

Erica Dunmow

UK Urban Mission Congress

*JITCBelfast2010*

The UK Urban Mission Congress is not a leadership event, but rather brings together Christians from all the Christian traditions and agencies, lay and ordained, from local churches and projects who are serving in the poorer and more disadvantaged communities of the UK.

It meets every three years – usually in June, hosted by different cities in the four nations of the UK. Three years ago, when we were beginning to plan this year's Congress, someone had the bright idea of having it in Edinburgh and inviting people to celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Edinburgh 2010 – and so we talked with people in Scotland and we found a rather bigger event was already being planned !

So we had a meeting with Daryl Balia, and we were attracted to the questions being posed in Theme 7 and he agreed that we could be a formal part of the Study Process for that Theme. We made its topics our topics for the 2010 UK Urban Mission Congress and moved our event to Belfast in March of this year – *Jesus in the City (JITC) Belfast2010*.

In the two years in the run up to Belfast, we listened to 13 different national conferences and events organised by urban mission networks and organisations around the UK – hearing what they were saying about the Study Group's questions.

We organised a day event in Wales in 2009 to trial our study process for Belfast. In the spirit of Edinburgh2010, we did this with Evangelical Alliance Wales' Gweini Project, Churches Together in Wales (CYTUN) and the Catholic Justice and Peace bodies for two Dioceses, and it was held in the Assemblies of God Church in Newport (sorry no Orthodox were involved, we'll try to do better next time !)

It was called *Adfyw'ion Trefi – Urban Refreshment*: a day of prayer and conversation. We spent much as much time in prayer and worship as we did in discussion because we knew that we could only possibly hear what God was saying to us clearly if we were listening to God and well as each other ! We were very happy that clear answers did come.

These and the findings in the other 13 events that we listened to formed the text of our Interim Report to E2010

**Study Group 7**

Then, in March of this year, local Christians from UK urban contexts, leaders of local churches and of small, specialist urban mission agencies from across the UK came together in Belfast from 12<sup>th</sup> –14<sup>th</sup> March. We discussed mission in a real, tough contexts, and the findings of the listening process.

We met in the *174 Trust* a reconciliation project based in part of north Belfast that experienced some of the worst sectarian violence in the Troubles of the 1970s-90s. It still has Peace lines to keep people apart – peacemaking is a long process.

As well as our times of prayer, conversation, Bible study and discussion, we also worshipped in Holy Family, the local Catholic parish, and Fortwilliam Presbyterian Church. In both places prayers were said for all denominations and traditions. We also visited several projects in Belfast to see

In our small groups looking at the Study Group 7 questions, we not only talked with each other, but we also prayed with each other (and for each other). We felt that the questions that we were being asked to tackle were so big that we would only be able to find the answers that God wanted to give to us, by listening directly to God as well through each other.

The groups each had a Reflector, who presented their thoughts and a Bible passage in an act of worship on the Saturday.

The groups Met again on Sunday morning to draft their final statements and again prayed before they wrote, and then presented them in the context of the final act of worship.

Visit [www.jitc.org.uk](http://www.jitc.org.uk) for a full Report of the pre-Congress findings with the materials from *JITCBelfast2010* itself.

We did not skirt the difficult issues. Praying with and for each other helped us name some of the hard things about mission with God:

- the churches have been part of the problem - dividing, exploiting, disempowering: we are often not very good at working together
- we need to be prepared to live with Holy Spirit inspired messiness and creativity, in a climate where it is OK to ask questions and have our own prejudices and assumptions challenged
- we need to serve not through obligation, guilt or duty but by sharing with and empathizing with other people – and fun!
- we are required to cross boundaries, moving out of our comfort zones as individuals and churches. If we do this we risk, like Jesus, being rejected and ostracised by our communities and churches
- the churches still have bad practice in terms of racism, and other oppressions, within them: good formation can help repair

Two of the groups at *JITCBelfast2010*, had a diagram as well as words, in their Reflections. These two diagrams were so similar, we felt they were especially prompted by God.

Both used a central circle for the focus on God and 'shalom' and both then had a number of very similar words about the many ways that we need to work with God for shalom in the different, disadvantaged UK urban communities.

The diagrams have been edited together to include both sets of words, and it feels appropriate to offer them as part of our concluding prayers. I will quietly pray through the diagram and then lead us into our own prayer time.

# "Messy Truth" about mission

God is community  
 God is love  
 God is life

'It's not simply blessing or conversion'



Diversity is at the heart of God's world, so it's not surprising that mission is diverse too, and looks quite different depending upon the context and community where Christians are living – it's messy, but not in a dirty or ugly way.

It is centred upon our belief that God **is** community, God **is** love, God **is** life. It's not simply blessing (serving others) or conversion, it's taking part in God's mission (Missio Dei to use a technical term) for 'shalom' for the world and all its creatures. We are all called to be and to do what God needs us to be and do in our time and place to help bring that about. Here's just some of our ideas:

So it's holistic - it's about everything ! It's about reciprocal relationships; self-esteem and self-worth; conversion; family, hospitality and welcome; sharing stories of Jesus and of his impact on our lives; it's good community that does not isolate and is relational; it's for life; it's a journey – towards a faith commitment, as a follower of Jesus, and alongside each each other; it's done through the Holy Spirit's power and not through fallible human power, it's blessing; it's doing justice – challenging structures that do not make for shalom, both within and outwith the body of Christ; it's health; being Christ-centred and Jesus-shaped; it's leisure – it's fun !; it's well-being for us and the whole Earth – physical, environmental, spiritual, mental; it's based on person-centred, not programme-centred ways of organising; it's about sharing our experience of God; it's for ourselves, it's growth.

Let's do it !

Reflection with God about mission helps us discern what God wants us to do with him/her in our own contexts.

We have absorbed, been challenged by, and been blessed by, a huge amount in our time together in this Track.

We offer you now, about 10-15 minutes simply to reflect on your own, on all you've experienced and bring it to God.

Psalms are a Biblical tradition of bringing deepest joys and pains to God, so we invite you to write your own Psalm to let God know what you've experienced in our time together and what you're celebrating or wrestling with. Or you may prefer to write a prayer, or if you are a musician, some music, or lyrics for a worship song – or just pray.

# "Messy Truth" about mission

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# The Lord's Prayer

(we will say it together, but  
each person may say it in their  
own mother language)

May the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
the love of God  
and the fellowship of the  
Holy Sprit be with us all,  
evermore.

Amen