- Broaden the meaning of work to include in particular, socially environmentally useful work. Begin the process of putting value on this work by having an hourly wage agreed.

- Challenge the 'Availability for a job' rule which demands that unemployed people as a condition of receiving their unemployment assistance remain idle. In this initiative when a person has worked the required hours, they are free for the rest of the week. If they take another part time job and the income from it brings them into the tax net, they are taxed in the usual way.
- To provide education & training which would be relevant to the work being done and would enhance the job opportunities and quality of life of the employee. Both the employer and employee participate in designing this education training.
- **To pay 'the going rate for the job'** It is important that employed people are not seen as cheap labour. This also ensures that the jobs of other employees are not undermined by initiatives which take on unemployed people at cheaper rates of pay.

Respond! partnered up with Teesside Industrial Mission , Shape Training, the Church of England and the New Economics Foundation and we tried very hard to implement this as a pilot programme in Teesside, but with just a few alterations to fit more closely to the then current British System. We felt this was an answer to prayer. However it failed because the Irish model depended on the dole being transferred to the employer to enable them to pay the workers with dignity.

In Britain our government would not allow that transfer.
So we in Britain had to still contend with unjust work schemes.

At that time in my status as a single parent I was not forced into those schemes. This fact gave me a chance to belong to the second largest industry in Britain, the unpaid workers sector worth £41 billion pounds annually to the British Economy.

Voluntary work gave me a *choice* in the work I was doing, was non compulsory was very satisfying, enabled myself and the wider community, *had hours around my children*. However the downside was that my children and I had to live **extremely frugally** (and I can't emphasise that enough) until I discovered Local Exchange & Trading Schemes. Or Time Banks as they're now called.

I survived by doing lots of things for other people and different people gave me things such as second hand furniture. This then was a natural progression to voluntarily help to set up a local Exchange & Trading Scheme (LETS) / (Time Bank) in Teesside.

The true wealth of any community does not rely on money but in the talents and resources of people.

A Local Exchange & Trading Scheme or Time Bank as it is now called, unlocks talent which is often locked away because money isn't there. People share their God given skills and hobbies to do jobs for each other without the use of money. If one person does a job for somebody but the other person hasn't got what they need in return, then the person who did the job can take from the pool of skills to get jobs done for them. The person who had the job done can share their unique skills with somebody else when needed. One hour of anybody's time is worth the same. It's a great opportunity to re-value women's work, home workers, carers, low paid and the unemployed and employed alike. It can cross racial and other social barriers. It justly values all those who the mainstream top down economic system often throws on the scrap heap, but also is wider ranging and has opportunity to value all people. People not only find self worth in keeping their skills alive but get jobs done which normally they would never afford.

However at that time, unemployed people on a LETS scheme/ would have their benefits cut for joining it. We weren't even allowed to help each other even though money was not involved and there was a chronic shortage of paid work. Teesside LETS then was at the forefront of a campaign.

Biblical reflection helped our determination to counteract this crazy unjust scenario.

In the New Testament the author of Mark's Gospel omits the story of Jesus' birth but writes two very similar stories of 'The Feeding of the Five Thousand' (Mark 6:30-end) and the feeding of the Four Thousand (Mark 8: 1-10) very close to each other.

Some people interpret these stories as magic miracles where food suddenly appeared.

I asked myself, ^Why were these two very similar feeding stories even more important than the story of Jesus' birth?"

I believe to reveal the important emphasis of Jesus' ministry and the real miracle of how he challenged the deep seated stratified economic structures of his day, which left the rich richer and the poor poorer, a reflection of our top down economic structures today.

After the disciple asked Jesus how much money would be needed to feed thousands of people, **Jesus didn't answer, but emphasised a more egalitarian sharing of resources by sharing the little he was given, and I believe thus encouraging people to share the little they had....**just as we tried to do in the Time Bank. **and there was loads left over.** And remember, sharing first took place with Jesus, by a non de script young boy way down the pecking order of the then society to start that ball rolling when he gave Jesus his loaves and fishes.

I began to ask myself questions,

"Why does the world 'economy' only ever include the word 'money'?"

"Why do we always look for a money solution when evidence shows that money does not trickle down to the poor in our trickle down economic system?" The only thing that does trickle down is 'fear and it goes from top to bottom. Fear of losing government position, fear of losing businesses, fear of losing jobs, fear of losing dole fear of losing what little we have, fear is poverty.

Why couldn't everybody have the potential to gain non compulsory job satisfaction as I had but without having to live so frugally?

What kind of system could eliminate the unjust stigma of means tested benefits, and the oppressive prejudice and marginalisation that go with them?

What kind of system could justly value the second largest industry in Britain, the unpaid workers sector worth at least £41 billion annually to the British economy but where a lot more of those volunteers struggle on the breadline, including single parents and other home-workers and carers?

What kind of system could give people a choice in the work that they did, thus reaching their potential?

What kind of system would value those who worked long hours with low pay and support the growing millions of people in and out of contract or part time jobs?

What kind of system, when all people's economic freedom is secure, will eliminate prejudicial scapegoating? And believe me, when as a single parent on the dole, I knew a lot about prejudicial scapegoating.

I believe, alongside Time Banks, '**Citizens Income**' has that potential. (The Part Time Jobs Opportunity Programme in Ireland had an element of Citizens Income).

Citizens Income, sometimes called Basic Income, is an unconditional, non - withdrawable income payable to each individual as a right of citizenship, just as family allowance is given to every child. People's work is separated from pay and every citizen gets a basic income but higher than the current benefit level.

People argue that it will be too expensive.

However, all current tax systems and benefit rules would be abolished. At a (CI) conference it was suggested that anybody who does paid work on top of (CI) should pay a flat rate tax of 37%. This might seem higher than the current 22%, but CI abolishes National Insurance Contributions and VAT and the massive cost of policing the current system. The difference is then only 1-2 %. People who pollute the atmosphere could be taxed.

If our Mission is to promote a more just economic sharing of resources then we need to shout out loud for Citizens Income!

20 years ago I joined with Church Action on Poverty's 'Local People National Voice' campaign. About 40 local hearings were set up across the country for people in poverty to tell their story in front of local politicians, business people and church leaders. This accumulated into an 800 delegate poverty hearing at Church House in London in front of national church leaders, politicians & business people.

I was asked to speak at the Teesside & National Poverty Hearing.

Among other things, I spoke about the unjust structures that made unemployed people lose their benefits if they worked on a LETS scheme / Now called a Timebank .

Only 3 weeks after speaking at the London hearing, I received a call from the TV producer of the 'Kilroy Show' and I was given to believe that he wanted me to talk about the LETS income support campaign. I didn't particularly want to go on TV but then thought it would be a good idea to get the publicity.

It wasn't until I arrived in the television studio just before the cameras began to roll, a slow realisation revealed the title of the Kilroy Programme: "People Who Cheat the Benefit System" I couldn't believe it! Just because I was a single parent on the dole I was automatically assumed to cheat the system.

The studio audience was full of single parents, asylum seekers and young unemployed teenagers as well as those who opposed them. We were the very people who that very week the government had cut all our benefits, the poorest in society... And we were there to defend ourselves!

They were setting poor against poor.

I was shouted down in front of millions of viewers by somebody yelling "You're a scrounging single parent...I pay tax so people like you can sit at home all nicey nicey looking after your kids!" Frank Field, a government MP was in the studio audience. Kilroy asked him how much money single parents cost his constituency. I remember Frank Field said £12 million per year.

Everybody jeered....I immediately spoke up and said "I belong to the second largest industry in Britain, the unpaid workers sector...and if that work was paid for it would be worth **£41 billion annually** to the British economy. Actually it was much more ! Kilroy changed the subject.

I inadvertently revealed lots of deeply private things about myself in front of millions of viewers to try and defend myself. I couldn't stop weeping on the train home absolutely wide open. laid bare & drained.

This and other personal bigoted incidents , too many to mention here, actually eventually gave me energy. I realised that prejudice was simply people taking on their 'significant others' negative value statements mixed with a lack of non judgemental communication to get to know 'the other'.

This energised me to make contact, off my own bat, with every marginalised group I could think of in Teesside: minority ethnic, gays, lesbians, unemployed , single parents, asylum seekers, transgender, travellers, disabled, I visited gypsy camps in fact anybody who was seen by society as subordinate. 60 people came together in a URC church hall in Stockton including young people from the local senior school simply to listen to each others stories and make an attempt to understand each other & cross prejudicial barriers.

For nearly every one of us, these barriers very much negatively affected our economic status in society. We were the scapegoats for many draconian economic policies and took the brunt of the so called 'deserving and undeserving poor' syndrome.

I kept on firmly believing in the Biblical quote: Romans 8: 31-end , which started "If God is for us who can be against us and it finished, " Nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate any of us from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord.

I didn't have a clue what would happen to the group next. The fact that we had listened to each other at that point was all I could think of.

Fortunately a few weeks later I was asked to represent 'Respond!' to go to the Second European Ecumenical Assembly in Graz, Austria. This coincided with the European Bishops conference. 10,000 Christians from all across Europe gathered for a week to explore the themes of reconciliation . Reconciliation of the environment, unemployment, prejudice, racism and refugees. I went mainly to explore unemployment issues and the future of work.

It felt ironic that many so called professionals, politicians and bishops from across Europe in the workshop I was in were transfixed by the ideas of this long term unemployed single parent dole scrounger giving clues on the future of work.

However quite unexpectedly I attended an interactive workshop on 'Welcoming Diversity and Eliminating Prejudice run by the National Coalition - Building Institute.

I was profoundly moved by the experience. As well as touching stuff deep within myself, the young Swiss facilitator translating in three languages revealed he was gay as the workshop evolved. Days later I met him on a tram and congratulated him on his fantastic workshop. I asked him whether he had enjoyed it as much as I had while he facilitated it. He replied. " I was a bit worried about this one Linda...because I knew I'd be talking to a room full of Christians! When I realized what he implied, I found that statement so so sad.

I immediately went home, raised funds and trained with the same international organisation based in Lancaster to set up Welcoming Diversity Workshops in Teesside.

I also went on and trained to be a counsellor to rape victims drug addicts and those with chronic illnesses and disabilities. I worked with the homeless and continued to work and campaign with the LETS scheme. All as a volunteer.

The United Reformed Church recognised the years of volunteer work that I had done. I was asked to stop everything I was doing and they paid for my three year college fees to be a Church Related Community Worker.

It was just at this point while attending college The 4 year campaign for unemployed people not to lose their benefit if joining a Time Bank had finally been WON. Here then was **JUSTICE** for all those volunteer and home workers who gave their time freely for nothing but struggled hard with nothing for themselves.

So then after three years in training . I finally got paid for doing the work I did for 18 years for nothing. Although I learned to analyze more deeply the reasons for my and others situations.

As a Church Related Community Worker (CRCW) in September 2001 I attended a Church Action on Poverty 'Debt on Your Doorstep' hearing in Birkenhead and listened to 4 people's experience of debt. One local speaker, a single parent whose husband had left her with 5 children

spoke how she borrowed £200 from the Provident Society to buy Christmas toys . At 167% interest and borrowing from Peter to pay Paul, which led her to borrow from Lone Sharks this £200 soon turned into well over a £5,000 debt. She only ever had £200 in her hand. She told us that now she never buys Christmas toys but only buys each child a birthday present so the cost could be spread over the year.

While one branch of the Provident was sending her to court another branch, 3 weeks before Christmas was knocking on her doorstep with a lorry load of toys asking her to buy them.

A local MP stood up and said " The government is helping people like Teresa with childcare cost so she can go to work" I could see and hear the audience jeering & muttering "She should go to work"...I was in tears because that politician should have known better.

His statement compounded the myths about single parents and societies negative attitude toward them. It brought back my own past prejudicial experiences. I couldn't help myself, I stood up and went to the podium, turned to Teresa and said,

"I'm sorry Teresa but you are condemned to live a life of poverty for a long time to come. Then turned to the politician and said, "It's true that single parents are getting help from government, but only help with paid work benefits and only for one child and if she was lucky (at that time) only 1 1/2 children. Single parents who choose to be at home to look after their children, for whatever reason, were the poorest in society, even though they arguably did the most important job in society, to bring up a child.

Teresa had 5 children....who was going to value her in the really hard work she already did bringing up her 5 children. I suggested Time Banks & Citizens Income.

The Debt Hearing only gave peoples experience of debt but failed to give solutions on ways to help eliminate it.

I was so moved by Teresa's story and so incensed by the politicians ignorance, or **was it ignorance or was it scape-goating away from bad government policies?**

Scapegoating, sadly & erroneously, defers individuals and governments from facing up to real personal, cultural and structural problems and

while scapegoating continues to be the 'norm' holistic solutions to value all people will never be found.

An example of this was just before single parent benefits were cut. I believe it was a deliberate government ploy to cut them at a time when the whole country was celebrating the run up to the D. Day Anniversary Celebrations. I wondered if the media were in cahoots with the government. At the same time, suddenly across all our screens the media covered the usual single parent horror stories while the government compared cutting benefits from the perceived undeserving single parent dole scroungers and debating to give more to the deserving war heroes. To this day I don't know if the war heroes got more money as they rightly deserved. But this definitely was a subtle but successful way of getting public opinion on side to cut single parent benefits.... Undeserving poor were set against perceived deserving poor! ... Shame !

The new rules revealed that any new single parents would be approx £11 down in their income. Those that were currently receiving Single Parent benefit would stay the same. However if that single parent took any kind of paid work then came back on benefits they would return at the lower level. This terrified a lot of single parents who knew there was not any regular work around, especially in Teesside. They knew that jobs allocated were usually low paid, & part time (which was not enough to live on bringing up children on your own) or temporary. Those single parents who would work a temporary Christmas job (because there was usually a lot of them around at Christmas) were now scared to do it because they knew they would return to the lower benefit. This encouraged Single Parents to go to loan sharks for Christmas toys.

I wrote to my local MP and Tony Blair. Later my MP told me that Tony Blair called him into his office to discuss my letter.

With other complainants the rules were then changed but only to the fact that any single parent who got a job would have 9 weeks lee way to find another job before their benefits were cut. This was ok if job hunting happened over Christmas but for the rest of the year single parents knew they were going to be exploited or struggle even harder.

After the debt hearing in Birkenhead, within days I contacted 7 different organisations in the Wallasey area that had anything to do with debt, including the local churches. Together we formed an Alternative to

Debt Group, put on another Debt Hearing but this time after listening to peoples experience of debt, held afternoon workshops on Citizens Income, Credit Unions, Time Banks /LETS Schemes and Food Co-operatives. I led the 'Time Bank' Workshop, then after a public meeting raised £30,000 to set up a Time Bank in Wallasey.

I lost contact with Teresa after the Birkenhead hearing as she lived about 50 miles from me, but before I left Wallasey nearly two years later I tried to find out what happened to her. I was told she was then, currently seriously ill in a mental hospital and all her children fostered out... All this, the consequences of the many unjust structures that she would have had to face as a single parent with 5 kids; including borrowing £200 simply for children's Christmas toys and 167% extortionate interest by the Provident Society.

Church Action on Poverty then went on to campaign against high interest rates.

I then lived and worked as a (CRCW) Church Related Community Worker in a very deprived but wonderfully multicultural area of Nottingham, Hyson Green. There were 51 languages on my street alone.

I was overjoyed to have found that National Coalition - Building Institute, the organisation that I first came across in Austria all those years ago that ran workshops on Welcoming Diversity had a group working in Nottingham which I joined.

To refresh my own spirituality I went alone on a week long retreat in the URC Church Bothy on the Holy Island of Lindisfarne. Lindisfarne has been a place of Christian pilgrimage since the 6th century. My spiritual director there was the caretaker of a retreat house on the Island, Marygate House. He was excited because the Churches Together on Lindisfarne wanted for the first time in their history to **officially** make multifaith links. The people of Marygate house offered our Faiths in Action Womens group , a FREE five day retreat for up to 15 multifaith/multicultural women from NottinghamThis happened for a further two years.

These retreats were a great blessing.

Jewish Muslim Sikh, fundamental & liberal Christian women found ourselves cut off from the mainland and the noise we had left behind in Hyson Green. We broke down misconceptions about each others faith.

We listened to each others personal stories at a deep level, We made lasting genuine friendships. Through our personal stories we found the thing that really connected us all was our basic experience of being a woman. Within that, our main connection among most of us was Domestic Violence.

After returning from the first retreat we joined with Nottingham Area 4 Domestic Violence Forum to organise a women's conference on Domestic Violence in Faith Communities.

After our 2nd February retreat we came home to the News that Gaza had been bombed and our local community was in uproar. One of our group, Zarifa, a Palestinian Muslim had her family living in Gaza. I joined a march with her in the streets of Nottingham and in London against the bombing.

But I also helped to organise a silent candle light vigil outside the City Council House for innocent victims from both sides of the conflict. We then listened to Jewish & Muslim speakers.

The stress of all this was quite immense.

Meanwhile I continued my research of the different faiths to try and find clues on why women across the world were subordinate.

I didn't have to go further than my own Christian faith.

I researched an article called 'Women in the Lectionary' written by a catholic female theologian called Ruth Fox.

The Lectionary comprises of passages from the bible one from the old testament and at least one from the new testament. All the major church denominations **world wide** use the same readings every week. Over a rotating period of three years it is understood that the whole bible is read.

Ruth Fox quotes....

"The widely-held assumption has been that the lectionary faithfully presents the essence of the Bible, with the omission of only a few troubling or gory passages.

A careful analysis of the lectionary reveals that a disproportionate number of passages about the women of the Bible have been omitted.

Women's books, women's experiences and women's accomplishments have been largely overlooked in the assigned scripture readings that are being proclaimed in our churches on Sundays and weekdays. In this article I will point out some of the significant biblical passages about women that are omitted altogether, are relegated to weekdays, where only a small number of churchgoers will hear them, or are designated as

optional. I hope to illustrate how some of the lectionary's readings are used to reinforce what some believe to be the weaknesses or proper roles of women."

To read the full report please Google 'Women in the Lectionary'
Men devised the Lectinary.

I have listened to many women of different faiths and non who are living in abusive relationships in Nottingham. I've listened to their horrendous stories of patriarchal abuse and their desolate feelings of nothingness or 'non being'. When challenged of what belief systems they hold that perpetuate their abuse, one Christian woman replied, "It says in the bible 'Women obey your husbands' "

Soon after I arrived in Nottingham , the 7/7 London bombing occurred.. My Urdu tutor was accosted 3 times simply because she was Pakistani. With a local multi-faith organisation called Faiths in Action we organised a gathering in the local park with speeches from local religious leaders of 8 different faiths, along with school children and set up gold balloons for the number of people who died and 100 white balloons with prayers attached for those who were still suffering including those in Hyson Green. We did this to come together in solidarity against the bombing.



Still recognising that a lot of women in the area are oppressively subordinate I co-ordinated, along with other women in Faiths in Action, a multicultural women's event 'Celebrating Women' After I gave statistics on the number of women abused

world wide we brought together Indian, Pakistani, Chinese, English, Turkish, Angolan, Iranian, from all faiths and none to sing , dance and tell poetry; and while the lady mayoress rattled her bucket they gave

their time freely and raised £500 for the Pakistan earthquake appeal . The 150 strong audience had a good laugh when I was on stage wiggling my hips with the Sikh women.

In many cultures women will not mix with men and vice versa but I look to the day when they



will mix on an equal footing. Although it is evident how freely women speak when men are not around.

A lot of women in my multicultural area were oppressively subordinate and many of us Christians shrug it off and say, well it's their culture. I might add that this is culture and not to be mistaken with religion. I have friends who have experienced female genital mutilation. I have friends whose husband forced them to have an abortion because the fetus was female. My next door neighbour who lived in her parents house was forced into a marriage and was not allowed to leave the house or even use the computer. She was an unpaid servant for the whole family. Her husband was always telling her to kill herself. The only person she was allowed to speak to was me but there was always a knock on the wall telling her to get home. How long are we going to allow culture to override oppression. And when Christians confine themselves to be involved only with Christians we are missing out on our neighbours sufferings.

I was always looking for opportunities to build bridges of communication between faiths. So when Muslim Hands, an international Muslim charity who had their international office near my home, were having sponsored events to raise money for their Green Ribbon campaign for children in war zones, I tried to encourage the churches to join them. I felt it was a great opportunity to meet together in friendship with helping those children as our common goal.

I discovered Muslim Hands and my own local church supports the same orphanage in Baghdad.

So a sponsored bike ride one sunny morning only two of us Christians joined the Muslims to what turned into torrential rain, gale force winds, hail stones as big as golf balls, thunder and lightening, and SUNSHINE.

A tree got struck with lightening across our path. Well it just adds to relationship building. Also for the Green Ribbon Campaign I climbed to the top of Mt Snowden (the second highest

mountain in the UK) I was 60 at the time. I didn't expect it would with **73 Muslim men** I churches involved with



end up with just me tried to get the local



this again. Some were enthusiastic at first but unfortunately only I ended up doing it.



I must admit I became extremely nauseous toward the top. BUT I WAS DETERMINED TO REACH IT! The picture opposite sees me hanging on to the summit plinth for grim life. Well even though I shuffled down to be last off didn't let the GIRLS Christians told me



painfully slowly the mountain I down! Many afterwards it myself ... what would have

was a waste of time me doing it by did it achieve..? ...And maybe that been true if just left at that.

However I met with Tarik the Muslim co-ordinator of the event from Muslim Hands and we both tried to analyse how it could be done better next time. I realised that the **long time pre- arranged** sponsored walk up Snowden was bang in the middle of Christian Aid week and was also on a Sunday when many Christians would be in church. Some Christians preferred to raise funds only for Christian charities anyway and probably it would be the same for many Muslims. **Sadly I feel , without all seeing the wider picture.**

I felt that maybe if the Christians were encouraged by Christian Aid nationally to support each other then Christians locally might feel it's ok to raise funds alongside Muslims and maybe eventually vice versafor the sake of friendship and community cohesion.

I then, encouraged by Tarik, rang Christian Aid in London and told them the situation. They were very excited and enthusiastic in the prospect of working together. They apparently had sought to work with Muslim Hands before.

Christian Aid then came from London to meet with Muslim Hands in Hyson Green for a very successful meeting . Unfortunately to my chagrin, I wasn't asked to attend but was kept informed by Tarik. Another meeting was planned in London. It was decided that they would support each other with the AIDs pendemic in Africa and Muslim Hands would support Christian Aid in areas of the Middle East such as The West Bank, where Christian Aid cannot get into. I also put them in contact with a friend who worked in Africa setting up village cooperatives to grow medicinal plants, especially the Artemesia plant which was brilliant for the immune sytem and therefore gave a better quality of life with people with AIDS.

A separate Christian Aid / Muslim Hands charity may be set up to work together for AIDS in Africa. We can all get involved, Muslims & Christians as a catalyst to local bridge building and feel ok about it. God moves in mysterious ways... I am reminded that Nothing in Gods work is a waste of time.

Note: after I retired I'm not sure if this working partnership was fully implemented as Muslin Hands suddenly focussed their resources and became very involved with an Earthquake in Burma

I just feel that in this day and age, and the atmosphere of real fear that permeates our communities, it's lack of communication therefore understanding 'the other' that leaves our minds vulnerable to negative value statements that often filters out through the media and sometimes government.

That attitude has moved through different marginalised groups to Asylum Seekers....

In March 2008 the results of the most comprehensive and independent 3 year review of the UK's Asylum System concluded, " The UK asylum system is not fit for purpose and falls "seriously below the standards of a civilised and humane society"

it identified a "culture of disbelief", among decision makers where a 'cat and mouse' game is played to remove failed asylum seekers from the country.

The commissioners found that the Border and Immigration Agency (BIA) staff often arranged enforced removals at times when refused asylum seekers could not contact lawyers or support workers and used procedures that were "inhumane and degrading".

Britain flouted many human rights.

If you Google Indapendent Asylum Commission you can get the full report.

I could definitely vouch for these findings personally while I was involved in supporting Asylum Seekers. One friend was deported to the wrong country. Another friend part of our multifaiht womens group, had very high blood pressure while in detention but was refused her prescribed dose of tablets . We campaigned through Medical Justice to get her out where she was sent straight to hospital seriously ill. After several weeks in hospital she was then transferred to a house, sharing it with other women awaiting their appeal. She's been there 8 years and is never allowed out at night, so she can't visit me now living 150 miles away. She's

not allowed to work, She told me of women being raped in the detention centre and just 2 years ago, I met up with her with her and other Asylum seekers on a campaigning march surrounding the centre with people from across the country to bring publicity to the issues to try and close it down, A few women stood next to me were pointing to the window of the room where the rapes always took place.

Because of all this I joined a core group of people which included asylum seekers and Nottingham City Council, The Rainbow Project, Refugee Action & other homeless projects to set up 'Nottingham City of Sanctuary' which encouraged people, businesses and organisations to welcome asylum seekers in Nottingham and counteract the negative tabloid press.

City of Sanctuary started off in Sheffield and now there are many City & Towns of Sanctuary across Britain.

We were encouraged to change the name from Asylum Seeker and its negative connotations to 'Sanctuary Seeker' which was closer to its historical meaning. This simple act helped toward turning negative public opinion to be more positive toward, Sanctuary seekers.

Many are destitute on the streets of Nottingham, so a group of us linked into Church Action on Poverty's 'Living Ghost campaign' and did the destitution challenge. This meant living on the same amount that a sanctuary seeker was given to live on for one week. I spoke at church services taking a 'living ghost' with me to de-myth the media's negative myths about sanctuary seekers and helped to arrange a conference where sanctuary seekers, told their stories in front of, among others, local political candidates hoping to win the looming general election. They spoke not only about their experience that led them to apply for sanctuary, but also on the way they have been treated since arriving in

this country.



My friend, Amdani Juma a Sanctuary Seeker who had been tortured in the Rwandan genocide, volunteered to wear a white ghostly cloth and on it was pinned all the uninformed negative statements about 'Asylum' Seekers that were blatantly promoted by the tabloid press. It was quite a poignant & profound experience when he walked very slowly all evening around the conference tables. Refugee Action provided us with a small pocket sized booklet that counter acted those negative statements and these were distributed among the audience. We also had the positive counter statements pinned around the conference hall as well as a rolling power point presentation that I made showing the findings of the UK Independent Asylum Commission.



I met a sanctuary seeker, Clarissa, who had failed her application, After being here for 3 years she was made destitute living on the streets. She lived with me for a short while. She eventually left and went to live with her boyfriend near London. He beat her up because she couldn't pay rent, hospitalised her then she was put into a detention centre when that was the last time I spoke to her. I later heard she had been deported.

This absolutely saddened me but partly because of this experience and similar experiences from different people , one Christian organisation that I worked with, the Rainbow Project, recognised the problem of nearly a thousand destitute sanctuary seekers on the streets of Nottingham alone. A house was gained from Southwell Church of England Diocese to set up a Sanctuary House for vulnerable destitute sanctuary seeking women and their children. This was to be the first of a few houses. The Rainbow Project linked into other Refugee and homeless agencies in Nottingham and together formed the Arimithea Trust, .named after Joseph of Arimithea in the Bible. The first house was called 'Jo's Place' We looked for good practice from the Boaz Trust. Although the house is secure there will always be ongoing costs for heating , lighting, food etc. because none of these sanctuary seekers are allowed to work to pay for anything. The Arimithea Trust is now a charity.

Note: Since retiring and leaving this project the Arimithea Trust has gone from strength to strength and is still up and running with houses for men too.

Scapegoating , sadly & erroneously, defers individuals and governments from facing up to real personal, cultural and structural problems and

while scapegoating continues to be the 'norm' holistic solutions to value all people will never be found.

To promote understanding of 'the other' I along with other Sikh, Muslim, Jewish women set up a multi-faith pilot group of women to spend one full day once every three weeks for one year to do the Pastoral Cycle together. The Pastoral Cycle is a tool usually used by Christian liberation theologians which I think first started in South America.

This tool, along with other faith resources helped us to

- look at our own and others life experience from our faith perspective.
- listen to that experience and link it to the wider community.
- Visit different secular organisations & faith buildings and organisations in that community.
- Walk different parts of the area, take photographs and analyse what we see.
- Ask 'What would our Faith Tradition do in this situation
- Go out and do it together
- Celebrate what we do. Ask what next?

Note: this tool can be used in any situation not necessarily from a faith perspective.

We hoped that by meeting each other as people of faith, learning from each other, opening our eyes to the wider community from all our diverse perspectives and working for our community together would break down the barriers of fear and prejudice.

In all my ministry as a Church Related Community Worker I found that one of the biggest taboos among the hierarchies of the faith communities was homosexuality. I found that hardly anybody in most all faith communities wanted to even talk about it.

I was told by the powers that be to stay clear of the subject because it could be the demise of Christian / Muslim relationships in Hyson Green. it would cause divisions and I shouldn't rock the boat, even though many homosexuals suffered harassment, prejudice and death threats and sometimes death itself because of it. There was a safe House for Lesbians a few doors down my street in Hyson Green.

I knew families in different faiths who refused to believe or hid the fact their children were gay and got them married off. Which in turn ruined two lives.

Homosexuality is a big problem for sanctuary seekers too. In Britain there are about 10 white listed countries and people from those countries. usually torn by war or natural disaster, deservedly find it easy to find sanctuary. However many homosexual sanctuary seekers don't come from those white listed countries and are being sent back to countrys with draconian homosexual policies such as the death sentence or at the very least, life imprisonment. Sometimes homosexuals find it hard to prove they are homosexual to the authorities when applying for asylum , because they have tried to pretend all their life that they are not homosexual in order to avoid persecution.

I found this very sad for all concerned and found hardly any support, in fact downright dismissiveness from a few of the hierarchies of the faith communities including some in my own. However before I retired I was determined to inform, at least the congregation about the issues.

Without mentioning homosexuality I asked for a long line of volunteers, some I knew were deeply homophobic to stand at the front and hold up a poster. On each poster was the researched name of a country and under the country was a punishment. Even I was surprised to find some of the countries on the list.

The congregation looked curious and sad trying to figure what it was all about until I told them who the punishment was for. Simply for owning their own truth. This was only part of my talk, I suppose I hoped some might see the serious consequences of any kind of prejudice, which was usually blindly past down from significant others.

Whatever side of the fence people sit within this situation, it is a fact... that not one of us was created with prejudice. It is a fact...every living thing came from and was created by pure love. It is a fact that all we simply have to do is deeply remember these facts for any challenging situations we will inevitably encounter on each of our life's journeys.

Meanwhile I was absolutely pleased to welcome a Christian woman to our Pastoral Cycle group who while we all shared our personal stories she comfortably revealed that she was a Lesbian. Simply by being herself

and owning her own truth, she broke down many misconceptions about gay people among these women of all faiths .

She soon became a much loved and respected member of the group often taking on a leadership role.

I feel it is in these simple non judgemental communications among our ordinary fellow human beings that we can genuinely foster understanding empathy and love.

At the end of the Pastoral Cycle experience we set up a multifaith garden allotment group as a catalyst to meet each other and work together growing our own food. This helped some of the asylum seekers in the group to happily remember their long lost gardening skills from their previous lives in their home country and now had the opportunity to feed themselves properly with fresh vegetables and fruit.

We held fortnightly gatherings in my home with women from Zimbabwe, Malawi, Canada, England, Jamaica, India, Pakistan, Ireland, Israel / Palestine, Scotland and The Philippines, to take turns to cook and teach each other our particular cultural food. This was interesting for me to learn the different taboos in each culture concerning food and thus helped me to remember those taboos so not to insult anybody when cooking them a meal in the future.

Respecting these taboos built up relationships. This was a great catalyst to then sit around my table in an informal very friendly atmosphere eating the food that was cooked together and discussing personal and wider women's issues.

I felt this was the **true** meaning of Gods 'communion table.'

I admired the bravery of my Muslim friend 'S.....' from our cookery group who volunteered herself to come to a Gay Pride conference during Gay Pride week in Nottingham even though she was really nervous what her community or even family would say. She was a beautiful open hearted soul. I can't remember seeing any other Muslims at the conference . S.....'s nephew was gay.

We also organised Domestic Violence training for Faith leaders. We did this to try to communicate these important DV issues to local men

through the faith leaders. Some faith leaders refused to even contemplate that domestic violence took place in their community.

When I first left theological college I worked with six churches with 5 different denominations, and all with different power structures and ideas about God.

I still cringe at some (not all) patriarchal language in some litanies and hymns. Some use of space where the patriarchal/matriarchal 'leader' sits at the top revisited childhood memories of subtle power based conditioning. I cringe because since childhood I've experienced what I believe to be the oppressive negative far wider consequences of it, both personally, politically, economically socially and globally. I prefer sitting in circles and using inclusive language.

On a visit to South Africa representing the URC Women in Ministries Group_I saw one such manifestation.

The prevalence of women abuse in Africa has greatly contributed to the AIDs epidemic. Men in their ingrained patriarchal tribal culture often refuse to wear a condom but more sadly from a Christian point of view when the Pope (significantly a man) decreed that men should not wear condoms. This I think has changed but not until after millions of people have died and mostly women & children.



I was able to give an organisation in Durban who helped abused women, information on 'The Freedom Programme' ..A programme I trained with devised in England that helps women recognise their abuse in all it's subtle manifestations. Then direct them to organisational support if they decided to leave their husbands. I was told that the problem with this programme in South Africa is that there was no organisational support for abused women This organisation supported women to go through the judicial system but the judges were men and often disbelieved the women.

I also gave another organisation who were in the process of setting up an AIDS hospice, information on an organisation called ANAMED which was co set up by a dear friend of mine, Keith Lindsey who was once Respond Co-ordinator years before. He and his doctor friend travelled around Africa and with permission from the tribe elders set up isolated village co-operatives to grow inexpensive medicinal plants and show people how to grow them. He especially showed how to grow the Artemesia plant which was very cheap to grow, excellent for the immune system without the usual side effects that came with expensive pharmaceutical drugs. therefore good for AIDS sufferers and especially good for those with Malaria.

The ANAMED website showed evidence that although the Artemesia plant was not a cure for AIDS it helped AIDS sufferers lead a more fulfilling life. (www.anamed.net)



These very unique women were Christian ministers from the Congregational Churches of Southern Africa working tirelessly at the coal face with AIDS and HIV . They had first hand horrendous stories to tell from across all their different countries of the impact of the double whammy of not only dealing with cultural, but also tribal patriarchal women abuse and AIDS. It was interesting that these were the very small handful of women ministers from across these countries except for 2 who couldn't come because they couldn't get visas. Hundreds of other ministers were men.

I have supported Christian women as well as other women who are living in abusive relationships. I've listened to their horrendous stories of patriarchal abuse and their desolate feelings of 'nothingness or non being'. When challenged of what belief systems they hold that perpetuate their abuse, some replied , 'It says in the bible 'Women, obey your husbands''

Our current economic structures and the way we see life in general have created a world of subordinates. Not only men over women but Employed over unemployed , First world over third world, west over east, north over south white over black, freeman over slave, heterosexual, over homosexual, Christian over other faiths, rich over poor, church goers over non church goers, able bodied over disabled...etcWHY?

I believe subordination of any kind is intrinsically linked and bound up in the universal conditioning of how we perceive God to be, and that conditioning is man made power based.

Male language for God in most religions inevitably perpetuates women's subordination across the world. God is love and love has no gender.

The world seems to be crucifying itself. But beyond crucifixion is the basic Christian belief of resurrection. Resurrection is not getting down off the cross back to the spot that put us there in the first place putting tiny plasters on our wounds. It's about sticking with the cross, learning from it but then going *beyond it* into a new and better way of **be-ing**.

As a woman of faith, I ask myself, could the same truly loving God that liberated me as a woman be the same God that perpetuates this and other's oppressive subordination across the world?

A quote from Mary Daly's book 'Beyond God the Father' gives me a clue...

"Why indeed must God be a noun?"

Why not a verb, the most active and dynamic of all?

*The human symbols for God may be intended to convey personality, but we fail to perceive that God is **Be-ing***

*That which it is over against is **Non Be-ing***

Women (and I would argue any other subordinate group) who have travelled through their experience of Non Be-ing in the process of liberation, are able to perceive this, ... because...

Our liberation consists of refusing to be 'the other'

And asserts instead... "I am" without making another the 'other'.

To conclude.

I've now reached the ripe old age of 72, retired and in this era of drastic government cuts and redundancies especially in my area of North Yorkshire, I'm still setting up and promoting Time Banks across the region and facilitating meditation classes still as a volunteer. I've recently been on a campaign march to try and stop 'Fracking' in our local area.

I now have 6 fantastic grandchildren and I love the whole of my family very much. I am absolutely blessed.

However, I cannot finish this rote without first, highly honouring , along side Jesus Christ, two very incredible people who have, without a real choice of their own, travelled this, often tough, journey beside me; through the long arduous childhood and teenage years of real frugality, frustration, tears but much much more laughter. I will never underestimate their true sacrifice supporting me, missing out on what other kids had, effecting their lives in ways even I might never understand. I thank them for understanding my passion for justice, striving for a world worthy of them to live in. This whole incredible journey started and ends with them... my two beautiful girls, Rebecca & Georgia.

Note:

It's ironic that in 2009 after the world banking system collapsed and unemployment rose across the world including Britain, within 1 week, yet again, the same British government picked out single parents as the economic scapegoats and again cut their benefits. Unemployed single parents are still treated with contempt and among the poorest in British society today.