

Triangle



The quarterly magazine of the
Methodist Churches of
Wombourne and Springdale

Summer 2015

Pick up your chair and walk

David Hotchkiss, editor



Hello and welcome. Join me, if you will, on a journey back in time – 50 or so years to the 1960s when I occasionally attended a neat, modern junior school in the suburb of Bushbury, Wolverhampton. Grey shorts (or skirts), white shirts, tan ties and the bright shining faces of well-scrubbed “baby boomers”. We learned our tables, sang hymns earnestly at assembly (“... for his mercies aye endure, ever faithful, ever sure ...” Never did find out who A N Dure was) and lived in fear of the headmistress, Miss Hassall, whose appearance on the stage was presaged by the echoing of stout brogues on parquet. There were Lowry prints and fresh flowers at strategic locations.



What is Springdale Junior Church up to?
Find out on Page 9

All very nice. But even in this educational idyll, a little rain sometimes fell. Sometimes, when Miss Jordan or Mr Ball or Miss Freeman needed to be away from school at short notice, classes in the two parallel years had to be merged. They were big classes to start with. Forty or more children would be told to pick up their chairs and carry them to the rival classroom next door, where they would be arranged on any available floor-space, and a makeshift lesson begun with no access to desks for writing to be done.

If you were the visited, you viewed the visitors with a mixture of wariness and superiority – well, you still had a desk, nah-nah. Much worse if you were the incomers, stared at and studied as you crowded in to this hostile territory, and subject to a teacher who didn’t even know your name, let alone where your inhaler was.

Which is all a bit like . . . Cluster Services! By now we should all be aware of the special arrangements for August, caused by a shortfall of available preachers, and will be off to “rival” churches on some Sunday mornings. We, though, will be made very much at home, wherever we go, and will look forward to exciting new experiences. Won’t we? Of course we will! Do have a wonderful summer – and may I add my heartfelt congratulations to Rev’d Chris (see opposite).

The deadline for the next edition of Triangle is

September 20

Articles can be given to me or your stewards, sent by post to David Hotchkiss, or emailed to [triangle\[at\]springdalechurch.org.uk](mailto:triangle@springdalechurch.org.uk)

A deeply humbling moment

The Reverend Christopher Collins



“What does it feel like now you are ordained?” has been a common question over the past few weeks. It’s one of those questions that sounds quite simple but one which I find almost impossible to answer.

Impossible because it means so much in so many ways and I have no idea where to start! So writing this article is a chance to spend a few moments reflecting.



After the ordination at Liverpool

It was firstly a real blessing. In the service there is a point at which the congregation are asked if the ordinands are “worthy”. To hear 1,400 people bellow “They are worthy!” was deeply humbling. But it isn’t a moment of declaring how good we are. It is a recognition that the Church – as in the whole body of Christ – will recognise the ministry we offer. That is really important to us, not because we want to be liked but because the ministry we exercise only finds meaning in the context of the whole Church. It’s also a lesson in grace – the only way any of us can be worthy is by the grace of God and by the prayers of all within the Church.

It was incredibly energising. In the ordination, I knelt before the President of the Conference. He laid his hands upon my head. A presbyter from an overseas Methodist Church laid hands upon me. Then my assisting minister laid his hands upon me. It felt like a great weight upon my head. Then a short sentence: “Father send your Holy Spirit upon Christopher for the office and work of a Presbyter in your Church”. I could feel the Spirit infusing me, like waking up dry bones or like the potter’s hands shaping me. It is hard to explain exactly how it felt.

It was also humbling. In the service we were reminded of what ordination means. In God’s name we are “to preach by word and deed the Gospel of God’s grace; to declare God’s forgiveness of sins to all who are penitent; to baptize and confirm; to preside at the celebration of the sacrament of Christ’s body and blood; to lead God’s people in worship, prayer and service; to minister Christ’s love and compassion; to serve others in whom you serve the Lord himself.” That’s quite a responsibility and to look at it starkly I find it overwhelming! But by and only through God’s grace can this work be undertaken.

But there was also a sense of pain. There were at least four friends and colleagues ►



Above, with Springdale's Paul Merchant: right, Chris and Jenny outside the cathedral



who should have been ordained at the same time but couldn't be for various reasons.

Despite the reasons, to have shared a journey together that did not culminate together was extremely painful for all of us. In addition to that is the realisation that even though I am ordained into the one, holy catholic and apostolic church (not just the Methodist Church), I know that my ordination is not yet recognised by some of our sister denominations. I hope and pray that the Methodist act of ordaining into the universal church is a prophetic act and one day our ordination will be universally recognised.

I am also left with a profound sense of gratitude. The church gave each ordinand

IT WAS wonderful to be part of the ordination service. It was truly uplifting and it was very special being with many friends from both Springdale and Wombourne. Although we were quite near the back of the cathedral the TV screens provided us with an excellent view of the whole service. I think we were all very impressed with the organisation of communion for such a large congregation. At the end of the service Brenda presented Chris with his stole. Many thanks to Penny for organising everything for us.

Phillippa Cooper

the gift of a retreat in the week leading up to ordination. It was a much valued time of space, peace and prayerful reflection. I am also thankful beyond words for the many cards and the gift of the stole. It is beautiful and will hold treasured memories of the churches that helped shape me through probation. So thank you!

A final sobering thought: after all the excitement of that weekend, it was not the end of a journey so much as the start of a new one. There is work to do and we must get on and do it.

With every blessing, **Rev'd Chris**

Pictures from Brenda and Phillippa

Springdale vestry news

James Peterson, senior steward

Well this came round quickly! I can't believe it's been nearly three months since Phillippa handed me the reins. So much has happened in a short time and here's a taster of the highlights.

Starting at Easter we had a lovely early morning service and for a change our Scout group provided a barbecue breakfast, which was very much appreciated as we welcomed the congregation for our 10.30 service. The church looked delightful with the floral crown on the Easter cross, and in the atrium the metre-square pyramid of tins for the Good Shepherd was completed with tins to spare.

The Junior Church Anniversary took a break from the theme of Pentecost and focussed instead on the Psalms. It was a thought-provoking service that showed us how the psalms are there to help us on all occasions. I'm particularly grateful for the work the Junior Church leaders do – both of my boys enjoy the activities on a Sunday morning and always come home with something to remind them of what they've learned through the week.

At our Annual Church Meeting we welcomed David Crook and Michael Oakes on to our team of stewards – Sam and I have taken them under our wings and they've made a really good start. I'm so grateful for the contributions that all of the stewards make, and that we have managed to maintain a full team of six so that the workload is spread out.

Family Hotpot continues to go from strength to strength and has succeeded in raising £60 to twin one of our church toilets with that of a family in Zambia who are in great need of their own loo.

With Phillippa's help we are working towards achieving Eco congregation status. This involves reducing our consumption of electricity, gas, water and paper – we've recently had a drive to encourage people to sign up to our emailed notices so that we don't have to print as many copies to give out on a Sunday morning – and I was pleased to see that there are lots of back issues of Triangle available on the website.

In June we had another successful summer fayre – thanks to everyone who helped to put this on, whether it was the behind the scenes organizing, preparing and staffing the stalls or simply turning up and spending your time and money.

Also in June was a musical double bill. The circuit choir led an evening of praise at Springdale which was also an opportunity to learn some of the newer hymns and songs in Singing the Faith. Meanwhile at St Michael's there was a concert given by the West Midlands Concert Band, in aid of PEC charities. Something to suit everybody's tastes!

We were delighted to welcome so many of the Wombourne congregation to join ►

us for the web-cast of the service from Methodist Conference and to watch Chris being received into full connexion. Even though the technology let us down – sadly the Methodist internet servers couldn't cope with the demand – we were able to worship in unity with many other Methodist churches up and down the country.

I hope this is a foretaste of our joint worship in August as we support the summer preaching plan. We are trying to be as organised as possible to ensure that everyone can get to the church they want to go to and can be among familiar faces while we worship away from Springdale.

In the coming months we look forward to the Fair Trade Soiree, our first Family Fun Day and the summer Ecumenical Bible Study. Watch this space and I shall report back – or come along and find out for yourselves.

I wish you all every blessing during these summer months.

Musical Barnabas

Carole Walker

On Saturday, June 20th, Pat, Eric and I were privileged to be part of the CD recording of Roger Jones' latest musical, Barnabas. The musical tells the story of Barnabas the encourager, as he and Saul visit Cyprus on the first part of their missionary journey.

The official launch will take place on Saturday, September 19th, at Shirley Methodist Church, Birmingham. You will be assured of a lively and inspirational story from the Bible.

When it's not easy to be happy

Carole Walker

A quotation from Fiona Castle in her book Give Us This Day:

“Christian joy is not dependent on worldly happiness, which is dependent on everything being right and going smoothly.

“If everything in your life is going right, it's easy to be happy; but if something bad happens, then you become depressed. I had to realise, immediately that accident happened, that my joy was not dependent on what was happening around me, but on my life in Christ.”

(After her son Daniel's almost fatal accident, which few know about, Fiona wrote these words.)

Springdale pastoral news

Jane Rawlings, pastoral secretary

As I write this we have just had our summer fair at Springdale, but I'm afraid summer forgot to arrive that day and it rained! We must not let our hearts be dampened though, but remember that the rain is important in getting things to grow to feed us and to allow the beauty of God's creation to bloom and activate our senses throughout the seasons.

Since my last Triangle our younger people have been getting active and raising money for good causes. In March Fiona Jones completed a marathon raising £681 for the Anthony Nolan Trust. Then in April Nic and Annette Gould completed the London marathon raising £960 for Sands (the stillbirth and neonatal death charity). Congratulations to you all, what an achievement! All those blisters and aching muscles are all worth it when you consider how important the monies you raised are in helping the charities you chose.

On Easter Sunday we had the best sign of God's new creation with the arrival of Joseph Cook, a son for Lucy and Andrew and a little brother for Emily. His arrival was announced at the end of the service giving all of his Springdale family the chance to celebrate together in this joyous occasion.

On May 3rd Samuel Varty came for baptism with all his family and Springdale friends around to celebrate with him. It was a special day for all concerned. May he continue to grow with the reassuring knowledge that God is with him every step of the way.

Well, from the young to the young-at-heart. On May 5th Audrey Grainger celebrated her 90th birthday with everyone joining her for a piece of cake. But on

May 10th Mary Keightley went further in celebrating her 102nd birthday.

Congratulations to both ladies and to anyone who has celebrated a birthday or special occasion recently.

At this time of year with think especially of all our young people who are undertaking exams and who then have the agonising wait for results. May they all get the grades they deserve and we wish them all well in whatever lies ahead. It can be a period of apprehension for all concerned, but know that you will never take a step alone – God will be with you, guiding you wherever life may lead you.

God bless . . .

Brenda Shuttleworth reports on the sponsored walk in June for the Methodist charity Action for Children. Several members took part and between them raised £86.50. Collections in the League of Light boxes counted so far amount to £54.79. Donations are still very much welcome and Brenda has some more League of Light boxes if anyone would like one for their home.

Hats off to our brilliant knitters

Pauline Hotchkiss on Wombourne Wives' needle match

On Thursday, July 2nd, we were delighted to welcome Mick back to Wives. He is a Street Pastor in Wolverhampton. He and a colleague came last autumn to tell us all about the wonderful work they do, caring for people in the town centre who are in need of help due to celebrating too much! During the presentation they opened

their back packs and we were able to see what they carried around. They carry flip-flops, usually for the girls who have lost or discarded their very high footwear. There is quite a lot of broken glass around in town and flip flops help to prevent accidents.

They also carry very large thermal

blankets to prevent hypothermia. The item that caught my eye was the beanie hat. In fact Mick gave me the hat from his pack and told me I could keep it.



Louise, Street Pastor Mick and Pauline with the hats

Wives group are just coming to the end of celebrating 50 years, so I had the idea that maybe we could knit 50 of the hats and give them to be used by the Street Pastors. Those of our members who are knitters, along with members from the Craft and Chat group, got their needles out and started knitting.

The reason for inviting Mick back to Wives was to present him with the hats. We had 51 hats and, of course, I gave him back the original one. On the photograph you can see the lovely hats with Mick and I each wearing one. Also on the photograph is Louise Wright, our star knitter. She made 30 hats. Well done Louise. I know there are needles still with the making of hats on, and they will be passed on when complete.

I am not a knitter, but I managed to complete one hat, in the time that Louise had knitted 30. I give a great big thank-you to all the ladies who helped in the "Knit 50 Beanie Hats" venture. God bless . . .

● ***A date for your diary: on Friday, November 13th, Ashmore Park Choir will be performing at Wombourne in aid of the church project Friends of Kenya's Children. Tickets will be on sale later in the year.***

Puzzle of the pyramids

Phillippa Cooper on the Good Shepherd lenten appeal

Along with many churches and schools in the area we supported the Lenten Appeal by The Good Shepherd Ministry to build a “one metre pyramid of tins”. At first I thought that this would be quite easy until realising that it actually involved building a square-based pyramid.

Rev'd Chris decided that we needed to make our pyramid as visible as possible and we marked out a one-metre square on the carpet in atrium.

We got off to a flying start with cans appearing before Ash Wednesday. We were fortunate that many of the groups that use our premises also got involved, which certainly made a difference.

We ran this special appeal alongside our usual weekly food bank collection, with any “non standard” tins, which would make our growing pyramid unstable, being donated to The Good Shepherd each week.

We managed to complete our pyramid just before Easter and members of our Junior Church were involved in placing the final tin on the top. There were more than 380 tins in the completed pyramid representing quite a weight of food.

Sincere thanks to everyone who contributed to this special, much needed, appeal.



Junior Church members Dylan, Tia, Lauren and Reuben with the pyramid.



Gill Worrall and Diana Spreadbury are pictured with the beginnings of Wombourne's collection for The Good Shepherd Ministry. Photos of the rather impressive finished mound of tins and packets do exist – but they remain stubbornly locked inside my former mobile phone. *David*

Wombourne pastoral news

Pauline Hotchkiss, pastoral secretary

As we are told in the book of Ecclesiastes, there is a season for everything. I walk Ty each morning along the east section of the Wombrook and I have been out with my camera recording the joys of summer and already, although we have not yet had a holiday, the nights are "drawing in"!

On one of our visits to The Maltings we celebrated Pentecost. Phil Bridgewater, who lives with his wife Pauline at the Maltings, led the worship. We enjoyed singing, reading from scripture and watching video clips which enhanced our worship. Our friends appreciate the visit and we feel it is an important part of our pastoral care in the community. We were sad to hear that two members of the group who had moved into residential care had passed away. Another member of the group has been diagnosed with skin cancer and our prayers are with her.

Another group from church visit Himley Mill Care Home each month. They witness to two units at the home and I am sure the residents and the staff enjoy this time of fellowship. If anyone is interested in joining in with either monthly event, please ask Carole Walker about the Maltings and Denis Beaumont about Himley Mill.

GOOD NEWS

Two more babies this season. **Zak** Henry Meddings was born on March 31st, weighing in at 8lb 13oz. His mom and dad are Chris Meddings and Lindsay McNaughton. Congratulations to them and also to Jane and David Meddings, another grandson. Meanwhile, **Matilda** was born on May 5th and is the fifth great-grandchild of Edna and John Fellows. Congratulations to all the families.



Zak

YOUNG AND NOT-SO-YOUNG

Congratulations to Paul Hughes, eldest son of Joyce and Bob Hughes. Paul was named in the Queen's Birthday Honours List in June in recognition of his work in the Royal Air Force. Also to his younger brother Jonathan, who was offered a fellowship to the Royal Society of Arts in the spring. Very proud parents and sister!

It does not seem like three years since we were waving Jak Doody off to university. He is the grandson of Val and Stan Edwards and was a very loyal member of Good News for Kids. Jak gained a First Class Honours degree in architecture at Birmingham University.

If I say Jack Cottis, everyone will remember the joyful, happy three-year-old who invaded us one Sunday morning 16 years ago. What a breath of fresh air he was. He joined Junior Church and later was a member of Good News for Kids. Jack has just completed his first year at university in Derby, where he is studying music and performance (I think I have that right). If you attended Wombourne Carnival

you may have heard his group playing. He also has one of the lead roles in Hairspray, which is on at the Grand Theatre in November. I am sure we will hear more about Jack. Well done to all of you.

SPECIAL CELEBRATIONS

A weekend of parties took place in Wombourne in May. Alison Martin celebrated her 50th birthday on May 14th with a wonderful party in the garden at home. Congratulations Alison. We look forward to the next celebration! Margaret Higgs also celebrated a 50th. Sadly, Margaret, I cannot report that it was your birthday, but congratulations were certainly due to you and Bill on your golden wedding anniversary on May 15th. I'm sure you had a wonderful time with the family.

PRAYERS

The Prayer Circle meets every two months to update our prayer cards. At the meetings in March and May we prayed for the families of those who have lost loved ones. We always name our older loved ones who are in residential care. We pray especially for each of them. New names are added to our prayer list and those who are well and no longer in need of the circle are removed. It is also a time of shared fellowship for the members of the group. We ask God to sustain those who pray daily for people in need.

It was very sad to hear about the death of Beryl Purchase. A long-standing member of church, and with her late husband George, she brought many blessings to our church life and family. Beryl was also a member of the Wives Group for many years. We remember Lisa and Gary, their family, and also Judy Mellings and Doreen Pike who were great friends. We are also thinking of Lynne Nicholls, whose funeral was on July 13th. Lynne was a member of church, the choir and the Wives Group. Her children attended Sunday school and she was always present at church events. Our thoughts and prayers are with Ron and his family. Lynne will be greatly missed by everyone.

Gladys Allport, a member of the Women's Fellowship died in June. God bless all who remember her, especially her family and the ladies of Women's Fellowship. We have recently heard of the death of Mary Webberly, Val Philpott's mother, who lived to be just over 100. Our prayers are with Val and her family. We also heard that Kathy Monckton's brother-in-law, Colin, has died. We pray for all those who have lost loved ones and ask that God will comfort you during a very sad time.

One of our oldest members, Alex Blackmore, has been in hospital for a while but is now in a nursing home. If any of you would like to write a letter or a card, Sue Sinnet and I will be visiting him shortly. We ask God to place His healing hand on all those who are sick. We ask Him to sustain their loved ones. Peter Moyle is ►

waiting to hear results of tests and we are thinking of you Pete, Sue and the family. Joy Brandrick's sister, Rita, has undergone surgery to the liver and gall bladder we are praying for her and all her family. We continue to pray for Cathy Anderson and for Robyn, the granddaughter of Eric and Carole Walker, and ask that your Holy Spirit will watch over them. All those who are in need of our love and prayers for healing will be blessed.

Many thanks are due to Denis, our Lay Pastoral Worker and all the Pastoral Group visitors, for all the work they do in caring for us all in so many ways. If I have failed to mention anyone with a need or with good news then I apologise. Jesus knows our every need and will watch over us. God bless . . .

Painting pictures with words

Jackie Neilson at Wenlock Poetry Festival

*A bright April day, with a cool breeze
We travelled from 'Hampton for a day
of ease,
Our destination was lovely Much
Wenlock
To enjoy the delights of the Poet
Laureate.*

*We had tickets for the Gala
performance,
At 8pm we took our seats,
The delights of Carol Ann Duffy were
heard
From Bees, My Mother (ie Water) and
Adelstrop.*

*Jean Atkin painted pictures in words,
Of France and Spain,
The Festival Laureate,
Her claim to fame.*

*Intiah Dharkhar the Queen's Gold
Medal winner,
She spoke from the soul for all to
hear,
Her poems relate to human
nature, tradition,
Observations with a dash of*

humour.

The treat did not finish here.

*Between the readings we had music,
Little Machine certainly grabs your
attention,
Puts a new perspective on rhyme,
Hearing their music accompanying
each line.*

*Never heard Yeats, Byron,
Carroll, Shelley, Larkin,
The Bard and Donne,
Sung with great aplomb.*

*Adelstrop was sung,
With pathos and vigour,
And Carol Ann's poem
Of Christmas, did mirror*

*The unity, between Carol and
Little Machine,
Has opened up Poetry to be heard,
and seen,
This Festival began in 2011?
Much Wenlock is a little bit of heaven.*

**LONG LIVE WENLOCK
POETRY FESTIVAL!**

Wombourne vestry news

Brenda Shuttleworth, senior steward

As I write, we have just come to the end of our Church Family Week at Wombourne, culminating in our church anniversary service led by Phil Bridgewater. He reminded us that the church is the people of God, united in our love for God and each other and the desire to be Christ's body in this broken world.

I was reminded of that great hymn by Timothy Dudley-Smith: "Lord, for the years your love has kept and guided" . . . for which "we bring our thanks today".

We have much to be thankful for because our community has been inspired by and provided for by God over so many years. That love has been shared in so many ways, large and small with a generosity that has a long reach.

Earlier this month a few of us enjoyed good company as we walked round West Park to raise money for Action for Children and we were grateful for the support of so many at church. Our recent quiz evening has helped us to make a difference to the lives of children in Kenya. There are so many acts of kindness done by church members that demonstrate the wish to serve God in practical ways.

We want to thank Diana for her stint in the vestry, her attention to detail having been a real asset. There is also much work done behind the scenes, keeping our church buildings fit for purpose and a welcoming space for visitors – the flower tubs, tended so carefully by Sandra, have blossomed just in time for Church Family Week. Thank you everyone!

While we are thankful for the fellowship of the church that has sustained us over the years, we are aware of the challenges that face us in the future. This year we will have only two church stewards. Our strong team of worship assistants means we can be confident that our preparation for worship will be done carefully, but it does mean that other work may not be done. At our recent Church Council we shared both our concerns and our hopes for the future, knowing that our energy for some work is flagging, but still confident that God can use us.

By the time this goes to print the Methodist Conference will be over and some of us will have had the opportunity to share in Chris's ordination service. We are grateful to him for his dedication to the work of God to which he has been called and as we go forward together, let us pray "Lord, for ourselves; in living power remake us . . . to live for Christ alone".

Gotcha! Organisers of the Family Week quiz at Common Road were surprised at the number of teams caught out by the question "How many of each animal did Moses bring into the Ark?" The answer is "none" of course, as it was Noah, not Moses. It goes to show that old chestnuts don't die, they just get recycled and folk still fall for them.

Idyllic setting for the sound of St George's

Jackie Neilson with a holiday recommendation

*There's a church at Dunster,
St George's by name,
But every day of the week,
The tune is not the same.*

LET ME EXPLAIN.

*A carillon sounds,
Four times daily thro' the air,
9am, 1pm, 5pm, 9pm.
Keeping the village, time
aware.*

*A joy to listen to,
After the chimes,
The melody changes,
With either hymns or rhymes.*

*Good old George Luttrell,
Used his voice,*

*Made the decision
The music his choice.*

*On Sunday we hear O REST
IN THE LORD.*

*Monday DRINK TO ME ONLY
WITH THINE EYES*

Tuesday HOME SWEET HOME

*Wednesday O WORSHIP THE
KING*

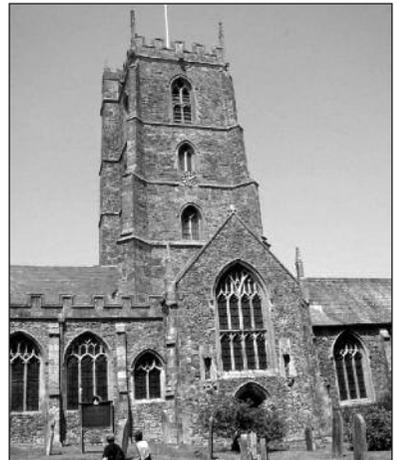
*Thursday THE BLUEBELLS
OF SCOTLAND*

*Friday 113rd METRICAL
PSALM.*

*Saturday HARK, HARK MY
SOUL.*

Last July visiting Dunster we made the effort once a day to hear these delightful melodies at St George's. However the main street is quite busy so it can drown out the lovely sound. The best spot to listen is the back of the churchyard, in the rear garden (elevated) at The Stag's Head (they do a lovely meal too) or by climbing up to The Buttercross above the village. Here the music wafts through the air, competing with bird song. Idyllic really.

In April of this year we timed it well, buying a couple of glasses of cider and some crisps, sitting in the elevated pub garden anticipating the carillon. Darkness descending, very little traffic, bats flitting by, odd birds twittering in the surrounding bushes and the owl hooting in the trees on the hill opposite. A calm English spring evening, then. The clock chimed 9pm and Monday's tune played – Drink To Me Only With Thine Eyes. What an apt spot we chose.



St George's, Dunster

The church at the centre of this lovely place is well worth a visit and the quiet garden of remembrance at the rear of St George's is a really tranquil spot to enjoy the stillness, sit on the bench to collect your thoughts and say a prayer.

Death by trade agreements

Brenda Shuttleworth on a threat to democratic rights



BITs, EPAs and now TTIP! What do these acronyms mean and what do they have in common?

BITs are bilateral investment treaties, EPAs are Economic Partnership Agreements and TTIP is the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership – a deal not yet agreed, shrouded in secrecy and causing concern to many NGOs.

BITs were sold as good news for poorer countries with the promise of investment but actually offer the investors huge power over the economies of the recipient nations. An obvious example of how this can be disastrous is the case of Argentina. Private energy companies invested in the country but profit came before welfare and these companies have sued the Argentinian government for loss of profits when it sought to freeze energy prices to support its people following the global financial collapse.

Britain has 104 BIT deals in place, including those with Ethiopian, Zambia and Costa Rica; countries too poor to cope with the amount of investor protection demanded by these deals.

EPAs are deals struck by the European Union, predominantly with African nations, requiring them to open up their markets and with the potential to ruin local farmers and small-scale producers.

TTIP is a deal being drawn up between the European Union and the USA. Under its terms powers will be transferred from governments to big business. Likely consequences of this deal include corporations suing governments if their profits are harmed, the privatisation of public services, the loss of labour rights including collective negotiation, the lowering of standards in the workplace, an increase in the price of drugs and the compromising of our NHS.

The negotiations concerning this partnership have been held behind closed doors with MEPs having little opportunity to express their views.

The fear is that our democratic rights will be severely compromised as issues are taken out of the public domain. Stories from developing nations concerning the way big business has marginalised the poorest in communities using these sophisticated trade mechanisms must make us ask whether this is a moral and just way to move forward.

In the coming months many of the development agencies will have more to say about TTIP so watch this space!

Life story written in your hands

Bob Hampson via Bob Hughes

Grandpa, some 90-plus years, sat feebly on the patio bench. He didn't move, just sat with his head down staring at his hands. When I sat down beside him he didn't acknowledge my presence and I wondered if he was OK.

Finally, not really wanting to disturb him but wanting to check on him at the same time, I asked him if he was all right. He raised his head, looked at me and smiled. "Yes, I'm fine. Thank you for asking," he said in a clear strong voice.

"I didn't mean to disturb you, Grandpa, but you were just sitting here staring at your hands and I wanted to make sure you were OK," I explained.

"Have you ever looked at your hands," he asked. "I mean really looked at them?"

I slowly opened my hands and stared down at them. I turned them over, palms up and then palms down. No, I guess I had never really looked at my hands, I thought, as I tried to figure out the point he was making. Grandpa smiled.

"Stop and think for a moment about the hands you have," he said, "how they have served you well throughout your years. These hands, though wrinkled, shriveled, and weak have been the tools I have used all my life to reach out and grab and embrace life. They put food in my mouth and clothes on my back.

"As a child my mother taught me to fold them in prayer. They tied my shoes and pulled on my boots. They have been dirty, scraped and raw, swollen and bent.

"Decorated with my wedding band they showed the world that I was married and loved someone special. They were uneasy and clumsy when I tried to hold my newborn son. They trembled and shook when I buried my parents and spouse and walked my daughter down the aisle.

"They have covered my face, combed my hair, and washed and cleansed the rest of my body. They have been sticky and wet, bent and broken, dried and raw.

"And to this day, when not much of anything else of me works very well, these hands hold me up, lay me down, and again continue to fold in prayer.

"These hands are the mark of where I've been and the ruggedness of my life. But more importantly it will be these hands that God will reach out and take when he leads me home. And with my hands He will lift me to His side and there I will use these hands to touch the face of Christ."

I will never look at my hands the same again. Not long after, God reached out and took Grandpa's hands and led him home.

When my hands are hurt or sore I think of Grandpa. I know he has been stroked and caressed and held by the hands of God. I, too, want to touch the face of God and feel His hands upon my face.