

# U.R.C. Southern Synod

## Church and Society Newsletter

Winter 2014

### In this issue

Don't talk about the war...

Slaves or immigrants?



The centenary of the start of the First World War will be an opportunity for the church to comment and take part in civic ceremonies and events throughout the country over the coming year and especially on August 4<sup>th</sup> when Great Britain declared war on Germany. The first shot fired by a British soldier in World War One came on August 22<sup>nd</sup> 1914 in the village of Casteau in Belgium.

But how should we respond?

As David Tatem writes in response to the subject being discussed at the Free Churches Group in April 2013, "The focus of the commemoration is not simply on the educational aspect for children ... it is essential that we approach the forthcoming period with great caution and rigorous theology."

Did the soldiers give their lives, lose their lives or have them taken away?



### Some useful websites

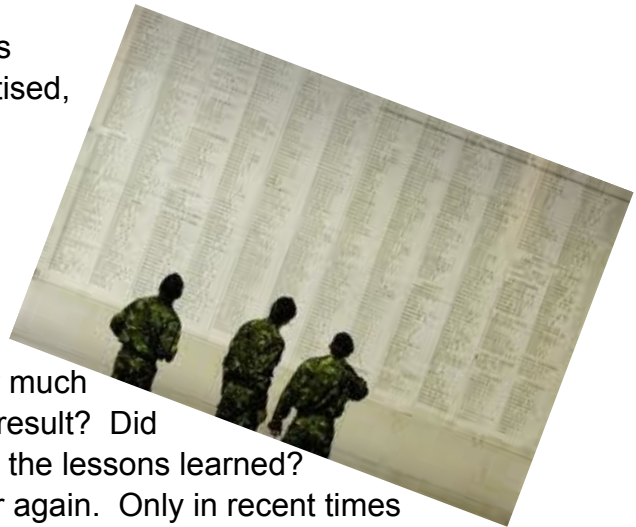
- |         |  |
|---------|--|
| Hope    | <a href="http://hopetogether.org.uk/greaterlove">hopetogether.org.uk/greaterlove</a> |
| CTE     | <a href="http://educationsunday.org.uk">educationsunday.org.uk</a>                   |
| History | <a href="http://historylearningsite.co.uk">historylearningsite.co.uk</a>             |
| Iona    | <a href="http://iona.org.uk">iona.org.uk</a> (but nothing yet)                       |



Edith Cavell was a British nurse serving in Belgium and her hospital became a Red Cross station after the country was occupied. She treated the wounded from both sides because she could not afford to hate or judge those who came to her for help. She was executed for treason and her final words embodied Jesus' commands in the Sermon on the Mount "... standing as I do in view of God and Eternity, she said, "I realise that patriotism is not enough. I must have no hatred or bitterness towards anyone."

At the heart of many discussions that will take place will be the question of obedience. Those who fought in the First World War, and any combat situation before or since were required to obey orders, no matter what their personal feelings might be. Others who objected were stigmatised, branded as cowards and even imprisoned.

Is the theology of a Just War 'fit-for-purpose' and has it ever been? In a wave of patriotic fervour many thousands of young men signed up and took the 'King's shilling'. How much did they know about the carnage that would result? Did they return to a 'land-fit-for-heroes' and were the lessons learned? In just another 21 years the world was at war again. Only in recent times can we say that Europe has been at relative peace since N.A.T.O. and the European Union. What would happen if members returned to separate nation states?



We must remember but we should also reflect on the causes of conflict and the politics of war. When language is used to speak of collateral damage rather than dead innocent victims should we not challenge and deliver a prophetic voice in such circumstances? Let us not confine our reflections to just the period of the war but also apply our thinking to the present time.

The Church has got a little better at choosing what to bless and what not to bless. Even our civic services recognise the realities that people are maimed and injured and we now see amputees, paraplegics wheelchairs in the processions. The humanist's request to be represented at the Cenotaph has been considered and there is no doubt that many groups will want to mark this year's significant commemoration.

The Church will have opportunity to play a part and would want the chance to represent the community they serve . Many churches will receive requests from uniformed organisations and may wish to display items and artefacts from their own members.



Since Harry Patch (the last Tommy) died in 2008 we can say that WW1 has passed from living memory. Therefore we have the chance of honouring the dead by telling another story about the world's need for peace and reconciliation. As we collectively remember the tragic event of the last century let us pause to think of how it relates to our faith in Christ's death and resurrection.

Rochester Diocese have produced a helpful pdf entitled "Ideas to commemorate the centenary of world war 1" that might help with alternative ways of remembering.

The Quakers have produced a paper entitled "1914-2014 - How will we remember the First World War?" available through the Churches Together in England website.

It would be helpful to share insights and ideas among the church leaders as we reflect on this matter and I am happy to co-ordinate response. Please contact Peter Stevenson with material on [revdpete@btinternet.com](mailto:revdpete@btinternet.com), or by phone 0207 708 0294 (office), 07972 790483 (mobile) or by mail at 16 Sutherland Sq., London SE17 3EQ





Some of you may be aware of the latest anti-trafficking legislation highlighted in December 2013 under headlines such as, "Theresa May's modern slavery bill will fail to provide protection to victims" *Guardian 20th December 2013 online*

In part the story of the South London sect that enslaved three women in a house in Lambeth has hastened the need for action. However there is a change to the domestic visa requirements that should alarm us all.

### SLAVES OR IMMIGRANTS

On 6th April 2013 the UK Border Agency changed the rules for domestic immigrant as follows, "The 'domestic worker in a private household' category allows overseas employers to bring their domestic workers with them when they visit the UK for up to 6 months. To come here as a domestic worker, you must be an established member of your employer's staff - you must have worked for your employer for at least a year before you apply for a visa." This has resulted in workers being forced to work for their owners for no money and prevented from complaining for fear of being left in the country without recourse to funds and access to help.

The [New Internationalist](#) magazine tells the following story,

"An Indian national, Sara was bought to Britain from Kuwait on a domestic worker visa. Living in London, Sara was treated appallingly by her employers. She was not allowed to contact her family, was often locked in the house, not allowed out to go to church and expected to be constantly on call, looking after a small baby 24 hours a day.

Sara had no contacts in Britain, no money and her passport had been taken by her employers. During the five months that she had been working in Britain she had received no pay. Sara was on the original domestic worker visa, so entitled to change employers so long as she only worked as a domestic worker in a private household. However, her visa was soon to expire and if she was to be able to renew her visa it was vital that she was in full-time employment.

She managed to escape, with one week before her visa was due to expire, and secured a job. Sara was able to apply for a new visa and is currently working in Britain as a nanny for a family. She pays her taxes and sends money home to support her family.

Accessed 27/12/13 [www.newint.org/](http://www.newint.org/)

As is often the case, when injustice happens we have to decide whether we are able to respond. This story is just one on many that might move us to righteous indignation. The work of the Church and Society group is to bring things to the attention of the churches and then its up to you!

