

**“ENTER, LORD CHRIST - WE WELCOME YOUR COMING!”**

*‘This day is a new day that has never been before.*

*This year is a new year, the opening door.’*

A very happy New Year to you all! I am writing this during the latter stages of the season of Christmas (the eleventh day to be precise – eleven pipers piping and all that) with the hope that your Christmas celebrations are not so far distant in your mind that you have entirely forgotten them.

I know that Christmas can be a strange time as we get older, with a real mix of emotions, which can sometimes be tricky to negotiate, but hopefully we are still struck by the awesome claim that Christmas makes that the Word became flesh and dwelling amongst us, and in the light of that claim, I trust that we are still determined to re-dedicate ourselves in 2023 to serving God, who continues to come to us in the people we meet in the places where we live.



The new year is, of course, a perfect time for re-dedication and as Methodists we have the wonderful tradition of the Covenant Service, dating right back to John Wesley himself, to help focus our spiritual minds as we move into the future. In the north of England, another important tradition is the custom of first-footing, when people go from house to house wishing each other all the best for the year ahead and sharing with them food and drink.

Traditionally the first person across the threshold is seen as a highly significant person. In many areas a tall dark-haired man is usually preferred, possibly because this practice dates back to a period of history, when to have a blond-haired man appear suddenly at your door in the middle of the night, often meant the Vikings were invading - and we all know what sort of things the Vikings used to get up to!

So the habit of first-footing continues strongly in those parts of Britain, which lie nearest to Scandinavia, even if the truth is that many people in the UK today carry within them some Viking DNA (me included: 'Sissons' = 'the son of Ciss', a good Viking/Norman name common in the Beverley area of the NE of England, whence our family originate).

The Northumbrian Community, a Christian collection of people founded in 1990 and dedicated to a life of contemplation and mission, were mindful of the first-footing tradition, when they included some words in their book 'Celtic Daily Prayer' inviting us at the start of a new year to make sure that the person who first-foots it into our house is Christ himself. So I would like to welcome you to this edition of the Circuit Magazine by sharing with you the poem they offer to be used as a meditation at this time of year. If you wish, you may even like to follow their suggestion by going to your front door, opening it and then praying these words.

*This day is a new day that has never been before.*

*This year is a new year, the opening door.*

*Enter, Lord Christ – we have joy at Your coming.  
You have given us life; and we welcome Your coming.*

*I turn not to face You, I lift up my eyes.  
Be blessing my face, Lord; be blessing my eyes.*

*May all my eye looks on be blessed and be bright,  
My neighbours, my loved ones be blessed in Your sight.*

*You have given us life and we welcome Your coming.  
Be with us, Lord, we have joy, we have joy.*

*Nick Sissons, Superintendent, January 2023*





**November is the time when we focus on Remembrance.**

**Around the Circuit people were creative in their Remembrance tributes.**

The Brownies in Bangor left these stones outside our church for the congregation to find as they went into church on remembrance Sunday.

Una from Penmaenmawr used her flower arranging skills to make this flower arrangement for the front of



## **Remembrance Day Poppy Display**

Twelve months ago, Robina Gretton had an idea! Everyone said "NO".

Robin's idea was to knit poppies to make a display outside our Church. The idea was discussed with Members, friends, relatives and anyone else who listened and then anyone who could knit started knitting over 800 poppies in red, white, purple and black wool.

A small group consisting of Robina, Gordon, Bernice and Kathy, assembled to discuss the form the display would take. It was a noticeably short discussion as we each had the same thought. The shape of the display would simply be a cross.

All the poppies were gathered and one Friday all who could gathered in the Church Hall to assemble the display. A prop, used for "Open the Book", was used to hold the netting in place to enable all the poppies to be tied on. It took three days to complete the task which resulted in a magnificent display as shown in the photographs - we think so!

The poppy display endured heavy rain and gale force winds and did not move.



On 11<sup>th</sup> November a small service, led by Sue Altree and attended by people who contributed including Members of the Church Circuit, Friends, Relatives and even those who could not knit.

A big thank you to everyone who donated time and wool in making the poppies. It was much appreciated. Now we wait to hear what Robina's next idea will be.

*Kathy Taylor  
St. David's English Methodist Church, Holyhead.*

## Jubilee Pilgrimage

**Pilgrims have completed their trek across across North Wales in honour of the United Reformed Church (URC's) 50th anniversary. St Paul's Church in Penmaenmawr took part in the final stage of the pilgrimage.**

In total, 94 people representing 12 different churches, and four furry friends, took part in the pilgrimage which ended at Penmaenmawr on 2 October having started at Wrexham on 23 July.

The final route took the walkers from the picturesque castle town of Conwy, to Sychnant Pass and then across the lower slopes of Snowdonia National Park.



Explaining how the day unfolded, the Revd Julia Bartholomew, a Minister in Rhos-on-Sea, said: “Somehow this walk embodied all the walks that had gone before.”

Every Saturday, pilgrims of all ages had travelled by foot, bus, train and car from one church to the next of the 12 churches taking part.

“It was a bright blustery day, and this was certainly not a ‘walk in the park’,” continued Julia. “Between gasps for breath, we told our stories. As we walked, our different church structures, worship styles, theologies, all disappeared in the background. Instead, we found common ground through sharing our own real-life stories, our hopes and dreams, our struggles with life, with church, with faith.”

Along the way the team paused for a lunch break at a scenic mountain stream in the shelter of a drystone wall, on the south side of Foel Lus.



The climb of nearly 1500 feet had been tough, the wind was fierce, and we didn't all have the most suitable footwear, but as we sat and shared our lunch, we realised how through our openness to travelling together on this path, God had brought us together in a place of refuge and refreshment," added Julia.

"It was our delight to realise that as churches, we are not left to struggle alone in the face of an ever changing and seemingly indifferent world. We have brothers and sisters in Christ on our doorsteps with whom we can share our joys, pray together and explore new ways of speaking Jesus' love into our communities."



At the end of the journey, the group were welcomed at St Paul's United Church in Penmaenmawr, a Methodist and URC local ecumenical partnership, with bowls of soup, cake, and mugs of tea followed by worship.

The walk took place across 11 weeks and included infants to people aged over 70 with the groups covering more than 90 kilometers in total. Some walkers included four generations of the same family.



# *Would you like to travel with us on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land?* Monday 6th - Thursday 16th November 2023

Led by the Rev'd Julia Bartholomew and the Rev'd Nick Sissons



As we move on from this year's Christmas and Epiphany celebrations, which have invited us to imagine what it might have been like to be with the shepherds in the field, or the Holy Family around the manger, or the Wise Men at Herod's court in Jerusalem, here is an invitation to travel to those very places at the end of this year.

Nick and Julia Bartholomew (who is the minister at the URC church in Rhos-on Sea), have worked together for many years, in the past at Rydal Penrhos School and more recently at St Paul's Methodist/URC church, Penmaenmawr. Now they are joining forces once again as joint leaders of a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, visiting key Biblical and historical sites and meeting local believers of differing cultural backgrounds.

Julia has led several Holy Land tours in recent years and Nick has long experience of leading pilgrimages in this country. Nick has also worked to develop inter-faith understanding for most of his ministry and this gives important insights into travelling in a land sacred to the three of the world's major religions.

Both Julia and Nick also have a passion for unpacking the scriptures and applying them to life today. What better place is there to do this than in their original setting? So they would like to invite you to consider joining them next November, in the hope that through our travels, encounters with others and times of worship, the Holy Spirit will touch us with the certainty of God's love, made manifest some 2000 years ago in the life of his Son Jesus in the land of Palestine.

*'Our longing is that we might all deepen our faith as we walk in the steps of Jesus the Nazarene and worship together in places whose stones still resonate with his words. We are sure too to enjoy a rich and varied holiday, making new friends, finding moments of stillness, and widening our understanding of the complexities of life in the Middle East.'*



A glossy brochure has been produced which, if not already in your church, soon will be. It explains in detail the itinerary for the trip and the cost. The trip is open to anyone, not only to the local Methodist and URC churches, so please share the information with others you think might be interested. Nick has copies of the Booking Form and the easiest way to express your interest in the first instance is to get in touch with him by email ([revdncsissons@gmail.com](mailto:revdncsissons@gmail.com)) so that he can give you more details.

## Warm Spaces

If you are responsible for paying household bills, you will be aware that energy bills are skyrocketing. People's gas and electric bills are doubling and tripling, with more price hikes on the horizon. As is always the case, this will affect people on the lowest incomes the most. Some people will have no choice but to be cold this winter.

Christians believe that everyone should be able to live with dignity, knowing their intrinsic worth and value. Poverty contradicts the will of God, and robs people of their dignity, sense of worth and value. So, in the light of this many community groups, including churches, are offering 'warm spaces' this winter: places where people can come and get warm, have a free hot drink, maybe grab a snack and charge their phone. The Methodist Church is encouraging its churches to embrace this opportunity and make a real difference to their local communities, offering a great deal of advice and assistance on its website. See more at <https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/evangelism-growth/respond-to-the-energy-crisis-this-winter/>

Churches are encouraged to register on the website [www.warmwelcome.uk](http://www.warmwelcome.uk) and with any local council scheme. In our case, that is the Croeso Cynnes scheme which Anglesey, Gwynedd and Conwy councils have bought into and can be found at this link

<https://www.gwynedd.llyw.cymru/en/Residents/Warm-Spaces-Croeso-Cynnes.aspx>

There is a logo which any such registered space can show, a sort of guarantee of legitimacy.



But there does seem to be a problem, in some communities at least - getting people in. In Bangor, there are 3 Council run warm spaces (the library, the Storiel and the Swimming Pool), but uptake is low. I have not yet checked out what is happening at the Age Concern café, the Youth and Community Centre up at Maesgerchen or at Penrallt's Thursday morning drop in, but the experience of those 3 council-run sites, St John's with its Sunday Soup lunch and St Paul's at Penmaenmawr is that people from outside those organisations who would not normally go are not yet availing themselves of the opportunities. Whether this is an advertising issue, people being generally distrustful of "something for nothing," or in the case of churches, Joe Public fearing that going inside the doors of those scary looking buildings might lead to them being hit over the head with a bible, who can say? Or maybe at the moment, the idea of coming together in community like this is an alien concept, and people prefer to soldier on and suffer in silence on their own. A dignity, pride thing. Whatever, I cannot believe the need in our communities is not there. But how to break down those barriers? This is where we all come in.

First, as always, we can pray. Second, be aware of where and when the warm spaces are happening. Third, promote. Encourage people we know who are worried about rising bills to go along to their local ones. Maybe even go yourself, so that you can gain first-hand knowledge of what goes on and offer to take others with you. Collate an information sheet of those places offering warm spaces in your community, put it in a prominent place in your church or church hall and have spare copies to hand out to anyone who might be interested.

Finally, this. There is no room for despondency. Though numbers are few at the moment, the church-folk attending are getting a great deal out of these occasions. The coming together, the working to make a safe space for others is a good thing in itself and also a very enjoyable experience. And above all it is the right thing to do. Post-Christmas as the winter bites, bills land on mats and word gets round, people may be more inclined to give our warm spaces a go – we are ready and there for them when they do!

# Warm spaces around the Circuit

## St John's Bangor

St. John's has responded to the " warm spaces " initiative by re-starting the Soup Lunches which were popular pre Covid . All are welcome , both members from St John's and people from the community . We serve a free, simple lunch of home made soup, cheese, bread and cake then offer some very optional activities for anyone who may want to take part ,including colouring/table tennis/ bread making / crafts and Lego for the children . We have already had two new people come along who appeared to enjoy themselves . The lunches are currently once a month but could very easily be increased in the winter weather. Sue Eckersley

## St Pauls United Church Penmaenmawr

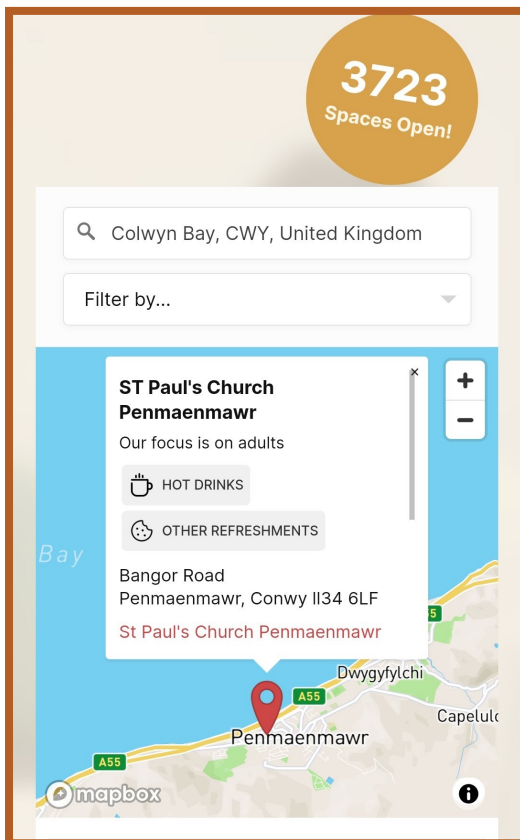
St Paul's opened their warm space in November and have been open each Friday morning.

The details are on the Warm Welcome map The photo is a screen shot of the interactive map which includes the times we are open and other details of what we provide.

We have been encouraged that this has been well supported by people from our wider church family and we it has been valuable to spend time relaxing, playing games and doing crafts together. We have had a few people from our local community drop by and we hope that in the New Year we will get more interest from the Community and people will feel able to come and spend some time with us.

We were very grateful to a local community group, Pobl Pen who gave us a donation towards the costs of running this space.

Heather Bonnebaigt





## Amlwch - A church without walls

What an exciting few months we've had!

Since COVID many members have moved away from Amlwch or feel unable to get into church, so we have been praying, looking for some answers to our problems.

The first experiment was cafe church in the Anglesey Good Gifts shop. We were really heartened to see how many people joined us. However, in November, the shop was closed permanently. So, we needed new premises.

We have been very fortunate to find Clwb y Gorlan, a small community hall in Amlwch. Our first café church there was really lovely- all our Anglesey Good Gifts friends came.

Our other very positive experiment has been in Hafan Cefni, Llangefni which is a sheltered accommodation complex with 60 apartments. We have two church members living there who invited us to take a service there. So, on the third Sunday every month we take our whole congregation to share worship.

The service that really makes us giggle takes place when there is a fifth Sunday in a month. We go to Margaret and Eddy's barn in Bwlch, Tynyngogl, Benllech- we sit around a log fire and share worship. This whole programme looks like a bag of allsorts.

The most difficult thing has been to let people know where to find us the following Sunday. Then, of course, not everyone likes these changes – tradition runs deep.

We're still working to find the best solution for all involved.

Please pray for us as we move forward.

Rev David and Liz.



# Getting to Know You

***Barbara Tottle, Llanfairfechan Church Steward***

I was born in 1951 in Oxted, Surrey. I am the youngest of 5 children having 3 sisters and a brother. We lived in a little tied cottage at the chalkpits where my dad worked. It was small house with an outside toilet and every Friday evening was bath and hair wash time in a tin tub in front of the big fire. My brother was a stranger who appeared every few months with a tin trunk and stayed for a while before he and the trunk disappeared again – back to boarding school.

We girls all went to Church at the Congregational Church in Oxted every Sunday morning and I remember walking home through the woods picking bluebells and primroses for my mum (frowned upon these days) I continued to go to Church every week until I was 15, when my parents and I moved to a small holding near East Grinstead. Roger, Marian and Sue were married and Jen was at the Royal Veterinary School in London. It was here that I met Geoff and I was 19 when we married.

We moved to Needham Market in Suffolk in 1979 and I took James and Anna to Christchurch United Reformed Church every Sunday until they had sat and passed their exams. I was working in retail by this time and Sunday was our only “family” day so we used to go out fairly frequently.

After school I worked mainly in Retail until Sunday Trading came in and I didn’t agree with it so left and had various dead end jobs until in my 40s I joined a big American company making opto-electronics. I worked my way through the company and when I was in my late 40s I studied for 3 years at night school at Colchester College for a qualification with the Institute of Quality Assurance and became the company’s Internal and External 3<sup>rd</sup> party Quality Auditor. The company closed and we were all made redundant. I had various jobs again after that and retired from Babergh District Council where I was a fitness Instructor for the over 50s and people with physical or learning disabilities. I qualified in teaching Aqua Aerobics, Nordic Walking, Chair based exercises, Otago Strength and Balance exercises and was the Health Walk Leader for the Borough. The thing I learned most is that if you want to do something, you are never too old to learn!

I think the key moment on my Christian journey was when my dad died about 20 years ago and when arranging his funeral at Christchurch I met the new minister, Mark Kenton, who was so truly inspiring that I started going to Church again and have done so ever since.



Continued

To me the most important thing about Jesus is that he is ALWAYS there for me. One day I was walking my dog Coco and he ran off in the woods for hours. I called and called but as he was a Patterdale Terrier he was off down rabbit holes hunting for prey. I didn't know what to do so I sat on a tree stump and prayed that he would come back to me safe and sound. Within about 5 minutes he appeared in front of me, dirt all over him and looked at me as if to say, "what was all the fuss about, of course I'm alright, I'm a dog doing doggie things" If ever the power of prayer and Jesus' love for us needs to be demonstrated, this was a perfect example for me.

I think that in Churches everywhere there is an element of, "We do it like this because that's the way we have always done it" There is nothing wrong with long held customs, but like everything else in life, there comes a time when sometimes, "things" have to change to survive

If I could only say one thing to someone I think, at the moment, it would be "Never give up, God will help you to find the right way"

I think the key moment on my Christian journey was when my dad died about 20 years ago and when arranging his funeral at Christchurch I met the new minister, Mark Kenton, who was so truly inspiring that I started going to Church again and have done so ever since.





## Name that Church— answers to last editions competition

In the last two editions of the Circuit Magazine I've shown some photos of churches I've enjoyed visiting in the local area. The last set of pictures in our Harvest edition were obviously so easy or so hard that nobody sent in any suggestions to me! But for those who did wonder and would like to know, here are the answers to the four churches pictured:

**Church 1.** Perhaps the most obvious of the set – St Cwyfan's on it's tidal island off the coast near Aberffraw. Did you know that this church, originally built in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, was part of the mainland until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the peninsula it was on was washed away by the sea?



**Church 2.** A good deal trickier. This is the chapel at Nant Gwrtheyrn on the western coast of the Llyn Peninsula, famous for its Welsh Language Centre. The village that used to stand on this site and to which the chapel belonged is Porth Y Nant. The chapel serves now as a museum to the history of the place and as a wedding venue.



**Church 3.** In the late 13<sup>th</sup> century it cost around £3,500 to build the town walls of Caernarfon. Next time you visit look out for this tiny chapel dedicated to St Peter and St Paul, built into the tower and arch opposite the East Gate, where Bank Quay goes underneath the High Street. It claims to be the smallest registered church in the UK. Easily missed!



**Church 4.** This is the 13<sup>th</sup> century Penmon Priory, which stands beside the road going towards Penmon point and lighthouse. This functioning church, built on the site of St Seiriol's original 6<sup>th</sup> century foundation, contains an impressive 10<sup>th</sup> century Celtic standing cross.



## Art in our churches



There was a time when you would never find any kind of artwork inside a Methodist church, because the history of our particular Protestant movement had seen it veer away from the kind of denominations that set great store by statues and paintings and candles and so on. Gradually things changed over the twentieth century and there was a growing feeling that we had rather thrown the baby out with the bath water, and so churches once again began to explore what kind of art might enhance worship rather than detract or distract from it.

Of course, all art is controversial, in that it is never going to be to everybody's liking and so it was perhaps not much of a surprise to me, when I asked the good folk of St Paul's Penmaenmawr, when was the last time the mural of St Paul had been uncovered and learnt that it had been hidden behind the curtain for many years on the instructions of one of the ministers, who firmly suggested it should never be revealed again!

That was an obvious encouragement to me to draw back the curtains and let the picture be seen once more, and if you visited St Paul's in the late autumn you will have seen the mural. What I hadn't entirely realized is that the mural was part of a wider art project leading up to the re-dedication of the church in 1966,

which included not just the mural but the glass doors and transept screen. An article written at the time explains it more fully:

*"The theme of our "new" St Paul's is 'The Light of the World.' It begins with the lighted notice board outside, then continues through the new glass doors into the newly screened-off transept, which can be used as a lounge, and so into the church and the climax comes with the lighted communion table, the illuminated cross and the mural.*

*On the glass panels of the porch screen there is an etching of the Conversion of St Paul – a reminder not only that the church bears his name but also of the light that shone on the Damascus Road. You can see the prostrate figure of the apostle whose open eyes are blinded by the light.*

*The mural was painted for us by a young artist, Mr Eric Birchall, Principle of the Bolton College of Art. It does not depict the scene at Calvary and of all the figures in the painting only the Roman Centurion would have been present.*





*The central fatherly figure is St Paul himself. Those on his right are men and women of the first century. Those on his left are folk of different nationalities from our own day. St Paul is pointing them (and us) to the light shining from the Cross and he is saying something like this, "We do not claim to know all the truth. We only see in a glass darkly. But this we do know. The light that shone from the Cross two thousand years ago is still the Light of the World today."*

*If the modern figures seem rather crude it is because the artist was asked to make them so, for they have not yet found the light, though they are looking for it. It is up to us all to help them to find it.*



*When the Chairman of the District spoke on the evening of the Re-Dedication he also pointed out that the outstretched hands in the mural are a reminder of the hunger of the world – both physical and spiritual. 'In fact,' he added 'the*

*more you look at this picture the more it has to say to you.'*

*(from Information relating to the Re-opening and re-dedication of St Paul's on Easter Saturday, April 9<sup>th</sup> 1966)*

If you have not had a chance to see the mural for yourself then do take the opportunity this year if you are at St Paul's for an event. The mural is not on display all the time – we drew the curtain across for the Christmas services – but it certainly has a powerful message to tell and it invites us to place ourselves in the scene and ask whether the light has truly illuminated all parts of our own lives yet.



*Nick Sissons*



## Student News from St John's, Bangor

It is always good to share in the successes of our students at the University, especially those who have come to study at Bangor from overseas. On December 16<sup>th</sup> I was attending one of the winter Graduation ceremonies in the University as one of the Chaplaincy Team, when I was delighted to see one of our international students, Stella, coming up to receive a degree. Afterwards this photo was taken of us in all our splendour. I asked Stella if she would share a word with us about herself for this magazine and this is what she has written:



*“Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good: Blessed is the person that trusts in him.” (Psalms 34:8)*

I have tested and seen that the Lord is good! I invite you to come and taste the Lord, and you will experience His goodness and mercy. Amen! I have experienced God's goodness, mercy and favour in my life. I lost my dad when I was only six years old so growing up without a father figure in my life was tough, but having Christ in my life made life very easy for me.

My name is Stella Gmekpebi Gabuljah, I'm from Ghana. I gave my life to Christ in 2014, and by God's grace I'm still standing in the Lord. I strive daily to grow in my relationship with God through prayers and the reading of His Word and other books on the Christian faith and fellowship with the church.

I studied business in high school, and I had my first degree in Social Work from Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Ghana. I came to Bangor in 2021 on a Commonwealth Master's Scholarship to study a Master of Art in Social Policy at Bangor University. I have had a wonderful life experience in Bangor. When I first came to Bangor, it was during the COVID period, so I was still joining my home church online for church service, but then I missed in-person service so I prayed about it, and the Lord led me to St. John's Methodist Church, Bangor. My first service with the church was awesome, after service, the Reverend and the church members welcomed me to church, and I felt so much at home. I invite you to come to worship us this and every Sunday and your life will never be the same.

Through the power of God and His mercies, I graduated with Master of Arts in Social Policy with a distinction. And by the grace of God, I have been awarded the Vice-Chancellor's Scholarship to study a PhD in Sociology and Social Policy at Bangor University which I'm starting in January 2023. I testify these to the glory of God in Jesus' Name, Amen!

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Rev. Nick and St. John's Methodist church for their prayers and support for me and all students. God bless you all. Amen!

## A Verse to Live By

*By Oyewole Oyebade, Masters student in Finance and Accounting at Bangor University.*

**My favourite bible passage is Psalm 121,**

“I will lift up my eyes unto the hills, from whence comes my help.”

This is a psalm of acknowledgment of Lack and Comfort.

The lack in the verse above denotes one’s recognition that as humans we can’t have it all, hence the realization of the fact that there exists a sufficient God that has it all in abundance and is ready to give to as many that need His help. As a believer, we are reassured that our help will come from the Lord.

On every side that we need help, He will deliver without compromise because the psalmist confirms that it is sacrosanct on the premise that “He who watches over Israel does not sleep nor slumber.”

In my journey of life thus far, I have absolute trust in this, that my Great God is my default helper and He can never disappoint me, though as humans I want it now, but when it is not happening now that doesn’t mean He will not do it because He is never late.

When I left the shore of Nigeria, there were many things that were yet to be fixed in respect of my relocation to a place where I don’t know people, but He provided every needed help at every stage of my family settling down. I want to encourage you that the real helper of life (God through His son Jesus Christ) will never disappoint you.

In Jesus’ name Amen.

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**We need you to help us to fill future editions of Circuit News. If you have any words of wisdom, jokes, pictures, stories you would like to share please send them to us.**