



Church Magazine
February 2025
Our Vision: "To celebrate God and share the love of Jesus."

Pastoral Letter

Dear Friends

I write this on the eve of the eightieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, while last week saw the inauguration of the 47th President of the USA. Who would have thought Auschwitz and the evil of the political force behind it would be linked to the President by the action of a billionaire supporter?

Germany was once home to an evil the world had never before seen, but had that billionaire supporter performed his action on the streets of modern day Germany he would be arrested. The Bishop of Washington, Mariann Edgar Budde, asks the President to have mercy upon those people of America who are scared of him and is criticised for doing so.

It seems we live in “interesting times”.

To whom should we cling when our world is turned upside down? Last Sunday I heard a discussion between stand up comics from different faiths, they were posed questions as to how their faith informed their routines and were there barriers that could not be crossed. Apparently the Pope has recently said that it was OK to make fun of God, that he is big enough that he didn't mind. One comic, a Muslem, said that they could not, going on to say that they didn't know God as a person and so could not make fun of him. For me that was a Eureka moment! As Christians we are fortunate in knowing our God as a person. Jesus, is my friend, my brother, my Father and My God. He understands us in every situation of life. But how do we get to know Jesus? That's an easy question to answer: read the bible, pray, worship, spend time with other Christians and serve God.

No one knows what the future will bring, we might have plans for next year, next month, next week but in truth none of us know what might happen.

All we know is that whatever happens God will be there sharing it with us, in both the good times and the bad. I urge you to pray to know God's will and then follow in whichever way he asks you to serve him.

You can tell God anything, if you love him – tell him, if you are angry with him – tell him, if you are unsure – tell him. Let him tell you how much he loves and cares for you and has a purpose for you.

May God working through his spirit bless you.

Tony

Greetings and blessings to our Witham Church Family. Denise and Philip Vinton

Christmas 2024 will now be a memory and for us a very different festive period in South Africa. Somehow Father Christmas and tinsel did not look quite the same but Christ's birth remains the real reason for celebration wherever we are.

We had an early Christmas Day at the beginning of December when we had the pure pleasure of treating 300 children to a food hamper including pre-loved toys, a large hot dog freshly cooked on the braai (BBQ) and a cup cake. There were some big smiles all round although some of the little ones found their food hamper too heavy to carry. Fortunately we had a number of volunteers at the ready.

In addition to the food we were able to provide the older girls with vanity bags complete with goodies inside and the older boys socks, playing cards etc. One little girl had her dream come true. She had been saving her Mula (points earned for collecting recycling materials) and purchased her first bicycle. A great day and the last one until 20 January as it is holiday time here and generally we only operate the Project during school terms. Thank you for your financial gifts – what a difference it has made. We have spare money too so looking at providing a geyser so we can have hot water on the premise.

At the time of writing our container is still travelling around the east coast of South Africa and we have no idea when it will finally arrive so we are learning to make do with minimal everyday items with borrowed plates and bowls.

However we are quite comfortable, have a bed, sofa and TV, a beautiful outlook, stunning beach just down the end of the road and lots of sunshine.

There are weaver birds building their distinctive hanging nests the trees adjacent to us and in the higher trees a colony of herons – at least 14 together with their young which are very vocal. We have learnt that a group of herons is called a seige. We have seen a school of dolphins playing in the bay which is not unusual but we thought was really cool. We have forgotten what sweaters and long trousers are like but of course we are in mid summer and we have to experience a winter as yet.

We continue to make connections in the local church we attended when we visited last year. When we spent 3 months here in 2023/24 Philip did some research as to what Church we might fit in. My daughter knew of someone who attended a local Church and we arranged to meet her at the door on our first Sunday. We have no explanation but we had stuck in our heads that this person attended Fathers House Church so off we set for 9.00 am service (still getting used to that time). When we arrived there was no one at the door and nobody knew this person but we stayed and felt so at home and continued to worship there. It turns out that this lady was waiting for us a couple of miles away at a completely different venue. We have seen her and apologised. We are certain that God directed us to where he wanted us. Over many months the Fathers House team in Jeffreys Bay have been praying about their next move. The large Church in Port Elizabeth wanted to close our church and amalgamate with them but they are an hours car journey from our community.

Apart from which we are a growing church which consisted of only 5 people about 5 years ago and now at least 100 attend Sunday Service.. However our pastor and his team are convinced, and wholeheartedly agree, that there is work to do in JBay. As from February we become an independent body called Abide Church. We believe that God has placed us here and is going to use us in some way. A case of watching this space.

If you should want to follow what is happening on the Jbay Recycling Project which has been magnificently supported by Witham URC, they post on Facebook and Instagram. You may get a glimpse of one of us although one of the videos featured mainly my rear end which was not particularly flattering!.

Should you wish to contact either of us we would be only too pleased to hear from you. Our details are available on church suite
God's blessing to all.



The Pledge: Thank you messages - Deborah Robinson

The donations from Witham URC via the Pledge Committee have all been sent to the 5 nominated charities. You can see from the thank you messages below that the money really does make a difference.

Fellowship Afloat

Thank you very much for the donation that Fellowship Afloat received from the Witham URC to go towards Fellowship Afloat's Bursary Fund. Please do pass on our warm thanks to all the members and the congregation for this generous gift. This year the Bursary Fund has supported over 160 individuals, coming on school residentials and summer camps. These young people would have missed out on a week on our Big Red Ship without this fund due to their circumstances and so thank you again for your contribution.

Thank you again to all the congregation of Witham URC for your continued support of Fellowship Afloat.

IJM

Thank you so much for your gift! Your kind donation will help IJM support children to heal from trafficking and abuse and build a world where all are free.

Hana* in Uganda dreams of being a doctor one day. Thanks to the support of people like you, with IJM's care, she's not letting her experience of sexual abuse steal her hope for the future.

IJM's Cathy Ajok remembers meeting 14-year-old Hana for the first time, after she was assaulted by a serving army officer, *"You could tell that her mind was so far away. She was worried about her future. It gets heavy to see a child so broken."* After receiving counselling and support from IJM, Hana bravely decided to testify against the perpetrator in court. She smiled with relief as he was sentenced to 14 years in prison.

Hana now lives in a shelter, where she attends school and is continuing to receive psychological support. Cathy shared, "She confided that she [now] has peace of mind. Being able to continue with her studies gives her so much joy. She feels safe." Hana's aunt and guardian is delighted to see Hana making steps towards recovery: "It is not easy, but she is healing."

Thank you for giving hope to children like Hana. Your donation is vital because thousands of children desperately need support to recover from trafficking and abuse. But when we take action together, hope and healing are possible. What's more, your gift will help build a world where children, women and men are safe and not abused in the first place.

Thank you for being part of the movement, until all are free.

Jbay Recycling Project

Can you pass on our thanks to Pledge for so kindly considering Jbay Recycling Project again this year. It is such a small and local concern and the money will go a long way to bring a little light into the children's lives. Donations like yours make a huge difference in the lives of our children, giving them access to the toiletries they need to live with dignity, the ability to add some welcome additions to the food cupboard at home, stationery and school uniforms to further their education and toys to add recreation and joy to their free time.

Financial support inspires our team of volunteers who contribute by their physical presence, assisting every child with empathy and kindness. Together, we are nurturing children and the environment.

Some recently received pictures from Denise and Philip Vinton taken at JBay



Care for the family

I wanted to thank you all personally for the incredibly kind recent donation to the work of Care for the Family. I can't begin to tell you what an encouragement this is to us all.

House of Grace

Thank you for the kind donation to the House of Grace. This financial support makes all the difference in our support of the three formerly homeless men who now have a secure home and are supported in getting their lives back together. Please continue to support the House of Grace in your prayer life and through the various fundraising events.

House of Grace - Update Shirley Ratnage

We have celebrated our 1st anniversary at the House of Grace Witham and have so much to thank God and our supporters for. During that year the house has been refurbished and furnished and we have welcomed 3 very special tenants into the house. It is a pleasure to be able to serve them and they feel like family. We could not have wished for 3 nicer men who are considerate and caring, supportive of one another and eager to give back to the community supporting them.

Two of our residents have been with us for 6 months and the other for 4 months. During this time they have undertaken casual gardening and outdoor maintenance work, worked as a regular volunteer at the Bethel 'Well' café and been willing to support various church functions, moving furniture, fetching and carrying etc. All recipients of their labour have praised the standard of their work, their reliability and their cheerfulness. In 2025 we want to grow the amount of paid employment offered to them. (All earnings are declared to DWP and their universal credit adjusted accordingly). This is where you can help. If you or any friend/relatives have any jobs you think they might be able to help with, please contact Emmelia van der Walt/Audrey Kennedy or myself. The cost is £12 per hour per workman. Not only does working provide extra income to our residents, it boosts their morale and work skills. We are very aware of the amount of prayer support which has underpinned the House of Grace and thank you for this from the bottom of our hearts. We know that without the intervention of God and your help none of this would have happened. While we rejoice in having reached the point where we are in our journey, we also acknowledge that the road ahead will be steeper. We are all on a steep learning curve. Please cover the work with regular prayers so that we are guided by God in all the words/actions we take. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective – James 5v16 Your prayers are very important to us. Thank you.

Poems by Rosemary Stinson

The Father's Plan

There once was a Father who lived in the sky
He looked down at His children and wanted to cry
They argued and quarrelled over money and land
and he said to himself "This is not what I planned
The young and the old should live side by side
In a world full of beauty looked after with pride
The weak should be cherished, cared for by the young
The homeless found shelter, made to feel they belong
No-one should be lonely without family and friends
True love the foundation on which all this depends
I love all my children so why can't they see
They should love one another
Be reflections of Me "

My Actions

If this will make my brother stumble
Cause him to falter on the way
Then help me Lord to show your wisdom
Lest I should cause his feet to stray

Lord help me in my daily living
Reflect your love and strength and power
That all who stand and watch my actions
Will see you working hour by hour

So often Lord my voice will praise you
I'll sing and worship, hands held high
While in my heart I harbour anger

How that must make you want to cry
Father, I ask for grace to serve you
Forgive each one who'se caused me pain
To reach our hands to heal and comfort
To walk your way of love again.

WORLD DAY OF PRAYER 2025

Friday 7 March

KiaOrana

Our sisters in The Cook Islands welcome us and lead us for the Day of Prayer 2025. This group of 15 islands in the South Pacific Ocean has a rich and colourful Māori heritage and a deep connection to nature. Join with us as we pray together and reflection the theme 'I made you wonderful'.

The World Day of Prayer is an international, ecumenical organisation which enables us to hear the thoughts of women from all parts of the world: their hopes, concerns and prayers.

The Day of Prayer is celebrated in over 120 countries. It begins in Samoa and prayer in native languages travels throughout the world— through Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Europe and the Americas before finishing in American Samoa some 38 hours later. A world wide wave of prayer.

The service this year shares the stories of three different generations of Christian women from Cook Islands, who have shared stories of their struggle during Covid-19, of devaluation of their culture and of the improvements in obstetric health care. Based on the words of Psalm 139, and woven within the stories, this worship service invites us to recognise that God created each one of us with great attention and loving care.

Witham and District Service

World Day of Prayer - Friday 7th March, 1.30pm at the Methodist Church

Fellowship Afloat is one of our nominated charities for 2025



Fellowship Afloat's lightship 'Trinity' is a unique place for adventure, relaxation and exploring the environment.

Based on a converted lightvessel moored on the coast at Tollesbury, it's an ideal activity venue for youth clubs, schools, churches, special needs groups and those wishing to gain sailing and power boating qualifications. Guests are served by the centre staff and expert volunteers, who form the lively Christian community which is Fellowship Afloat.

In 1965, the inspiration for what was to become Fellowship Afloat grew out of a summer camp for a Harlow church youth group. The young leaders of that camp dreamed of creating a permanent venue for young people to enjoy the challenge and excitement of outdoor activities – especially sailing and other outdoor activities – while providing an introduction to the Christian faith, and the possibility of developing a friendship with God.

The search began for something floating on which to start the venture, and a place from which to operate. This led the youth group leaders to the unique charms of the Blackwater estuary and to the purchase of the oyster smack *William Emily*. Quickly joined by local supporters, they took on the task of restoring her to glorious sail.

The venture grew, but so did a need for a larger base, and the former Thames sailing barge *Memory* was to meet that need. In 1968 an anonymous donation enabled the group, by then established as a charitable trust, to purchase her. Moored alongside the old Gridiron Pier by Rickers Hard in Tollesbury's saltmarshes, with accommodation for 22 and a cosy saloon, she became the weekend retreat for groups of young people who ventured into the estuary in sailing dinghies. Very quickly other groups from local authorities and probation offices discovered that a residential visit could challenge and benefit young offenders.

Groups continued to visit *Memory* and many primary school groups became regular users. By the late 1980s it was realised that the old barge was in need of replacement. More accommodation was required and, though chemical toilets and paraffin lighting had given the centre a unique atmosphere since the early days, these facilities could not remain as they were. One thing was for sure, the new centre would have to float, so the search for a suitable craft ensued.

In 1988 a retired Trinity House light vessel was inspected in Harwich Harbour. She was perfect: full of history, with potential to become a purpose-built activity centre – and in remarkable condition. Donations enabled the trust to buy 'Light vessel Number 15' and, in the September of 1988, she was towed into the Gridiron berth where *Memory* had been previously moored. Plans were drawn up to create visitors' cabins for 36, with toilets and showers plumbed into the local sewage works, and a galley and saloon to seat 50, with the existing crew's accommodation being devoted to staff use.

Over the next 30 years many young people enjoyed the life-changing experience of a week or weekend on Trinity. From 2016 – 2023 further upgrades were undertaken, the engine room was converted into new showers and toilets, accessible and ensuite cabins added, the galley extended, a new entrance and reception area built, and a new mooring to piles constructed.

Fellowship Afloat sounds very established now – a far cry from those pioneering days in the 1960s. But now, as then, the trust is dependent entirely upon its volunteers who help run the courses, and on its wider fellowship of friends and supporters for their inspiration, skills, giving and prayers.

Over the last fifty years, many thousands of children, young people and visitors have heard about God's love and for many it has been a life changing experience.



Prayers from Point in View Chapel - Fenella Hardie

Fenella visited this Chapel a few years ago and has forwarded a couple of prayers that she found.

Merciful God we pray
Where love is denied
Let love break through...
Where justice is destroyed
Let righteousness rule...
Where hope is crucified
Let faith bring new life...
Where peace is fragile
Let passion give strength
Where truth is denied
Let the struggle continue
Through him whose love will never cease
Jesus Christ Our Lord,
Anon

May God bless you

with a restless discomfort about easy answers, half truths and superficial relationships, so that you may seek truth boldly and love deep within your heart.

May God bless you

with holy anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that you may tirelessly work for justice, freedom, and peace among all people.

May God bless you

with the gift of tears to shed with those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation, or the loss of all that they cherish, so that you may reach out your hand to comfort them and transform their pain into joy.

May God bless you

with enough foolishness to believe that you really can make a difference in this world, so that you are able, with God's grace, to do what others claim cannot be done.

Christian Aid week - Monday 11th May to Sunday 17th May -

Lorna

Churches Together in Witham & District is hoping to obtain permission to collect for Christian Aid at the railway station Monday to Friday of this week, as commuters go for their trains in the morning.

This year there will be no forecourt sale as none of the other churches wishes to take part in one but there will be envelopes available if anyone would like to make a donation.

In order to raise some money for Christian Aid, we are suggesting that during that week, we have a table in the café area with home made items for sale. Those of you who are gifted at making marmalade, jam, biscuits or cakes might like contribute in that way. Some might want to 'sell' a promise of something: a basket of ironing, a cake or a loaf of home made bread for example. We hope that you will come up with some really creative ideas.

Celtic Service
Sunday February 16th
at 6.30pm

Celtic worship stretches our understanding of what it means to be a follower of Jesus. It often uses a written liturgy with responses by those present. Why not come along and try a different style of worshipping?

Afternoon Tea

at 2.30pm

Monday February 10th
Sandwiches, Scones with
Tiptree jam & cream
Home-made Cakes
£10.00

Booking with the office
is essential
01376 500958

Preachers visiting Great Totham URC in February

Sunday 2nd Richard Maison
Sunday 9th Trevor Andrews
Sunday 16th Ian Hardie
Sunday 23rd Rev. Mark Ambrose
 with communion

Our services begin at 10:30 am and all are welcome.

Our next coffee morning will be on Saturday February 8th
10 till 11- 30 , when we will be supporting the "Toilet twinning"charity.

Find us in Chapel Road, Great Totham CM9 8DA

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

Today, Artificial Intelligence (AI) touches us in many spheres of life, including medicine, transportation, robotics, science, education, the military, surveillance, finance, agriculture, entertainment, retail, customer service, and manufacturing. AI is growing more and more prevalent. It helps fly planes, interpret X-rays, and sift through forensic evidence. Algorithms can paint masterpieces and compose symphonies in the style of the great Johann Sebastian Bach. Google is even developing artificial moral reasoning so driverless cars can make decisions about potential accidents. But AI is not a person, it is software.

Thanks to AI, you can talk to “Jesus” online for free. But is this a good thing? “Welcome, my children! I’m AI Jesus, here to answer your questions 24/7. Whether you’re seeking spiritual guidance, looking for a friend, or simply want someone to talk to, I’m here for you. Join me on this journey through life and discover the power of faith, hope, and love.”

The oracle, Wikipedia states, : “The history of AI began in [antiquity](#), with myths, stories, and rumours of artificial beings endowed with intelligence or consciousness by master craftsmen. The study of logic and formal reasoning from antiquity to the present led directly to the invention of the [programmable digital computer](#) in the 1940s, a machine based on abstract mathematical reasoning. This device and the ideas behind it inspired scientists to begin discussing the possibility of building an [electronic brain](#).” The government announced recently that it is their intention to encourage greater development of AI in order to make UK the world leaders in this field.

As I reflect on this growing reliance on, and commitment to, AI, God's command to Adam and Eve comes to mind. *Genesis 2:16 And God commanded the man, saying, you shall eat freely of every tree of the garden, 17 But of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it: for in the day that you do so, you will die.* We know that he did not physically die when he ate the fruit, but spiritually and mentally he lost something of his humanity and not long after, his son murdered his brother – sin had entered the created order and humanity has stumbled and floundered as a result.

My question to the reader is, “Am I being overly cautious about this new technology and should I embrace change and progress more willingly?”

Answers on a postcard please. Blessings, Peter

TUESDAY PRAISE

FEBRUARY 2025

AT WURC

12.30 - 1.00PM

TUESDAY

Speaker

4th Feb

'Femi' Cole-Njie

11 Feb

Lorna Bantock

18th Feb

Richard Wearmouth

25th Feb

Jane Quinton

Everybody Welcome

Refreshments available afterwards

Greetings - Timothy oshoiribhor

My name is Timothy oshoiribhor. I am married to Josephine oshoiribhor with three children.

I joined Witham United Reformed Church in March 2023, since then it has become a family. I wish to let you know about the project that I have in Nigeria, since I started ministry work many years ago and God has been faithful .

After my service as a minister of God in the 90s, with the cooperation of some ministers, we established a ministry in Nigeria with the name, RAWWORD EVANGELICAL MINISTRY in the year 2012, January 1st.

Over the years, God has been faithful and great to us. Along the way our community head brought some people who had no place to live, they are survivors from war in Liberia, Sierra Leone and other parts of Africa, since when they lived in the church premises.

As time goes on, I was able to apply for resettlement for some with the UN and they were taken to America, where they live now.

The others have been with us in the church with many other widows, orphans and less privileged, both children aged 7, 12, 17 to 27 and above. Some cannot locate their parents and families anymore . We were able to create opportunities for few of them to go to school and to learn crafts .

So far, we have been able to survive with the help of friends, a few churches and good citizens. We live on a rented apartment, a place not well built, rain and wind is a big problem to us. They all, both old and young sleep on the floor in an open arcade, with some ministers taking care of them and the church and they all are exposed to wind and rain.

We need assistance to relocate to a better place and to feed and cloth them as they are increasing in numbers by the day. I do the little I can, anytime I am able. They need good accommodation, feeding and clothing.

However, we need space where we can move to permanently but we require funds to make this possible. It could happen to anyone, no one ever wished for that.

We need assistance to put a smile on their faces again.

I need your assistance in all ramifications to give them a happy life again .

Thanks and God bless

Meals for the Alpha course commencing 5th February

Could you help please, by providing a simple one course meal, for the next Alpha course which commences on 5th February and runs for 12 weeks. The meal provides an important focal point for the start of every session.

There is a signing up sheet in the community cafe. Please speak to Tracey if you have any queries

Thank you.

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 Secretaries (also Elders)	Mr Mr	Tony Deighton and Ian Hunt	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
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