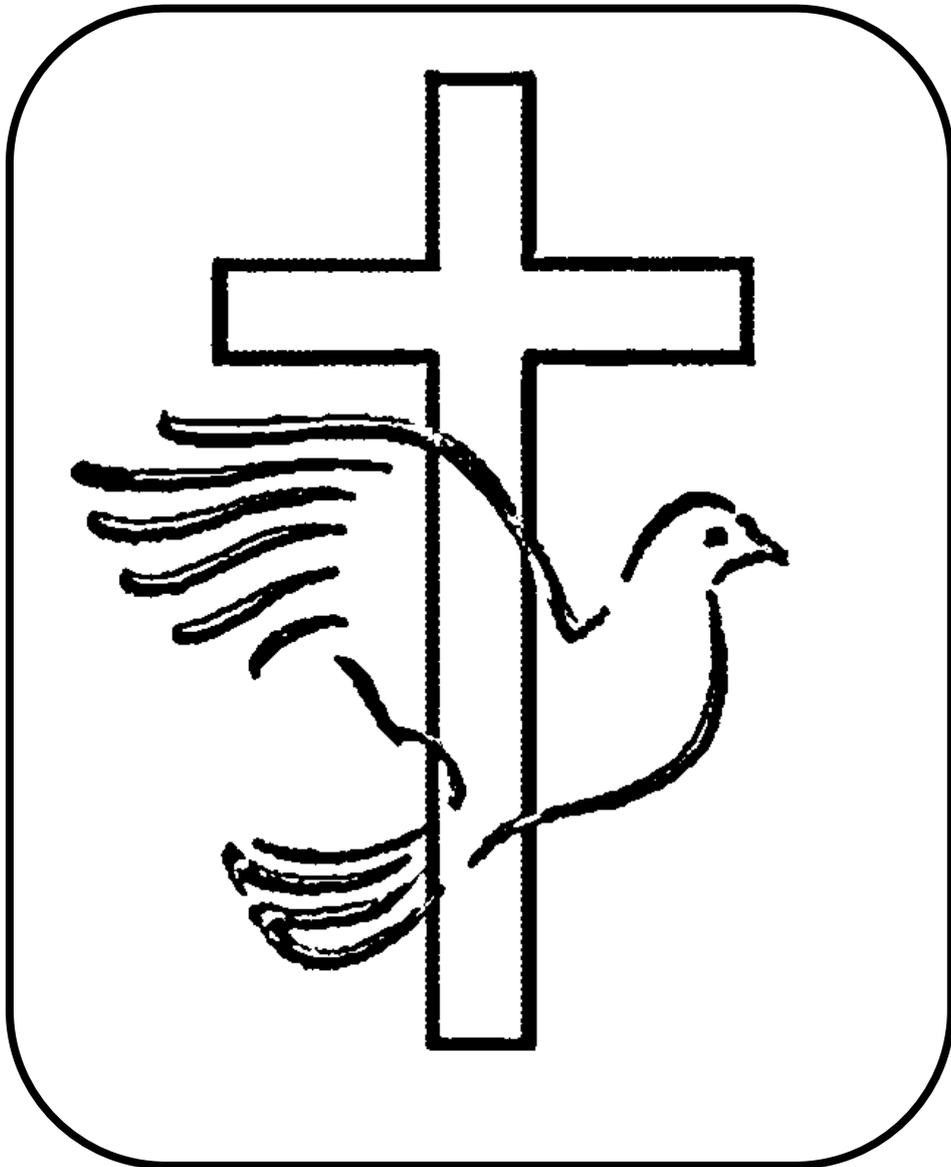




In - Touch

January/February 2020



**THE METHODIST CHURCH
WITNEY**



Minister's Letter

Dear Friends,

As I write this the fires in Australia are still raging, and there seems to be no end in sight. So many lives lost, both human and animal, and so many homes and lives destroyed. This seems one of those tragedies that seems so unjust and leaves us beating our chests and crying up to the heavens asking how God could allow this. A valid theological question, but I want to ask a more practical question, how could we allow this?

Now I am no scientist and I do not know the impact that climate change has contributed towards these fires, but I am convinced that there is enough evidence out there now for us to be able to say that we are destroying this planet. Not God, but us. This destruction is affecting the lives of millions and it will no doubt be the poor economic areas that will be affected the most. This is only going to get worse if nothing changes and so many more lives will be lost.

The first ever instructions given to humans in the bible is to 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it'. (Gen 1:28 NIV). We've done pretty well at being fruitful and increasing in number, but how about that second command? The word subdue means to bring under control, and the language includes an element of improving. To be good stewards. Something that we are failing to do right now.

The Anglican church has something called the '5 marks of mission'. These are the 5 things that the church should do in order to fulfil the mission that God has called it to do. The fifth mark instructs that we should, 'strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth'. We have to start taking this seriously as Christians. Our generations are guilty of causing a climate emergency, and this destruction will be our legacy if we are not careful. The generations that destroyed God's creation.

So, what can we do to help? Firstly, I think we need to take a community approach, we need to ensure that our churches are 'green'. Should we be appointing someone into this role? Is this something that would interest you? Should it be a circuit role? We need to be acting as individuals too. In the last few years there has been a focus on use of plastic, and that is really good and necessary. But recycling plastic will never be a big enough solution. The top three contributors of an individual's carbon footprint are usually: air travel, consumption of meat and dairy, energy use in the home. So, if one of our Christian missions is to care for God's creation, we each need to be making changes in each of these areas. Not because it's a nice thing to do, but because it is what we are called to do as followers of Christ.

Jason Cooke

In-Touch is produced every two months and hard copies are available from High Street and Davenport Road Methodist Churches. However, if you would like to receive the magazine via email, without having to wait for a hard copy, please just let me know and I'll mail it to you as soon as it's ready. I shall

of course need your email address! You can always pick up a hard copy as well when they are available. RL – ruthlapworth@hotmail.com

Personal News and Prayer Concerns

Newland

Happy New Year to all In-Touch readers from Newland, as we have now left 2019 behind and entered the year 2020.

Looking back at Newland over the past year, we lost one of our faithful members of our fellowship, Doreen Hartley who passed on, and was buried early on in the year, followed by an evening dedicated to her memory a few months later. Our well-loved friend Ian McGhee left Newland in 2019 and has now joined a Pathway group at Welcome Evangelical Church. However, during the year Margaret joined us, then another lady, Anne, came among us. Leaflets went around the local Newland area inviting people to a carol service on 19 December and a Christmas meal was planned for 2 January 2020.

At our annual business meeting 21 November, we decided to invest in a complete job on the chapel ceiling to resolve the dangling paper problem, so there is no meeting on Thursday 9 and 16 January. Ironically this is happening at the same time as High Street embark on a major refurbishment of their lower kitchen and coffee bar area, to be unveiled toward the end of January.

A major innovation for Newland started a few years ago, to look at where things are going and the way forward. The Mission Support Group meets three or four times a year, and we offered our gratitude to Ruth for her involvement in the group on deciding after about three years to hand her place over to someone else, when I joined the group a year or two ago. At our last gathering on 23 September Janice also felt that it was time to move on, so we thank Janice for her input in the group and welcome Dot, who has volunteered to take the vacated seat.

We are hopeful that a change of date for our next meeting on Wednesday 8 January will enable our minister Rev Jason Cooke to join us, as Mondays and Tuesdays are his days off. As a probationer having come into his first appointment from college, he still has to make time to study, as is required with all probationers in the Methodist Church in their first two years in circuit.

There is always some uncertainty with regard to the future, but Newland has been on the scene for close on 200 years now and with God's help and our willingness as his servants in Christ, things will hopefully continue, in the ways that the Lord will lead us at Newland, even at the present time as a class of High Street.

Robin

Edmunds

Davenport Road

As we move into 2020, we must first acknowledge with grateful thanks the wonderful work and generosity of so many over the Advent and Christmas season. Firstly, we had a great Christmas Fayre when we made over £1,000 for our outreach work at home and abroad (the Amos trust and their work with Street Children in Durban, South Africa). We enjoyed shared lunch, parties,

and some truly inspirational and delightful services. Friends and family came together for a lovely Candlelit Carol service with All Age Nativity including a real live 'baby Jesus' who slept through the whole performance. Thank you to all who

participated and enlivened the whole of our fellowship and worship this Christmas.

We now look forward and pray for the work of our many groups who meet regularly at the church. We particularly think of the Girls' Brigade and their staff as they have their rededication service at the beginning of February.

We pray too for our friends who are or have been unwell over recent days, asking God's blessing on Eileen, Ken, John, Sarah and those residing in care homes. We think too of those facing times of loneliness during these winter days, those who are missing their loved ones and dealing with uncertainties in life. May they know and feel the loving arms of our Lord Jesus surrounding them.

Judith Bucknall

High Street

Naomi, newly qualified Worship Leader, led our Nativity Service very well on 22 December with much congregational participation from all ages. During the service Rev Jason presented Naomi with her certificate to mark her completion of the course. Well done Naomi. That evening the impressive Candlelight Carol Service was led by Jason, and was enhanced by contributions from a large singing group and orchestra very ably led by Rachael and included a significant piece of drama performed by members of the congregation. Jude and Jason led our thoughtful and reflective 'Blue Christmas' Service, for those who find Christmas a difficult time and Jude also led our well-attended lively Crib Service on Christmas Eve. Our joyful Christmas Day Service was also led by Jason.

We remember Roy Cobb in our prayers on the death of his mother Elsie, our oldest member aged 99, who died 21 November. Elsie married Gordon Cobb in 1941 and came to live in Witney after WW2 when he worked at De Havilland and they had four children, Roy, Brian, Susan and Ann. After Ann's untimely death Elsie and Roy took on the responsibility of caring for her two sons, Ben and Ian. For the last few years of her life Elsie was well-cared for in Beech Court Nursing Home, Eynsham.

Please remember in your prayers: Val D, Gladys, Ron, Cicley and Sharon, Brian, Carmen, Ken and Phyl, Heather, Paul, Nancy and Elgin, Muriel, Jean, Megan, Ruth H, Mary P and Andreen all living with their own particular health difficulties.

We also continue to remember our housebound friends and others who sometimes find it difficult to join us at church: Pino and Sylvia in Mill House; Sharon in Merryfield House also Gill, Joyce and Michael, Yvonne, Dot and Margaret B living in their own homes. We pray for them and trust that they are well cared for, and aware of our loving, caring thoughts and the peace and comfort of God's presence with them daily.

Anne Crawford



Aspire to inspire before you expire.

If talking to plants helps them grow, imagine what speaking kindly to humans can do!

The Reverend John Platts 1937-2019

We were sorry to hear that the Reverend John Platts died aged 82 on 2 November after a long illness. He was minister at High Street and Circuit Superintendent 1985-87. John and Betty, Rachel and Andrew lived at the manse at 21 Woodstock Road, and left after only two years with us, when John was appointed Chair of the Darlington District.

John was a wonderful preacher with carefully planned and thoughtful sermons conveying deep theological truths. I can still remember some of his sermon illustrations - for example people whose lives were disrupted by events could react as if a brick had been thrown into a frozen pond - all jagged edges that endure - or their lives could resemble a liquid pond where the initial splash turns into ripples that eventually fade away. His taste in hymns was traditional (Hymn and Psalms had only recently appeared). Later when worship songs started to become popular, I asked him what he thought of them. He said that 'Servant King' was an excellent song about the atonement. John had a range of elaborate but effective easel-based visual aids for family services. He made a superb MC for a church variety show, with a long-running joke about a man with a wonderful watch that would do all sorts of things. It turned out that the wheelbarrow he was pushing contained the battery needed to make it all work. John's pastoral care was first-class. He was an outstanding visitor, quick to respond to a need. He would arrive, sit down, give his full attention for 20 minutes, make wise, supportive and helpful remarks, and leave. In this way he visited the entire membership of High Street (200+ members) between starting in September and Christmas! He was greatly helped by Betty, who was the classic supportive minister's wife. She sat quietly at the back and talked to people, and was very aware of what was happening in people's lives.

The town centre development east of High Street was starting, which opened up new possibilities for the church premises, which had become very tired. John had to chair complex Church Councils with some strong personalities who were almost equally divided between redeveloping the existing premises and building a completely new church on land to the rear of the current church. When the Reverend Ian Lunn, John's successor, came to visit, he was told by John that the development would be largely over by the time he arrived. In fact, the discussions and planning continued through the whole of Ian's time with us, and didn't come to fruition until 1995!

As northerners, John and Betty were wary of moving so far south, but came to enjoy Witney and the sense of being part of the community, with a recognisable identity as the Methodist Minister for Witney. This contrasted with some larger conurbations where John was responsible for a rather diffuse area with no clear boundaries.

John had a practical streak, carrying out paperhanging at the manse, which must have gladdened the circuit stewards. As far as I am aware, he and Betty did not complain about their rather basic kitchen facilities, and John was highly amused when a stirrer got a subversive reference into the Peterborough column of the

Daily Telegraph about the alleged extravagance of 'the Spanish-style patio and high-tech kitchen' being provided for their successors.

It was undoubtedly a difficult decision when, shortly after arriving in Witney, John was offered the chairmanship of his home district of Darlington. Betty was particularly upset at the prospect of leaving Witney so soon. In their second year, Andrew moved to a school in Darlington, and Betty went north to look after him. John thought nothing of a round trip to Darlington in a day to visit them!

John said he was interested to become a chairman as he had never been able to understand what a chairman actually did. Some years later, when John returned to circuit in Grange-over-Sands, I asked him about his time as a district chair. He said it wasn't the most fulfilling time of his ministry as too often he was called in to sort out problems by superintendents who hadn't had the sense to ask for help at an earlier stage. By the time John arrived, everyone was shooting at everyone else, and he was caught in the cross-fire!

We enjoyed John and Betty's friendship and continued interest in Witney members after they left Witney. I suspect that, as a district chair, John missed the day-to-day involvement with ordinary people. We later visited them after John's retirement, where John's devoted care for, by then, an incapacitated and almost unresponsive Betty, was deeply touching to see.

A lovely man and a wonderful minister and friend.

Keith Crawford



High Tea at High Street

4pm in the Coffee Bar at High Street Methodist Church, Witney

- **Sunday 19 January**
- **Sunday 16 February**

All welcome but booking is essential. Call Brenda to reserve your place. There is no charge!



Supported by Witney Rotary Club and Witney Lions

Mother has a New Address

On 21 November, Mother, (Elsie Cobb), having spent six happy years in Beech Court, had become extremely tired and was finding it difficult to stay awake. Though well settled with the friends she had made in the staff, Mother decided to accept the Lord's open invitation to move to paradise.

Having been a High Street member for 60+ years, Mother had experienced and drew great strength from the love, support and fellowship she found in High Street so the family decided a service of celebration should take place there.

High Street sprang into action and it was deeply moving to be made aware of the love and respect shown to Mother with a vast number of friends willing to be actively involved in all of the arrangements.

Reverend Jason Cooke was a tower of strength throughout, making himself readily available to take care of all our need. Credit as well to Reverend Roger Faulkner and Reverend Richard Donoghue, who having both blessed Mother in their ministry at High Street, willingly took part in leading the service.

Mother and I became friends with Peter and Wyn when they joined High Street and Peter blessed us by leading our singing as the organist.

Further blessings; all the stewards made sure they could help and did a fantastic job.

Flowers meant a lot to Mother and so Joyce, Doris and Mary, our flower ladies created some wonderful floral displays.

All these blessings were added to by the hard work carries out by our excellent catering team who made sure everyone was well provided for.

Add to all that the huge amount of cards and prayerful support we received, that too was a great blessing to us. Thank you all and thanks Mum, for everything.

Roy Cobb and family

High Street Women's Fellowship

2nd and 4th Mondays at 2.30pm in the Wesley Room followed by tea, biscuits and a chat.

No meeting in January.

Monday 10 February. Speaker: Mike Limmer

An invitation to all ladies (and gentlemen!) to an informal, friendly afternoon with hymns, prayers and an interesting informative talk. Come and join us!



Knit and Natter

High Street Church Coffee Bar

Every Tuesday from 10.30am to 1pm

During January the meeting will be in Delice cafe, opposite the church, while the coffee bar and kitchen



are being refurbished.

A New Year

The beginning of another year can bring mixed emotions. Some of us may have just experienced the best year ever and look forward to an even better one ahead. Others may have just trudged through one deep struggle after another and look ahead with dread at what the future will bring. Whatever has been your experience; an easy stroll through green, flower studded meadows or a hard, exhausting climb up a winding narrow path, or a mixture of the two, one truth rings clear for everyone – you have not been alone, and will not be alone, whatever the coming year brings. Christmas celebrates the birth of God on earth and powerfully brings home that God is with us, always and whatever, and though the world around us shifts God never changes and his love never fails.

When we think of the dark things that happen in our world – the famines, the wars, the disasters, overwhelming catastrophes with death at the outset and disease in their wake, the thousands of people living a travesty of what life should be – we wonder, and worry about, what lies ahead.

Help us to hold onto the knowledge that you are in the world and remember the Christmas message that you are Immanuel, God with us. But let us not be complacent, it is not enough to hold that thought – let that knowledge fire us to action, to show your love practically to those in need, both near and far.

We long for others to know you better, to be set free by the Good News of your love and salvation, to have life in all its fullness.

We pray for those who especially need to experience your love and nearness:

- those who dread what the coming year will bring

- those who are leaving those they love further behind in human time

- those who face the year alone

- those who feel that life has nothing to offer them

- those who feel that they have nothing to offer

Give us a quick eye and a warm heart to show your compassion, to encourage and support.

We pray for those who are filled with excitement at this time:

- those taking new opportunities

- those broadening their horizons

- those embarking on new relationships

Give us a generous spirit to rejoice and delight in the good fortune and happiness of others.

This is also a time for resolutions – as we look into our hearts we see that we need your guidance and so we pray for ourselves.

Help us

- to know you more deeply though prayer and fellowship

- to be more understanding and forgiving

- to be more aware of the needs of others

- to reflect your love, to laugh more, to delight in the good,

But also, to know that you love us and forgive us when we fail.

RL

A Sunday Afternoon Treat

What do you do on a Sunday afternoon? After that lovely roast dinner do you have a snooze, or watch sport or a film on the television? Perhaps you go for a walk? Maybe it's time when you feel a little lonely and would like some company. How about a change? Why not come along to the Cream Teas at Witney's High Street Methodist Church at 4pm on the 3rd Sunday of every month? All are welcome.

We serve freshly made sandwiches, scones with clotted cream and jam, plus a selection of cakes accompanied by tea or coffee. These teas are free thanks to the generous support of Witney's Lions and Rotary Clubs, for which we are extremely grateful. It is an excellent chance to meet new people or to see old friends, to chat and share a laugh or two.

All we ask is that you book a place by the Friday prior to the Sunday, and, if you have any dietary requirements, you let us know when you book. If you require more details, see the notice on the board in the Coffee Bar or call Brenda. We look forward to seeing you soon.

The
Cream Teas Team

**1st Sunday
every month**

4-6pm



**5 January:
Epiphany Party**

**2 February
Wedding in Cana**

High Street Methodist Church

**1 March:
The lost sheep**

Fun Food Fellowship

All are welcome at Messy Church! It is an informal, interactive gathering for people of any age or background to come and explore the Christian faith. Come on your own, with a friend or bring your whole family. There are always activities to use your creativity and imagination, as well as space for quiet or conversation. Make new friends and catch up with old ones. If you've never been, we'd love you to come along! You don't need to bring a child but all children must be accompanied by an adult. We finish by sharing a meal.

www.witneymeth.org.uk

Never predict the future – even at New Year!

'We don't like their sound and guitar music is on the way out.'

Decca Recording Co. rejecting The Beatles in 1962

'The wireless music box has no imaginable commercial value. Who would pay for a message sent to nobody in particular?'

David Sarnoff's friends replying to his urgings for investment in radio c 1920s

'I think there is a world market for maybe five computers.'

Thomas Watson, chairman of IBM, 1943

New Year's Prayer: I don't know about you, but I hate the long, dark winter days. So, at this time of the year, my mind looks forward to the brightness of spring and sometimes revisits days from the past. This is a story from another era. A time when I used to sleep tucked up in my foldout bed, with a wooden bar propping the mechanism in place, because the bed would slump otherwise, and my parents couldn't afford to replace it. When I shared the bedroom with my sister, nine and a half years my elder, with our matching quilts made by mum. Her presence there always made me feel that any monsters or dangers were kept at bay. Quilts were expensive and money was in short supply, as usual. So, my mum, who didn't have much schooling but had a PhD in the School of Make Do and Mend, sewed a stripy blue blanket on to some material, left over from her job as a seamstress. Rectangles and squares with different textures, and so the quilt of my childhood was born.

My family, in all its complexities, tensions, needless arguments, broken wings, frustrations, silences and fears, has been my safety blanket for so long. They gave me the most important thing they could: the ability to give and receive love, and most of all, the drive to move forward whatever obstacles on the way. They were my safety blanket, my warmest memories, always at the root of my present and future, until three years ago, when a family crisis occurred, the monsters were unleashed, and some darkness seeped into the surface. It made me realise how darkness inhabits all of us.

We never had much, but in a sense, we had everything. There was no money for holidays but we had many books and a TV set that was always on. When my parents' dining room furniture was falling apart, eaten away by termites, we had to wait a few months until we were given my aunt's second hand set. I inherited lots of clothes from my sister and brother. And one Christmas, my mother asked that I put some of the money I had been gifted by my uncle inside my slippers, so when I woke up in the morning the three Wise Men would have afforded to get me some presents.

As the years passed, I was lucky enough to have my own amazing family. Nothing hurts like the fear that I could ever lose them. And that is the true monster under the bed. It eats my heart with anxiety when I see my parents getting older and frailer in the distance, more unable to cope with the stresses of life, overburdened by worry at a time when they should be relaxing and enjoying their final years. Nothing frustrates me like the knowledge that, however many times we speak about detaching yourself from conflictive situations, this is so much against their way of parenting, and of seeing life, that this is just not going to happen.

So, my prayer for the new year is that everyone who is struggling may see the light and feel the power of their soul, giving energy to their feet as they move towards their horizon - so they can run, walk or even crawl if need be. So they can move towards being the best version of themselves they can. So they can see that others love them for being who they are and that in loving others and loving ourselves we have the power to defeat any monsters and to fight the darkness within.

Eva Oliver



Grand Re-opening of the Coffee Bar

The

Meeting Point

High Street Methodist Church

Saturday 1st February

10am-Noon

**Free Tea
& Coffee**

**Music &
Children's
Activities**



Holocaust Memorial Day – 27 January

Don't be content in your life just to do no wrong, be prepared every day to try and do some good

Sir Nicholas Winton, who rescued 669 children from Nazi-occupied Europe.

Holocaust Memorial Day Trust (HMDT) encourages remembrance in a world scarred by genocide. It promotes and supports Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) – the international day on 27 January which remembers the six million Jews murdered during the Holocaust, alongside the millions of other people killed under Nazi Persecution and in subsequent genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur. 27 January 2020 marks 75 years since the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the largest Nazi death camp, and the 25th anniversary of the genocide in Srebrenica in Bosnia.

From 1945 Marshal Tito ruled Yugoslavia and succeeded in suppressing nationalist and ethnic tensions between the six republics making up the state. After Tito's death in 1980, nationalist parties began to gain power in the republics and in the early 1990s, Yugoslavia disintegrated into six states. When Bosnia declared independence in 1992, it soon descended into civil war. The population of Bosnia and Herzegovina consisted of Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims), Bosnian Serbs (Orthodox Christians who have close cultural ties with neighbouring Serbia), and Bosnian Croats (Roman Catholics who have close cultural ties with neighbouring Croatia). Bosnian independence was resisted by the Bosnian Serb population who saw their future as part of 'Greater Serbia'. Bosnia became the victim of the Bosnian Serbs' determined wish for political domination, which it was prepared to achieve by isolating ethnic groups and, if necessary, exterminating them.

In July 1995, Bosnian Serb troops and paramilitaries led by Ratko Mladić began shelling the town of Srebrenica. On 11 July Mladić claimed Srebrenica for Bosnian Serbs. On 12 July, Bosniak men and boys over the age of 12 were forcibly separated from women and younger children, who were deported on trucks and buses. As the deportation commenced, eyewitnesses observed General Mladić arriving in Srebrenica accompanied by journalists and TV cameras. He tried to calm the panicking civilians by handing out bread and water to the refugees and tossing sweets to the children. By the end of the day, 5,000 women, children and elderly people were deported by the Bosnian Serb forces to Kladanj. Over the next 30 hours, 23,000 people were deported. That evening, the systematic murder of the Bosnian men and boys left in Srebrenica began. Over the next 72 hours up to 8,000 men and boys were murdered by Bosnian Serb forces in and around Srebrenica. Many were shot in the act of trying to escape. Their bodies were bulldozed into mass graves and concealed. The Bosnian war resulted in the death of around 100,000 people, and the displacement of over two million men, women and children. A campaign of war crimes, 'ethnic cleansing' and genocide was perpetrated by Bosnian Serb troops under the orders of Slobodan Milošević (the President of Serbia),

Radovan Karadžić (the Bosnian Serb leader), and Ratko Mladić (the Bosnian Serb

commander). In 1993, a UN resolution established the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in order to hold the perpetrators of the atrocities to account. Between 1993 and 2017, 90 individuals were sentenced, including former Bosnian Serb President Radovan Karadžić. The UN described the events in Srebrenica as an act of genocide and it is the largest incidence of mass-murder in Europe since World War Two.

Every year a theme for HMD is chosen; the theme for 2020 is 'Stand Together'. Genocidal regimes have always deliberately fractured societies by marginalising certain groups. In the years leading up to the Holocaust, Nazi policies and propaganda deliberately encouraged divisions within German society – urging 'Aryan' Germans to keep themselves separate from their Jewish neighbours. The Holocaust, Nazi Persecution of other groups and each subsequent genocide, was enabled by ordinary citizens not standing with their targeted neighbours and speaking out against oppression.

Unfortunately, genocide is not just a historical fact it is always a potential present reality and must still be resisted every day. We cannot be complacent. Even in the UK, prejudice and the language of hatred is rising and there is increasing division in communities. Now more than ever, this needs to be challenged and we need to stand together with others in our communities in order to stop division and the spread of identity-based hostility in our society.

In 2019 HMDT commissioned research into the general public's knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust. Alongside some encouraging results, there were some worrying findings. 5% of those polled didn't believe the Holocaust really happened, 8% believed the scale of the Holocaust has been exaggerated, and 64% do not know how many Jews were murdered or grossly underestimate the number. It is a similar picture in Bosnia - despite the post-conflict justice efforts, ethnic Bosnians continue to be marginalised and denial of the genocide is widespread amongst local politicians. Mladen Grujičić, the current mayor of Srebrenica, has stated that he does not believe that the massacres of Bosniaks that took place in Srebrenica were a genocide.

In 2017/18, there were 94,098 hate crime offences recorded by the police in England and Wales, an increase of 17% compared with the previous year. This continues a trend of increasing numbers of offences recorded in recent years. In order to combat hate in our communities, individuals have a crucial role to play in changing what is seen as acceptable language and behaviour – through challenging lazy assumptions and discriminatory, dehumanising language when we come across them and through education, dialogue and involvement.

Info from

hmd.org.uk

Look on hmd.org.uk for background, stories and how to get involved

SPACE2B

You will be very welcome to join us 9.25 to 10.30am on Wednesdays for a chat, followed by a Bible study, topic for discussion and led quiet prayer. Afterwards enjoy a cup of tea/coffee. We meet in Witney. For more info contact Brenda

Minster Lovell - Community Counts

Some time before I got involved with the fellowship at Minster Lovell in what is now called Community Counts, the people there had been considering their future as a worshipping congregation. Numbers had dropped over recent years bringing the difficulties of resourcing traditional roles and financing the upkeep of the church. If nothing changed, the fellowship saw the future of the building in the hands of an estate agent. There was a strong feeling that this should not happen; partly due to the importance of the building with its associated memories of events and people, but mainly as it would be a loss of a potential community space to the village. This at a time when new homes were being built bringing in new people. Initial thoughts turned to improving the building, and plans were drawn up and amounts of money started to be discussed. Things stalled however due to various reasons beyond the fellowship's control, and investing in a brighter, better equipped building as a means to inviting people into the fellowship, was no longer an option. I am impressed listening to stories of churches that have re-imagined themselves.

The key message I had taken away from their initiatives was to offer what the surrounding community tell you they need (as opposed to what the church may feel the community wants). We set out to ask the people of Minster Lovell by producing a questionnaire delivered to every home, collating the feedback and hosting an open morning to share the results and have conversations with anyone who came. As you might imagine, all this was supported by a team of people who were passionate about the preservation of the building as a potential community space. However, we resisted structure and formalism having only a list of things we had to get decisions on each time we met, no formal roles or offices and only a summary email of actions in place of minutes. Our conversations focussed on the practical and the short term. In July 2019 we started Saturday Café – a weekly open-door opportunity offering free tea/coffee and biscuits and a place to sit and chat. Saturday Café is now able to provide 'proper' coffee, frothy milk and home baked cakes – everything though is still free. In September 2019 we added weekly Wednesday afternoon and evening groups (again with free tea/coffee and biscuits), for the most popular activities voted on by the village. These included (any kind of) craft, light lunches, jigsaws, CD/DVD swap, mending broken appliances and IT support for 'phone, tablet and laptop. Starting in February 2020, these have been rationalised into a single first Wednesday of the month 'café plus' featuring light lunch, crafts and IT support running from 12:30pm to 6pm. The timetable for 2020 is simpler to remember and publicise! Numeric growth at these events has grown; on average over 20 people attend Saturday Café each week. Light lunch has been the most successful second event with about 15 people and IT support – while not massively attended – being perceived as the biggest value-added service – even if not yet well known/understood (free IT support in a church – what's THAT all about?!).

If this article has any value however, it is not to be found in recording the cold facts of a scheme that has survived its initial six-month self-imposed probation

period (another key lesson from re-imagine – if your grand plan doesn't work, stop doing it and do something else instead) or in the numbers of non-church people who now come each week (some faithfully bringing cake to share) to meet and spend a fun time together. Where there is value and, I hope, worth, is in reflecting on what makes this scheme such a joy to be part of.

There are three groups of people involved in Community Counts. Firstly, there is the group of volunteers who fill the rota. The scheme has certainly benefitted from the time given by already stretched church goers and others like myself but mostly from the time, energy and work injected by people who do not attend the church services but share the idea of developing spaces to create community; Minster Lovell has nowhere like Community Counts for people to go to that is so open, informal, cheap and regular. Another re-imagine fact – your scheme will fail if the people for whom it is intended aren't involved in running it. Spun another way, don't invent something that depends wholly on already overcommitted church people to resource. It is through what the team has DONE, that things have actually happened. Loving service of those around you demands your attendance and your energy, on the ground with the very people you hope to serve.

Secondly, there is the church fellowship and the tension that needs to be lovingly explored and discussed to balance a core Christian desire to be open to the community (to live out the great commandment to love our neighbour) whilst coming up against the understandable moments of hesitation and panic over whether doing THAT with the space is going too far!

Thirdly, there are those who come out of their homes to attend, share, laugh and enjoy chat – plus that cake and 'proper' coffee! Seeing the fun that they have and the relationships that have developed, hearing the stories that hint of a new home, new family; these are what inspire the first group to cheerfully want to be part of the rota and what give the second group a new excitement about the opportunities for use of the building. The personal journey that those involved have travelled has been every bit as transformative as the experience of the lonely people who now find a regular point of contact with new friends. The team constantly try and remind themselves to enjoy this journey and every good session rather than on where 'the scheme' may be heading. We continue to resist the temptation to formalise roles, define structure and become anything other than a group of individuals who see value in greeting with love anyone who comes through the door.

Community Counts is a really small, simple, obvious idea that works within the context of a village like Minster Lovell. For those of us who call ourselves Christians, it is one small way of offering the love we have unconditionally received from God to others, an opportunity to step out of the boat and take a risk in following where Jesus leads us. We continue to learn so much from our non-Christian partners who bring a clear reason to our discussions and are more easily able to ask 'why not?' when we get distracted by tradition and (Church) experience. Scripture (the Bible) is the fourth element in our

Methodist quadrilateral (something every Methodist preacher and leader of worship needs)

to use) and is what we Christians uniquely bring to our thinking and that is reflected in the way Community Counts uses the church space. We have two or three long, low coffee tables with the seats informally arranged around them. The point is that everyone who comes sits together in a big group. When people lean in to get their mug or plate, they draw closer to one another. People move around to sit with others as conversations ebb and flow; we come into a space to be together, not to sit isolated at tables with those we arrived with, people offer to get refills and more cake for one another. We share in the company of one another in what is less of a coffee shop and more like a (big) family living room. The Kingdom of Heaven on earth is revealed one person to another, where love, acceptance, kindness and care are the driving forces. It's a privilege to be a part of this for as long as it continues, in whatever way God leads us and I thank the team for the opportunity to learn and grow through our experiences.

Andrew Maisey

Experience Christmas 2020

Nine year 3 classes from seven local primary schools came in to Experience Christmas for themselves, with the help of our loyal team of over 20 people. They talked about the preparations that we make for Christmas, they heard the story of the visit of the angel to Mary, the wise men who followed the star and brought amazing gifts, the journey of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem and the shepherds who heard of the birth of Jesus from angels. In small groups they thought about the gifts we can give of our time and our love, those little acts of kindness that can make a big difference to someone, they decorated an angel to take home as a reminder that God is with them and they do not need to be afraid. They decided what gift they would have given to Jesus, here are my favourites:

- Everything he needs.
- A sunflower and a rose.
- I would give some of my finest hugs I have ever done...

What more could he want?

At the end each child wrote down what they most enjoyed or learnt.

Here are a few of the 280:

- I loved it all.
- God is always with us.
- Eating the biscuits.
- Caring for everyone even if you don't like them.
- Jesus is our present from God.
- Christmas isn't just about getting presents.
- The LOVE!

What a privilege it is for us to share this most amazing story with so many children, some of whom have not heard it before. Thank you to all who helped. I wonder what struck you this Christmas?...

I wonder what was the most important thing you learnt?...

I wonder what you will take away from Christmas, that will stay with you as you journey through 2020?...

Brenda Woods

Candlemas – 2 February

Candlemas – like so many Christian festivals – is a melange of pagan, pre-Christian traditions and later Christian commemorations. It falls 40 days after Christmas and is the midpoint of winter, halfway between the winter solstice, the shortest day, and the spring equinox. In pre-Christian times it was known as the 'Feast of Lights' and celebrated the increasing strength of the life-giving sun as winter gives way to spring.

Near the end of the winter season, as ancient people looked forward to the planting season of spring, many different cultures found ways to celebrate this shift from the cold and dark days to a warmer and more productive time of year. Ancient Celts took this time of year to honour Brigid, the goddess of purification and fertility. They would process from their homes across the fields while praying for the health of their soil before planting. The Romans associated their festival with the god Lupercal, their god of fertility and shepherds, again playing into the desire to shake off winter's sterility and darkness and bring growth and light in the planting time.

With the growth and expansion of Christianity, this pagan festival of light was Christianised, so the midpoint of winter was marked by the bringing forward and the blessing of all the candles to be used in the coming year. It was the festival, or mass, of the candles, hence Candlemas. It also marks the occasion when Mary and Joseph took Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem to present him to God and give thanks as told in Luke chapter 2:22-40. This was when the family were met by an elderly couple, Anna and Simeon, and Simeon took Jesus into his arms and proclaimed him a Light to the World. 'Lord, now let your servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for my eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.'

So, Candlemas is a time of rejoicing that God has kept his promise and given his Messiah for the sake of the world. But there is another side to Candlemas. Simeon goes on to speak some chilling words of prophecy and heartbreak for Mary: 'This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.'

Candlemas has been described as having one foot in Christmas and one foot in Easter, it is a watershed when we look back at the birth of Jesus and we look forward to the cross of Easter. Candlemas reminds us that Christmas is not an event for one day, but an invitation to a new life.



Candlemas marks the end of Christmas – it was traditionally the day when the greenery and decorations put up for the festivities were taken down and there still persists the custom that if decorations aren't removed by 5 January, Twelfth Night, then they should stay up until 2 February.

2 February is also, apparently, Yorkshire Pudding Day – but that's another story!
sources RL. Various

Piety, Pleasure, Politics

...Even though we do not all believe exactly the same thing about God, most of us here do believe that God is the reality 'in whom we live, move and have our being'...(and) what we all make of God is very important indeed: to engage in any God-talk at all is a risky and responsible thing to do. For what we make of God affects the whole of who we are, what we believe and practice, what we think, and what we do and say...God-talk really is important and...doing theology is actually a very exciting thing, as well as an important thing, to do.

I really like sport...Sport is a wonderful, wonderful thing. (But) I get exasperated when sportspeople say after some major triumph something like: 'I am evidence that you can be anything you want to be if you just believe and try hard enough'...Ultimately, such a comment devalues sport. Sport...can be enjoyed fully whatever level you play at, and however good you may or may not be...That's precisely why it is so crucial. It is about enjoyment and exhilaration at whatever standard you play at. I also like films, TV, newspapers, books and music...all sorts of music. Why do I mention such enthusiasms?: because they are examples of what make life enjoyable and pleasurable, at the same time as being really important as channels in and through we discover more about who God is and what God is doing...I've spent...three decades exploring and researching the ways in which theology and the arts and popular culture interweave...From teenage years on I was asking: where is God in the world, and what is God up to, and how am I, and how are churches, part of that?

Playing was, then, never just playing. Don't get me wrong: I didn't start doing things purely for their theological pay-off...It's just that my faith gave me a whole world into which my artistic and sporting activity fitted. And vice versa: what I was learning about the world and myself, about history and about the culture of others, both challenged and enriched my faith. The experience of God became all the more scintillating and energising the more of the world of the arts and culture I encountered and engaged with...simply because of the ways in which God is entangled, enmeshed, incarnate in the world.

(On Being Rooted) It's not, though, possible to do any sort of God-talk unless there is some sort of God-talk around you to begin with...Those of us who believe in God hold to the view that God *is* before there is anything else. So whatever God-talk is, it's only possible because God *is* first. And then we can only do God-talk by latching on to what those before us, and alongside us, have made, and are making of God. Otherwise, we'd be inventing God for ourselves...It's valuable to do lots of other exploring, and listening, and probing, and encountering in order to make sense of, and get more from, what my evangelical young self called 'a personal relationship with Jesus'...The journey from my teenage self to now also meant that I studied the Bible – and not only within the community of faith. Study of both Bible and theology, far from destroying my faith, enriched it no end. I did detailed study of the Gospels and went in search of the historical Jesus...examining the relationship between the Jesus of history, the different portrayals of Jesus in the Gospels, and the

interpretations of Jesus as the Christ throughout Christian and world history...And then I went exploring

what it means when people are 'in Christ', because I began to see that this couldn't possibly be confined to what we call 'church'. Jesus was not, after all, a Christian himself. He was more interested, it seemed, in the Reign of God than in organised religion – though never ceased to be a loyal Jew...

'On Raging (Righteously)'...It may seem an odd thing to say but there is a clear sense in which I had to learn how to be angry. But it was only later that I began to rumble the fact that there was also a whole strand of Christian history which would bear witness to the political side of the life of Jesus, and the political side of the justice sought by God for and in the world. Jesus got angry, so we need to be angry too. Of course, the Christian world of my youth had not been unpolitical. It had simply been rather quietist...not rocking the boat. Many people helped me...to ask hard questions about supposedly a-political Christianity. I began to appreciate that there's an appropriate anger that's part of Christian faith. To be consistent with the Jesus who turned over the tables in the temple you have to know what it is you stand for, even what you're willing to fight for, whilst also recognising that simply because you want to rant about or against something doesn't necessarily make you right. It's vital that you're doing your background work as you rage, as only righteous raging is of God...As we know well, Christians disagree at times. What's vital, though, is that those of us who are Christian handle not just respectfully, but always 'in, with and under Christ', the contradictory convictions we may hold as a Christian body. If we can't justify theologically our convictions, we shouldn't hold them. But we can't dodge politics. And we can't always agree.

So, 'On Playing' becomes 'Pleasure', 'On Being Rooted (and Grounded)' becomes 'Piety'; 'On Raging (Righteously)' becomes 'Politics'.

Pleasure is a really difficult term, as it may easily imply self-seeking, individualism, frivolousness, indifference to others, excessive sensuality...many things that various forms of Christianity have not been much in favour of over the years. Christians are much more comfortable with words like 'enjoyment' and 'joy' and 'bliss'...But I am supported by the hymn-writer Isaac Watts who reminded us that 'religion never was designed to make our pleasures less'. Admittedly, Watts might not have written those words in quite the same way now, but I receive them as a reminder that faith does not squeeze the pips out of life. On the contrary, faith allows us to enjoy life to the full. It gives us a measure of, and ways of discerning, what is genuinely life-enhancing. Even if a particular pursuit of pleasure may need reining in, pleasure is a welcome part of life.

Now what about piety? For faith to play a role we need to be rooted and grounded in some kind of faith tradition, and to be carrying with us a working, usable spirituality. Christian faith roots us in the Gospel, supports us within a rich doctrinal tradition, and invites us to participate in a range of practices which keep our faith buoyant. Keeping all of those elements living is what it means to be 'cultivating piety'... (but 'pious' usually means) 'holier-than-thou', stand-offish, supercilious. But... 'piety' at its best is about having a balanced, grounded, nourishing approach to daily life...the cultivation of piety means

supporting people to develop a healthy, structured spiritual lifestyle which takes life seriously

– whilst still enjoying life – and in the company of others. The piety we all need is warm, emotionally satisfying, intellectually stretching, and grounded in deep friendships...It is the basis on which we are able to make prayerful evaluations and hard choices about both the pleasure and politics which make up our life. 'Politics'...is the way communities organise themselves, acknowledging...who has power and authority, and why...There is a politics of the church, of the family, and politics in community life and working life as well as politics in the way that government locally, nationally and internationally takes shape. All of these politics relate to faith. What we believe about God, who we believe God to be, and how we believe...that we relate to God affects how we participate in, and make decisions about, all of the structured forms of human community in which we participate. And because politics is about setting up structures which do not just relate to ourselves, it is crucial for us to think in and from faith about whose interests are being served in the forms of political life we support, and the political decisions we make...Christians must not become detached and distant from political processes. Human life has to be organised somehow, and it's vital that we know who is pulling the strings and why...Pleasure and piety without politics would be in danger of being self-serving, even if spiritually well-intended.

Pleasure, piety and politics provide a framework within which we can understand more than just our own lives. It's a framework which we can also use to commend Christian faith to others. It seems some distance from encouraging people to accept Jesus as their own personal saviour. But...it's simply a different way of demonstrating how the figure of Jesus relates to the practice of everyday living. Jesus is a politically inspiring figure. As the Christ in and through whom we can relate to others, and experience God now, we can seek to cultivate a piety 'in Christ' which nurtures and develops us spiritually. And as the figure in relation to whom we are able to adjudge what is, and is not, of God in the world we are helped to make decisions about how to participate in the whole of cultural life...

How are we to understand the relative weighting of the three Ps? What if the world of politics took over? This could mean that the immediate demands and needs of human communities took up such space, that there was little room for fun and laughter, and little opportunity for theological considerations to be able to critique how societies are being organised. 'God' would be controlled by political ideologies. When pleasure takes over then piety is providing little constraint on a life-style of potentially quite selfish experience-gathering...We may be prone to think that piety should predominate. (But) if the cultivation of piety were to make us too religious, then we might spend so much time cultivating our religiosity that we might not be doing what's necessary in the world. It may be safer to return to a sense of equal balance between the three, even if their inter-relationship will always be contested. Pleasure, Piety and Politics are all necessary, and God's wrapped up in all three. Piety needs cultivating; politics really does matter; and 'religion never was designed to

make our pleasures less'. In the midst of those three dimensions of life, God enables us to live life to the full.

From the address by Clive Marsh, Vice-President of the Methodist Conference, to Conference 2019

Meditation for Candlemas

God said, 'Let there be light', and there was light.
The psalmist said, 'In your light do we see light.'
Jesus said, 'I am the light of the world.'

Look at a lighted candle,
rest your eyes on the candle flame,
allow your thoughts to pass through it to the truths it symbolises.

Watch the flame as it grows in strength,
seemingly without substance, yet casting light around it.

See beyond it to the light of the glory of Christ,
filling the skies,
declaring before men and women the eternal truths of the gospel.

See it as it flickers,
caught in the whisper of a draught, but never extinguished.

It is the light God created before all created things,
and it will always give light in the darkness.

Let the light of the flame enter your heart.

Do not resist what it shows there, however painful.

Let it cast its quiet radiance on your disorder, hardness, selfishness,
all that you keep in the dark and hide even from your closest friend.

Let it shame you by its revelation of your inadequacy,
your preoccupation with yourself,

your instability,

your shirking of responsibility, decisions and sacrifice,
your lack of generosity and enthusiasm.

Let the flame penetrate those murky corners where you hide memories you
would rather forget:

the persistent buried grudge;

the half-acknowledged enmity, smouldering away;

the bitterness of that loss, that you never turned into a sacrifice;

the self-indulgences you cling to;

the secret fear of failure which saps your initiative and is really inverted pride;

the pessimism which is an insult to God's joy.

Review these things with shame and penitence in the steadfast light of Christ
and as the flame of the candle burns the oxygen around it to create light,
so know that Christ's love burns up all that of which you are ashamed.

Know yourself forgiven and renewed.

Adapted by RL



Mother decided that 10-year-old Cathy should get something practical for Christmas. 'A savings account for you was suggested. Cathy was delighted. 'It's your account, so you fill in the application form'. Cathy was doing fine until she came to the space for 'Name of your former bank'. After some hesitation she put down 'Piggy'.

Newland Methodist Chapel Meetings and Speakers January – February 2020

Thursdays weekly

1st and 3rd Tuesdays

3rd Saturday and 4th Sunday

Chapel closed for ceiling repair 6 - 20 January

Tuesday	21 January	2.30pm	Newland Friends
Thursday	23 January	7.30pm	Reverend Jason Cooke
Sunday	26 January	3pm	Reverend Jason Cooke Holy Communion
Thursday	30 January	7.30pm	Anna Pile Her story and current work
Tuesday	4 February	2.30pm	Newland Friends
Thursday	6 February	7.30pm	Jude Levermore My trip to Gaza
Thursday	13 February	7.30pm	Verner and Hannie Open Doors
Saturday	15 February	10am-12 noon	Coffee Morning Tea, coffee, cake and chat
		2.30pm	Prayers
Tuesday	18 February	2.30pm	Newland Friends
Thursday	20 February	7.30pm	Reverend Jason Cooke
Sunday	23 February	3pm	Sunday Worship Reverend Fred Ireland
Thursday	27 February	7.30pm	Katie Lowe My visit to Japan

Thursdays at High Street

Prayer: Thursdays 9.30-10.10am

A quiet time to reflect on the needs of others,
our church fellowship and concerns worldwide.

Third Thursday Holy Communion

16 January and Thursday 20 February 10.30-11.15am

Holy Communion, with hymns, prayers and a message from Rev Jason Cooke.
An opportunity for mid-week worship or if you miss on Sunday.



Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 18 - 25 January

This is an annual initiative whereby Christian communities throughout the world are invited to pray for one another and for greater Christian Unity. The theme for 2020 is 'They showed an unusual kindness', which finds its origins in Acts 27:18 - 28:10. Material has been prepared by the churches of Malta and Gozo.

On 10 February many Christians in Malta celebrate the Feast of the Shipwreck of St Paul, marking and giving thanks for the arrival of Christian faith on these islands. The reading from the Acts of the Apostles used for the feast is the text chosen for this year's Week of Prayer.

Hospitality is a much-needed virtue in our search for Christian unity. It calls us to a greater generosity to those in need. The people who showed unusual kindness to Paul and his companions did not yet know Christ, and yet it is through their unusual kindness that a divided people were drawn closer together. Our own Christian unity will be discovered not only through showing hospitality to one another, but also through loving encounters with those who do not share our language, culture or faith. In such tempestuous journeys and chance encounters, God's will for his Church and all people comes to fulfilment. As Paul will proclaim in Rome, this salvation of God has been sent to all peoples (see Acts 28:28).

We know that God speaks to us in still small voices, but also in the people and places we least expect. In supposed barren hard places there can spring unimaginable beauty and nourishment. In spite of the turbulence of the world at the present time, we also discover acts of kindness, of love, forgiveness and hospitality in places or from people we did not expect. As in the natural world, there are still the places where the water of life seeps into the mainstream and brings colour and joy and offers a hopeful future. The bible story gives us a visceral story of human fear, survival, hope and love. It will invite us to reflect upon the abundance of God's grace and fullness, that we can see if only we stop and look closely at what is in front of us. In the most difficult situations, inhospitable places and even in the most inhospitable people, there we will find something of God's grace. We are invited in this year's Week of Prayer for Christian Unity materials to see God working through people and places which offer unusual kindness.

Bob Fyffe, General Secretary, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland

We pray for unity because Jesus prayed that His disciples would be one, that the world might believe (John 17:20-21). Paul also urged the churches to which he wrote to recognise their unity in Christ, even though there was much diversity within them (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). For the churches in Malta, the bible has special relevance for the shared life of the churches there, for the Gospel first came to Malta in the events that are told in the Acts of the Apostles, where Paul and those with him encountered unusual kindness from the inhabitants. The story reminds us that Christianity is not merely a spirituality, but a faith rooted in events in human history: the redemption of

humanity and the whole of creation. The unity for which we pray therefore serves to make Christ known in the world.

The story of Paul's being shipwrecked on Malta leads us to reflect upon many aspects of our own lives and the lives of our churches.

As we approach one another, seeking unity, we recognize that we sometimes carry baggage from history, tradition and cultural expectation, which can weigh us down and threaten to overwhelm us. There is the danger that, in the face of that experience, we might lose sight of the hope which first called us and so give up reaching for the light which Christ offers us.

Paul challenged his fellow travellers, sailors, soldiers and prisoners to keep up their courage. In the face of apparent desperation and hopelessness, we are challenged to put our trust in God and allow ourselves to be held and carried through the waters. There will be times when we are broken, as individuals and as churches, and looking back we shall see not just the one set of footprints in the sand, but hundreds, as we are surrounded and supported by those who love us.

There will be times when, standing in the storms of our own making, we are challenged to demonstrate unusual kindness in the face of worldly indifference. To demonstrate unusual kindness is to see the sister and brother in the monster's shame and know that they too are children of God. To demonstrate unusual kindness is to give without counting the cost, and to allow ourselves to be given unto without questioning worth.

As we reflect upon, and pray for, Christian unity, we acknowledge the injury that we have caused, the pain that we carry, the baggage that we must jettison. We pray for Christian unity as the place from which we can move onward in faith and in hope for the redemption of the world and the restoration of creation.

Ad by RL. Taken from the Churches in Great Britain and Ireland website.

Dates for your Diary

January

Sunday 5 4-6pm at High Street. Messy Church

Sunday 19 4pm at High Street. High Tea – see inside for details.

18-25 January – Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Look out for local events

Sunday 26 3pm at Newland. Holy Communion with Rev Jason Cooke

February

Saturday 1 10am -12 noon at High Street. Grand reopening of the coffee bar with free refreshments, music and children's activities.

Sunday 2 4-6pm at High Street. Messy Church

Sunday 9 10.30am and 6pm at High Street. Church Anniversary

Saturday 15 10-12 noon at Newland. Coffee morning; prayers at 12.30pm

Sunday 16 4pm at High Street. High Tea – see inside for details

Sunday 23 3pm at Newland. Worship with Rev Fred Ireland

March

Sunday 1 4-6pm at High Street. Messy Church

Copy date for March/April issue Sunday 23 February ruthlapworth@hotmail.com