

Now these three continue . . .



Of these, the greatest is . . . 1 Cor 13:13

WITHAM URC CHURCH MAGAZINE

February 2024

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

Pastoral Letter

Dear Friends

I'm writing this in January, so I'll take the opportunity to wish you all a Happy New Year, even though you will be reading this in February or later.

Stewardship

Since well before Christmas I've been thinking about what to write. One thought came to me as I was washing up, the washing up liquid was sitting in front of me and my eye was caught by a warning on the label: "Warning ... Harmful to aquatic life with long lasting effect...". Now, what do we do with washing up liquid? We wash up and when finished we empty it down the sink, where it goes into the sewage system and eventually gets emptied into a river or the sea. Why are we deliberately flushing something harmful to fish into rivers and seas? Madness! I went straight out and replaced it with a brand safer to the environment.

In Genesis 2:15 mankind is told to cultivate and take care of [the garden]. My replacement brand of washing up liquid is more expensive to buy, but a lot less expensive to the planet to use. Not everyone can afford to buy the environmentally friendly alternative, so what is the point of my doing so? Am I virtue signalling or am I making a difference? There are many ways we can make a difference, but often we get lost in the maze of determining what the best thing is.

Don't let perfection become the enemy of the good!

It is better to do something even though it might be a small thing than do nothing. If we all do a small thing, then together we do a big thing.

Do you feel guilty about using hydrocarbons but can't afford to replace your car with an electric one? Why not better organise yourself so you use your car one day less each week? I'm preaching to myself here!

As I've thought about this it occurs to me that I need to set myself an annual budget in car miles and each year reduce it. There are lots of things like this that we can do, and each little step is better than no step at all. Please let me know what ideas you have that I can learn from.

Worship

Most Sundays I see someone new join us for worship, in fact it can be difficult keeping track of all the new people, this is especially difficult if newcomers aren't encouraged to enter their details into ChurchSuite. ChurchSuite allows the fellowship to keep in touch with one another, it becomes a Church Directory on your smartphone. It also allows me to contact you by email in my 'Notices' Email that goes out each Saturday evening. Viv, Tracey and our team working with children and young people use ChurchSuite to take a weekly register of the children and young people on our premises and ensure that they are in the right age-appropriate groups. Parents, please make sure you or your children are registered each Sunday morning.

We currently have two Sunday evenings a month without organised worship, if you have an idea for worship and are willing to organise and lead it, please do let me, Keith Meredith or Lorna know, and we should be very happy to make a Sunday evening available for you.

May God working through his spirit bless your lives.

Tony

Fellowship Profiles.

In 2021 we ran a series of articles in the magazine inviting members of our fellowship to tell us something about themselves and in the July/ August edition Rosemary wrote an article. This was very much about her life with Irvine, which we have reproduced with her kind permission; they had known one another for 60 years and were married for 58 years.

We are sure that we will also learn much more about Irvine, a very kind and gentle man with a lovely voice, at the service of thanksgiving on 3rd February.

Rosemary Stinson

I was born into a loving but strict Christian home with my mother, grandmother and grandfather. I never knew my father and although my mother married him in this church she had no idea he was a bigamist. One thing I know about my father is that he wrote poetry and this is something I do.

I had a very happy childhood and was given a strong foundation in the Christian faith, I made my commitment to Christ in a gym equipment room at the Girls' High School after a C.U. meeting.

Having always wanted to teach, I trained as a Business Studies and Divinity Teacher at a Methodist church in Wimbledon. During my second year there I met a group called The Gospelairs at a Christian Youth activity in Braintree. One of the group was Irving who came from Florida and was stationed at RAF Wethersfield. He had three brothers, was class President of his year at school and debated a lot. He placed second in the State for extemporaneous speech. In his late teens he started a workshop at Pleasant Valley Baptist Church and later at the chapel at Wethersfield.

The plan was that we would go to live in Florida but things didn't work out as we expected and Irving trained as a Science Teacher in Brentwood. Irving became Sunday School Superintendent at Guitham Valley and we organised many holiday clubs and I ran the Bible Class. For most of this time we lived in Braintree, then moved to Witham but I was beginning to have health problems and was diagnosed with Agoraphobia.

I then spent a long time not going out and then discovered a lump in my breast. God was with me through all of this and especially during my operation in hospital. He also provided me with work I could do at home teaching shorthand to local reporters.

Time passed and we became members at Witham URC and later we became Elders. I counted it a privilege to lead worship with Irving and to play for services, share God's word and lead a house group.

Irving, as many of you know, has a wonderful singing voice and used to take services in a number of churches in Essex including Little Waltham where he was Interim Moderator.

Eleven years ago I was rushed into hospital in a diabetic coma; we had no idea I was diabetic. My eyesight has been affected and I had to have the toes and ball of my right foot amputated.

God has been very faithful and I began to realise He had new work for me all concerned with prayer and listening. I run the Prayer Chain and I was the Pledge Committee Chair for many years. I hope everyone knows I will listen if they have needs and will pray with them over the 'phone.

Irving has supported me through all of my ups and downs and especially during lockdown, which has not been good for the agoraphobia which I had to fight every day my during my teaching career and am now finding it very difficult to get out.

My life verse would be - Jeremiah 29 v11

"For I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

In closing a couplet from one of my favourite Gospel songs and some words I have added.

"When the one who has kept me standing stands in front of me and every battle that I've fought just fades from memory. When I gaze into His eyes of love and His scarred hand and feet, I'll know that I am home at last, my story is complete."

From both of us we wish God's blessings upon you and pray He will bind us all together in His love.

The Pledge -Thank you's !! - Deborah Robinson

The Pledge Committee would like to share some thank you's from the charities that, as a church, we have donated to this year.

52 lives

I know you will have received an automatic thank you message, but I saw your very generous donation and wanted to thank you personally. It's going to make a really big difference for what we can do for people.



52 lives is a charity that aims to change someone's life every week of the year. Recently 20 years old Max, who has been living on the streets since 16, was homed in his own flat and has found a job. He needed a bike to get to his place of work more easily. 52 lives were able to provide Max with a bike.

www.52-lives.org

ACLT

On behalf of the ACLT charity and the patients and families of patients we represent in the UK and around the world, we would like to thank The Ministers, Elders, and Congregation of Witham United Reformed Church, for your continued support and for selecting the ACLT (African Caribbean Leukaemia Trust) to benefit from your kind donation which will assist our lifesaving work.



As a small charity, the continuation of our lifesaving work relies on the generosity of supporters like yourself; your donation will help us meet costs and fund patient appeals and donor registration drives.

ACLT is driven by a belief that no patient needing a matching stem cell (bone marrow) or organ transplant should die waiting for a donor to be found.

ACLT supports patients and their families and continues to recruit potential stem cell donors, and blood and organ donors whilst campaigning for better services for all patients diagnosed as needing a transplant.

With your support, we'll continue Changing Attitudes, Giving Hope, Saving Lives

ACLT is dedicated to raising awareness of the severe shortage of donors in the United Kingdom Stem Cell, Blood and Organ register. Promoting stem cell, bone marrow and blood donation, registering potential donors and supporting patients and their families.

www.aclt.org

Hand in Hand

Please pass on our sincere thanks to the Witham United Reformed Congregation for the gift to the work of Hand in Hand.



Your gift has been allocated to our general fund which has been used in the last year to support our students in Kenya from deprived backgrounds into training courses, mentorship as well as supporting shortfalls in funding to our project partners.

Hand in Hand has its offices in Witham and promotes their work in Essex schools. Their mission is to educate, mentor, train and empower orphaned and vulnerable East African young people. This will enable children to realise their potential and break the cycle of poverty.

www.handinhand.org.uk

House of Grace

The House of Grace Witham Trustees wish to thank you for the allocation of money to our charity over the next 3 years. This money will help enable us to set up a home for 4 homeless people in Witham. We look forward to telling you of our progress as the months go by. Thank you.



House of Grace Witham is a supported house project for Witham, providing accommodation, friendship, and training for the homeless.

www.houseofgracewitham

JBay Recycling Project

Thank you for the absolutely AMAZING donation your congregation made to our project.



I am sure Clair has briefed everyone as to how we are able to utilise these funds to the benefit of so many of our children in need. And you will no doubt be kept updated via pics and videos!!

God Bless you all.

JBay Recycling Project is based in South Africa. The children are encouraged to collect materials for recycling for which they are paid by weight in tokens called Mula. Mula is an imaginary currency which can be exchanged for goods such as rice, flour, vegetables, tinned food, school equipment, clothing including school uniform, shoes and toys. Some of the items are donated by companies and are new but most are second hand.

www.jbayrecyclingproject.org

Pledge Committee The Refugee Council - Jan Upson

Each year 10% of the church's offering income is allocated to charities through The Pledge Committee. As a committee we feel it is important not only to support these charities financially, but also through prayer, and a greater understanding of the work they do.



One of the charities selected for support this year was The Refugee Council. They aim to support and empower refugees who arrive here in the UK in search of safety. Each year they support over 12000 men, women and children across the country. The aim is to help them to rebuild their lives here by offering life-changing services such as therapy for those who have suffered trauma and loss, housing advice, language classes and employment and training workshops. They can help with guidance on opening bank accounts and finding school places for children.

The asylum application process is very complicated and lengthy, with only 17% of applications being processed in the first year. This can leave people in limbo, with only £6.43 a day to live on and the fear and anxiety of an uncertain future. The Refugee Council is actively advocating for a better asylum system which will treat refugees with kindness and fairness. One of the top priorities of the Refugee Council is to support the rights of separated refugee children who have been forced apart from their parents. They help them to understand the complexities of the system and help to move them from unsuitable adult accommodation to that more appropriate for children. Much of this work is done through their Ages Dispute Project.

The Refugee Council are also actively working to help to improve the public attitude to refugees, and to reform the hostile environment which can really impact lives.

By supporting The Refugee Council you are helping to bring hope to some very vulnerable people who have had to flee their homes through no fault of their own and who desperately want to rebuild their lives.

More information can be found at www.refugeecouncil.org and there are leaflets in Meeting Point.

Sunday evening services - Bob Stibbards

Tony, in his pastoral letter mentioned that we have two Sunday evening services every month, and there are opportunities should somebody have ideas and would like to run services for the other two evenings.

I thought that it might help to say something briefly about the two present evening services which Jo and I have both enjoyed.

Peter Howard has for several years lead and co-ordinated a service on the second Sunday of every month. It is a format that works well starting and ending with prayers, a mix of worship songs, normally 6 or 7, suitable for guitars (oh yes indeedy Tim and I join Pete on guitars) intersected with short talks given by members of our fellowship which are always interesting and engaging and fit well together. The **next service is on 11th February.**

Muriel Heppinstall has been running a Celtic style evening service on the third Sunday of the month for just over a year. It is a reflective service including what I would describe as a written call and response, prayers, a short talk, normally traditional hymns and occasionally also including holy communion. The **next service is on 18th February.**

These service are very different Both start at 6.30pm and are not long - why not give them a try!

Thanksgiving for Raju and Anu - Lorna

Raju and Anu have bought a home in Sutton and I was privileged to be invited to lead a short service of thanksgiving and blessing on Sat 6th January for them and their home. We were a small group of 12 and Graham and I enjoyed some wonderful fellowship including delicious Indian food afterwards. They will move in over the coming week or so. It also transpired that it was Raju's birthday.



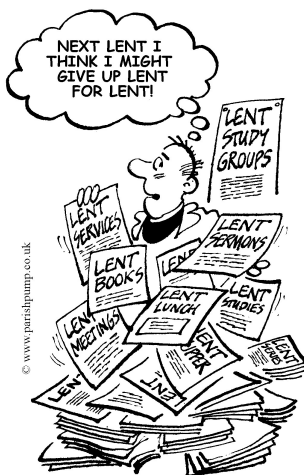
Welcome Team Deputy Leaders needed David Goodwin Welcome Team Leader

As you know, Mary and I lead the Welcome Team on a Sunday morning. Prior to the Covid pandemic we had several Deputy Leaders to cover us for absences. Unfortunately, that number has diminished post pandemic so we are again looking for volunteers for this important role.

You should arrive by 10:00 and your duties will be to make sure the Welcome Team member on the door knows what they're doing, to organise the offertory collection and to take the headcount for the service (and anything else that might arise during the service). You will NOT be asked to get involved with organising the Welcome Team rota.

If you think this is something you would like to help with please speak to me on a Sunday morning. Alternatively, please telephone me on 01376 515203 (mobile: 07932 198352 or Email me on: davidgoodwin2009@hotmail.co.uk

Thank you



Join us for
Afternoon Tea

Monday February 5th at 2.30pm

Sandwiches, Scones with Tiptree jam & cream,
Home-made Cakes

All for £6.00

Please let the office know if you would like to come

- 01376 500958



Clogs in the wheel - Josie Bloice

All cogs work next to each other attached to each other in order to complete a chain.



A chain may drive a wheel, In order for the chain to move smoothly they need to be cleaned and oiled regularly.

We are like cog's in a chain; we need to play our part to keep the wheels moving.

Each wheel may drive another wheel. Maybe the same size often leading on to larger ones depending on the end purpose of the machine it is driving .

I am a cog in this service today as you are too.

I need to do my part and prepare myself, as do the worship team, the preacher and all those involved in different aspects of the service.

Pray so that the service moves forward smoothly as the Holy Spirit leads

Please do your part as you are a cog in this wheel .

Let us run together encouraging one another sometimes holding, carrying, supporting or nudging when needed .

We may only be a small cog but we are needed, our minister is in need of our support and prayer as are the eldership.

Each of us have our different needs, we need to know we belong and valued.

And loved by each other for all our quirks and faults.

If the wheel is too slow or grinds to a halt how will we then reach out to our community?

Also from Josie

2 people, one a Christian the other a Wanabe.

A Christian is a follower of Jesus and accepts Jesus as the Son of God who Died for Us and is forgiven and Saved.

A Wanabe there is hope that they will be, but not there yet so is not yet saved.

Or are you a Won't Be ?

Or even a has been ?

The decision is yours to make and best to try to make the decision sooner rather than later.

Witham Lunchtime Concerts - Emmelia Van der Walt

Witham Lunchtime Concerts **return on Monday, 19th February 2024** with a special concert featuring Students and Teachers from the local area. '

Time: 1 - 2pm at WURC

Next concerts: 11th March; 15th April; 13th May; 10th June

TUESDAY PRAISE

at Witham URC

EVERYBODY WELCOME

DATE

LEADER

6th February

Noah Cocket, St, Nicholas

13th February

Howard Schnaar, St. Nicholas

20th February

Richard Wearmouth, Salvation Army

27th February

Jane Quinton, St. Nicholas

TIME: 12.30 - 1pm

Volunteers needed to help with refreshments for Tuesday Praise. Emmelia

We are looking for volunteers to help prepare and serve Tuesday Praise refreshments from the beginning of March onwards, please.

Diana and Sheila have been doing it diligently for so many years, and we are very grateful to them for always being there with a smile and lots of love towards everybody after Tuesday Praise services.

Diana has recently moved to Suffolk so we are looking for more volunteers. If this is something that might interest you, or if you know of someone who would like to help, please contact Emmelia on [07940512407](tel:07940512407) or email: vanderwaltemmelia@gmail.com

Thank you so much

Dr. Peter Steveson from Jean Moody Great Totham URC

On Tuesday 13th February 2024 some churches will hold events to mark the eve of lent. The expression "Shrove Tuesday" comes from the word shrive, meaning "absolve". It marks the last day of eating fatty foods before the fasting that follows.

Lent is a period of 40 days during which Christians remember the events leading up to and including the death of Jesus Christ. The first day of Lent is known as Ash Wednesday (14th February this year) when some churches will burn the palms from the previous year and mix the ashes with oil in order to 'impose' a mark onto those who wish to make a public statement of their desire to observe the time of repentance and confession.

The 40-day period is called Lent after an old English word meaning 'lengthen', to recognise the longer daylight hours and the approach of Summer. It is a time of reflection and of asking for forgiveness.

At the dawn of the Protestant Reformation, people like Luther and Calvin recognized that feast days and seasons of the church were practically elevated to an eighth¹ sacrament fuelling people's belief that salvation was by works rather than grace alone through faith alone. Calvin believed that the people lacked contrition and used fasting as a badge of honour. Records of Lenten abuses led some monasteries to reform the practice after the Catholic Counter Reformation, but it remained a commanded practice, a common fast for repentance and prayer.

1. The Catholic Church hold to a seven-fold sacramental belief of Baptism, Eucharist, Confirmation, Reconciliation, Anointing of the sick, Marriage and Holy orders. The Reformed Tradition holds to two: Baptism and Communion

In Scotland John Knox also rejected the practice of Lenten fasting, though he didn't condemn fasting in itself. He called for corporate fasts during periods of intense persecution. Simply put, the Reformers rejected Lent as a season of the church calendar because it had become synonymous with Catholic fasting. Some would say that in rejecting some of the Catholic practices, the Reformed Tradition has become poorer in imagery and practice. Over the years, liturgy has been adapted to regain the sense of Lenten preparation so that Christians can wrestle and reflect on the journey Jesus takes to the cross. It is no longer unusual for churches of the Reformation to offer Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday and Good Friday services in order to help worshippers walk in the footsteps of Jesus.

My encouragement to us this year is not necessarily to give something up for lent but to be intentional about reflecting on what the Easter story means to us. Are our lives in good order and have we ensured reconciliation, peace and harmony surround us? Do we need to say sorry to God and are we prepared for Christ's return? What does the cross mean to us and are we ready to tell others?

Perhaps Paul's instruction to the church at Phillipi could help when he writes, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." Phillipians 4:6. And from the Hebrew text, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight." Proverbs 3:5

May your journey be blessed

Sue Bowyer - Great Totham URC

Preachers at Gt Totham URC in February.

February 4th. Ron Hutson.

February 11th. Rev. Mark Ambrose

February 18th. Songs of praise.

February 25th. Gil Heathcote.

All are welcome to join us, our service begins at 10:30.

You are also very welcome to come along to our next coffee morning
on Saturday 10th of February at 10 am.

You will find us in Chapel Road, Great Tottenham North CM9 8DA

Mark MacDonald - Trustee The Othona Community

Just to highlight that The Othona Centre in Bradwell on Sea is available for themed retreats or simple day visits for reflection and quiet prayer.

Please visit the Othona Website for more information.

www.othonaessex.org.uk

Mr Bates vs The Post Office: Not the only one

The Post Office scandal reminds us it's important to stand with victims of injustice.



‘We’re here because the Post Office told every single one of us sat here today, told us over and over, “You’re the only one.” And that was wrong. That was a lie, actually. Because... Well, look at us. Here we all are. And from this moment forwards, none of us will be the only one ever again.’

It’s hard to believe that ITV’s *Mr Bates vs The Post Office* isn’t just a true story, but one still being played out. The **horrendous injustice** suffered by hundreds of sub-postmasters caught up in the scandal, including the one local to me, has been described as the biggest miscarriage of justice in British legal history, with enormous human cost.

Horizon, the computer system rolled out to each post office, incorrectly showed huge account shortfalls. These were then blamed on sub-postmasters, who were told that nobody else had had any issues, that they were the only one. Except they weren't – and the Post Office knew this. How frightening to believe that, facing a sudden debt of thousands of pounds and the possibility of bankruptcy or prison, you were utterly alone.

Alan Bates emerges from this story as a heroic figure. An unassuming but tenacious man, he led the fight against the Post Office for over 20 years, as David against a seemingly all-powerful corporate Goliath. Unwilling to stand by and watch others endure injustice, he stood up for, and stood by, those who had no fight left in themselves.

To show them they were not alone.

The outcry against the Post Office is welcome. We all – individually and collectively – cry out for justice. We want to live in a society where justice is done.

As Christians, this should be close to our hearts. The Lord is a God of justice. Righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne (Psalm 89:14). And Christ stands by those who suffer. He doesn't look on from a distance, but as one who, at the cross, has experienced it himself.

It's through his people, reflecting his character and his priorities, that he reveals this.

Jules Gadsby is Church Engagement Specialist at LICC.

30 Years of the Care Leadership Programme - Eve Murfitt

30 YEARS, 30 STORIES



Zoe Warren 2017-2018

Maurice Golden, MSP for West Scotland

What did you learn from the Friday teaching sessions?

The CARE Leadership Programme created space each Friday for us to connect with some of the most remarkable Christian leaders, across all spheres. What I learnt was that hearing the 'why' behind what they did was game-changing when it comes to understanding their 'what'. It was a privilege to hear from their wealth of experience and varied careers, but I was most impacted by the journey God had taken them on personally to get to that point. God is a masterful storyteller!

What are you doing now?

I have been working to address slavery and violence

against the world's poorest with International Justice Mission (IJM) in various capacities across the past 5 years; I am currently helping to lead the IJM UK Partnerships Team in major-gifts fundraising.

How did the CARE Leadership Programme prepare you for that?

It set my heart alight for the renewal of our world, our responsibility to shape it, and the protection of the vulnerable, but also for how we were each created to bring something very different to the work. All God asks us to do is to bring our very unique, different fish and loaves and He does the rest!

Imogen Sinclair 2014-2015

David Burrowes, Conservative MP for Enfield Southgate



What was the most exciting thing you did on your placement?

The 2015 General Election was the first time I had ever done extensive political campaigning, day after day. I moved house for six weeks so that I could commit to the local effort!

Who were some of your teachers on the Friday teaching sessions?

Danny Burbeck from the L'Abri Fellowship. The texts and his lessons were so refreshing! When we started exploring cultural engagement, I felt my own instincts come alive. I shared the conviction that there is 'not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence' which does not belong to Christ, but CARE helped me to understand more fully God's heart for cultural transformation from a biblical perspective.

What was one lesson which stuck with you?

The last will be first!

What did you go on to do next?

I went on to work at the Centre for Social Justice and now I am involved in the rough and tumble of political movement building. It's not a very shiny job, but I wouldn't want to be doing anything else!

Are you still in touch with people from your time on the programme?

Yes. Not all of them and not very often, but I've certainly made lifelong friends. The programme offers a very special and unique shared experience. It's a lot of fun to get together and reminisce!



Minister	Minister	Lorna Bantock	571757
Children and Youth Pastor	Mrs	Viv Sollis	500958
Associate Children and Youth Pastor	Ms	Tracey Eagling	500958
Centre Manager	Mrs	Ana Martin	500958
Children & Youth Elder	Mr	Gavin McCall	
Church Secretaries (also Elders)	Mr Mrs	Tony Deighton and Muriel Heppinstall	518866
Discipleship Elder	Mr	David Wellings	
Mission and Growth Elders	Mrs Mr	Fenella Hardie Ian Hunt	
Pastoral Elder	Mrs	Sarah Wellings	
Property Elder	Mr	Billy Kennedy	
Church Treasurer (also Elder)	Mr	Ian Hardie	
Worship Elder	Mr	Keith Meredith	
Centre Director	Mrs	Fenella Hardie	
Kitchen Manager	Mrs	Heather March	500958
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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