

In the February edition of St Andrew's magazine Sheila Telfer wrote that that the United Reformed Church expects its ministers to undertake ongoing training and study throughout their ministry. This includes a three month sabbatical every ten years, away from their regular service, but on a subject which will benefit them and their ministry as a whole.

## Tim's sabbatical 2019:

### 'IN-CAR-NATION: a grand tour of what's driving faith in Britain'

*"This life is not righteousness,  
but a growth in righteousness...  
not an end, but a road."*

*(Martin Luther)*

My parents would probably say that they could not remember a time when I wasn't interested in cars. So much so, that cars became the subject of my BA dissertation (on the design of three key historic cars from Citroen). That was over twenty seven years ago and included producing a full-scale exhibition for my degree show, including a real Citroen 2CV. Cars are still my other passion, outside of my Christian ministry, but aside from reading the occasional car magazine I rarely get the time to engage with this interest. So I'm taking the opportunity to combine two at long last!



As a nation of people on this small island we call Britain, we have a significant historical relationship with the motor car. Ministering in the city of Coventry for over six years I came to appreciate how our place at the centre of a great manufacturing industry has waxed and waned. Yet despite this, along with obvious environmental concerns, we still place the private automobile at the centre of our daily life as we travel from one place to the next. It is literally the driving force behind our daily journeys from one place to the next.

I have been intrigued on two occasions when the time came to change my old car to a newer one, to find that as I compiled a list to try to establish what characteristics I wanted from a replacement mode of transport there was one strange word which stood out – **'sanctuary'**. Therefore my key focus for this sabbatical is to look at the role the car plays in our daily lives as a place of sanctuary, but also, on the flip side, as a place of **'hospitality'**. How might our use of the automobile be likened to the principles of old style Christian monastic life? I want to look at the car as a place of **sanctuary**; as our own modern-day **monastic cell**; a **prayer space**; but also a place where we meet with and **journey with others**.

Over the last 10 years, building towards this sabbatical, my intention had always been to take it in the winter of 2018, over Christmas. The timing of moving to Leeds in late 2017, along with developments of what I might do in terms of a subject, made this impractical. However, having already had the main title – **'in-car-nation'** – in mind for some time, as well as being spurred on by my love of the seasonal journey of Advent and Christmastide, I want to keep an element of this Christian season in what I do. Therefore I want the Biblical journeys of Advent, Christmas and Epiphany to provide much of the inspiration behind any work I produce. Hence my stubbornly sticking with the title.

Building on my background in art and design, along with the theme of my previous sabbatical, which looked at the use of art in worship, I want to take the chance to be inspired by the visual wonder of the land we live in, alongside the architecture of some of the great church buildings which our denominational forebears have constructed here. So I aim to keep a journal in which I hope to get creative: writing prayers and reflections; as well as aiming to produce a *'Driven Daily Doodling the Divine'* sketch – inspired by David Hockney's *'Spring'* series of iPad images. Being a self-confessed technophobe I hope to discipline myself to learn how to post some of this work on the interweb.

Other things and places I'm hoping to include in my reflections on our use of the motorcar as part of our living as Christians in Britain today:

- moral dilemmas of owning and running a car
- investigating Christian car clubs
- car clubs and events in general and what fascinates people about the sense of community they imbibe
- motoring events such as the British Grand Prix at Silverstone
- volunteer as a taxi driver within the campsite at the Greenbelt Christian arts festival (although this is not until the 23-26 August) so as to engage in cabby-like banter with my clients!

Original inspiration for the theme came principally from the book *'Raw Spirit'* by Ian Banks, after it was recommended to me by colleagues who knew of three great loves in my life – cars, Scotland and single malt whisky. I'd highly recommend this book to anyone who enjoys any of those three! Banks travels throughout Scotland with a varied bunch of fellow travellers in a selection of awesome cars, as well as travelling by various other means, all in search of the perfect dram.

Another book, which some time ago sparked my longing for some sort of a 'Grand Tour', was *'Kevin McCloud's Grand Tour of Europe'*, based on the Channel 4 series by *Grand Designs* presenter and architect, Kevin McCloud. I love architecture (I confess I had a desire part way through my Graphic Design degree course to shift to studying architecture, as I shared a house with an architecture student) and being in and around churches gives me the chance to see some great (and awful) architecture. I hope this might help as St Andrew's is having to rethink how it must refurbish and adapt its buildings for serving God's mission to our community today.

It would be fair to say that I don't get out much and don't make time to do my own thing, but I have become a recent convert to the writings of Bill Bryson, particularly *'The Road to Little Dribbling'* and *'Notes from a Small Island'*. This has inspired a desire for me to get out there and see more of the land in which our denomination is based. Bryson takes a satirical look into the best and worst of Britain today, as he travels the length of the island he has made his home, bolstered by its noble history, cream teas and an extra day off at Christmas!

So, I shall be off-grid and away from you for three months after Easter. During that time I hope to clock up much driving, reading and reflection time. **See you at the end of the road!**

