

THE HADLEIGH MESSENGER

March 2020



The Magazine of the
United Reformed Church, Hadleigh, Essex

SUNDAY SERVICES

10.30am every Sunday
with Holy Communion on 3rd Sunday of the month

6.30pm on 1st Sunday only
with Holy Communion

PREACHING ARRANGEMENTS FOR MARCH 2020

Sun 1 st Mar	10.30am	Morning Service	Rev. Celia Whitman
	6.30pm	Evening Service with Holy Communion	Mr Jim Clubb with Mrs Heather Brown
Sun 8 th Mar	10.30am	Morning Service	Mr Adrian Tinning
Sun 15 th Mar	10.30am	Morning Service with Holy Communion	Rev. Dr Jim Tarrant MA MTh
Sun 22 nd Mar	10.30am	Morning Service - <small>Mothers</small> Sunday	Mr Dave Bigmore
Sun 29 th Mar	10.30am	Morning Service	Mrs Joyce Berry

SUNDAY MORNING DUTY ROTAS FOR MARCH 2020

	ELDER	STEWARD	REFRESHMENTS
Sun 1 st Mar	Jean Reeve	Doreen Churchill	Doreen Churchill
Sun 8 th Mar	Heather Brown	Ann Purkiss	Kay Watson
Sun 15 th Mar	Malcolm Brown [Holy Communion]	Malcolm Brown	Jean Reeve
Sun 22 nd Mar	Jean Reeve	June Gargrave	Doreen Churchill
Sun 29 th Mar	Heather Brown	Janet Wimbledon	Janet Wimbledon

FLOWER ROTA

Sun 1 st Mar	Heather Brown
Sun 8 th Mar	
Sun 15 th Mar	Jean Reeve - in memory of her Mother
Sun 22 nd Mar	
Sun 29 th Mar	

ELDERS' MEETING

Wed 11th Mar 6.00pm

CHURCH AGM

Thu 26th Mar 12.30pm

HADLEIGH URC OFFICERS

Interim Moderators:

Rev. Jim Tarrant/Rev. Celia Whitman

Hon. Secretary:

Mr Royston Brackin (01702 558862)

Acting Hon. Treasurer:

Mr Royston Brackin

Serving Elders:

Mr Royston Brackin

Mrs Heather Brown (01702 557678)

Mr Malcolm Brown (01702 557678)

Miss Jean Reeve (01702 554907)

Useful information

Address: 1 Church Road, Hadleigh, Benfleet, SS7 2DQ

Website: www.hadleighsexurc.org.uk

An invitation

We invite you to join us for worship and fellowship at any of our services where a warm welcome awaits. If you are in need of help that the ministry of the church can supply then be assured of our interest and concern. If you are suffering from ill health, loneliness or bereavement and feel that we could help, or if you would like to ask for a prayer or personal visit then please let one of our church officers know. All such requests are treated in the strictest confidence.

Letter from Adrian

Dear friends,

At Caesarea Philippi, once the disciples had recognised who he was, Jesus began to face them with what it really meant to be the Jewish Messiah. What it meant for Him and just as important what it meant for them. As we journey through Lent it might be an appropriate exercise to walk with this band of disciples listening to what Jesus said and reviewing what he did in the light of these questions: “What does it say about Jesus’ concept of Messiah?” and “What does it say about being a disciple?”

In the very next verse at this point in the Bible, Jesus begins to try to eliminate from their minds the common idea that the Messiah would instantly restore the physical Jewish nation. It was not to be the world’s idea of the road to victory. For both Him and them it was to be a time of suffering.

As we experience Lent it is right to remember first of all that the call to discipleship is not a call to a life of ease leading to a star dust heaven! but a difficult life which will result probably in as much pain as laughter.

In the same passage we also find the lesson – “Don’t contradict the Messiah!”. As soon as Jesus begins to teach the path of suffering Peter jumps in to contradict Him. Jesus’ response sounds almost harsh as he rebukes Peter. The problem that Peter had however is one we know quite well from our own experience. We are ready in our best moments to recognise our Lord and worship Him but when we are called to sacrifice, somehow, it does not seem as attractive anymore and we look for an easier way.

To be a disciple of the Messiah means to accept the entire package as it is offered to us. Today with our society of choice it is even more

difficult to accept the absolute of the kingdom. In essence it is all or nothing if you really want to follow Jesus there is really only one way to do it – His way.

Then we come to the Mount of Transfiguration. Here we see the Messiah in the eternal perspective talking with men who, as far as the world is concerned, have been dead for hundreds of years. And yet, in the context of the Messiah, they are people with whom you can communicate and receive confirmation of the correctness of the path He has chosen, as they spoke to Him of what He was to accomplish in Jerusalem. It is a passage too where we see reflected in a sense the purity of His Glory as He was transfigured before them; a passage where the very voice of God is heard confirming the reality of the Messiahship.

What does it say of the disciples? Well now they can be encompassed in the councils of heaven. They can behold the Glory of the Lord. They also discovered it was fine to ask questions. As disciples the same privileges are open to us. To be included in the counsels of heaven and to experience some of the Glory which is to come.

And so we can travel on through Lent discovering more about our Lord and our own discipleship. Just as the disciples did as they travelled towards Jerusalem and Good Friday. In the same way that Jesus tried to prepare them for their future lives so if we will let Him, He will prepare us for the service we would give Him. Let’s then walk on with Him allowing Him to open the scriptures to us as he did after Easter morning to the travellers on the road to Emmaus.

May God so bless you during this time of Lent and Holy Week.

Adrian



From the Bible

“For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eye-witnesses of his majesty. He received honour and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. ... We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.’”

2 Peter 1:16-17 & 19 (NIV)

From the Editor

Welcome to the March 2020 edition of the
Hadleigh Messenger.

Apologies for the late publication once again.
Life has been very busy recently and included a
trip to East Yorkshire to take my mum home. The
magazine is slimmer than usual and I have had to
change the layout slightly, which is why the

Family News section appears below. Hopefully,
normal service will be resumed in April

Many thanks to all those who have made a
donation towards the cost of producing the
magazine in 2020. A final reminder that if you
would like to make a donation then the suggested
amount is £5.00 plus extra for any postage costs.

Malcolm Brown

Family News

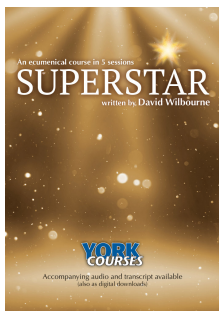
Tuesday Fellowship Programme for Mar 2020

Date	Time	Meeting
Tue 3 rd Mar	2.30pm	Annual General Meeting followed by a Members' Afternoon
Tue 31 st Mar	2.30pm	Easter Meditation & Communion led by Heather Brown

Meetings are held in the Small Hall with refreshments served at the end.

Meeting fee £2.00 (first time free) – Annual subscription £3.00

Churches Together in Hadleigh Lent Course



At the January meeting of Churches Together in Hadleigh it was agreed that we should use the York Course 'Superstar' for this year's Lent Course. The course booklet is written by David Wilbourne, who studied Natural Sciences and Theology at Cambridge. David has been a vicar and published six books. Having worked with three Archbishops of York, he went on to serve as Assistant Bishop of Llandaff.

Back in 1970, the show *Jesus Christ Superstar* asked daring questions. Half a century on, its message remains just as relevant, and we explore themes from its iconic lyrics in this 5-session course.

The course audio is produced by Simon Stanley, co-founder of York Courses, Canon Emeritus of York Minster and a former BBC producer/presenter. Simon puts questions to the participants on the course audio who comprise: Carmody Grey (Assistant Professor of Catholic Theology at Durham Cathedral), Steve Chalke (A Baptist minister and author, and a leading Christian thinker), Catherine Fox (author of seven novels, with a degree in English and a Ph.D in Theology) and Stephen Wigley (Chair of the Welsh Synod of the Methodist Church).

All five sessions will be hosted by St James the Less Church on Tuesday evenings from 3rd March to 31st March. Each session will be led by a different leader from the local church community. The dates, titles and bible references for the five sessions are as follows:

- Tue 3rd Mar – Who is Jesus? – John 8:1-11**
- Tue 10th Mar – Miracles – Matthew 19:26**
- Tue 17th Mar – The Psalms – Psalm 27:1**
- Tue 24th Mar – The Church – 1 Peter 2:9-10**
- Tue 31st Mar – Cross Purposes – John 12:27-36**

The sessions start at 7.30pm with refreshments served from 7.15pm. All are welcome to attend.

Malcolm Brown



Who do you say I am?

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

Matthew 16:13-16 (NIV)

WHAT'S ON

A round-up of future events in the area

Tue 3 Mar 2020 - Churches Together Lent Course Session 1 of 5 at St James the Less Church. Starts at 7.30pm. Refreshments from 7.15pm.

Fri 6 Mar 2020 - World Day of Prayer Service at Hadleigh Methodist Church. Starts at 2.00pm. Refreshments served afterwards. All welcome.

Tue 10 Mar 2020 - Churches Together Lent Course Session 2 of 5 at St James the Less Church. Starts at 7.30pm. Refreshments from 7.15pm.

Wed 11 Mar 2020 - Kingsway Community Cinema Presents 'Mrs Lowry & Son' at Hadleigh Old Fire Station. Doors open 6.30pm for 7.00pm start. Tickets £5.00 in advance via Eventbrite or pay at the door if seats available.

Sat 14 Mar 2020 - Coffee Morning at Hadleigh Methodist Church - 10.00am to 12 noon.

ditto - Beat & Beans Café with the Salvation Army Singers at St James the Less Church from 10.30am to 12.30pm. Live music with coffee, tea and snacks. Enjoy music in historic surroundings. Free admission.

ditto - Local Councillors' Surgery at Old Fire Station - 10.00am to 12 noon.

ditto - Hadleigh & Thundersley Community Archive Drop-in at Hadleigh Library from 10.30am to 12 noon. Bring your memories, old photos and documents or view articles on the Archive website

ditto - Hadleigh & Thundersley Community Archive Slideshow on 'Thundersley Postcard Memories' at St Peter's Church Hall. Doors open 1.45pm for 2.00pm start.

Tue 17 Mar 2020 - Churches Together Lent Course Session 3 of 5 at St James the Less Church. Starts at 7.30pm. Refreshments from 7.15pm.

Thu 19 Mar 2020 - Poetry Reading Group Meeting at Hadleigh Library from 2.30pm to 3.30pm. This month's subject - W.H. Auden.

Fri 20 Mar 2020 - Four-mile Health Walk. Meet at the car parking area at the bottom of Castle Lane, Hadleigh from 10.15am for 10.30am start. All welcome.

Sat 21 Mar 2020 - Hadleigh Heritage Coffee Morning & Neil Hamper Memorial Talk at St James the Less Church. Doors open 10.00am. Talk by Elizabeth Barham on 'Investigating The Prittlewell Princely Burial' starts at 11.00am.

Sun 22 Mar 2020 - Woodland Church, suitable for all the family, St Peter's Church, Church Road, Thundersley, from 3.00pm to 4.30pm.

Tue 24 Mar 2020 - Churches Together Lent Course Session 4 of 5 at St James the Less Church. Starts at 7.30pm. Refreshments from 7.15pm.

Sat 26 Mar 2020 - Ancestry Taster Day at Hadleigh Library from 1.00pm to 3.00pm. Find out who is in your family tree and what resources are available in your library. Advice available to assist you to take your research further.

Tue 31 Mar 2020 - Churches Together Lent Course Session 5 of 5 at St James the Less Church. Starts at 7.30pm. Refreshments from 7.15pm.

Sat 4 Apr 2020 - Hadleigh Gardening Association Spring Show at Hadleigh Methodist Church Hall from 2.00pm to about 4.00pm.

Wed 8 Apr 2020 - Kingsway Community Cinema presents 'Judy' at Hadleigh Old Fire Station. Doors open 6.30pm for 7.00pm start.

More events listed on the HELIX website at <http://www.hadleighessex.info>

Some thoughts about Ash Wednesday

From the Methodist Church website

On Ash Wednesday, in some churches, palm leaves and crosses saved from last year's Palm Sunday are burnt into grey ashes. They are then smeared in the shape of a cross onto the foreheads of Christian people.

It's a powerful symbol – an unexpected image. If you're walking down the street or coming out of a shop and you happen to pass someone who has recently been at a church service and is marked with this prominent Lenten sign, you'll look twice. The cross makes a person stand out.

But not just the person. This sign, whether worn on the forehead or not, signals for all Western Christians the beginning of Lent. Focussed reflection follows as it did for Jesus when he spent 40 days in the wilderness prior to three years of itinerant ministry. It is our period of reflection too. As Paul Wood and Ian Worsfold write in the hymn *You call us to the wilderness*:

*... You call us to the wilderness
to concentrate the mind
on letting go of many things
that stifle humankind.*

Often, we think of Ash Wednesday as a day of confession. We may pray with St Augustine:

*O Lord,
The house of my soul is narrow;
enlarge it that you may enter in.
It is ruinous, O repair it!
It displeases Your sight.
I confess it, I know.*

But Ash Wednesday is not just about repairing ourselves as individuals. It is also about re-establishing good and balanced relationships with those around us.

In the Eastern Catholic and Orthodox traditions, the beginning of Lent is signalled differently – not just on a different date but with a different day. “Clean Monday”, a day of strict fasting, reminds Eastern Christians that Lent begins with good intentions and a desire to clean our spiritual house. On this day, and frequently throughout Lent, Christians pray the Prayer of St. Ephrem the Syrian.

O Lord and Master of my life, keep from me the spirit of indifference and discouragement, lust for power, and idle chatter.

Instead, grant to me, your servant, the spirit of wholeness of being, humble-mindedness, patience, and love.

O Lord and King, grant me the grace to be aware of my sins and not to judge my brother; for you are blessed now and ever and forever. Amen.

It's a prayer for self-awareness and of awareness of our brothers and sisters.

And should we choose to read or speak these



words this year, will we also take note that these are the words of a Syrian man? Will we picture in our mind other Syrians, our sisters and brothers who have been made homeless and chosen to run from the places they know best because of war,

oppression, and complex international relationships? Will they and others like them be part of our Ash Wednesday reflections on the flawed behaviour of humankind, and of our roles in that?

The Rev. Norman Wallwork suggests that Alan Luff's hymn *God grant us words to speak* is one we should consider singing on Ash Wednesday.

*God grant us words to speak
when words are all we bear
to ease the pain that others feel
and show our loving care.*

The final two verses of Alan's hymn evoke the example of Jesus hanging from a cross with thoughts still for “the ones whose pain he healed by words of love and life”. The cross becomes a sign “beyond all speech” of hope through the pain and struggle. It can help us, too, on this day of confession to look outwards.

Returning to Paul Wood and Ian Worsfold's hymn:

*... You call us from the wilderness
to diff'rent barren lands
to breathe the message of the cross
for other empty hands.*

The Pleasant Sunday Afternoon Movement

Introduction

A few years ago, the British Newspaper Archive added a number of editions of the Southend Standard newspaper to its database. In the edition for 11th October 1906, I came across the following item about a Pleasant Sunday Afternoon meeting at our church (then known as Hadleigh Congregational Church).

HADLEIGH CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH.

The P.S.A. held in the small hall was re-opened on Sunday last, when an inspiring address was given by Rev. N. Richards on "Christian Socialism"; the soloists being Miss E. Loft and Mr. Choppen. A good attendance promises this P.S.A. to be an active feature in the village life of this winter.

The first evening in connection with the Mutual Improvement Society was on Tuesday, when a scene from Shakespeare "The Death of the Duke of Clarence" (Richard III.) was acted in character; Mr. H. Fay performing in grand style as the Duke of Clarence; Mr. H. J. Mitchell as Sir Robert Brakenbury; and Mr. Hertert Choppin, with Mr. Percy Snow, as the murderers. Although it was a wet night, it did not prevent a good attendance, and a thoroughly enjoyable evening was passed.

History

The Pleasant Sunday Afternoon (P.S.A.) movement owed its origins to John Blackham, a linen draper from West Bromwich who was a leading light in the religious life of that town. He was a member of the Ebenezer Congregational Church, and became a deacon when he was only 29 years old. In addition, he became active in the early morning Adult School Movement which was prevalent in the Black Country during this period. He had a concern as to how to regain and reclaim the lost older scholars from the churches' Sunday schools.

In 1875, when he was 41, he made a special visit from West Bromwich to nearby Birmingham to hear the well known American evangelists, Moody and Sankey who were speaking at the Town Hall one Sunday afternoon; finding himself unable to get in due to the crowd of 4000 at this meeting he asked about other bible study meetings being held nearby. He was given directions to the Steelhouse Lane Congregational Church which was not far away where he joined thirty young men for a bible study in a church that could have held a thousand.

When he reflected on the handful at the church, the erudition and skill of the teacher to whom he listened and why this splendid bible class teacher could only draw about thirty to the meeting, he saw clearly why he had failed and how this could be changed. 'I learnt how not to do it' it is reported that he said later, 'I realized that if men were to be won, we must give them a service neither too long nor too learned. We must avoid dullness, prolixity, gloom and constraint'.

Back at his West Bromwich chapel he shared his idea at a meeting with the Sunday School officials, and offered to make the experiment of a new form of service on condition they would support him with prayers and give him an entirely free hand. They were happy to back him and he gathered a few friends who went out on to the streets to button hole every man they met who, they thought was an old Sunday school scholar and did not attend church.

No handbills were given out, no posters put up, but the next Sunday, 120 young men went to the Ebenezer Chapel responding to these personal invitations. Thus was started the first meeting of what became the Pleasant Sunday Afternoon movement. The popularity of the meetings spread over the next ten years throughout the Black Country, across the Midlands and then beyond.

How to Work a P.S.A.

This account of the operation of a P.S.A. by a Baptist minister appeared in *The Free Churchman* of March 1904 (pp55-56):

If I were to begin again I think I would adopt the title 'Men's Own' or 'Men's Brotherhood', instead of P.S.A. for the Pleasant Sunday Afternoon has in many cases fallen beneath the high standard designed by its founder, and which many of us have endeavoured to maintain. Too often it has become a mixed gathering of men and women for little else than a Social Meeting in which the moral and religious elements are overpowered by solos, recitations, and other pleasantries. In my opinion these mixed P.S.A.'s have a serious defect in depleting the morning and evening congregations, and lowering the standard of religious worship.

It was agreed that the meetings should be held in the church, the consent of our trustees having been obtained, rather than in any public hall, first, because it saved expense, and secondly in order to make the men feel that they were an integral

part of the Church and its operations. A man who will cross the threshold of your place of worship in the afternoon will be more likely to feel a kind of proprietorship in the place, and will almost certainly reappear at the morning or evening services.

On the appointed afternoon some 250 men entered the church, and we followed the usual programme of a P.S.A. Meeting as supplied from headquarters, and which we have subsequently improved upon. I should be happy to send to any that contemplate starting such a meeting the programme which we now follow. With unusual trepidation I took the chair, and we went forward decorously enough, until we reached the time for my inaugural address. The men clapped me when I arose. This for a moment disconcerted me, and I thought my Gothic arches gave an involuntary shudder, but I realised that probably this was the men's way of saying Amen, Hallelujah!

I remembered also that it was the practice of the early Church to receive the magnificent orations of the golden-tongued Chrysostom with similar manifestations of approval; I therefore said nothing by way of reproof or restraint, and a hearty clap with which they always greet me when I enter, and the applause that follows the singing of the solo, or any striking point of the address, does more than anything to promote the good fellowship of our gathering.

Two or three Sundays after we started, a group of the men came to me at the close of the meeting, and said 'Look here, gov'nor, is this going to be a blanket and coal affair?' I said, 'What do you mean?' They said, 'Are you going to give away a lot of things?' and I said, 'Not that I know of: I am going to do my best to help you to help you to help yourselves.' They replied, 'If that's so, we'll come right enough, but if you are going to give away a lot, our mates would roast us for coming for what we could get.' I said, 'All right, I understand.'

As a result we have given nothing, but the men have helped each other marvellously. They have a Help-one-Another Society, from which they make loans; they have two or three Benefit Societies; they have got a Coal Club, where they get the best coals at greatly reduced prices. Some are bent on starting a Co-operative Society, which I believe will be of immense service to the district. For the last one or two years the income from the P.S.A. from all sources has been about £1,500. We make a halfpenny collection each Sunday, half of which

goes to maintain the Institute and Club, always open in the evening, and the other half is administered by the Committee of the Brothers to relieve cases of necessity. It is very much better for them to administer relief, as they understand each other's circumstances better than men of a different station could.

I generally get some one else to give the address, but always take the chair, and speak for seven or eight minutes at the end, in the simplest and directest way possible. Hundreds of drinking men have signed the pledge, hundreds have given their hearts to God, many have handed over playing cards, and other associations of the life which they have left for ever. The tone of certain streets has been entirely altered, and a body is being formed which is pledged to promote in Borough Elections the purity, righteousness, and well-being of the district.

The most interesting incidents are perpetually transpiring, for which in this brief article we have no space; and in concluding it I will only say that it is a great mistake to think that working men desire addresses on political economy and social economics. They long for, and appreciate, simple, manly talks about Christ, interspersed with good stories, ending with a straight appeal. They do not like ranting or being preached at, or anything weak and sentimental, but an earnest utterance of the claims of Christ is always enjoyed.



Pleasant Sunday Afternoon in Richmond, London

Sadly, there is no mention of Pleasant Sunday Afternoon meetings at our church in Ron Patten's brief history booklet written for the 90th anniversary. This is probably because there are no records from that era. However, I am fairly sure that there will be other reports in the Southend Standard. If any reader has information about P.S.A. meetings in the local area then I would be glad to hear from you.

Malcolm Brown



‘Green shoots of spring’

The Rev. Nigel Uden, Moderator of the URC General Assembly, writes:

Squelching around the manse lawn late in February, I noticed various green shoots of spring, snowdrops and daffodils among them. I had to be careful, to make sure I did not crush them – they were small, and I am not. Stopping to observe them, gave my heart a lift on a wintry day.

Since I last blogged, my diary has afforded me several opportunities to see green shoots of spring in the United Reformed Church (URC).



URC Youth Assembly

It was my turn to be the General Assembly Moderator at URC Youth Assembly which took place from 24th to 26th January at Whitemore Lakes, Staffordshire. Derek Estill had told me how much it meant to him in 2019, and I rejoice that it was possible for me to attend this year. I was struck time and again by the passionate consideration of some diverse business:

- care for URC people who are university students;
- a reasoned and bold reaction to a current ecumenical issue that affects all the denominations in Churches Together in England;
- recognition that the world is in a climate emergency and a challenge to the whole URC to make events eco-friendly; and
- interest in a youth-focussed celebration of the URC’s 50th anniversary.

In search of common ground (the event’s theme), Youth Assembly was punctuated by the earnest

examination of three big issues: sex, faith and relationships; war; and politics.

There was worship that was at once both thoughtful and vibrant. There was a warm and generous spirit through it all. And the leadership of the moderators and the moderator-elect, with their colleagues, was a moving mix of carefully prepared steady hand and (seemingly) unflappable spontaneity. In fact, it seemed to me that Youth Assembly was less a green shoot of spring than a life-giving organ of the URC.

The following Sunday I was leading worship at St John’s URC in Marsh Green, Kent. I was presenting A Rocha’s Eco Church Gold Award, which St John’s had recently become the first URC to achieve.



St John’s URC in Marsh Green, Kent

Its commitment to the environment is movingly inspired, as stated on its website: “Every time we baptise a new baby we are reminded of the state of the planet on which they (and children the world over) must live; they are the ones who are going to ‘inherit the earth’ however damaged it is.”

The church has spent some years working on installing photovoltaic panels to become a net exporter of electricity, and a rainwater tank that flushes the toilets and another that waters the plants. There’s a nature reserve, with a wildflower meadow grazed by sheep loaned by a local farmer, fruit trees and numerous bird, bat, bug and butterfly boxes, and a whole lot more.

As members make clear: “The church’s environmental work is a continuous process since moving forward is essential if we are to play our part in passing on a world to our children that is fit to live in.” The next chapter is to encourage the entire village to become hedgehog friendly. These were literally green shoots – for a local church that in its modest size is thriving, and for our world to which this is making a difference.

A couple of weeks later, with Quentin Milan-Laguerre, a French theological student on placement with us in Cambridge, I visited some more green shoots in West Thamesmead. When the sprawling south-east London housing estate was established, churches were carefully inaugurated in the east, south and north, but not in the west. Just as the URC had taken its place in those other ecumenical causes, so a more recent church plant has begun to take root in the west, meeting in homes and on Sundays in a school.

With serious pump priming from the URC’s Southern Synod, alongside the faith-filled and energetic ministry of the Revs Andrew and Sally Willett, a church is emerging. As the poster suggests, children are at its heart, but they are not throbbing there alone. A young people’s ministry thrives at the manse, where around 15 teenagers gather every week, and this embryonic church also has four people praying about their vocation to some sort of ministry. It’s not easy work and there are real challenges in many ways, but such has always been the authentic living out of the Gospel. As by hard work and prayer seeds are sown and watered, so green shoots are being brought to growth. Surely, they witness to God, who is “ever faithful, ever sure.”

And finally, Fulbourn URC is one of the rural chapels that I am privileged to serve as part of the Cambridgeshire pastorate I came to in 2010. It knows what it is to have small congregations Sunday by Sunday. It understands the challenges of maintaining its 19th century buildings and is grateful for Eastern Synod’s help with that.

Fulbourn URC also faces the succession planning questions so inevitable for an ageing membership.



Fulbourn URC

And yet ... in six weeks it raised over £1200 for charity. Benefitting from villagers’ great support, it gave its Christmas offertories to a hospice and to work among children in hospital, and then, at the beginning of February, raised more than £500 at a coffee morning in aid of toilet twinning. People seemed to be inspired by the opportunity to afford dignity and safety to strangers far, far away who otherwise have nothing of the lavatory provision we so take for granted. Green shoots of love in action.

Spending a month moving around these green shoots of new life around the United Reformed Church was true joy. We have to be careful, to make sure we do not crush them with neglect, discouragement or failure to build upon or resource them. But the truth for me is this, stopping to observe them gave my heart a lift on wintry days, and I can only say thank you to each person involved, and “to God alone be the glory”.

P.S. Since writing this blog, the flooding in various parts of the UK, and the global development of the Covid 19 virus have filled the headlines. Part of our Lenten discipline could be to include them in our prayers as well.

Nigel Uden

Posted 2nd March 2020

Prayer for those affected by flooding

Compassionate God, source of all comfort, we pray for the people whose lives have devastated by rain and flood. Bring them comfort, we pray. Protect the vulnerable. Strengthen the weak. Have mercy on all those who work to rescue those in danger or care for those in need. And may our response to their suffering be generous and bring you praise. For we ask it in Jesus name, *Amen*. (Adapted from a Christian Aid prayer)

Newsletter from Zimbabwe – dated 26th Feb 2020

The content of this year's World Day of Prayer service was prepared by the women of Zimbabwe. This newsletter gives a stark picture of the current conditions in the country.

When I put my finger into a black china bowl of water in the sink to scoop out what I thought was a leaf, I found myself holding a small black scorpion. A yelp of alarm, a few unrepeatable swear words and a quick flick of my wrist left the scorpion running around the sink, its stinger poised, and me realizing what a close call I'd had. The thought of a 30km journey on eroded, potholed roads to the nearest health facility which very likely wouldn't have electricity or water, would probably not have a doctor, definitely wouldn't have medicine and with no cash in my purse to pay any help I needed, made the reality of life in Zimbabwe very frightening.

This is the fact of the shocking situation Zimbabweans are trying to survive in the second collapse in our country in just over a decade. A situation where taps are usually dry, the power is almost always off, banks have no money, fuel stations are mostly dry, over half the population needs food aid and the rest of us can't afford most of the food in the shops. Drought or not, it's fair to say that Zimbabwe is again in a state of deep failure.

In the past fortnight we have seen scenes in Zimbabwe not witnessed since 2008, things we thought, hoped, prayed we would never have to see again. We have yet again run out of our staple food: maize meal. It's not as if we didn't know this was coming: for months International Aid agencies have been calling for donations, warning of hunger, starvation and even famine. Meanwhile our government has been talking about it promising no one would go hungry and putting a positive spin on the looming disaster in interviews in Davos, but all of that did nothing to stop us going full speed ahead into the brick wall.

Speaking in Bulawayo two weeks ago our Agriculture Minister said there was only 100,000 tons of maize left in the country's grain reserves. Zimbabwe consumes 80,000 tons of maize a month which meant that a fortnight ago there was only enough maize left in the country for five weeks. The cold hard fact of the situation now is that Zimbabwe needs to be moving twenty thousand tonnes of maize into the country every single week.

For the past fortnight there has been no maize meal to buy in the shops. Empty shelves have been filled with rice, an unaffordable option for most people, in urban areas you see queues of hundreds of people outside supermarkets waiting for the chance to buy one 10kg bag of roller meal. As deliveries come in the queues swell, tempers flare, queue jumpers push in and in a ridiculously short space of time the sales stop and the managers say they have nothing left, everything's been sold. Exactly as it was twelve years ago, every dirty trick in the book played. Mysterious night-time loadings from back doors, cars with tinted windows and an instant black market has emerged.

In a nearby rural area the Headman called the whole village to a meeting to relay the news that the International Food Aid was about to come. Representatives of two hundred families in the village gathered and were told that every family was going to be given international food aid once a month for the next four months. This would consist of 10kgs of maize meal per person in the family and an unspecified amount of cooking oil and dry beans. The Headman proceeded to make a numbered list of all the two hundred families in that village.

The news of food aid had come from the Chief of the district, representing twelve villages each with an estimated two hundred families. From village to village the people were called, the lists made and one person from each family told to go to a central distribution point at a school seven kilometres away. Representatives of two and a half thousand families gathered, arriving early in the morning and then they waited and waited. At 4pm an announcement was made. There was only enough food for five families from each of the twelve villages, only sixty of the two and a half thousand families would get food, everyone else must go away and try again next week.

Zimbabwe is restless, people are desperate but there is no sign of relief from our government. We are still crippled by the 2% tax on every bill we pay, every item we buy, every service we use, every mouthful of food we eat. It seems we just keep on putting our hand into the bowl with the scorpion.

Author unknown

Taken from the UK World Day of Prayer website (www.wwdp.org.uk)

Computer Corner

Rob Outen Photography

Interesting videos

Rob Outen is a local photographer and a member of Rayleigh Camera Club. He has a YouTube channel where he publishes videos taken on photography trips locally and further afield. The videos may be of interest to photographers because Rob shows how to take better photos and the settings he uses to do so but they may also be of interest to those who enjoy seeing different parts of the country. Recent shoots have taken place at Cobbold Point (Felixstowe), on the River Crouch, at Old Leigh and at Hadleigh Castle.
URL: Go to www.youtube.com and search for 'rob outen'.

In Business - Zimbabwe's Food Crisis: Can Old Crops Fix New Problems?

Interesting radio programme

This programme was broadcast on BBC Radio 4 in January but is available for over a year. It is topical because the plight of Zimbabwe was highlighted in this year's World Day of Prayer. The programme concerns attempts to reintroduce indigenous crops like millet and sorghum as a way of reducing food shortages.
URL: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m000czf6>

Literary Hub

Interesting website

This website claims to be "a single, trusted, daily source for all the news, ideas and richness of contemporary literary life". With the help of a large number of editorial partners, it provides a host of articles that are primarily book-related. The site is split into various categories including 'Craft and Criticism', 'Fiction and Poetry', 'News and Culture' and 'Lithub Radio'.
URL: <https://lithub.com>

Word Search – Water-related

Inspired by the recent rainy weather.

D	O	I	O	U	M	R	O	T	S	R	E	D	N	U	H	T	R	S	R	AQUEDUCT
V	M	D	S	E	X	K	I	R	U	O	P	N	W	O	D	J	M	D	Z	BROOK
B	G	T	A	Q	K	Z	O	I	Q	T	Y	G	U	A	J	I	I	X	C	CANAL
Z	Q	T	V	D	U	X	A	O	A	G	J	N	J	I	O	Q	C	P	A	CLOUDBURST
E	C	N	X	Q	W	A	T	V	R	W	Q	L	W	S	G	Y	E	D	B	DELUGE
L	E	O	U	U	Z	R	L	O	X	B	A	R	Z	T	Y	Y	J	M	H	DOWNPOUR
Z	S	I	B	N	X	U	I	L	R	N	Q	Y	X	R	N	P	T	J	M	DRIZZLE
Z	K	T	G	O	S	I	L	O	A	R	W	K	P	E	R	Q	E	T	P	FLOOD
I	O	A	W	O	A	P	M	C	V	U	E	Y	Y	A	C	F	Q	S	Z	GALE
R	Z	T	L	G	P	Q	X	I	D	R	N	N	I	M	L	C	N	R	Z	LAGOON
D	M	I	T	A	R	V	U	E	N	F	E	N	T	O	U	E	K	U	J	MONSOON
S	H	P	Y	L	E	C	W	E	D	E	F	S	O	N	C	D	Y	B	S	PRECIPITATION
B	H	I	W	P	J	J	O	V	D	A	C	D	E	F	R	H	T	D	W	PUDDLE
B	P	C	R	X	E	H	K	P	L	U	O	J	G	R	U	Q	F	U	X	RAINFALL
U	U	E	I	S	A	L	Y	L	R	S	C	A	U	Y	O	P	H	O	Y	RESERVOIR
D	D	R	V	D	A	J	A	U	H	C	R	T	L	J	A	Z	T	L	Q	RIVER
N	D	P	E	C	K	E	I	G	H	Y	B	I	E	X	S	A	Y	C	R	SQUALL
P	L	O	R	Y	N	R	C	O	B	X	W	E	D	O	F	F	N	Z	V	STREAM
B	E	B	F	F	K	N	E	L	V	B	E	W	A	V	L	O	U	Z	G	THUNDERSTORM
W	M	O	N	S	O	O	N	N	I	T	K	M	I	P	R	V	O	M	X	TORRENT

Words may appear in any direction including diagonally, back to front and upside down.

CHURCH DIARY FOR MARCH 2020

DAY	TIME	EVENT
Sunday 1 st	10.30am 6.30pm	Morning Service – Rev. Celia Whitman Evening Service with Holy Communion – Mr Jim Clubb
Monday 2 nd	8.00pm - 10.00pm	Ladies Recreation Group
Tuesday 3 rd	2.30pm	Tuesday Fellowship – Annual General Meeting and Members’ Afternoon
Thursday 5 th	10.30am - 12 noon	Coffee Morning
Saturday 7 th	8.30am	Men’s Breakfast Meeting
Sunday 8 ^h	10.30am	Morning Service – Mr Adrian Tinning
Monday 9 th	8.00pm - 10.00pm	Ladies Recreation Group
Wednesday 11 th	6.00pm	ELDERS’ MEETING
Thursday 12 th	10.30am - 12 noon 12.30pm - 13.30pm	Coffee Morning Bible Study
Sunday 15 ^h	10.30am	Morning Service with Holy Communion – Rev. Dr Jim Tarrant
Monday 16 th	8.00pm - 10.00pm	Ladies Recreation Group
Thursday 19 th	10.30am - 12 noon	Coffee Morning with bric-a-brac table for Christian Aid
Sunday 22 nd	10.30am	Morning Service – Mr Dave Bigmore (Mothering Sunday)
Monday 23 rd	8.00pm - 10.00pm	Ladies Recreation Group
Thursday 26 th	10.30am - 12 noon 12.30pm	Coffee Morning CHURCH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
Sunday 29 th	10.30am	Morning Service – Mrs Joyce Berry
Monday 30 th	8.00pm - 10.00pm	Ladies Recreation Group
Tuesday 31 st	2.30pm	Tuesday Fellowship – Easter Meditation & Communion

A Prayer for Lent

Dear God,

In this season of Lent, we’re reminded of our own difficulties and struggles. Sometimes the way has seemed too dark. Sometimes we feel like our lives have been marked by such grief and pain, we don’t see how our circumstance can ever change. But in the midst of our weakness, we ask that you would be strong on our behalf.

Lord, rise up within us; let your Spirit shine out of every broken place we’ve walked through. Allow your Power to be manifest through our own weakness, so that others will recognize it is You who is at work on our behalf. We ask that you would trade the ashes of our lives for the beauty of your Presence. Trade our mourning and grief for the oil of joy and gladness from your Spirit. Trade our despair for hope and praise.

We choose to give you thanks today and believe that this season of darkness will fade away. Thank you that you are with us in whatever we face and that you are greater than this trial.

In Jesus’ name,

Amen