



**Church Magazine
April 2025**

Our Vision: "To celebrate God and share the love of Jesus."

Pastoral Letter

Dear Friends

Who are you in the story?

It seems that every time I sit down to write the Pastoral Letter for the church magazine, it's a day of beautiful sunshine. I don't know if it's divine timing, filling me with joy? Read into that what you will.

Over the last 12 months, it's been a joy to watch and listen to the people who have been blessed directly or indirectly by the Alpha groups that have taken place in the church.

For me the blessing has been two fold. Firstly, the enormous privilege of seeing Sarah being drawn in by the holy spirit, her deepening in faith and being baptised. Secondly, I've had free choice of what's on TV most Wednesday evenings for the last 12 months.

But this has also presented me with a challenge. (Not just what to watch on TV?)

“Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?”

This story has 101 cast members...

The lost sheep, The Shepherd and the other 99 sheep.

The question: Which part do I play? And my question to you as you read this... Which part do you play?

The Lost Sheep:

The Sheep: Represent people, and the lost sheep specifically symbolizes those who have strayed from, or never found God's path or those who are considered sinners.

At some point or another, we've all been this sheep. Perhaps for some of us the path was always in sight, or we simply lost our footing momentarily. For others, the path may not have been visible.

The Shepherd:

Their role is that of a caretaker and overseer. A shepherd would watch over the sheep, protect the sheep, feed and water the sheep, and in every way care for the sheep. They would live with the sheep 24/7. They would protect their flock, and a good shepherd might even grow their flock.

Do you have a gift for ministry, outreach or evangelism? That doesn't necessarily mean preaching a sermon every Sunday, but it does mean being able, ready and willing to share your faith in a way that draws people in at any opportunity, and seeking those opportunities.

The other 99:

We don't hear about the other 99 sheep in the parable, other than to say that the Shepherd left them while he searched for the missing sheep, but what did they do?

If, the moment the shepherd left the flock, the other 99 sheep panicked and scattered, the shepherd would have found themselves with a lot more work to do, rebuilding their flock, but sheep are amazing things. They stay together, forming close bonds with one another. Alone, sheep are vulnerable, but they have safety in numbers.

As Christians we might feel like one of the 99. We're saved, but we don't know what our role is... but we have a role. To protect one another, to welcome home the lost sheep and to stay together whilst the shepherd(s) go about their work.

And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders ⁶ and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbours together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.'⁷ I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

Every Blessing

Keith Meredith

Summary of Items discussed at March 2025 Elders' Meeting

Ian Hardie attended, sharing a note detailing the Treasurer's tasks and invited the Elders to find a successor to him.

Elders also discussed different ways in which people can give, traditionally it has been cash (or cheques) or bank standing orders, but we want to investigate other options such as using a debit card, apple pay or Google pay.

Elders discussed Ian Hunt's resignation. Details regarding this were shared at the March Church Meeting.

Tony shared draft updated job descriptions for the Director of Outreach and Building Manager, the update was to add wording that refers to the Church Secretary in situations where the normal Elder role to which they report has not been filled. Tony also produced a new draft Staff organigram, more work on this is required.

Gavin McCall tabled an updated Safeguarding Policy (based on a Synod template). This came to the March Church Meeting and was approved.

Changes to the telephone provider are still proceeding, watch this space.

Synod insist we form a Mission Partnership and will take on the role of getting other churches to engage in the process.

Tracey is busy holding both a normal Alpha course and an Alpha Youth course (run by Viv). Tracey is also planning to hold a Church Alpha course, there is a sign-up sheet in the Café area – please see page 13 for further details

The Elders discussed ways in which as a Church family we can spend time together away from agendas. A number of church family breakfasts are in the pipeline, the next will be on Easter Sunday –Everyone invited!

Lorna shared a number of church family concerns which the Elders prayed for.

Clever trees at Hyde Hall !



C



Christian Aid Week
11th – 17th May

Julie and Muriel will be holding a plant stall in the forecourt on **Saturday 17th May**

There will be lots of bedding plants for sale. At present, tomatoes (Gardeners' Delight), sweet peas, lobelia, nasturtiums and zinnias are germinating while plug plants of red geraniums, busy lizzies, cosmos and gazanias are growing away. They might not all survive but if they do they will be for sale on May 17th at bargain prices, all for Christian Aid Week.



Please note we will not have any bags for you to take away your purchases. You might want to bring newspaper with you as a lot of the seedlings are growing in compostable cardboard pots which can be planted as they are and might be a little messy, so please bring bags or cardboard boxes or other eco friendly containers to take away your purchases.

Thank you so much, and we look forward to seeing you, for what is a very worthwhile cause,

Join us for

Afternoon Tea

Monday April 14th at 2.30pm

Sandwiches, Scones with Tiptree jam & cream

Home-made Cakes

£10.00.

Booking with the office is essential: 01376 500958



April Newsletter - Philip and Denise

Greetings from us both. It is the middle of March and we are heading towards autumn in South Africa. However the temperature is still around 20 to 25 degrees so no long trousers for Philip yet. It is getting dark earlier – around 7.30 pm.

We are now hosting the first Housegroup in our home for the month of March and April to trial how it goes. We have between 8-10 people attending but are open to anyone who wants to join us. It has been a great time to get to know fellow Christians in a more relaxed space especially for newbies like Philip and me.

Lloyd, our Pastor, has set a challenge to the Church to read the Bible in 30 days during the month of March. We are called 'Bible Shredders'. I have to say we did not think we would manage it but with prayer and discipline we are on target and feel much more confident that we may reach the target for the second half of the month. It has been daunting but a blessing too. Fortunately we are retired and have more time on our hands so I think that has helped but we know that those with work and family commitments find it a struggle. I am sure the exercise is proving to be worthwhile and is available to anyone on the You Version Bible App.

Philip has been busy with various projects including keeping the supply of crosses going. We have been able to pass them on to various workmen and acquaintances and we continue to be thankful of how well received they are. One of our Church members recently gave the word in our Sunday service and was holding the cross during his talk – it was a great message from beginning to end.

The Recycling Project will be having a break over the Easter holidays but recently I was tasked with hard boiling 180 eggs as one of the free food items we handed out together with a sandwich, carton of milk and an apple and pear. The following week another member of the team and I made 180 syrup and peanut butter sandwiches.



Philip was tasked with refurbishing 3 bicycles. The young man in the picture had saved his Mula for over a month which meant he had to collect 300 kg plastic – some very hard work - and you can see from the smile it was a dream come true.



We have had various works carried out at our home and now have water storage tanks so when the water is cut off, with no notice due to a leak somewhere, we are able to carry on as normal. We also had solar panels installed so that when load shedding is put in place intermittently we will have electric power.

God continues to bless us abundantly with our home, Church, and new relationships. It has been wonderful to be able to keep in touch with several of our Church family and of course continue to receive prayer chain requests.

Our love to everyone. X

Sunday's Coming! Rosemary Stinson

It was Friday, the blackest of all Fridays,
Their hearts were filled with dread.
What could they do, where could they go?
The one they loved was dead.
There was no doubt about it - they'd stood and watched him die.
That loving Lord, who'd done no wrong, lifted up against the sky.
Those hands, so full of healing, now marked by cruel nails.
His side pierced by the soldiers, such awful cursing rails.
That brow, crushed by the mocking crown,
They'd stood and watched his blood run down.

He'd gone - it was all over.
A chill was in the air.
They walked away, dejected men,
Filled with such despair.
They passed the hours in fear and sorrow,
They'd forgotten what he'd said,
"I came to die, but do not mourn,
I'll come back, rise from the dead."

It was Sunday, early Sunday, there's a knocking on the door.
Mary stood outside and to Peter cried,
"His body's not in the tomb."
They ran and found it empty - the great stone was rolled away.
It was Sunday, glad, glad Sunday, the very first Easter Day.
He came to them and showed the wounds
His love allowed to be made.
No-one took his life from him, for all he freely gave.
He changed Friday, black, black Friday into joy and peace and love.
When on Sunday, glad, glad Sunday His mighty power He proved.

Please join us for

Whole Church Alpha

Sundays 12:30-14:30

11 weeks Starting 27th April

Bring a packed **lunch***

All in our church fellowship

welcome New Christians,

Established Christians

Doubting Christians **Curious**

Christians...

Holy Spirit Day 14th June

Sign up sheet in the café

*please ask if you need a packed lunch to be provided

TRY ALPHA

A
different
kind of
hope.



TRY ALPHA

Good news
worth **sharing.**



A
different
kind of
peace.



Local Witham Walkers Celebrate Bill Watson's Big Birthday - David Goodwin

Some of you will already know that Mary and I lead a Witham Walking Group every Tuesday morning followed by tea/coffee and a chat. Five members of the congregation are participants, including Bill Watson. He recently celebrated a big birthday and, prior to the walk on 11th March, we made a presentation to him of a gift and a card. Bill has been a walker for many years and, in the past, has lead longer walks on behalf of Braintree Council. Some of you may recall that he lead at least one walk during one of our past weekend away.

Please let me know if you are interested in coming on our free walks, which are open to all ages and abilities.





April

TUESDAY PRAISE

REFRESHMENTS AVAILABLE AFTERWARDS

12:30-1:00 PM

1ST APRIL

VICKI ZARB

8TH APRIL

NOAH COCKETT

15TH APRIL

KEITH IVES

22ND APRIL

LORNA BANTOCK

29TH APRIL

MARINA PRICE



Witham United Reformed Church
Newland Street, Witham, CM8 1AH
01376 500958 / info@withamurc.org.uk

EVERYONE IS WELCOME

The Pledge - Care For the Family.

This month we feature Care For the Family one of the Charities which has been supported through the Pledge.



Care for the Family is a national charity which aims to promote strong family life and to help those who face family difficulties.

"Since 1988, Care for the Family has sought to promote strong family life and help those who face family difficulties. Our work has been focused on the UK, but increasingly through digital technology, we are reaching a wider audience.

We focus primarily on the following areas of family life: marriage, parenting and bereavement. Our aim is to be accessible to every family whatever their circumstances and to create resources and support that are preventative, evidence-based and easy to apply.

Every family and marriage is unique. Parents may have one child or many, be fostering or adopting, be parenting a child with additional needs, parenting alone or apart from their children. Couples may have been together for many years or just beginning their marriage adventure. Whatever the context and circumstances we want to do all we can to support both marriages and families to help them thrive.

However, we also know that on every journey they will experience difficult times as well as the good. Our telephone befriending services are there to support them when the going is tough. In particular, we are aware that all will experience grief and loss during their lifetime. We want to help those

who are living with loss to discover hope for the future, and the strength to rebuild their own lives and the lives of those that they love.

Motivated by our Christian faith, ethos and compassion we are committed to supporting families of all faiths or none, with outstanding services and resources. For marriage preparation, relationship tips, and help in the testing times. From birth to the teenage years and beyond. For bereaved parents, those widowed young and anyone supporting bereaved people".

Further leaflets regarding this charity are available on the Notice Board in the Community Cafe.

<https://www.careforthefamily.org.uk>

Jean Moody - Great Totham URC

The first of a 3 day farewell.Christian Aid Lent Lunch at the Catholic Church.Today Grantham Methodist Church.Tomorrow Stamford URC.We will miss his pastoral letters in the Witham Church magazine.

Blessings Jean



And on a personal note from us, we will miss his monthly letters.

Jo and Bob Stibbards

**Rev Dr Peter Stevenson, Stamford URC
from Jean Moody, Great Totham URC**

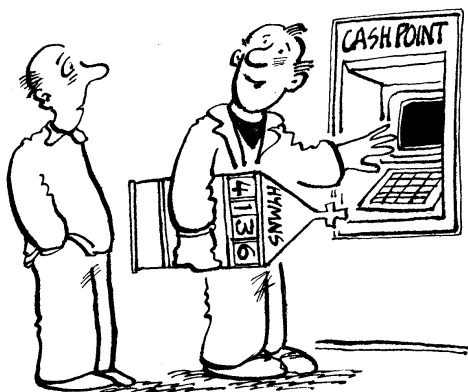
Looking at the diary I have just two church commitments, preaching at Trinity URC Sheffield on 1st June and 9th November. We have holiday booked and family time arranged. With my Christmas gifts of binoculars and bucket and spade, I have everything I need for promenade walks and I will be getting my Grimsby Town FC season ticket for 2025/6 as soon as they go on sale. The U3A program is extensive and I think I will take up ten-pin bowling again. Beyond that, who knows, other than to take the opportunity to rest in the Lord and be guided.

What has been the role of full time paid ordained ministry and could it not have been done by anyone with a heart for Jesus. For nearly 25 years, I have received a stipend - *a payment to enable clergy to exercise their ministry without the need to take another job*. I have friends who do the job without payment and others who do the exact same tasks without being ordained (often referred to as lay people). I studied for 4 years in order to gain a 'leavers certificate' that warranted ordination and voluntarily a further 5 years to gain additional academic qualifications. I never felt called into the church but always felt that I could serve a wider community as a theological practitioner. Working in an array of chaplaincies has been rewarding and helped me to feel purpose. It has been a privilege to share deep emotional and spiritual time with people and I have rejoiced with those whose faith has strengthened.

Where to now? More of the same but in a different context and without payment. Thanks to prudent financial planning I am able to serve without recompense so I shall be about God's work instead of the Church's work. The subtlety will not be lost on any reader that has been shackled by rules, regulations and the expectations of others. I am looking forward to finding where God is at work and joining the Lord there.

Thanks to the many people who have supported, encouraged and loved me during the past six years and I look forward to seeing you for fish and chips at Papa's on the pier.

Blessings



...between you and me, it's the only way I can remember my PIN number!

Knitters required for Hamlin Fistula - Naomi Claxton

- "The moment I arrived I felt a big relief of my pain. The beautiful compound, the motherly welcome and everything was so amazing.
- We took shower, provided with new pyjamas,
- slippers and a Hamlin blanket which made us feel renewed."



There is a wonderful charity, Hamlin Fistula, who are doing life-changing work for women in Ethiopia. Many women are suffering from devastating birth injuries when a baby becomes stuck during childbirth, which leads to incontinence. The women are then often ostracized from their villages. Hamlin Fistula not only performs surgical repairs, they give each woman their own blanket, nightie, and toiletries, as well as a new dress to return to their village in. They also train midwives to help prevent these injuries occurring in the first place.

The knitted blankets are a real comfort to the women, both practically and emotionally. Hamlin ask volunteer knitters to make these blankets, and they are collected from the UK three times a year. The full details are in a PDF which I would be pleased to provide but the basic requirements are:

- Use DK yarn and 4mm needles
- Blankets to measure 91cm x 122cm (36in x 48in) or 107cm x 137cm (42in x 54in)
- Blankets which fall between those sizes can still be accepted and used
- The next collection week is 26 June - 30 June
- If you can help by either knitting a blanket if you are feeling enthusiastic, or by knitting squares that can be joined together to

make a blanket, I would be so grateful. I am making 20cm / 4in squares.

- I am praying into my squares as I knit them, and will be asking Lorna to bless our blankets before they go off to our Ethiopian sisters.

If you do not knit, but feel moved to help in this work, you can donate money on their website. <https://hamlinfistulauk.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Knitting-for-Hamlin-2023-1.pdf> Thank you.



HOLY WEEK
SERVICES

PALM SUNDAY
13th April 10:30
The Sanctuary

MAUNDY THURSDAY
17th April 20:00
Room 1

GOOD FRIDAY
18th April
Messy Church - 10:30 -The Hall (book in advance)
Church Service - 10:30 -The Sanctuary

EASTER SUNDAY
20th April
Church Breakfast, 09:00 -The Hall
Easter Morning Worship, 10:30 -The Sanctuary

WITHAM UNITED REFORMED CHURCH



EASTER
AT WITHAM URC

Monday 14th April

Afternoon Tea (book in advance)

Tuesday 15th April

Memories and More, Tuesday Praise

Wednesday 16th April

Café and Baby Bank Closed

Maundy Thursday, 17th April

Café and Baby Bank Closed

Good Friday, 18th April

*Messy Church - booking required
Café closed, no community lunch*

Saturday 19th April

Bread collections only, café closed

Monday 21st April

Bank Holiday: Café and Centre closed

OPEN AS USUAL FROM TUESDAY 22ND APRIL

SERVICE DETAILS OVERLEAF →

Minister	Minister	Lorna Bantock	07935 307 958
Children and Youth Pastor	Mrs	Viv Sollis	500958
Associate Children and Youth Pastor	Ms	Tracey Pepper	500958
Building Manager	Mr	Ray Westrip	500958
Church Administrators		Naomi Claxton Anna Johansson	500958
Director of Outreach	Ms	Tracey Pepper	500958
Hospitality Manager	Mrs	Heather March	500958
Church Secretary and Elder	Mr	Tony Deighton	518866
Church Treasurer	Mr	Ian Hardie	
Discipleship Elders	Mrs Mr	Sarah Wellings David Wellings	
Social Justice including the Environment Elder	Mr	Gavin McCall	
Worship Elders	Mr Mr	Keith Meredith Allwyn Rajkumar	
Community Cafe Pastoral co-ordinator	Mrs	Eve Murfitt	
Prayer Chain Co-ordinator	Mrs	Rosemary Stinson	516602
Pastoral Team Co-ordinator	Mrs	Ruth Blackett	07546 838825
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