

Explorers—new group



Still life with oysters, Theodule Ribot

Over the past 8 months a new group has been formed, meeting every 3 to 4 weeks in homes. One defining image has stuck with them—the oyster.

'They (oysters) aren't particularly pretty from the outside. Similarly we are a rag tag bunch of misfits on the perimeter in many ways. But within there are pearls and we find plenty of those when we meet! Beautiful people with fascinating ideas and wonderful hearts seeking the pearls of the kingdom.' Others describe the group and their motivation as...

People coming together in faith and doubt to discuss living by their convictions and developing their questions, without judgement, condemnation or even certainty. Walking together with open hands and open hearts because we love God and one another. (Rachael)

It is a group made up of people with an existing mutual love & respect who are exploring together, some of whom struggle with the traditional church format to varying degrees. Initially a theme of inclusivity and belonging, or being known seems to have emerged. (Drew)

We are a cross generational group, exploring how to live out inclusional faith. My favourite bit is the unconditional love and acceptance that I feel. (Brian)

Our group context is to explore questions, faith, intimacy and friendship, particularly around the subject of 'Inclusion' and what that means for us personally as well as together as a group. (Liz)

Brian Donaldson

And finally...



The divine will is a deep abyss of which the present moment is the entrance

If you plunge into this abyss you will find it infinitely more vast than your desires.

Jean Pierre de Caussade

October 2016

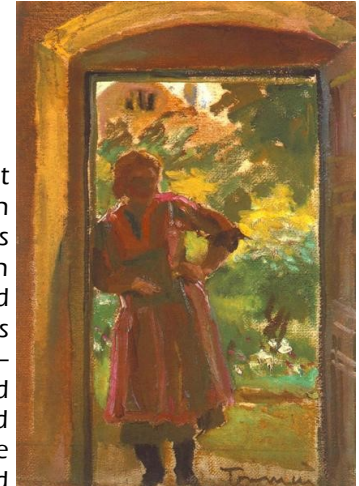
The Coracle Trust



On the pictures within

Work of sight is done.
Now do heart work,
On the pictures within you.
Rainer Maria Rilke

A curious idea perhaps? Pause for a moment. What do these words conjure up? The relationship between what we see and perceive in the world with our senses ('the work of sight') and what information we glean and the resonances they invoke may, and should, lead us into heart work, and back again. They are a tennis match of sorts. We see trees, hillsides or hear a song—they go somewhere. We watch and read local and international news accounts, of the camp in Calais and of kindnesses in trying circumstances. Stories sombre and inspiring are received. We feel them deeply, hold them or shy from them and then they are recycled into renewed attitudes and actions if 'heart work' is done. Life, the world is gift and we see anew.



Pictures: Woman standing in door, Window of the atelier, Janos Tornyai, both 1934

I have read Jesus described as a metaphorical theologian. His parables draw, stroke by stroke, for his audience and readers a picture of themselves, unique and personal, dividing and clarifying, holding up a mirror to what we do not or cannot see. We are shown our interior landscape as we had not before. This can be disturbing (yes), surprising (yes) and bottom line, a gift.

The poet David Whyte writes of security gaining us time and space until we can ground ourselves more solidly in our own identity but then we recall, as if a siren were heard a memory or dream, of 'former intuitions of a possible life'. We move on, we bid things goodbye and hail new strangers, be they ourselves, others or even the Divine. For Coracle this has meant two new groups emerging, trustees changing, reflective material now available as downloads and a Facebook account. What do you see?

Andrew Hook

East Lothian Coracle Group—new group

An oasis with bite

After an initial planning meeting in October 2015, the East Lothian Coracle Group first met in November and is now up and running. Although numbers remain small, it feels a good group to be part of. Meeting on the first Thursday of the month in the cosy and welcoming home of two of our members, we start the evening with pudding, tea or coffee. This is followed by a quiet gathering time, with music, reflection and sharing ideas and experiences shaping the evening.

As with the Edinburgh group, the tone of the group is reflective, allowing silence and listening to one another rather than the usual 'discussion group'. This may be why it feels a safe space and we have quickly become an open and sharing group. At our recent review it was acknowledged that new members would need to respect these features for the trust and openness to continue. Below are other comments to provide the flavour of where we are—the superb puddings clearly making an impact!



- * I find it really nurturing
- * Quiet, respectful intimacy
- * Very special
- * Worshipful
- * A real oasis
- * Very helpful
- * From the first session...(the Taize) music has created a meditative, prayerful space
- * The kind of space I don't have anywhere else. Being here helps encourage meditateness the rest of the time
- * Really appreciate peoples' honesty
- * The puddings are great – more puddings please!

Rosamond Robertson

Photographs:
Neha Deshmukh and Macarons by Tatiana Lapina,
both unsplash.com

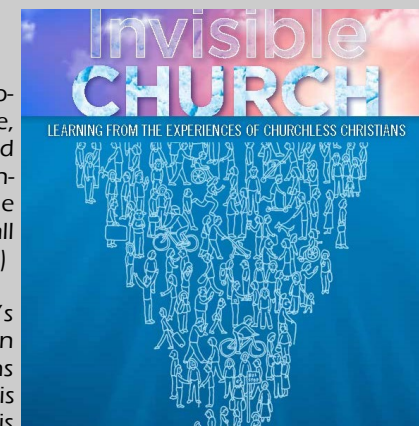


The Invisible Church—a book review

The Invisible Church by Steve Aisthorpe

'Churchless faith is a feature of the dramatic and momentous change going on in Western society. Here, new research provides a window into the world behind the statistics of so-called decline and enables us to understand what is going in - why this is an exciting time and why declining church attendance may not be all that it seems.' (from Chapter 1, Forgotten but not gone.)

Many people will be familiar with Alan Jamieson's books, 'A Churchless Faith' and 'Journey in Faith', in which the author recounts interviews with Christians who have disengaged with church. Steve Aisthorpe is doing similar research in Scotland, having completed his PhD whilst working as Missions Development Officer at the Church of Scotland (C o S), and now making such research accessible in popular book form. His research is looking/working with greater numbers of people than I have seen in similar studies. His open questioning and carefully planned research makes me feel like the 'unchurched' are truly being given a voice and that this work deepens our understanding of these issues.



~ Quote: [Two-thirds of church leavers maintain a strong personal faith](#) ~

The book is written primarily to and for the established church that they may hear from those who have left the church. It is a positive message, encouraging the church to understand that faith is not lost by a person merely by dint of being outside the institutions' doors. He presents evidence that suggests the Church in Scotland and the UK is in transition, posits that God is changing the landscapes/structures rather than agreeing with the view that the christian faith is in decline. Church is greater, in its spread and influence, than just the numbers attending established church, which has been the subject of previous surveys.

This is a very readable book, not full of statistics, though they have been done and are in the background. (Having been trained in science I do like to see that!). The chapter subjects are drawn from themes that came out of the conversations with people he interviewed. Headings include, 'Stereotypes, generalisations and prejudice', 'Longing for belonging', 'Life really is a journey'. One chapter challenges various myths that have grown up around the church and its progression: 'Myths masquerading as facts.

~Quote: [The church is in transition rather than decline ...those attending church services are the tip of the iceberg of the total christian community~](#)

Andrew and I went to a couple of book launch events around the time of the C of S General Assembly which reported on Steve's findings. Among a number of memorable things Steve said in answer to questions was, 'the pioneers have left the building!'. A strong message coming through is that many of those people who have left traditional church structures are not giving up on living out their faith or sharing it with others but on the contrary, they leave out of a sense of deepening faith and desire of being more present to their own lives and their neighbours.

Kirsty Hook

Coracle Mums—Universal themes

Shame and Vulnerability

We have been reading Brene Brown's book called, 'Daring Greatly'. Brene Brown has become a household name since her Ted talk on [Vulnerability](#), and she has written several books. I have had a couple of them sitting on my bookshelf for a year and not quite got round to picking them up and reading, so was pleased that someone suggested we read through one of them with the group. The themes below are universal and for us as a group of mothers who are trying to fit into life; family, work, and church they resonated deeply.

Scarcity - we live in a world telling us (or we are telling ourselves) we are 'not enough', not good enough, not doing enough, not talented enough, not giving our kids enough. There is a constant inner voice of guilt. This feeds our shame. I see in parenting this passed onto our children, are they reading enough, clever enough, how do they compare with other people's children.

Shame - we can often live with a deep inner shame, that no one must see. A lot of time and energy is spent covering up. Sometimes we want our children's performance to ease our sense of shame and of the 'not enough'. We fear their failure, not just for our own sense of shame of course. We connect deeply, feel intensely any sorrow or pain they experience. But do we end up protecting them from their vulnerability, identify too strongly, protect too fiercely. Can we free ourselves from the tyranny of shame, and help those we share our lives with also live more courageously?

Vulnerability armour - learning how we armour ourselves and how to let go of these defenses. Brene's thesis is that vulnerability is the key to living well but that we defend our vulnerability fiercely. *Perfectionism* is one defense, we only want people to see the positive. The answer; to embrace the mess and foster self compassion. Another piece for our armoury is *numbing*. The answer: to feel our feelings, leaning into discomfort.

Brene Brown is saying we can 'Dare Greatly' if we embrace our own vulnerability. If we live protectively, consummately avoiding shame, do we really live fully?

Kirsty Hook



Averie Woodard,
[unsplash.com](#)



Giulia Bertelli, [unsplash.com](#)

www.coracletrust.org.uk —Downloadable Topic sheets launched

Gallery of topics covered by the groups

This wall of topics shows the subject matter covered in Coracle groups, broadly on the issue of faith transitions in life. Material gathered for those subjects over the years is being distilled into concise downloadable single page topic pdfs. The first pdf, for the topic *A new space* released in June 2016, is part of an ongoing project to make the subject matter more widely available and practically accessible. The intention is to provide a stream of pdfs that assist new groups to start up wherever you are whilst at the same time offering food for individual reflection. We will outline suggestions for running group meetings. Email us for more specific support if you are looking to start a new group or run a series for your existing group.

DOWNLOADABLE PDF MATERIAL NOW AVAILABLE FOR THESE TOPICS...



BEAUTY

In the experience of beauty we awaken and surrender in the same act.

John O'Donohue



ACEDIA

Torpor and the refusal of joy. The word literally means 'not caring' or 'being unable to care'

Kathleen Norris



TRANSITION

Infatuation and enchantment—Nesting and manipulation—Crisis—Resolution and integration.

Bridget MacAulay

[TOPICS BROCHURE \(PRINTER FRIENDLY PDF\)](#)

Click the Topics **Brochure** button for a pdf brochure which presents a fuller listing of the 50+ topics; titles, thumbnails and excerpts.

Clicking on any of the topic pictures below (the full list of topics) will enable a [slideshow](#). Use arrow keys and place your cursor as required to move between topics and reveal text respectively. Each of these topics will be gradually moved up to the 'pdf download now available' status.



THE BODY

Our rootedness is profoundly



LOST

The old skin splits



EXHAUSTION

Why am I so tired?

Discoveries shared— recent Two Halves of Life group topics



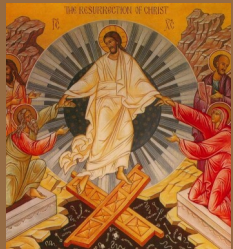
The life and truth of the imagination

Asking for and moving towards guiding internal images



Grief

Conscious living and conscious dying
Stephen Levine



The harrowing of hell

Somewhere within there is a threshold or a gate beyond which we feel we dare not go.
Malcolm Guite



What lies behind everything I see now

We are invited to forget ourselves on purpose, cast our awful solemnity to the winds and join in the general dance

Thomas Merton

Trustee news

Rosamond Robertson and Brian Donaldson have joined the Trustee team during the year. **Rosamond** began her life journey in the Blue Mountains, of Jamaica and moved through social work, family work and counselling practice. Now having retired she runs a sustainable productive home out of a ruined farmstead on the edge of the Lammermuir Hills. Social justice as an integral part of her faith led her to significant experiences of civil rights in North Carolina, a Quaker Action Group in Philadelphia and in 2011 Palestine as a human rights observer.



Brian is a Business Development Manager. His particular interests are in mentoring and helping people of any age and particularly young people transitioning into what Richard Rohr calls 'the joyful recognition and acceptance of our own smallness and ordinariness. Where we are free because we have nothing to live up to, nothing to prove, and nothing to protect. I am who I am and it's enough.' He loves the best coffee, dancing and his gregarious family.



Jane Edwards and **Mags Bryan** have stepped down as trustees. We thank them for their valuable input and welcome insight over the season they joined with us.

Harvesting our gifts

This year saw the Trustees make the move into online ethical banking by moving from the Royal Bank of Scotland to Charities Aid Foundation. It has made doing the accounts so much easier!



Harvest time provides a reminder to us of the gifts we sow and the gifts we reap. Do you feel able to make a regular charitable donation to support the work of Coracle Trust? Any amount would be so gratefully received.

If you are able to Gift Aid your donation, that would be even better! Please download the [Bankers Order / Gift Aid form](#), fill it out, post it off to me (address is on the form), and I will do the rest!

On behalf of the trustees, and with gratitude,

Nancy Adams, Treasurer