

Christian Aid at St Andrew's and St George's West, Edinburgh

Presentation of Book Sale cheque from St Andrews and St George's West to Rev Dr Kathy Galloway, head of Christian Aid Scotland, 14th June, 2015

I have in my hand a cheque for £105,000 which I am about to hand over on your behalf to Kathy Galloway, the Director of Christian Aid, Scotland. Since its foundation 70 years ago, Christian Aid has sought to alleviate the distress of the world's needy and to advocate greater justice for them, and for 40 years this church community has provided its support for that cause through the annual book sale in Christian Aid week.

If you weren't among the people who took part in the sale last month, it's hard to imagine this tranquil and beautiful space utterly transformed by a vast tide of books that spills out on to George Street, and it happens every year. After two weeks of sorting and pricing, supported by a number of people with real expertise, the moments before the Sale opened at 10am on 9th May are unexpectedly quiet as we wait for the doors to open. There is the chance to hold in my hands a tiny, 500 year old volume before it is taken by someone who knows its true worth.

Then the public flood in, jostling and pushing (I even heard from a reliable source of some un-Christian elbowing, such is the popularity of this Sale!). They are intent on seeking particular books or postcards, records or antiques, pictures or children's games of their choice. Many are the interesting encounters that ensue, with ardent collectors, book specialists, students, travellers and holiday makers, casual browsers and oftentimes people who are lonely and vulnerable. All of life is there and we hope that moments of friendly interaction will remain with them as they leave. After all, we are the public face of Christian Aid in this place.

And it is the people who make the Sale such a life enhancing event. There are the dedicated volunteers sorting and selling or minding coats and valuables: the young men hefting impossibly heavy boxes: the cheerful helpers serving hundreds of meals in the Undercroft. But for most of us this is merely a three week commitment. For Mary Davidson and her team there is massive responsibility and meticulous planning throughout the year. As a result, the Sale unfolds (mostly) in calm and serene progression with relatively few aware of the hard work that goes on behind the scenes.

While this cheque for the vital work of Christian Aid represents so much from this church community, we are mindful of our privileged state in a relatively safe and prosperous country. We have our own needy of course but an increasing number of countries elsewhere seem to be plunged in total chaos and desperate need. When we look at the world it is easy to despair: Nepal, Syria, Iraq, Gaza, many parts of Africa. And increasingly those who go to their assistance are themselves endangered, whether they are individual volunteers or large NGOs.

But to counteract despair it is vital to DO something and through Christian Aid we have that opportunity, to translate enjoyable hard work into meaningful help. It is our heartfelt wish that every fraction of this donation goes to making life better for people, families and communities wherever there is need, continuing the great tradition of Christian Aid in the world. It is my privilege to hand it over.

Jeanne Bell