

shelter of your wings Ps 17:8

Keep me in the

WITHAM URC
CHURCH MAGAZINE
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Our Vision: "To celebrate God and share the love of Jesus."

Pastoral Letter

Dear Friends,

Greetings in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ!

People always joke that Ministers only work on Sundays. How I wish that were true! It is a Thursday morning as I write, and I am sitting in my lounge soaked head to foot after trying to track down a homeless guy who has been sleeping rough in the town centre. Very unglamorous! So much of my work has changed over the last year. I have to confess that in all honesty I really cannot work out now when I am working and when I'm not; I have got to the point of thinking my job is much more about 'being' than 'doing'. Throughout this Coronavirus lockdown I have been walking around the town and along the river walk chatting to friends and strangers alike, stopping off at the Church and standing around to chat to anyone passing. I have so valued every kind of personal contact. How I miss my more traditional role in meeting you all at Church.

Like you I have found the periods of Coronavirus lockdown particularly wearing. I long for face-to-face conversation and human touch. A year ago people were telling me that the Church was too active, with too many meetings and social events. How things have changed! Now we would give anything to be able to get together at Church. I particularly miss the Sunday morning worship when we gather as a Church family. Losing the spiritual uplift from singing and worshipping together has been detrimental to us all, and I really hope that in a few months - after vaccinations have been administered, we will be able to congregate again. It can't come fast enough for me!

I am so thankful to those of you who have been reaching out to others in so many ways, trying to hold the Church fellowship together. The encouraging phone calls, the kind gifts dropped off on the doorstep, those who have

shopped for vulnerable people; thank you. I also want to thank Viv and Tracey who have been continuing their work with children, young people and younger families; and Lorna who has been supporting us so ably over a time that I have found particularly difficult. Our 'Prayer Chain' has become invaluable as so many of us reach out to God in our distress. Thank you Rosemary and Mike, and all the faithful praying partners.

In my walk this morning, I was excited to see the river full to overflowing. Parts of the river walk were flooded, and the swans and ducks were having a field day. The river Brain is normally little more than a stream as it meanders through Witham, but now it is transformed into a raging torrent, powerful and swift. My prayer for 2021 is that in a similar way Gods Spirit will flow through the town, overflowing from normal paths, and flooding out to other parts of the town and neighbouring villages. If the crisis has taught us anything it is that God is not to be confined to Church buildings. The Church of God continues to move and adapt to every circumstance, and history has repeated itself by locating itself in our homes, just like it began two thousand years ago in the early church.

With the Covid vaccinations going ahead at some pace now, we will not have many more months to wait before restrictions begin to loosen. I know this lockdown has been difficult for us all, but better times are ahead. Please hang on in there, and stay safe. Our prayer is that God will bring us through together, perhaps more appreciative of the joys of being 'Church'. May God bless you and keep you, and make his face shine upon you; and may he grant you that most wonderful gift of 'peace'.

New Year greetings from all of us in the leadership team.

Mark

The origin and cost of our Bible - Keith Moscrop

Light after Darkness

I grew up after the second world war, in a family who were followers of Jesus. I remember, when I was very small, a song entitled, ‘Tell me the stories of Jesus’. Bible stories were a big part of my upbringing, and family life was all about hospitality and sharing God’s love with people.

How much today we take our bible for granted. Through the leading of the Holy Spirit we can discover the truth and meaning of a full life serving God, finding again the way taught by Jesus to the early church. The following is a short summary of what happened in the early Christian church.

When Jesus was born the world was changed forever. The Israelites, under occupation for hundreds of years, were to be challenged by a prophet unlike any before him. The Israelite’s own religion was to be transformed into a new way of living for the whole human race.

Jesus only lived for 33 years, teaching the new way before he was crucified as a criminal. Stories about Jesus were shared widely in the early church. The new organisation was made up of the followers of a new ‘Jesus movement’, they were called ‘The people of the way’. Many of them were used to the old religion but this was a new and compelling way to live.

Letters from the leaders of the emerging church were circulated and shared amongst the small communities which sprang up, meeting in homes, and other buildings. The new church was very inclusive and made up of people of all races and religious backgrounds, from slaves to roman soldiers, poor people and rich, women, men and children. For about three hundred years the early church prospered and grew. Despite persecution, controversy and many other difficulties, it became a powerful and dynamic movement.

The leaders' letters about church life and documentation of the stories of Jesus' teachings were copied, passed around and gathered together over many years. At Easter in the year 325 the first council of Nicaea met, all but two of the hundreds of delegates agreed on what written content should be included into what we know now as the New Testament.

Christianity became established as an official religion in the reign of Constantine. Property and entitlements that had been removed from churches were restored. However, this led to increased bureaucratic and theocratic control and diminished the influence of woman in the church for many centuries.

I have written this article as I have been wondering how it is that the church has survived down the ages. The advent theme we have followed 'light in the darkness' prompted me to look into this. The story down the next 20 centuries is amazing and the light has shone through people of all backgrounds and often in very difficult circumstances including executions by burning in many communities.

In my next article I will begin to describe the long and painful journey the Bible took to come to life in our own language, enabling all of us to read it.

If you are interested in going further into this subject a paperback by John Barton entitled "The History of the Bible" has recently been published and there is a lot of interesting information to be found in Wikipedia and on the internet.

Please get in touch if you have any questions.kgmoscrop@gmail.com

Always to Care - A poem by Peter Howard

I've got an appetite for religion,
But it's strange how it ebbs and flows
Just when I think I've lost it
It reappears and grows.
There are days when I see it O so clear
God's power and all its glory.
Then other days I swim in doubt
And think it's just a story.
I see in the wake of the famine
A stick child with fly filled eye
Whose mother sits in the dust
Can't help with breasts so dry.
And me I stand the hypocrite
My excuses to myself I make.
Well, what can one man do
And the easy way, out I take.
It's all God's fault, He's to blame
Why doesn't He help and play the game.
Would a God of love let this be?
I just can't see it, it baffles me.
But I was my brother's keeper
To feed him in times of trouble
And when he cried out in Jesus' name
To be there at the double.
No need of rain or ego tripper
To help him to his feet
Just a knowing soul who's passed his way.
And his debt to Jesus would keep
To move beyond human emotions
Just to depend on God's spirit each day.
T'would be to me such a blessing
True peace, all love, I'd say.

Fellowship Profiles - Bob Stibbards

This is the start of what we hope will be a new series. This idea came from Graham Bantock who, on delivering the written weekly service with Lorna to Eve Howes, mentioned that she did not know half of the people in the church directory; perhaps some of you might feel the same? So each month we would like to produce short articles from someone young and someone slightly older, you will get the idea from the following. Thank you Hannah and Eve for being the first. It would be great to hear from you. Please do not be shy!

Hello, I'm Hannah Robinson and I am 19 years old. I have been



working at Holly Trees Montessori Nursery since July when I graduated from Chelmsford College with 3 distinction stars in childcare. At the beginning of January I was promoted to the Preschool Room Leader, where I manage the room and a team of staff and most importantly care for around 28 three year olds everyday which is exhausting but great fun! I have also taken on the role of SEND where I help children with special needs to receive the support they deserve.

I am currently studying to achieve my Montessori qualification. I also find time to write a childcare based blog called Joyful Play Days where I have over 2,000 followers from all around the world, and post weekly crafts and faith based activities on the church Small Talk Facebook page. In my spare time I really enjoy baking, spending time with my family, eating chocolate and watching 'Say Yes to the Dress'. I really dislike animals and have a huge phobia of dogs which can be interesting when we go on family walks! I love traveling and going on holiday. I have been lucky enough to visit 15 different countries, including Latvia, Estonia and America. I would love to go to Italy next!

Eve Howes (some of my life story)

I think perhaps our memories begin when I was about three years old, and my first one is of waking in a darkened room with a strange man standing by my bed, along with my mother. Later she told me I was very poorly with measles and the strange man was the doctor. In those days it cost 7s.6d (37.5p) for a home visit, which was very expensive when your weekly income was £1.8s.0d (£1.40). At about that time, I acquired a step-dad and a baby brother.



Our village school (Chigwell Row), held 60 children in three classes, aged 4 to 14 years. By the time I was 12, the school curriculum had ended (Standard 7), so I spent my last two years helping younger children and serving lunch to the Headmistress, for which she gave me 6d (2.5p) a week.

I was also the school air-raid warden. When the siren sounded, I stood in the playground with a whistle and blew it in times of danger (having decided whether the overhead aircraft was friend or foe) and sent the whole school scurrying to the underground air-raid shelter.

At 14 I was able to start work as a filing clerk in a London office evacuated to the Director's house at Chigwell. We worked in the billiard room, so it was very useful to have the velvet cushions to slide under the table to protect us from anything dropping from the sky (did I mention there was a war on?).

The most danger our family knew was when a small bomb dropped in our front garden and it only blew the windows and doors in. Once, two large 'concrete' drums landed by parachute on the golf course and we villagers climbed all over them, pulling off pieces as souvenirs (we collected shrapnel then). It was later we learned they were land-mines and hundreds of people were killed by those that did explode.

I was 18 when the war ended and the office moved back to London, so my next job was for the contractors building the Hainault Housing Estate for the London County Council (2,500 homes). I had learned to type at my first job and took evening classes for shorthand for this one. Much of the outside workforce was made up of German prisoners of war and I did the first aid on all and sundry, with no training whatsoever. Health & Safety didn't exist then!

After about three years, I transferred to the Debden Housing Estate, where they erected 8,500 homes which were being built for the people who had been bombed out of their London homes.

In 1952, I left to marry Terry and moved to live in his parents' home in Barking. We had met 18 months previously and were extremely blessed in that we had almost 53 happy years together before he died in 2004.

During that time, we lived in Chipping Ongar, where I was a school secretary and, later, a clinic clerk, and Terry went on the little steam train to his work in a bank in London. The train driver waited for us in the station, as we ran across the field, dodging a belligerent herd of cows.



After being married for 11 years, our daughter, Kate, was born, bringing great happiness and it was about then that we came to Witham. When Kate started school, I was again employed in clinic work, which I loved and that lasted until I was 70. By then, Terry was retired and had rebuilt two Morgan cars as a hobby and, having almost an acre of garden where we lived at Inworth, we always had plenty to occupy us.

For the last eight years, my home has been in Kelvedon, in sheltered housing, for which I am very grateful. After 38 years at Inworth, the property became too much to manage, although, bless them, my daughter and two grandsons coped with anything that I couldn't.

From day one, my parents took me to our local chapel and I have always been blessed with my faith. As a teenager, I joined the youth group at the free-church in the next village and it was there that Terry and I were married.

My husband was brought up in the Catholic faith and, for some of the early years of marriage, I didn't attend any church, but my faith was always with me. I have worshipped at Witham URC for the last 40 years or so, as God pushed me very hard to return and I ended up on Peter Flint's doorstep one morning. Later, he took me into membership, along with Arthur Hall, Sue Shoesmith, Rod and Christine Gayton and Christine and I were baptised.

I have seen five Ministers come and go here – Peter, Richard, Leonard, Paul and now, Mark, and we have been truly blessed with each one. I am not forgetting Lorna, who, as we all know, has contributed a vast amount to the smooth-running of our fellowship. We are also blessed indeed with the number of folk attending Witham URC, who are so talented in many ways and give freely of their gifts for the love of our church family.

I thank God for the years of blessing He has given me – I have always been greatly blessed.

PS. Do your best to recognise me from the photos – I am somewhat older now and my hair is white.

A message of encouragement from Revd Leonard and Judy Phelps (Past minister of Witham URC)

Hello everyone at Witham URC

Hope all is well with you. We still remember all the good times we had with you as a pastor and friend. Often Judy and I talk about some of the experiences we had there.

So what are you doing to pass time in this virus lockdown? I have been working on the word 'ponder'. Towards the end of the Christmas story, it says that 'Mary pondered all these things in her heart.' So I have been pondering scripture instead of rushing through a chapter a day. I have also been pondering the significance of this virus bit. Is God trying to tell us something? Have I missed it? Or is it a time to just to slow down, relax and enjoy some peace and solitude? Even last night I was pondering an event that happened many years ago and wondering, did I do the situation justice? Could I have been better at helping? You have the idea so hopefully you can ponder too.

All the best and may God encourage you all

Leonard and Judy

Victor Community College (VCC) - Shirley Ratnage

Due to the pandemic the VCC has been closed to students since May last year. Most of the staff/students come from very poor families and when the government introduced lock down restrictions, most were unable to work and therefore had no money to live on. The government did make some provision but it was not adequate. Over the months we have been able to send funds to Paul (the Director) and he has used these to buy food and toiletries for the families. A good proportion of the money sent out came by way of donations from the congregation at Harold Wood Baptist church where Jan normally worships but we have also given some from our fund raising account. (I did not ask for donations from our church as we have a fair amount in hand.) .

You may recall that groups of ladies have in the past been learning the skill of dressmaking at the VCC. Once they pass the 6 month course they are given a sewing machine so that they can seek work to do from home. This has helped quite a few families but it has always been in the back of Paul 's mind to try to set up a cooperative in the VCC as in a group, the ladies could command work from manufacturers and earn more. At the end of last year Paul was in talks with a nightwear manufacturer in the nearby town and now 3 of the ladies are going to work there for a month to learn the skills, then return to the VCC to teach others, with a view to setting up the co-operative. We have indicated that when they are ready, we will fund some industrial sewing machines to help the initiative get off the ground.

Please pray for this initiative.

Christmas Offertories

Thank you to everybody who donated money in lieu of sending Christmas cards and to our Christmas services which raised a total of £1,058 so Holdfast and Mercy Ships each received £529, in addition. Mercy Ships were a recipient from our Pledge giving and received a further £500.

Fenella Hardie, Chair Holdfast Credit Union

From everyone at Holdfast Credit Union, many many thanks to all at Witham URC for your generous gift to Holdfast Supporters. Holdfast relies on financial help from Holdfast Supporters' fundraising to pay for things like training and new equipment, the pandemic restrictions put an end to active fundraising while at the same time requiring additional outlay to enable remote working. Your gift is very welcome and much appreciated.

Taken from an out-of-date diary when serving/tidying in the shop a couple of years ago - **Dot Banks.**

We all make mistakes – some knowingly, some not. We inadvertently hurt people at times. We let people down, trample feelings, don't live up to expectations. But it's not just careless or bad behaviour at stake. Make no mistake, guilt is a spiritual battle.

Many of us are spiritually schizophrenic like the apostle Paul in Romans 7:15 – “What I don't understand about myself is that I decide one way, but then I act another, doing things I absolutely despise”.

And then guilt sets in like wet cement.

Even when we ask for forgiveness, sometimes our guilt brakes don't engage, and self persecution just keeps barrelling full speed ahead. That's when we have to allow Papa God to override the gears and stall out our revving self condemnation engine with His supernatural grace.



Mercy Ships Update - Gavin and Julia McCall

Thank you for supporting Mercy Ships as one of our 2021 nominated charities.

As a next step, we would like you to collect your loose change for Mercy Ships during 2021.

We have converted many Pringle tubes into collecting boxes (see photo), and we would like to get these out to you asap. Please get in-touch 01376 502 864, and we will deliver one to you, while maintaining safety rules to keep us all safe.

I hope that you have seen some of the video's which explain the work of Mercy Ships in previous years. We plan to bring you updates to share the story of individuals whose lives have been changed by this unique charity.

Mercy Ships brings free, world class surgery and medical support to people in some of the poorest countries in the world. Founded 40 years ago, there have performed over 100,000 surgeries.

This work continues as their newest ship – Global Mercy is launched and doubles the capacity of this act of love and mercy. Global Mercy is a purpose built ship with six operating theatres, wards with 102 beds, Intensive care, x-ray and CT scanners, and everything needed to be a self-supporting hospital in a remote location.

Further, it is the aim of Mercy Ships to leave a changed local capability. Extensive training and support of local medical staff ensures that the change continues.

Why use hospital ships?

Worldwide, 5 billion people lack access to safe, affordable, timely surgery. Many of them live in developing countries where healthcare infrastructure is limited or non-existent, or where there's a shortage of trained healthcare providers.

Fortunately, more than 44% of the world's population lives within 100 miles of a coast — which is why Mercy Ships uses modern hospital ships to bring world-class volunteer medical professionals directly to the places they're needed most.

These ships are the most efficient way to bring a state-of-the-art hospital to regions where clean water, electricity, and medical facilities and personnel are limited or non-existent. Instead of trying to build the facilities they need to bring life-changing surgeries to ports around the world, they can provide a safe, stable, fully outfitted hospital ship to help change the odds for thousands of people in need.

They also train local healthcare providers and improve medical infrastructure. And they even stock our ships with a supply of vehicles so they can reach remote areas!

How do they operate?

Mercy Ships typically spend 10 months moored in each country, followed by a 2-month maintenance stop for repairs and updates. Before arriving, they will have worked with the government of the country for several years to gain an invitation, agree provision of dock space, fuel and security. They will also require a commitment from the government to continue a certain level of healthcare funding for the years after the visit, to cement in the

changes made. They will also work with local doctors and medics to have a plan for local support.

While moored, both on ship and dockside facilities are used to treat people, with the best care available. Surgery which requires months of physiotherapy are performed early, so that post-op support can be provided before the ship departs. Other smaller cases can continue throughout the stay, such as eye surgery and cleft lips.

In many African countries, conditions such as cleft lips are seen as a demonic sign, so these people can be social excluded and avoided, adding greatly to the difficulty of these people.

The ship is both a hospital, and a self-sufficient community. The ship is staffed by volunteers, who spend between 2 weeks and years on the ship. This includes not only the medical team, but the ships captain and crew, cooks, plumbers, teachers, cleaners etc. Many roles are available for people to volunteer to fill, not just medical!

Thank you for helping to Support Mercy Ships in 2021!

More information from www.mercyships.org.uk

Pastoral team - Ruth Blackett

Hello to you all.

Following on from Mark's letter in December, I am pleased to say that we are gradually building a small pastoral team to work alongside Mark, Doug (from eldership) and Rosemary (prayer chain). By the time you read this we should have had the first of our two training sessions.

Next month I can let you know who is in the team as a couple are awaiting to make their decision following the training.

As Mark pointed out in his letter in December our most effective pastoral care goes on day to day through our relationships with others. Whether these are formed by being part of home groups, teams, our friendship group or other groups we are connected with.

I have been amazed over the last few weeks about how our Church family does support one another. Especially at this difficult time of lock down many are contacting each other with notes, phone calls, zooming and other electronic means. We all indeed need to play our part in supporting each other spiritually, physically, emotionally etc.

However there may be some of you who are not in contact with anyone else please do let us know as we would be happy to talk with you.

Also there are times when things are more difficult and we may need a bit more specialist help, we would love to come alongside you in these times.

Our Contact details are

Ruth Blackett and team 07546 838825

Church office 01376 500958

Born on the 25th December! Part 1 - Christine Barton

Yes, that's right Christmas Day. When I was delivered the doctor allegedly said "Oh you have a little Christine!" Thank God he didn't say "you have a little Noelle". I don't think I could have lived with that. I was a little reluctant to put in an appearance and the doctor used forceps to drag me into the world. "Joy to the World" I could have been named Joy but I really could never have lived up to that name!

Anyway everybody was suitably pleased with themselves until my mother became ill with Puerperal Fever soon after. This my parents put down to dirty forceps. Whatever the cause she became very ill and had to go to an isolation hospital. I was taken by my father to my Grandmother and my spinster aunt who looked after me for several weeks. My mother always said her life was saved by penicillin which was still relatively new. So Father went to work during the week and visited me and my mother at weekends, though not in the same place so a certain amount of travel was necessary. I don't know how he did it because we didn't have a car all those years ago. Whatever he did it wasn't easy.

So here I was in Rhyl North Wales, an only child a prime case for separation anxiety; but back then who knew?

Eventually we moved into a rented bungalow on a short term lease, a holiday let I think, out of season. Dad carried on with his job, home on a Friday night and Mum coped as best she could with the help of Nanna and Aunty Betty. I have seen photos of me way back then and I was quite cute really with white blond hair, no particular distinguishing features. Nothing to show but my name that I had been born on Christmas Day, no angels in tow, no halo, no heavenly chorus. Just me, just as I was, just like anyone else. For which I am eternally grateful.

After two joy filled years with me my parents decided to go through it all again, well not all of it obviously just the conception, pregnancy and birth. This time they chose to have my sibling delivered at home. So my sister Wendy Elizabeth was born 2 years after me. Mum was attended by a midwife and the G.P. visited a couple of days later.

To this day my mother was convinced that the medics knew there was something not quite right about my little sister. In fact she had Down's Syndrome. She had that Mongol look about her face and was slow to sit up, she had large spaces between her big toes and the rest, a sign of the syndrome apparently. Her development was slow, she didn't walk until she was 5 years old. She was a loving child, mostly happy, and loved spoiling anything I was doing or wanting to join in with my friends though she wasn't physically able. She had something wrong with her knees and hobbled about with a cheeky grin. She wasn't able to talk but pointed at what she wanted and had us at her beck and call. I was shy. Accepting that my sister was different but loving her anyway. They believed that God had chosen to have this special child because they would care for her.

Psalm 139 tells us that God knew us in our mother's womb. So what did this all mean?

End of Part One.

We are delighted this month to have several new contributors and we would really like this to continue.

The deadline for the March Church Magazine is 20th February to

bjstibbards@gmail.com

Christiana Moon



Psalm 89:1 NIV

"I will sing of the LORD's great love forever; with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations."

Psalm 89 is, for the first part, a glorious exaltation of God's love and faithfulness. Particularly exalted is God's promise to David, the Israelite king, that his kingdom would last forever. One of David's descendants would always be on the throne. Nonetheless, the second part of the Psalm has a dramatic change of tone. The Psalmist writes of crippling doubt about the fulfillment of those promises.

It was reasonable to question the fulfillment of God's promises to the Israelites. Their king and people had been captured by Babylon in the 586 BC exile. Those who were not captured were killed. But the wonder of this Psalm is that today we can read it with fresh eyes. We know that God did in fact fulfill his promises almost 600 years later through a descendant of David. Jesus Christ, and His death and resurrection brought a kingdom that lasts forever.

Many of us this last year, like the Israelites, have asked the question in Psalm 89:46- How long, O LORD? We know God is faithful, but we also have a limited understanding of what His timing looks like in a complex world. I have asked this question myself as I have met the challenges 2020 has brought. 2020 was my first year of teaching, my first year of full-time missions, and the year of a global pandemic.

In March 2020, I arrived back from Armenia at our missions centre in Ukraine. I found the chaos, confusion and uncertainty surrounding an international lockdown. We weren't sure if we could even run our Bible school. On top of the pandemic- the government had a crackdown on misuse of volunteer visas. This meant that all volunteer visas would shortly become invalid and foreigners would have to leave.



However, the lockdown meant that administration froze. This actually enabled time for our organisation to regain its registration. In a few months, the borders opened again and all our students were able to join us. Praise the Lord for His faithfulness! For 9 months we studied every book of the Bible. I saw incredible transformation in students' lives. I saw people falling in love with

God as if for the first time; released into their gifting; answering a call to dedicate their lives to missions and the teaching of His Word to others. They all graduated after a year of crazy faith, hard work and are now taking the same teaching internship that I took at the beginning of this year. They will be equipped to give away the gift of the understanding of God's Word to others, vital in many places where there is a lack of Biblical training and resources.

The international church plant I serve in Kyiv closed during lockdown. Our meetings were completely on zoom. Many of our members found themselves isolated. However, this came with a renewed hunger for God's Word and a desire for connection. Our women's Bible study began meeting every week. God laid on my heart not just to raise these women up as students, but teachers. I made a study guide for small group preparation

and sought God's wisdom on how to teach people how to teach! Now most of our members have created and led their own Bible study. Praise God!

The end of 2020 was more difficult for me personally as infection rates soared in Kyiv and globally. Thankfully, none of our ministry team or church members became seriously ill, but I felt heartache for those I knew worried about their loved ones, and also experienced loss in my own family. But I am so grateful for a new dependency on God. This could only have been forged through the unique challenges of this year. Praise God for His faithfulness to draw me closer to Him, growing me and using me.

I know that God is faithful to fulfil His promises to us. He is faithful- whether we see the fruit of those promises on this side or the other side of eternity.

Please keep myself, our team, church and future students in your prayers. I will return at the end of January to continue serving and teaching. I wholeheartedly thank you for your support and prayer. None of this would be possible without you!

The Faithfulness of God is not dependent on the circumstances around us. It is not dependent on our understanding of His faithfulness. Answers to prayer this year are reminders to me to trust in God's faithfulness, and His perfect timing.

I conclude with Hebrews 10:23 NIV, referring to God's accomplished promises through Christ in the New Testament.

“Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful.”

Other praise points from 2020:

-A Fruitful Teaching trip to Armenia in February 2020

-My improving Russian.

-Our new missions centre

-Provision of visas and finances for our students and staff. Visa issues

-Coming home for Christmas!



Witham Food Bank - Janice Hawkes

The Witham Food Bank is desperately in need of volunteers. They would only need to do one Friday a month and the service is very much needed at the moment. Anyone who might be interested should phone the office in Braintree on 01376 330694 and they will give full details.

The I AM Sayings of Jesus Material for Lent

During Lent this year we are looking at the 'I AM' sayings of Jesus in John's gospel.

We would like the house groups to follow the same material and have found a study book from the Scripture Union, LifeBuilder Series, entitled The 'I AM' SAYINGS of CHRIST which contains 8 studies suitable for group or individual use.

As there are eight studies and most groups only meet fortnightly, you might like to start sooner rather than later or you could even meet weekly during Lent! That's a rather radical suggestion but is an excellent combination of giving something up for Lent (time) and taking something up (Bible Study).

If you are not part of an established group but would like to look at the studies with a few friends on Skype, Messenger, FaceTime or any other means, then that would be great.

If you let me know, I will order one booklet for each group.

Lorna

lorna.bantock@withamurc.org.uk

Office routine - Derrick Coleman

Since March 2020 life has been changed, every country throughout the world brought together fighting the same war, Coronavirus.

Many in this country now working from home, even children learning at home, some accepting that the change would only be short term, but alas the further it seems that we are from the starting place, the end of this practice is ever further away.

What about those, like myself, who's daily task cannot not be actioned from home, and the daily travel to work is unchanged.

Although the daily drive to work has little difference, lighter traffic, when arriving at work this tells a different story. A two-storey office where, normally over 200 persons perform their daily tasks, now reduced to less than 40. Where are the others? Some departments have been divided and now operate from other locations where space has been made available and more people are now operating from home.

All our offices have been drastically affected. Some now void of office staff, with only the security or occasionally maintenance personal wandering the cold dark corridors.

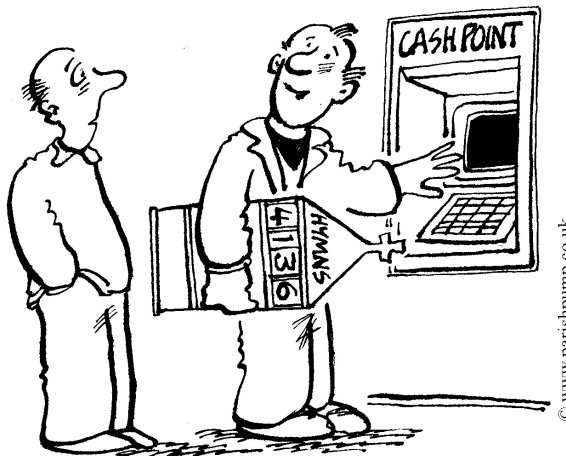
Other offices, like where I am based looking a lot different. From the moment you enter so many changes, temperature taken, non-contact wrist machine, sanitise jell and face mask available, each of the two floors having separated entry points, and moving between them limited.

The work area zoned off to make, where possible, one way traffic. Staff sitting alone at their desk, no one beside them, no one opposite them. An eerie silence echoes around, the once clatter and exchange of 'what I did yesterday' no longer shared. Leave your desk then don a face mask, only talk now is work related, and then back to the solitude of your own desk and

work area. Use a photocopy then sanitise your hands before and after, using the dispensers scattered all around. Phones fallen almost silent, communication now electronic, and the inevitable wait for a reply.

Meetings now via Zoom, faces, seen nearly every day now an image on the computer terminal. The only sound now is the rustling of paper, machines coming to life for a short while then silent again. One meeting area now reserved as a Quarantine Room in preparation should it be required. All is being done to protect all members of staff as much as possible.

A vaccine now available, and soon, hopefully, some form of normality, will return, but for many life will never been the same again. In the future we will be able to look back at 2020 and wonder how did it ever happen, and when will it happen again?



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



The Real Easter Egg - Lorna

February means pancake day.... and pancake day means Lent....and Lent means EASTER.

No Easter is complete without an Easter egg. Well of course it is really but an Easter egg is a brilliant reminder of the new life Jesus gives us as a result of his death and resurrection.

If you would like a Real Easter egg, fairly traded, to give to your children, grandchildren, spouse, in fact, anyone, including the child (or adult) in you, then please let me know as I am going to put in a bulk order.

Each egg comes with an Easter story activity book and you can choose between white chocolate or milk chocolate at £4.50 per egg or dark chocolate which is slightly thicker and includes three small dark chocolate squares priced at £5.50.

Real Easter eggs are palm oil free and all the packaging is plastic free.

They are produced by the Meaningful Chocolate Company and it is even more important to support them this year as last year, because of Covid, supermarkets were left with a lot of Easter eggs on the shelves so many of them have not ordered from the Meaningful Chocolate Company this year.

Please let me know by Monday 1st March so I can get the order in with plenty of time.

Thank you

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ANGEL PROJECT 2020

Firstly, a **big thank you** to all the people who knitted Angels during 2020 – the total was 270 – a wonderful effort. They came in various shapes and sizes, some sparkly with introductions of different colours. Clever knitters produced them with halos and even hair, so a real assortment. Each angel had a label which said “Made for you with love by Witham URC”.

About 42 were given to Park View and I understand that they were going to firstly decorate their Christmas Tree before being handed out to residents. Mark, Hilary Topham and myself took the remainder into the Town on the 19th December, backed by prayer, to hand them out to residents in the High Street. They were all gone within an hour. There were various reactions as we offered people a gift. A few people ignored us or shook their head and solemnly walked on - it may be that they thought we might be asking for a donation and there might be strings attached somehow. One lovely family offered to buy me a hot drink.... In the main the angels were accepted gratefully and generally the recipients thought they were a wonderful gift and we were blessed with smiles and thanks. The rain only started coming down when our bags were empty – thank you God. We enjoyed some interesting conversations too and we just pray that these simple gifts are a real blessing to their owners.

God bless you all

Denise

Emergency help with bills, food and other items



If you find yourself in need of some help this winter, the Essential Living Fund can help pay for heating, electricity, water and food. We can also help you get essential household items like a fridge, cooker or table.

To get a grant you must

- Live in Essex, Southend or Thurrock
- Be aged over 16

How to apply

Check if this applies to you.

Visit www.southend.gov.uk/elfforessex

Or if you are vulnerable or have no access to the internet you can call **0300 7900124** (between 8:45am - 5:00pm).

Serious Lockdown Advice - Philip Vinton. A post from a friend in Spain

Everyone PLEASE be careful because people are going crazy from being locked down at home!

I was just thinking about this with the microwave and the toaster while drinking my Pepsi, and we all agreed that things are getting bad.

I didn't mention any of this to the washing machine, because she puts a different spin on EVERYTHING¹

Certainly couldn't share it with the fridge, 'cos he has been acting cold and distant.

In the end the iron straightened me out. She said the situation isn't all that pressing and all the wrinkles will soon get ironed out.

The vacuum however was very unsympathetic. Told me to just suck it up.

The fan was VERY optimistic and gave me hope that it will all blow over soon.

The toilet looked a bit flushed but didn't say anything when I asked its opinion, but the front door said I was becoming unhinged and the door knob told me to get a grip.

You can just about guess what the curtains told me – they told me to “pull myself together”

We will survive. Keep safe.

7 Day WELLNESS PLAN

Monday

GO FOR A NATURE WALK. As you walk, exercise all your senses. Take in a view, take a deep breath, listen to bird song.
DID YOU KNOW? Across Compassion projects children take part in different educational activities; for children aged 3 to 5 this includes learning about their five senses.

Tuesday

COMPLIMENT SOMEONE. Giving genuine compliments can increase your empathy and give your wellbeing a boost.
DID YOU KNOW? Through Compassion project activities, children are encouraged to build friendships which increases their social skills and confidence.

Wednesday

SET A NEW FITNESS GOAL. Physical activity can boost your energy levels and improve your mood.
DID YOU KNOW? We have different types of physical challenges that run throughout the year, find out more at: challenges.compassionuk.org

Thursday

A RANDOM ACT OF KINDNESS. Helping others can reduce your stress levels and increase your mental wellbeing.
DID YOU KNOW? For the 3 to 5 year olds in the Compassion programme socio-emotional lessons might include learning how to treat others.

Friday

DRINK PLENTY OF WATER TODAY. Keeping hydrated can improve your concentration and help to boost productivity.
DID YOU KNOW? Children and their families are taught about the importance of safe water.

Saturday

PLAN A HEALTHY MEAL. Eating a balanced diet, rich in vitamins, can help improve your mood and overall wellbeing.
DID YOU KNOW? Thanks to their sponsor, children receive nutritional support to keep them well and healthy.

Sunday

MEDITATE ON GOD'S WORD. Put time aside to focus on encouraging Bible verses that remind you of God's promises in your life.
DID YOU KNOW? Through the local church, children have opportunities to hear how much God loves them.

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