



Ammerdown's 100 Club

Recent 100 Club winners were Brenda Dammers (October), Ken Biggs (November), Joyce Shannon (December), David Potter (January), Tordis Marks (February). All received a £50 cheque and Ammerdown received the same amount to support its work.

New faces at Ammerdown



There have been quite a few changes amongst Ammerdown staff in recent months. Long-standing members of the team such as Carol (Operations Manager) and Kelly (Bookings Officer)

have moved on, others have retired (Graham and Mike, both Maintenance). Tessa has also taken on a more responsible role away from reception. There are therefore quite a few new faces around including (from left to right in the picture): Bene (Reception), Jan (Maintenance) and Lucy (Bookings Officer). Welcome to them all!

A big THANK YOU

In our last newsletter, we asked for help to create a 'Peace Garden' for quiet contemplation in a corner of the back lawn. As always, you responded marvellously, raising nearly £900. It will be spent on upgrading the paving and buying plants and shrubs. The whole area has now been cleared, awaiting Spring time for further landscaping and planting work. A huge thank you, as always, to all who donated.

Can you help with our bedroom make-over?

How time flies! It is hard to believe that Ammerdown re-opened after extensive refurbishment nearly 10 years ago (June 2005). The bedrooms looked pristine then, but 10 years have taken their toll and we think it is time to give them a bit of a make-over. We are therefore arranging for all bedrooms to be re-decorated and for the linen to be replaced. Among the other improvements we are keen on introducing are large bath towels - so much nicer after a shower! These towels cost £8 each. We are also looking at new mugs and trays, and other little touches that can make a real difference. Can you help? As always, any gift, however small, will be gratefully received. THANK YOU!



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A MESSAGE FROM LORD HYLTON



Many of you will know that Ammerdown was founded in the wake of the Vatican II Council. This was a time of great excitement and hope, not only for the Roman Catholic Church but also for many other Christian Churches. We longed for a church open to all humanity. We prayed for a coming unity of all the baptised. We trusted that God's people would be in dialogue with all the great monotheistic faiths.

Although there have been many positive changes since then, I continue to lament the impotence of the movement for Christian unity and the failure of the Ministry of Christian Healing to achieve major change in the life and practice of the churches. A return to, and rediscovery of, the imperatives of the gospels will necessitate change. I suggest a great campaign of prayer so that the whole church may discover its role as a signpost and witness to God's Kingdom as preached by Jesus Christ. Prayer is needed to end separation and re-discover unity. Concerted prayer will enable the churches to become bodies that exist not for themselves but for others, including those of other faiths or none. Prayer will make possible outreach to the needs of others, to the difficult work of loving enemies, peace-building and reconciliation. It will not be easy but we can take courage by noting that the mighty deeds of the early church were usually preceded by concerted prayer.

And what of Ammerdown, which was set up to help renewal and the implementation in Britain of the new vision of Vatican II? We the founders sensed that this would be best done in an ecumenical setting, and the first Director we appointed was a Methodist. Soon afterwards, the Sisters of Sion introduced us to their Jewish friends and we started on inter-faith dialogue. Later, Ammerdown committed itself to the theme of reconciliation.

There have been several pioneering events at Ammerdown since it opened in 1973, in areas such as interfaith dialogue, the conflicts in Northern Ireland and later in Sudan, the support of HIV and Aids sufferers and the debate on the war on terror. I welcome the initiative on 'Security for the Future' mentioned elsewhere in this newsletter. The needs of our world are, however, so great. Please pray that the Holy Spirit will enable the Trustees and the working team to discern how to use Ammerdown's facilities even more for the purposes of renewal, dialogue and reconciliation and, in our modest ways, to go on supporting the work of healing all creation.

With every good wish.

SPOTLIGHT ON AMMERDOWN'S PEACE-BUILDING WORK

Given that our location in rural Somerset is not particularly conducive to grassroots peace-building work, we seek to fulfil this central part of Ammerdown's mission by offering our facilities to relevant organisations and by running courses and events that promote dialogue and reconciliation.

SECURITY FOR THE FUTURE

In an earlier newsletter, we reported on the 21 peacebuilding professionals who came together at Ammerdown in January 2014 to explore new ways of bringing about a more peaceful world. Their vision and commitment were truly impressive - so much so that they decided there and then to launch a campaign to promote to the British public alternatives to the current approach to national security. Following two more gatherings at Ammerdown, the campaign is now well underway. A consultation document, aptly named 'The Ammerdown Invitation', was published in September under the title 'Security for the Future: in search for a new vision' (for the full text, visit www.opendemocracy.net and type 'Ammerdown' in the search engine). Here is an extract from the introduction:

"We all want to feel safe and secure in our beds at night, but the news is dominated by tension, conflict and violence across the world. ... Research suggests that levels of anxiety in the UK have increased, particularly among young people, and that we believe the world has become a more frightening place. As a group of people who share experience of working with conflict and building peace, we are increasingly concerned that the world's governments have yet to grasp the emerging challenges to our security. We would like to begin a public conversation about this in the UK, asking how best to build long-term security for people in this society and worldwide. Is a less anxious, less insecure world possible? What does 'security' really mean? What roles might citizens and governments play to achieve it? These, we believe, are among the most pressing issues of our time. ..."

The document has already been used as a basis for consultation in a range of settings - from grassroots community groups to Parliament. This is remarkable given that the campaign started only a year ago. The group is returning in July to review progress and plan the next phase. We will continue to help in any way we can, including offering our facilities for free, because we passionately believe the questions they address are amongst the most important ones of our time.

UNDERSTANDING ISLAM

It is so hard to make sense of the news concerning Islam these days. So many news reports speak of terrible atrocities being done by extremists in the name of Islam, but then we hear mainstream Muslims from all over the world and in our own country saying "Not in our name!". How can we help to build greater understanding and bonds of friendship with our Muslim brothers and sisters?



The Ammerdown Invitation

There is plenty of information and opinion flying around, but much of it is conflicting and it can be really hard to make sense of it. What is needed is a reliable and knowledgeable 'interpreter'. This is exactly what Dr Chris Hewer, who leads our 'Understanding Islam' courses, offers. Chris is a Christian who has dedicated his life to studying Islam and making it accessible to others. He explains: *"If you want to understand a religion, you need to learn to see it through the eyes of those who follow it. Both Christians and Muslims have 'wonderful ideals' alongside some 'awful realities'. We first need to grasp the difference. Then we need to make sure we compare like with like, ideals with ideals and realities with realities, for, if we compare 'our' ideals with 'their' realities, we will always feel 'we' are right and 'they' are wrong. We have to hear the truth as Muslims understand it, even if it goes against something we believe and hold dear - because, if we do not listen with our ears and with our hearts, we will never understand, and if we do not understand, how can we ever become instruments of peace and justice in our own families, communities and society at large?"*



N.B. Our two 'Understanding Islam' courses this year will be on 28 to 30 April and 17 to 19 November. We subsidise them but if the reduced £199 fee would still be difficult for you, please contact us to discuss further help.

BUILDING PEACE WHERE WE ARE

One of the most enthralling aspects of Ammerdown is that peace sometimes breaks through day to day life in wonderful and unexpected ways. Here is one example among many: a member of a Shamanic group recently gathered here said that Ammerdown was the first ever Christian place where she had felt welcomed and accepted. The group leader told us subsequently that this particular guest had been deeply scarred by her childhood experience of Christianity and that her stay at Ammerdown had had a powerful healing effect on her. Yet, we hardly did anything apart from offering a safe, open and accepting space for our guests to be. Nothing earth-shattering but, according to renowned priest and author Henri Nouwen, this is the hallmark of true Christian hospitality. His superb description of hospitality is in fact so remarkably in line with Ammerdown's ethos and approach that we are gifting it to you (see insert), and ask that you join us in praying that God's healing power will long continue to be at work in this very special place.