**Chair’s Update to PCN Members from Adrian Alker**

December 2018

Dear Peter

I am writing this news update a week before Christmas when our country seems to be in one of the worst states of political crisis which most of us have experienced. Yet despite so much in our social, economic and political life which causes us to be angry, (and to work with others for the common good) I hope that the coming festival will be an opportunity to relax with family and friends and participate in the many ways in which community is strengthened.

**Membership**

Members of PCN will recently have received yet another splendid edition of Progressive Voices, so excellently edited by Dave Coaker. With PV comes a reminder to us all that our membership renewal is due. I hope that all members will not only renew their membership but will accept the challenge of commending membership to a friend or colleague. For the cost of little more than a theatre ticket, each £30 received is vital for the continuing work of PCN. Whatever amount of money you are able to donate as a member, please be assured that the trustees do their best to ensure that monies are spent wisely and well to fulfil our aims. I believe there are quite a large number of people who attend a PCN group and /or see a copy of PV and yet have not joined PCN. Please do encourage them to join. The larger our numbers, the more we can claim to speak out with some weight.

**Exciting year ahead!**

**Saturday April 6th Birmingham**

I am delighted to be able to tell members about three PCN conferences in 2019.  Firstly, n Saturday 6th April, we are to hold our **Annual General Meeting, when our guest speaker will be Professor Richard Wilkinson,** who, alongside his partner Professor Kate Pickett, founded the Equality Trust and co-wrote that influential book ‘The Spirit Level’. Now they have written another book entitled ‘The Inner Level’, which explains how inequality affects us individually, how it alters how we think, feel and behave. This book sheds new light on many of the most urgent problems facing societies today, but it is not just an index of our ills. It demonstrates that societies based on fundamental equalities, sharing and reciprocity generate much higher levels of well-being, and lays out the path towards them. Such sentiments accord with the principles behind our eight Points and I am sure this will be a stimulating and challenging day. We will meet in Birmingham, beginning at 11am and closing at 3.30 pm. The venue is not yet confirmed but will be easily accessible by public transport. Please book the date in your diary now and in the New Year the venue will be confirmed.

**Saturday June 8th London: ‘Religion and Atheism :Beyond the Divide?’**

Members will already know from PV and our website,  that we are holding a major conference in London on June 8th, in which four eminently qualified thinkers will hold a public conversation with their audience and each other about religion and atheism and seek to move beyond the divisions to a new place of mutual understanding and respect. We are delighted that Richard Holloway, Julian Baggini, Harriet Harris and Fiona Ellis have all agreed to speak on this day. Tickets are now on sale via the website and I do urge members to book soon since we anticipate a full house!

**Autumn 2019**

As we continue to honour the work of Marcus Borg, our fourth memorial conference to take place in the autumn.  It will centre around the contribution of Dietrich Bonhoeffer in the development of Christian thought and praxis and will reflect upon Bonhoeffer’s legacy in our present world context. More details about the conference will be available in the New Year.

**Short films!**

Members will be aware that the Westhill Trust awarded us a grant.  This is to help us fulfil our aim of producing a series of short 5 minute films which will focus on the stories of individual young people facing the challenges of 21st century life and what a progressive Christian faith might have to say in response to their stories. We are now well on the way to finalising our choice of media company (based in Manchester) and this promises to be an exciting focus for PCN in working alongside a younger demographic. However such professional productions are expensive and we do need to raise about £3000 to £4000 in addition to the grant aid and decision, by the trustees, to release up to £5000 of reserves. We believe this is an import piece of work if we are to engage with a younger audience. I have floated the idea of establishing a separate ‘film fund’ as we did with the Marcus Borg Memorial Fund (which we can now close, having secured sufficient funding for the remaining two years of memorial conferences). Already some members have responded positively to the idea and I would appreciate your views on this so that we might decide at our next trustees meeting at the end of January to formally approve such a fund.

**PCN Website**

Our new team of website editors, Peter, Adrian and Tim, are working to maintain a stimulating web presence, full of interest and helpful resources for PCN members and the general public. Soon the website will have a new freshly coloured make-over as well! Members are encouraged not only to enjoy reading the various items of news and comment but to contribute their blogs as well. Those of you who receive PV by email as an attachment will in future be sent a link to open PV on the PCN website. This will encourage more awareness of what is currently on the site and will enable the editors to assess how many times the PV link is actually opened! And more of the current PV (but not all) will be available to be read on the site. A reminder too of the importance of using both our Facebook and Twitter platforms to promote PCN and progressive views in general!

Much to be thankful for then, as PCN marches on into a new year. Once more my thanks to all who contribute in any way to our work and I look forward to meeting members at our gatherings in 2019. There are  a lot of PCN groups which I have yet to have the privilege of visiting and I am happy to receive any invitations ( as are my fellow trustees) to get to know more of what is happening across the UK.

**A very happy Christmas**

Adrian