

Church Magazine
December 2024/ January 2025

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

Pastoral Letter

Dear Friends

*Come let us sing for joy to the Lord.
Let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.
Let us come before him with thanksgiving,
and extol him with music and song.
For the Lord is the great God,
The great King above all gods.
(Psalm 95 1-3)*

It's often the case that when great things happen, it's easy to be thankful, but when times are tough, sometimes we find it hard to give thanks. The fact of the matter is that we have an overwhelming reason to be grateful because of what Jesus has done for us. Jesus gave His very life for us, giving us the gift of eternal life. On top of rescuing us from death, He also gave us access to the throne of God and a loving relationship with our Creator. He gave us a place to belong in the family of God and He gave us the gift of the Holy Spirit – a comforter, counsellor, and ever-present friend. He took away our sins, and with Jesus, we are destined to live in hope, victory and to have eternal life! Gratitude begins with realising that Jesus is the 'Rock of our salvation'. When we realise what Jesus has done for us, an attitude of gratefulness should flow freely from our hearts.

In Paul's letter to the Thessalonians, he wrote to the Thessalonian Christians to strengthen their faith and to give them assurance of Christ's return. Paul was not teaching that we should thank God for everything that happens to us, but in everything. Evil does not come from God, so we should not thank Him for it. But when evil strikes, we can still be thankful for God's presence in our lives and for the good that He will accomplish through those challenging times.

Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

(1 Thessalonians 5:18)

In our house group, we are currently looking at the story of Joseph from the Andrew Ollerton series. Joseph's early life was an absolute 'rollercoaster' of challenging circumstances, in which God turned Joseph's nightmare into a life filled with purpose and 'used for good'. Joseph always knew that God was with him, and he seldom questioned why but 'What shall I do now?' There is nothing like God's presence to shed new light on a dark situation.

Thankfulness opens the door to God's presence. When thankfulness flows freely from your heart and lips, your gratitude will draw you closer to God. See how many times you can thank God daily; this will awaken your awareness to a multitude of blessings. It will also cushion the impact of challenges when they come against you.

There are five ways in which we can be thankful:

- 1) We can be thankful that God answers our prayers (Isaiah 65:24; John 11:41).
- 2) We can be thankful for God's provision for our needs (1 Thessalonians 17,18; 1 Timothy 4:4, 5)
- 3) We can be thankful for God's blessings (1 Chronicles 16:34; Philippians 4:6)
- 4) We can be thankful for God's character and wondrous works (Psalm 17:17; 2 Corinthians 9:15)
- 5) We can be thankful for our brothers and sisters in Christ (1 Corinthians 1:4; Ephesians 1:16)

May God continue to bless you and your families.

Sarah Wellings

Thank you - Denise and Philip

By the time the church magazine is printed we will have arrived in SA of course. Our last couple of weeks have been a whirlwind of goodbyes and tears exchanging memories from our last 30 years worshipping with you all.

Thank you all for the love and support we have received in so many ways, the Memories Book and the very generous donation for the Jbay Recycling Project which will play an enormous part in providing 300 children with a food parcel this Christmas (we will be sending a report and pictures we hope later). So many people we need to thank so we hope that you can accept this general letter as we still have final packing etc to get done.

We are humbled by the love and support we have received over the years from the moment we walked into Witham URC and are so glad that God messed up our plans. When we married in 1994 and Denise moved to my house in Witham our intention was to move nearer Colchester so did not accept the offer of joining a housegroup or getting further involved in Church life. As is so often the way our plan was rubbish and God's plan was already put into place and we remained in Witham and became part of this very special Church family and have been blessed by God in so many ways. We have had so much enjoyment, laughter and fun (and some tears) shared with so many for which we are grateful beyond measure.

We 'think' we have a plan for SA but are well aware that it could be turned upside down. However our certainty is in the fact that we know and have experienced that in all things God works for our good whether the road is rocky or smooth and we have the certainty that no matter what he never leaves our side. We will continue to hold everyone in our prayers and please

continue the amazing work that goes on in the Centre which has been a privilege for us to be part of.

We will be keeping in via the Church Magazine just in case you try to forget us.

God's blessings

All our love
Philip and Denise x



Our last housegroup with Philip and Denise we shall miss this lovely couple



Discovery by Rosemary Stinson

When we first saw the star we had no idea where it would take us
Something compelled us to follow its leading
We followed across deserts, through sandstorms and into unknown
countries
Ancient writing foretold of a King being born
His arrival announced by a new star
We imagined that the star would lead up to a royal palace
A fitting place for nobility to offer their gifts
We had selected the costliest presents we could find
Knowing that only the best would be good enough for a King
Imagine our amazement when the star stopped over a humble stable
Our wisdom told us that this could not be right
Unless celestial beings were seeking to make fools of the Wise
I find it hard to express my feelings upon entering the stable
I only know that something brought me to my knees
In the past I had expected others to reverence me
But then I just wanted to adore the child I had found
I saw Love Incarnate in a manger
Watched by horses, cattle, sheep
True majesty was encapsulated in a baby fast asleep
I gave my gift of gold - the only gold present at this King's birth
And in giving it, I gave every part of myself
Somehow I knew that my life would never again be the same
I had set out on a journey to find a King
And I ended up on the floor of a stable having found myself.

Smalls for All Julie Harris

I would like to update you on the collection of bras to send to a charity based in Scotland, Smalls for All, who use these for distribution in the UK, and onwards to Africa.

Thank you to all those who passed these items on to me. I am delighted to tell you that a box of these items have been made up ready for delivery to the charity. The box contains 7 kilograms of bras.

I would like to extend a huge thank you to a lovely couple in our Church family, who have very kindly said they would coordinate with a friend to get the delivery made via car, when their friend visits, and returns to Scotland. I am so grateful to them, the money I am saving on the postage can be given to another worthy cause. Thank you lovelies, you know who you are, it's most kind of you.

Every Blessing,

Have you considered having an allotment ? Julie Harris

Have you ever considered having an allotment ?

Do you have preconceptions about them ? Then please let me clarify a few points for you.

First and foremost for me, I love being at my allotment and enjoying being close to God and to nature.

I have had my allotment for 3 years now and feel so very fortunate. I knew that as I approached my retirement, I would love to have an allotment. I first applied for a plot at Cut Throat Lane allotments in Witham, but was informed the waiting list was long, I went on the waiting list and got a phone call 2 years later offering me a plot, I politely declined as I had been very fortunate in finding another plot.

Allotments are literally like gold dust, so I was overjoyed when I got mine.

So.....what do you conjure up when you think of an allotment? Expense? Hard Work? Little or no success?

Well....please allow me to share my experience. Someone that I know suggested I try Hatfield Peverel Allotment Association...they have 2 sites, an old site which probably dates back 100 years and a new site.

I was overjoyed to be offered a plot virtually straight away. I knew what I wanted and was delighted to be offered a starter plot, which is a half a plot. A starter plot is for people who want to dip their toe in the water and see how they get on with it, some people stick with that size, others like to upgrade to a larger plot.

Having an allotment isn't expensive, for my little plot the fee is less than £40 a year. There is equipment onsite you can use, for a fee and with some safety training.

We are a friendly community and help each other out with advice or seed sharing etc.

So....why get an allotment ?

It's great to be out in nature, fresh air, sociable, you are helping the planet the crops you grow will be totally organic and fresh.

To grow your own fruit and veg is good for the planet in terms of carbon footprint, plastic wrapping and for your health. It's rewarding when you get a good crop and the seeds, compost, birds etc. Works out a fraction of what you would pay in a shop for the end product.

With the way things are going, I think fruit and veg are going to go up in price, if farmers are impacted by the Budget, there are many reasons why prices might go up, but I think they will.

So.....allotments are becoming more scarce, I feel very nostalgic about the site where mine is, possibly our great grand parents had one, they are historical, precious and should be protected at all costs.

If you think you might be interested, please go to this link and register your interest, the waiting list is considerably short.....believe me, the joy of going over my allotment early on a Summer morning or watering on a warm summer evening as the sun dips is absolutely priceless....there will be lots of support and advice to get you up and running, if you need it...we are a really friendly bunch.

Speaking of nostalgia, you can always pack a sandwich and a flask of tea and spend the day over there, it's glorious !!!!

Here is the link;

<https://membermojo.co.uk/hpaa>

An Evening At The Well
presents

BACK TO THE 90'S

Sat
Dec 7th
Entrance
£5



Doors
open
6.30

Open mic night

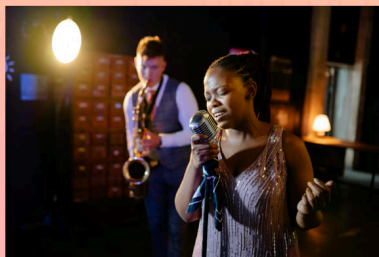
In aid of House of Grace(Witham)

The Well 1 Penhaligon court
Witham CM8 1BQ. Tel: 07494 443161

In association with Bethel(Witham)

An Evening At The Well
presents

The Café Soul Review



Open mic. 6.30 1st February

In aid of House of Grace(Witham)

The Well, Guithavon St, Witham, CM8 1BQ. Tel: 07494 443161

In association with Bethel (Witham)

Fellowship Julie Harris

Winter is coming....the days are getting shorter and for many this may lead to a feeling of isolation loneliness and more.

Yes....many of us communicate via devices or social media, but for me I still love the good old telephone, whether it be a landlines or a mobile.

We have all gone through periods of loneliness, perhaps people are housebound or maybe have a small circle of people.

Whatever the reason, we can all make a difference to someone by surprising them with a phone call out of the blue.....sometimes we tend to wait for that call....and there's nothing wrong with wanting that, but why not make that call ? You could make someones day.....and make a new friend....

If you ever feel like a chat over a cuppa, I am here...whether at Church or elsewhere.....I would say to you all.....please don't suffer in silence.



Celtic Services

There will be no Celtic services in December or January.

The third Sunday in December (15th) is our annual carol service and in January next year the third Sunday (January 19th) is the Sunday of the week of prayer for Christian Unity and there will be a united service in the Methodist church at 3.00pm.

The next Celtic style service will be on Sunday February 16th

Welcome Team Rota David Goodwin Welcome Team Leader

I'm preparing the rota for January to June 2025 and volunteers of all ages are needed for this very important role of greeting people as they arrive for our Sunday morning service. **Please note that serving and former Elders have their own rota.**

You should arrive by 10:00 and your duties will include handing out the service sheets (and bibles & song books should they be requested), taking one of the Offertory bags (only if you want to) and collecting the bibles, song books, any unwanted service sheets/newsletters and water jugs & empty drinking beakers after the service.

I hope enough volunteers come forward so you only have to undertake the role once in the period, although you are more than welcome to put your name down more than once if you wish to. Please add your name to your chosen date/s on the rota in Church Suite if you can. If this isn't possible then please either email me with your chosen date/s or text/call me – details below.

Email: davidgoodwin2009@hotmail.co.uk

Mob: [07932 198352](tel:07932198352)

Thank you

Tuesday Praise

December 2024
At WURC
12.30 - 1.00PM

| Tuesday | Speaker |
|----------------|----------------------|
| 3rd Dec. | Keith Moscrop |
| 10th Dec | Ian Hardie |
| 17th Dec | Gretta Bray |
| 24th Dec | Come and sing Carols |
| 31st Dec | Marina Price |

Refreshments available after the services until 17th December.

January 2025
At WURC
12.30 - 1.00pm

| | |
|----------|--------------------|
| 7th Jan | Jonathan Pritchard |
| 14th Jan | Deirdre Schnaar |
| 21st Jan | Femi Cole-Njie |
| 28th Jan | Howard Schnaar |

Refreshments available afterwards

Everyone Welcome

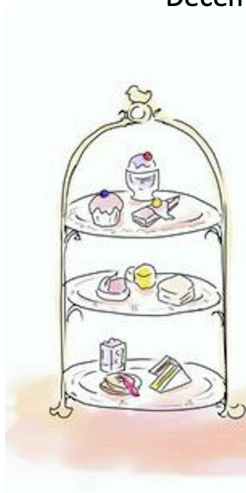


Lunchtime concert Thursday 12th December - Lorna

There will be a special lunchtime concert by candlelight at 12.30pm. It's a solo performance, an inspiring sequence of 'Reflections', focusing on peace and freedom with beautiful unaccompanied melody and classic poetry. It will be played and presented by bassoonist Laurence Perkins, who is regularly featured on Classic FM, BBC Radio 3 and has had two solo recordings in the U.K. Classical Charts.

The concert is 45 minutes long, and is free admission. There will be a collection for two charities - UK-Med, a World Health Organisation medical team, and Action Music International who work through music to help and support traumatised war victims. Both organisations are currently very active in Ukraine, Gaza and other war-torn parts of the world.

December & January Afternoon Teas



The December Afternoon Tea will be on Monday December 9th at 2.30pm. At the time of writing, it was very nearly fully booked, however there will be a waiting list as there are often cancellations.

January Afternoon Tea will be on Monday 13th January and bookings for the church fellowship will open on Tuesday January 14th. The price will be going up, at the time of writing the amount has not been decided.



Rev Dr Peter Stevenson - sent by Jean Moody Great Totham URC

As many of you know our house starts early in preparation for Christmas. By mid-November the presents are bought and wrapped; the festive menus are set and non-perishable items purchased; the cake is maturing; Advent study, services, and the December diary is finalised and travel arrangements made. Why? Early preparation means that changes can easily be made without adding pressure to the schedules; the mind can be cleared so that deeper reflection can occur; and the season can be enjoyed rather than endured.

I have been reading Stephen Cottrell *Walking Backwards to Christmas*, the study book for the Advent course [Stamford members can access this via Zoom on Thursday evenings – happy to supply details on request] taking the nativity all the way back to Moses and the burning bush. The study will consider the perspectives of Old and New Testament characters in order to reflect on how God has brought Light to the world.

Another book I have enjoyed in the pre-Advent period is Paul Kerensa *Hark! The Biography of Christmas*, [Paul writes a regular epilogue feature for Reform]. In twelve chapters he takes the reader from 4BC to the present exploring how a pagan festival becomes the Christmas celebration we now regard as ‘normal’. The churches’ involvement and engagement came fairly late into the story, even banning it during the Puritan and Reformation periods. In 1575 Scotland, Christmas Day became Yule Day with punishments imposed on those found playing, dancing and singing ‘filthy’ carols. It was not reinstated until 1618 by order of King James but nobody turned up and the festival was re-banned in 1640. It was not until 1958 that Scotland officially reinstated Christmas – in the meantime a New Year ceremony, Hogmanay, filled the gap.

The present-day Christmas has been shaped by royal banquets, an enterprising American entrepreneur, a Prince regent and a Victorian storyteller. The church only added the majority of the carols we sing today in the twentieth century so the next time you hear someone say that we have lost the true meaning of Christmas, ask them what true meaning they have in mind! For Christians, let us recapture the nativity story as we start another liturgical journey of discovery in the hope of understanding Jesus, our Lord, better.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year,

Blessing of 34 shoe boxes on there way to children at Christmas and Remembrance Sunday service at Great Totham URC.



December Sunday Preachers at Great Totham URC

December 1st. Advent Sunday service led by Rev. Hans Stein . 10-30am

December 8th. Rev. Mark Ambrose. 10-30am

December 15th. Ernie Finch. To include communion. 10-30am

December 22nd. No morning service but all are welcome this afternoon to our 4 pm Carol Service with the Maldon Pioneers (who we will be supporting this Christmas) lead by Rev.Mark Ambrose.

December 29th Our fifth Sunday service at Witham URC

You are also very welcome to come along to our Christmas Coffee morning on Saturday 14th of December at 10 am .

Preachers for January

January 5th. Pat Goodall

January 12th Sarah Wilson

January 19th. Ian Hardie

January 26th. Dot Dean

Our January Coffee morning will be on 11th at 10 am .

All are welcome to join us at our services

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

Middle East Christian Aid Appeal



Through the Pledge a £500 donation to this appeal has been made which with the Government UK Aid Match scheme is worth £1000.

A prayer for peace

God, hear our prayers for peace in the Middle East.
May all people in the region be protected, safe from harm.
We pray that this crisis will end now, with no further loss of life.
God, may the injured and distressed know your healing presence.
May the powerful and the decision-makers follow the paths of justice,
mercy and peace.
We pray for recognition of the dignity and value of every life.
May the clamour of violence cease,
Replaced by the beating of swords into ploughshares.
God, in your name, **Amen.**

Pray for

an end to the conflict
all parties to abide by international law
every life to be valued
emergency supplies like blankets, food, sanitation and medical support
to promptly reach those who need the
lasting peace and justice.

Witham URC
Christmas Services

Sunday 15th December
10.30am Nativity Service
A Messy Church style service
6.30pm Traditional Candlelit Carol Service

Sunday 22nd December
10.30am Family Service
6.30pm Carol Service

Christmas Day
10.30am Family Service

Sunday 29th December:
10.30am Family Service

Witham URC
Community Café
Christmas Opening

Open
Saturday 21st December
(Community Café and Baby Bank)

Then CLOSED until
Monday 6th January

No Waste food collection
Saturday 28th December
Saturday 4th January
9-10.30am




save the date

*Churches Together in
Witham and District*

30 November 2024
Mayor's Carol Service with
Churches Together in Witham and District

19 January 2025
Week of Prayer for Christian Unity Service
Witham Methodist Church 3pm

25 January 2025
Prayer Breakfast

07 March 2025
World Day of Prayer

| | | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|---|--------------------------------|
| Minister | Minister | Lorna Bantock | 07935 307 958 |
| Children and Youth Pastor | Mrs | Viv Sollis | 500958 |
| Associate Children and Youth Pastor | Ms | Tracey Eagling | 500958 |
| Building Manager | Mr | Ray Westrip | 500958 |
| Church Administrators | | Naomi Claxton Anna Johansson | 500958 |
| Director of Outreach | Ms | Tracey Eagling | 500958 |
| Kitchen Manager | Mrs | Heather March | 500958 |
| Children & Youth Elder | Mr | Gavin McCall | |
| Church Secretaries (also Elders) | Mr Mrs | Tony Deighton and Muriel Heppinstall | 518866 |
| Church Treasurer (also Elder) | Mr | Ian Hardie | |
| 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 | |
| Worship Elder | Mr | Keith Meredith | |
| 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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| Magazine Editors | Mrs &Mr | Jo and Bob Stibbards | bjstibbards@gmail.com |