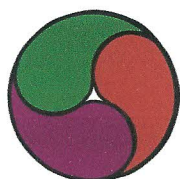


# BRIEFING

The monthly newsletter for Endcliffe Methodist Church



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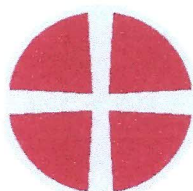
Rev Rachel Downs-Lewis



We are linked with  
the Kafue Mission in Zambia.



We are a fair-trade church.



## FEBRUARY 2012



**Fairtrade fortnight starts 27 February.**

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**A large print edition is  
available on request**

In Rachel's absence pastoral support for Endcliffe is being provided by Rev Canon Nick Jowett, from St Andrew's Psalter Lane. We are delighted that Nick has been able to this month's "Minister's letter" or "page 2 spread!" We thank Nick for his contribution to Briefing.

## Friendship

'It is no small consolation in this life to have someone you can unite with you in an intimate affection and the embrace of a holy love, someone in whom your spirit can rest, to whom you can pour out your soul, to whose pleasant exchanges, as to soothing songs, you can fly in sorrow, to those in whose friendship, amidst the many troubles of the world, you can safely retire... a man who can shed tears with you in your worries, be happy with you when things go well, search out with you the answers to your problems, whom with the ties of charity you can lead into the depths of your heart.'

Those words were written by Aelred, the 12<sup>th</sup> century Cistercian Abbot of Rievaulx, in his book on spiritual friendship. He may have been thinking about the relationships within a monastery, but his thoughts have a much wider application. People need friends. It's a basic building block of healthy personalities and of community. Many are fortunate enough to have a 'best friend' in their spouse or partner, but all of us are better off if we have really good friends whom we can trust.

Just think back to the very first disciples of Jesus: yes, they became followers, learning from Jesus' words and actions, but, as the Fourth Gospel has it, they were also Jesus' *friends*. In other words, they shared the deepest things together, they bore each other's burdens and *they really enjoyed being with him and with each other*.

Today it's quite hard for friendships to survive after one gets into an intense relationship or gets married and has children, so that friendships tend to be limited to family relationships; and for many who don't find a lifelong partnership, friends can be at a premium. Even the comfortable relationships with work colleagues can prove to be superficial and easily lost once one stops work. Men seem to be worse off than women in this regard.

So I think it's a great challenge for the church to become a place of real friendship. I think you could argue that Jesus wasn't that interested in the genetic family, because he was too busy creating a bigger family of friends, of brothers and sisters who called God 'Father'. But in many churches today, you will find a lot of *friendliness*, but you may not find *friendship*. Why? Because, I think, many church members are as much wrapped up in their own families and their busy jobs and lives as anyone else in society, and simply have no spare time and energy for making new friends. But one reason some churches really grow is, I think, that there is a nucleus of people who are friends with each other and really enjoy being with each other, but have enough left over to draw others into friendship. If there's fun and trust at the heart of a community, others will be attracted, and it will be possible to draw quite difficult or isolated people into that friendship.

In a period when affluence has caused many families to live isolated from other people, and – especially in a time of economic decline – when there are many casualties of loneliness and different kinds of addiction, the church has one crucial gift to offer: friendship.

